

Written Answers.

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

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

National Broadband Plan Implementation

12. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the extent to which the provision of broadband in all areas is progressing in line with expectations; if he anticipates the provision of services to the blank spaces between services within a reasonable time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23943/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Government's National Broadband Plan aims to ensure high speed broadband access of a minimum of 30 Megabits per second to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location through a State led intervention and commercial investment. 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 NBP. The Map is colour coded and is searchable by address or eircode. I also signed a Commitment Agreement with eir in relation to its plans to provide High speed broadband to 300,000 premises in rural areas on a commercial basis. As of end March this year eir has passed 145,000 premises and has committed to completing this rollout. Information on eir's planned rural deployment is available at the fiberrollout.ie website.

The procurement process to select a company who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network in the State led intervention area is now in its final stages. My Department will engage with the successful company on the most efficient rollout of the network.

In the interim, high speed broadband services continues to be rolled out through significant commercial investment by commercial operators to a value of €2.75 billion in the last 5 years. By 2020, 9 out of 10 premises the length and breadth of Ireland will have access to high speed broadband.

For those premises awaiting access to high speed broadband, 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.

Solar Energy Guidelines

13. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when his Department will liaise with the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government to prepare official guidelines to regulate solar energy projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23803/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The issuing of statutory guidelines for planning authorities under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) is a matter for the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government and I have no direct function in the matter. Given the significant level of interest in developing solar energy projects in Ireland, I wrote to my colleague the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government last year, and we agreed that both Departments would engage at senior level to explore the potential for enhancing national planning level guidance on solar energy.

My officials are engaging with their counterparts in the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government on this matter taking account of solar energy projects being assessed by planning authorities and the scope for future development of the sector in the context of emerging and future policy direction in the area of renewable energy generally.

My Department's engagement with Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government officials will also examine if scope exists to streamline wider regulatory measures in a manner sufficient to enhance the development of solar energy, such as enhancing current exemptions from planning permissions in relation to rooftop solar installations.

Given the interrelationships between the development of our renewable energy potential and strategic planning objectives as laid out in Project Ireland 2040 and the National Planning Framework, both Departments will work to progress these matters in the coming months.

Household Waste Collection Price Monitoring Group

14. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if the Price Monitoring Group will display the prices for each company that it monitors on its website in the interest of transparency for consumers of the household waste collection market; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23969/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Price Monitoring Group is displaying the prices for each company that it monitors on its website at present and it has published the detailed data on the prices it is tracking on a monthly basis. The most recent analysis from April was published on 25 May 2018 and is available on my Department's website. Last summer, I established the Price Monitoring Group to monitor pricing developments for residential household waste collection services during the phasing out of flat rate fees. The Group is chaired by Mr Frank Conway, an independent financial expert. The membership of the Group also includes a statistician from the Central Statistics Office and Shelfwatch, an independent price monitoring group. The Group monitors 26 service providers; this comprises 19 individual companies with several of those being monitored in more than one area. I have recently decided to extend the operation of the Price Monitoring Group to the end of the year to continue its monitoring of pricing developments.

The Price Monitoring Group was not established to provide a price comparison service. This would require whole-of-market monitoring of the sixty plus household waste collectors in the country across the different areas they provide a service. Accordingly, while the company names are not currently being published, the prices quoted by the companies being tracked are

made available by the Group for all to see.

The Chair of the Price Monitoring Group, Mr Conway, has recently reported to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Communications, Climate Action and Environment that while fluctuations in prices and service offerings have been observed, the overall trend is relative price stability for householders. The Price Monitoring Group has reported that there are currently 9 different types of price models on the market. The main price examples include a service charge plus charge per bin lift, with an excess per kg charge, and a service charge plus per kg weight charge. The most popular service offering now is the ‘service charge including weight allowance, plus per kg charge for excess above allowance’.

Post Office Network

15. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the input his Department has into ensuring the viability of the rural post office network; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23921/18]

34. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to assist An Post with its sustainability issues; the measures he is taking to protect the rural post office network; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23971/18]

37. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the work his Department has carried out with An Post regarding the future of the rural post office network. [18911/18]

40. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans in conjunction with the Department of Rural and Community Development to retain and rejuvenate the rural post office network. [18902/18]

43. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to facilitate the implementation of the recommendations of An Post’s New Vision plan; and the way in which he will support the rollout of new State services to post offices. [23958/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 15, 34, 37, 40 and 43 together.

As Minister, I am responsible for the postal sector including the governance of An Post. I am acutely conscious of the value placed by communities in both rural and urban areas on services provided by post offices and am concerned to ensure the needs of those communities continue to be met.

As part of its strategy for modernising the post office network, An Post has established a dedicated business unit within An Post, An Post Retail. An Post’s recently announced vision for the post office network centres around the availability of new services in a modernised, revitalised network. Such services will include a better range of Government services, financial services and e-commerce services for shoppers and small businesses. The announcement by An Post is supported by an agreement reached with the Irish Postmasters Union (IPU) executive following three months of intensive negotiations, which has subsequently been endorsed by 80% of IPU members.

The agreement represents a positive first step in reinvigorating our national post office network and making it a viable sustainable, modern and vibrant network for the future, capable of

adapting to the changing environment in which it operates by providing a service that meets the needs of communities across the country, particularly in rural areas.

We are already seeing a number of important new business initiatives being progressed.

A pilot e-Local service was launched by An Post last year in three districts- Bantry, Mullingar and Ennis. This service combines the strengths of online commerce with that of An Post mails network for the benefit of local business. It gives local business an edge over national and international online operators by connecting retailers with their customers both online and in person. A key feature of the eLocal.ie service is that An Post will give each retailer an online presence, displaying their goods and services, and enabling online orders.

As part of its consideration of the financial position of An Post, Government agreed that further opportunities for Government business through the Post Office Network, particularly the payment of motor tax, should be explored. While Government policy is to offer Government services online, there is always likely to be a segment of the population that is not comfortable or proficient accessing online tools or services. The post office network is the obvious choice as the “offline gateway” for citizens with its nationwide network and existing strong relationship with offline citizens. My Department has engaged with An Post and other relevant stakeholders such as the Office of Government Procurement, the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer and other Government Departments to assess how additional Government business might be channelled through the post office network. Discussions have been positive in this regard.

The first practical step that the Government is taking in this area is to rollout the digital assist pilot programme. Under that programme, post offices will provide access to a wide range of Government services. Government funding of €80,000 has been secured, by the Minister for Rural and Community Development, for the roll-out of the pilot scheme. Ten post offices will be equipped to help citizens with online Government interactions. The ten pilot schemes will be located in rural post offices and will be in place later this year.

In April 2018 the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection renewed her Department’s contract with An Post to provide pensions, Child Benefit and other social welfare payments in cash at Post Offices. Last year’s contract amounted to €51 million for 33.6 million payments, and the value of the 2018 contract is expected to match that. This re-affirms Government policy which sees the post office network as a key piece of the country’s financial and social infrastructure, particularly in rural areas. Accordingly, the Programme for a Partnership Government commits to actively encourage payment at post offices.

In addition to this the National Treasury Management Agency also provides significant business to An Post.

I appreciate that there is concern regarding the potential closure of post offices. An Post have advised that under the terms of the new agreement between An Post and the IPU some postmasters who wish to retire will be offered a voluntary severance package. There will be no compulsory closures of Post Offices as a consequence of this new deal. Postmasters have until July 31st next to signal their intentions in this matter. It is important to note that a new protocol has been established which sets out how An Post will facilitate the continued provision of Post Office services in areas where an existing postmasters retires or ceases operating an existing Post Office. In such cases An Post will make an assessment on the future provision of post office services within the locality by reference to specific agreed criteria.

Any individuals, groups or representatives concerned with the decision can apply to have An Post’s decision reviewed through a new independent review process which will determine

if An Post has correctly applied the criteria outlined in the protocol. Details of the independent review process will be specified in the notice detailing the decision of the future post office services within the relevant post office and will also be detailed on the An Post website.

All avenues are being explored to ensure services available through the post office network are enhanced in order that we have a strong, sustainable, customer focussed network

North-South Interconnector

16. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if all procurement related activities will be halted pending the determination of the judicial review in view of the recent decision regarding an incinerator development in Northern Ireland and the impending judicial review of the proposed North-South Interconnector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23923/18]

22. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if the procurement process that he approved some time ago will be halted in view of a judicial review in Northern Ireland in relation to the proposed North-South Interconnector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23924/18]

47. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the North-South Interconnector project; and if the transmission lines will be undergrounded. [23918/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 16, 22 and 47 together.

The North South Interconnector, as proposed as an overhead line, has full planning permission in both Ireland and Northern Ireland. On 21 December 2016 An Bord Pleanála granted planning permission for the North-South Interconnector in Ireland. The decision concluded a lengthy planning process which included an Oral Hearing completed over eleven weeks from March to May of 2016. On 23 January 2018, full planning permission was also granted for the section of the line that lies in Northern Ireland.

The approval process for that part of the North South Interconnector in Northern Ireland is a matter for the authorities there. The Judgement referred to in the question relates to a different project although it has been acknowledged that it could have wider implications for decision making in Northern Ireland. I understand that the decision is being appealed by the Department for Infrastructure in Belfast.

Following the planning consents, and the conclusion of a number of judicial review proceedings relating to the planning decision in Ireland, the construction of the project and any procurement processes that arise from that construction are operational matters for EirGrid and ESB Networks, and one in which I have no function.

Energy Policy

17. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans for a reduction in the dependency on fossil fuels with particular reference to the need to reach targets already set in the shortest possible time; if a campaign to encourage the use of electric motor cars will be considered; if specific new objectives can be identified in the context of a reduction in fossil fuel based electricity generation thus making

a major contribution to offset climate change; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23942/18]

183. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the extent to which he has identified the primary issues and actions required to address the issue of climate change with particular reference to the need to reduce dependency on fossil fuels, encourage the use of motor vehicles not dependent on fossil fuels and other measures likely to address the issues in the short to medium term and in line with EU targets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24162/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 17 and 183 together.

The Energy White Paper presents a long-term strategic vision that is intended to guide the direction of Irish energy policy from now until 2030. At its heart is a commitment to transform Ireland into a low carbon society and economy by 2050 and envisages a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from the energy system by 80-95% relative to 1990 levels by 2050. The White Paper identifies the importance of diversifying Ireland's energy generation portfolio and largely decarbonising the energy sector by 2050 but also recognises that some fossil fuels will remain significant elements of Ireland's energy supply in that transition period.

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

Overall, provisional SEAI analysis shows that 10.6% of Ireland's energy requirements in 2017 were met from renewable sources, with an expectation that Ireland will achieve at least 80% of its 16% renewable energy target by 2020. The SEAI has also estimated that the contribution of renewables avoided €276 million of fossil fuel imports in 2017.

The Programme for Government commits to supporting the transition of peat power plants to greater amounts of biomass whilst mindful of the need to develop a sustainable indigenous supply chain and support employment in the regions. Furthermore, the National Mitigation Plan 2017 restates the Government's commitment to move from a fossil fuel based electricity system to a low carbon power system.

The Government has also adopted a range of policy measures and schemes to incentivise the use of renewable energy including the Renewable Energy Feed-In-Tariff (REFIT) schemes. In addition, my Department is currently developing a proposed new Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) which will be designed to assist Ireland in meeting its renewable energy contributions out to 2030.

Ireland aims to increase renewable energy in transport by increasing the use of sustainable biofuels and by the increased deployment of Electric Vehicles. An Electric Vehicle Grant Scheme is in place to provide grant aid of up to €5,000 towards the purchase of a new full battery EV (EV) or Plugin Hybrid Electric Vehicles (PHEV). These grants are in addition to the VRT reliefs of up to €5,000. Budget 2018 extended VRT reliefs on PHEVs to end 2018 and on EVs to end 2021. A new grant to support the installation of home charger points for buyers of new and second-hand EVs is in place since January 2018.

An electric vehicle public awareness campaign was developed by SEAI and launched on the opening day of the SEAI Energy Show last month. The first phase of the campaign includes a new website (www.DrivingElectric.ie) which provides information on the benefits of buying

and driving an EV, the EV models available and where to arrange a test drive. The accompanying advertising campaign will be followed by a series of national, regional and local roadshows providing the public the opportunity to test drive electric vehicles.

The Low Emissions Vehicle Taskforce, which is co-chaired by my Department and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, is considering the measures and options available to Government to accelerate the deployment of electric vehicles. This has led to an expanded range of supports for electric vehicles (EVs).

The focus of my Department remains firmly on meeting our 2020 renewable target and on implementation of renewable energy measures, including the new Renewable Electricity Support Scheme and the Support Scheme for Renewable Heat.

Waste Management

18. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if the proposed deposit and return scheme will be supported as a part of the Waste Reduction Bill 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23901/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Ireland is currently one of the top performing countries in the EU in terms of recycling and recovery. The EPA Progress Report Towards EU Targets 2017 showed that Ireland recycled 34% by weight of plastics in 2015, counting exclusively material that is recycled back into plastics. The EU target is 22.5% and Ireland is clearly well ahead of this target.

A private member's Waste Reduction Bill was introduced to the House last year. On its introduction, I fully supported the intention of the Bill to reduce plastic waste, but I expressed reservations in relation to certain aspects of it, including the introduction of a Deposit and Return scheme for sealed containers in which beverages are sold.

My main concern in this regard was in relation to the potential costs versus the benefits of the introduction of such a scheme. I am of the belief that the operational and economic impacts of a Deposit and Return Scheme on an existing successful producer responsibility scheme need to be assessed thoroughly.

In addition, the effect of the introduction of such a scheme on domestic collections needs to be evaluated. If we take the more valuable material out of the domestic recycling bin, waste costs for households will rise.

In light of this, I asked the Joint Committee on Communications, Climate Action and Environment to look at the merits of a deposit and refund scheme at a national level. The Committee's report, which was published this week, recommends that the Bill proceed to Committee Stage. However, it also suggests that the following may merit consideration:

- firstly, whether adequate up-to-date analysis has been completed to support a Deposit and Return Scheme; and

- secondly, whether alternatives to the proposal have been adequately addressed to ascertain whether the proposal reflects the most feasible, efficient and sustainable option which will most likely achieve the best environmental benefits while minimising financial/economic risks, Exchequer outlay, both set-up and annual costs, and the compliance burden.

In the absence of an examination and a clear understanding of the costs and impacts, I will

not be in position to support the introduction of a Deposit and Return Scheme in the manner proposed by the Waste Reduction Bill.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

19. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of his Department's interaction with commercial providers in relation to their roll-out of broadband provision in County Kildare; the extent of their plans for the area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23963/18]

44. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the roll-out of the National Broadband Plan in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23970/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 19 and 44 together.

The Government's National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to ensure high speed broadband access (minimum 30 megabits per second) to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location. The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector. Today, 7 out of 10 of the 2.3 million premises in Ireland have access to high speed broadband. By 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 rollout high speed broadband to 300,000 premises as part of a Commitment Agreement signed with me in April 2017.

There are over 90,700 premises in Kildare. Some 13,400 (15%) fall within the AMBER area and will be served under the State led Intervention. Nearly 74,000 (82%) of premises are in a BLUE area and are, or will be, served by commercial providers, while approximately 3,300 (3%) are LIGHT BLUE and fall to be served by eir's planned rural deployment. A county by county breakdown of eir's data for Q1 2018 is available on my Department's website.

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.

As per the obligations of the Commitment Agreement, officials from my Department meet with eir on a monthly basis to review the company's performance on its ongoing rural deployment, including Kildare. The purpose of these review meetings is for eir to report progress and also to identify any risks or issues and their associated risk mitigation plans.

Data for Q1 2018 recently submitted by eir to my Department indicates that the company has passed some 145,000 premises nationwide as part of its ongoing deployment. eir has signalled that there would be likely knock-on effects to the 2018 milestone targets due to the severe weather impacts of both storms Ophelia and Emma. I have met with the senior management in eir and expressed to them the importance of implementing measures to catch up with milestone targets as a priority

For those premises currently awaiting access to high speed broadband, 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. The Department of Rural and Community Development maintain a list of Broadband Officers, a link to which is available 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>.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

20. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the roll-out of the national broadband plan in isolated rural areas. [19080/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Government's National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to ensure high speed broadband access (minimum 30 megabits per second) to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location. The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector. Today, 7 out of 10 of the 2.3 million premises in Ireland have access to high speed broadband. By 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 NBP.

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

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

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

- The LIGHT BLUE areas represent eir's commercial rural deployment plans to rollout high

speed broadband to 300,000 premises as part of a Commitment Agreement signed with me in April 2017.

The Commitment Agreement signed with eir relates to its plans to provide high speed broadband to 300,000 premises in rural areas on a commercial basis. eir remains committed to completing this rollout. 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.

Data for Q1 2018 recently submitted by eir to my Department indicates that the company has passed some 145,000 premises nationwide as part of its ongoing deployment. eir has signalled that there would be some knock-on effects to the 2018 milestone targets due to the severe weather impacts of both storms Ophelia and Emma. I have met with the senior management in eir and expressed to them the importance of implementing measures to catch up with milestone targets as a priority.

There are more than 40,000 premises in County Sligo of which some 14,300 are located in the AMBER area and are part of the State led Intervention under the NBP. Some remaining 25,800 premises are located in the BLUE/Light BLUE areas on the map and will be served by commercial operators and includes nearly 3,800 premises that fall within eir's plans to deliver rural high speed broadband.

There are more than 22,300 premises In Co Leitrim, of which almost 11,300 premises are located in the AMBER area and are part of the State led Intervention under the NBP. Some remaining 11,000 premises are located in the BLUE/Light BLUE areas and will be served by commercial operators. This figure includes nearly 2,500 premises that fall within eir's plans to deliver rural high speed broadband.

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.

For those premises currently awaiting access to high speed broadband, 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. The Department of Rural and Community Development maintain a list of Broadband Officers, a link to which is available 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>.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

21. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the implementation status of the national broadband plan; and the date by which the contract for the State intervention area will be awarded. [23959/18]

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 NBP.

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

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

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

- The LIGHT BLUE areas represent eir's commercial rural deployment plans to rollout high speed broadband to 300,000 premises as part of a Commitment Agreement signed with me in April 2017.

There are over 68,400 premises in County Clare, circa 45,200 of which fall within a BLUE area of the Map and will be covered by commercial operators. Of these 45,200, over 8,700 form part of eir's planned rural deployment to deliver rural high speed broadband. The remaining 23,200 premises in County Clare fall within the AMBER area and will be part of the State led Intervention under the NBP.

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

Question No. 22 answered with Question No. 16.

Household Waste Collection Price Monitoring Group

23. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans for alternative tendering options for household waste collection in line with models that exist across the EU. [23939/18]

24. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will commission a report on the feasibility of the remunicipalisation of the household waste collection service in view of the rising costs, poorer services and the increased difficulties in achieving sustainable waste management under the current privatised system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23893/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 23 and 24 together.

The Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) is currently conducting a study on the operation of the household waste collection market which it will complete in 2018.

I understand that the study will assess the nature and scale of consumer and operator issues in the household waste collection market and consider if the introduction of an enhanced regulatory regime could efficiently address these issues in the short and long term. I have been informed that the study will include the following elements:

- research on current issues in the waste sector;
- an economic assessment of the household waste collection market;
- an overview of waste collection in other countries; and
- recommendations, based on the evidence collected, to address any systemic issues uncovered.

Separately, I also established a Household Waste Collection Price Monitoring Group (PMG) last year to monitor the rates charged by household waste collectors during the phasing out of flat rate fees. The PMG has met each month since September 2017 and has considered eight months of pricing data trends. The PMG has indicated that, in the vast majority of cases to date, prices have remained stable.

The results from the PMG in conjunction with the study being undertaken by the CCPC will provide an evidence base for future policy decisions in relation to the household waste market.

Mobile Telephony Services

25. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the steps he is taking to address the mobile coverage blackspots, especially in rural areas; the position in relation to the outstanding actions remaining which were identified in the mobile phone and broadband taskforce report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23972/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I recognise the frustration felt by Irish consumers where telecommunications networks are not always delivering the services people expect. Accordingly, I specifically included in the Programme for Government a commitment to a Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce. The Taskforce worked with key stakeholders to produce a report in December 2016, available on my Department's website, which contained 40 actions to alleviate some of the deficits. The Implementation Group which I co-chair with Minister Kyne is overseeing implementation of the actions and comprises all key stakeholders responsible for delivery. This includes ComReg, which attends as both an action owner, and in an observer capacity in its role as the independent Regulator. Minister Kyne and I published the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce Implementation Review 2017 on 21 February 2018, which comprehensively outlines the progress made in 2017 on the actions identified by the Taskforce. Of the 40 actions, 29 have been completed, with work on the remaining 11 carrying into the 2018 Work Programme. Following close engagement with stakeholders at the National Stakeholder Forum, an additional 23 new measures have been identified for delivery in 2018, which will lead to improvements for consumers across Ireland.

The fifth meeting of the Taskforce Implementation Group was held on 25 April 2018, and the Quarter 1 2018 Progress Report has since been published on my Department's website. This report offers progress updates on all Q1 actions.

In terms of addressing mobile coverage blackspots, various initiatives are under way:

- My Department and the Department of Rural and Community Development have worked to achieve a greater consensus around site selection for telecoms infrastructure and therefore improve mobile phone coverage.

- Both Departments also worked with a pilot group of local authorities to identify the issues associated with mapping local blackspots. This pilot exercise has been completed, with all local authorities having been asked to map local blackspots and identify infrastructure that could potentially be used to provide additional coverage on an economic basis. This exercise is ongoing, and has been included in the 2018 Taskforce Work Programme. It is planned to have dedicated Geographic Information System (GIS) resources in place to support this.

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

- ComReg is also delivering a composite national coverage map, which will, in tandem with its work on handset testing and activities to raise consumer awareness, allow people across Ireland to optimise the services available to them.

In tandem with the work of the Taskforce, the release by ComReg of the 3.6GHz radio spectrum band, which has been identified at EU level as a primary band suitable for the introduction of 5G, will also contribute to addressing increasing mobile data demands and improve mobile coverage. Mobile operators' commercial investment has also resulted in improved services, following ComReg's 2012 multi-band spectrum auction. At least one operator now has in excess of 90% 4G population coverage.

All of these initiatives should assist in enhancing the quality of mobile phone and data services, particularly in rural areas.

Renewable Energy Projects

26. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he has considered establishing a support scheme for the development of micro-generation across the State. [23941/18]

27. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the progress which has been made to further explore opportunities for supporting micro generation of renewable energy as an important role in Ireland's transition to a low carbon economy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23968/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 26 and 27 together.

I am committed to exploring opportunities for micro generation further, as I believe micro generation not only offers customers protection from rising energy costs, but also because micro generation could enhance broader social engagement with renewable energy projects across Ireland and enable the transition to a low carbon economy. Furthermore, micro generation will be required given the scale of our climate and energy ambition as laid out in the National Development Plan and Project Ireland 2040.

The proposed pilot scheme for micro generation which I announced earlier this year will

target solar PV and self-consumption amongst domestic customers. It is important that before a scheme like this is introduced, the likely demand for the scheme is understood and the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) are currently undertaking a study which will inform the final design of this pilot. It is equally important that safety, technical and training requirements are established in advance of this pilot scheme being rolled out.

The data gathered during the pilot scheme will inform potential future phases of support for micro generation in Ireland that may be appropriate, as we align with the ambition of the recast Renewable Energy Directive which recognises the rights, entitlements and obligations of renewable self-consumers. This pilot scheme will deliver on ambitions and commitments made in the Energy White Paper and the Programme for Government.

Last year, my Department assessed micro generation, across a number of renewable electricity generating technologies, as part of the economic analysis to underpin the new Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS). The assessment identified technical and financial challenges which may need to be addressed before a broader support scheme for micro generation can be introduced. This is in line with international experience, including across the EU, where many member states who have introduced supports for micro generation have had to reform them or cancel them altogether.

The reality is that bringing microgen onto a system designed for large generators is complicated. It impacts how we pay for the network, how we manage regulation and how we technically manage the system. My Department is continuing to work closely with the micro generation sector and the SEAI to better understand how to validate and further develop these policies in a fair and cost effective manner.

Broadband Service Provision

28. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of his commitment to provide high speed broadband to every house and business in County Donegal; the deadline for same; the number of homes and business which have access to high speed broadband; the number of additional homes and businesses which received access to high speed broadband in 2017; the number which will receive access in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23804/18]

45. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the impact that Eir pulling out of the tender process will have on the commitment to provide high speed broadband to every house and business in County Donegal; the number of homes and business which have access to high speed broadband; the number of additional homes and businesses which received access to high speed broadband in 2017; the number which will receive access in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23805/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 28 and 45 together.

The Government's National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to ensure high speed broadband access (minimum 30 megabits per second) to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location. The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector. Today, 7 out of 10 of the 2.3 million premises in Ireland have access to high speed broadband. By 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 rollout high speed broadband to 300,000 premises as part of a Commitment Agreement signed with me in April 2017.

There are over 101,000 premises in Donegal. Nearly 34,000 (34%) fall within the AMBER area and will be served under the State led Intervention. More than 59,000 (58%) of premises are in a BLUE area and are, or will be, served by commercial providers, while approximately 8,000 (8%) are LIGHT BLUE and fall to be served by eir's planned rural deployment.

Information on the categories of specific 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.

One bidder, eir, publicly withdrew from the procurement process on 30 January 2018. While this was regrettable, it was a commercial decision for eir to make. The specialist NBP procurement team continues to engage intensively with all relevant stakeholders, including the sse/enet consortium, to ensure the earliest possible achievement of the Government's objective of providing reliable high quality, high speed broadband to all premises in Ireland.

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.

Quarterly updates on eir's rural deployment are published on this website. Data for Q1 2018 recently submitted by eir to my Department indicates that the company has passed some 145,000 premises nationwide as part of its ongoing deployment. 17,772 of these are in Donegal. A further 8,302 Donegal premises are in the LIGHT BLUE area on my Department's High Speed Broadband Map and remain to be passed as part of eir's rollout.

Eir has signalled that there would likely be knock-on effects to their 2018 milestone targets due to the severe weather impacts of both storms Ophelia and Emma and my Department continues to engage with the company in this regard. I have met with the senior management in eir and expressed to them the importance of implementing measures to catch up with milestone targets as a priority.

A county by county breakdown of eir's data for Q1 2018 is now available on my Department's website.

For those premises currently awaiting access to high speed broadband, 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. The Department of Rural and Community Development maintain a list of Broadband Officers, a link to which is available 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>.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

29. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of rural broadband roll-out in County Meath. [23919/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Government's National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to ensure high speed broadband access (minimum 30 megabits per second) to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location. The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector. Today, 7 out of 10 of the 2.3 million premises in Ireland have access to high speed broadband. By 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 NBP.

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

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

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

- The LIGHT BLUE areas represent eir's commercial rural deployment plans to rollout high speed broadband to 300,000 premises by the as part of a Commitment Agreement signed with me in April 2017.

The Commitment Agreement signed with eir relates to its plans to provide high speed broadband to 300,000 premises in rural areas on a commercial basis. Information on eir's planned rural deployment is available at <http://fiberrollout.ie/eircode-lookup/>. A copy of the Commitment Agreement is available on my Department's website www.dccae.gov.ie.

Data for Q1 2018 recently submitted by eir to my Department indicates that the company has passed some 145,000 premises nationwide as part of its ongoing deployment. eir has signalled that there would be likely knock-on effects to the 2018 milestone targets due to the severe weather impacts of both storms Ophelia and Emma. I have met with the senior management in eir and expressed to them the importance of implementing measures to catch up with

milestone targets as a priority.

There are over 84,000 premises in County Meath of which approximately 64,500 fall within a BLUE area of the Map and will be covered by commercial operators. Of these, nearly 4,500 premises are part of eir's planned rural deployment to deliver rural high speed broadband. The remaining approximately 19,500 premises in County Meath fall within an AMBER area and will be part of the State led Intervention under the NBP.

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

For those premises currently awaiting access to high speed broadband, 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. The Department of Rural and Community Development maintain a list of Broadband Officers, a link to which is available 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 Speeds

30. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will take into consideration and provide a guaranteed speed to mainly rural broadband users while they wait for the roll-out of the national broadband plan in view of an amendment to a motion passed in Dáil Éireann in February 2018. [23938/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Government's National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to ensure high speed broadband access to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location. The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector. Today, 7 out of 10 of the 2.3 million premises in Ireland have access to high speed broadband. By 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. The state led intervention is targeting those premises that will not be served with a high speed broadband service by commercial operators. Decisions made by private telecommunication operators relating to the rollout, 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

For those premises currently awaiting access to high speed broadband, 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. The Department of Rural and Community Development maintain a list of Broadband Officers, a link to which is available 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>.

Renewable Energy Generation Targets

31. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if Ireland is on target to meet binding European Union 2020 renewable targets; the fines that will be realised if they are not achieved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23960/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The EU Renewable Energy Directive 2009/28/EC set Ireland a legally binding target of meeting 16% of our energy demand from renewable sources by 2020. This represented a 12.9% increase on Ireland's reference starting point of 3.1% in 2005, and is the third highest increase assigned to any of the 28 Member States of the European Union. Ireland is committed to achieving this target through meeting 40% of electricity demand, 12% of heat and 10% of transport from renewable sources of energy, with the latter transport target also being legally binding.

Provisional data from the SEAI indicates that 30.1% of electricity, 6.9% of heat and 7.1% of transport energy requirements were met from renewable sources at end 2017. Overall, SEAI analysis shows that 10.6% of Ireland's energy requirements in 2017 were met from renewable sources, with an expectation that Ireland will achieve at least 80% of its 16% renewable energy target by 2020.

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

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

While the focus of my Department remains firmly on meeting our 2020 target and on implementation of renewable energy measures, including a new Renewable Electricity Support

Scheme (RESS) and a new Support Scheme for Renewal Heat (SSRH), contingency planning has commenced to explore the potential extent, mechanisms and cost of addressing our target within the framework of the Directive.

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

Renewable Energy Generation Targets

32. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his target for the percentage of the energy derived from renewable energy by 2030; and the target percentage of renewable power is he suggesting for Europe as part of the new EU clean energy legislative package. [23966/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Energy White Paper presents a long-term strategic vision that is intended to guide the direction of Irish energy policy from now until 2030. It identifies the long-term strategic importance of diversifying Ireland’s energy generation portfolio and largely decarbonising the energy sector by 2050. It does not set out targets for specific renewable technologies; rather it provides a framework to guide policy between now and 2030.

The National Mitigation Plan 2017 restates the Government’s commitment to move from a fossil fuel-based electricity system to a low-carbon power system. Investment in further renewable generation will be incentivised. Natural gas will continue to play a key role as a transition fuel.

The National Development Plan 2018-2027 sets out clear measures towards decarbonisation, including the upgrading of 45,000 homes every year from 2021 to make them energy efficient, up to 4,500MW of renewable electricity generation, roll-out of the support scheme for renewable heat, and commitments on electric vehicles and low-emission public transport. However, in the transition, the lowest CO2 emitting fossil fuel is still required to ensure a safe, secure and competitive path towards sustainability. In addition to this the planned closure of Moneypoint by 2025 and the ending of peat for electricity generation in advance of 2030 will have a positive impact.

In regard to future electricity demand, EirGrid have modelled a number of scenarios in their 2017 publication “Tomorrow’s Energy Scenarios”. Each scenario predicts a different possible future for the generation and consumption of electricity out to 2040. A link to the document is available at

<http://www.eirgridgroup.com/site-files/library/EirGrid/EirGrid-Tomorrows-Energy-Scenarios-Report-2017.pdf>.

At the December 2017 Energy Council, the General Agreement reached by the Member States on the Clean Energy Package set out an EU level 2030 target of 27% for Renewable Energy and 30% for Energy Efficiency. There were also a number of flexibilities agreed by the Council across a number of the proposals. Trilogues with the EU Parliament are ongoing with the Parliament seeking a 35% renewable energy target, a 35% energy efficiency target and also seeking to limit the flexibilities in the proposals.

The level of Ireland's renewable energy ambition post-2020 will have regard to our obligations under the Renewable Energy Directive and the Governance Regulation as may be agreed under the Clean Energy Package. It is important that our contribution to the overall goals can be met in a cost efficient way, that is fair and technically achievable, and takes account of our specific economic circumstances and geographical position on the periphery of Europe.

Electricity Transmission Network

33. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he has had discussions with the ESB regarding the potential use of the electrical grid network to deliver fibre broadband to homes as part of the national broadband plan; and the way in which the process would cater for such a possibility. [23964/18]

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

My Department is in a formal procurement process to select a company who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network in the Intervention Area. The National Broadband Plan State Intervention does not limit or prescribe the type of infrastructure that can be used for the purposes of the roll out. It encourages the re-use of existing infrastructure where appropriate, which is viewed as critical having regard to the need for efficiency, value for money and minimisation of any potential environmental impacts. This approach is consistent with the Broadband State Aid Guidelines.

While the selection of the most appropriate infrastructure to use as part of the rollout of the network is a matter for the Bidding Consortium, my Department continues to encourage engagement with infrastructure owners including ESB and those on the DCCAE Register of Infrastructure which is available at: <https://www.dccae.gov.ie/documents/Register%20of%20Infrastructure%20Owners.pdf>.

Question No. 34 answered with Question No. 15.

Building Energy Rating Administration

35. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the way in which he plans to meet the objective of 45,000 houses retrofitted in 2021 as outlined in the National Development Plan 2018-2020; the number of those 45,000 that will be classified as deep retrofits; and the plans or schemes he is putting in place to achieve this deep retrofitting. [23965/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The National Development Plan (NDP) 2018 -2027 recognises that improving the energy efficiency of the built environment is a central plank of Ireland's action on climate change. Energy efficiency will also realise benefits for air quality, health, social inclusion, business competitiveness and better public services, all of which will make a real and positive im-

pact on people's lives. Exchequer investment of €4 billion, along with taxation and regulatory measures, are provided for under the NDP. This will be necessary to drive the step change in energy performance in the residential sector. The ambition is to increase grant supported energy efficient renovations from 30,000 homes per annum to circa 45,000 from 2021, while driving the demand for a higher energy performance standard. Ireland's White Paper on Energy Policy, *Ireland's Transition to a Low Carbon Energy Future 2015-2030*, National Mitigation Plan (NMP) and Long Term Renovation Strategy (LTRS) all recognise the fact that extensive renovation of our building stock will need to take place in order to meet both national and international targets for energy savings and emissions reduction by 2050. A number of actions which are outlined in the NMP and LTRS are already underway to achieve these levels of retrofit and promote deep retrofit of buildings across all building types and tenure. Those actions which relate specifically to homes are outlined below.

- The Deep Retrofit Pilot Scheme is investigating how to create a scalable offering for the deep retrofit of Ireland's housing stock to an A3 Building Energy Rating (BER), while building consumer demand and contractor capacity for deep retrofit. Under the scheme Government is funding up to 50% of the total capital and project management costs for homes that achieve an A3 Building Energy Rating post retrofit. This will inform a model that can make deep retrofit available to individual homeowners on a larger scale post 2020, and critically will help Ireland move away from fossil fuels to clean renewable heating systems, such as solar and heat pumps.

- The Better Energy Homes Scheme provides grant aid to homeowners who wish to improve the energy performance of their home. Fixed grants are provided towards the cost of a range of measures such as insulation, heating controls and solar thermal technology. I recently expanded this scheme to support the transition away from fossil fuels, and achieve greater energy savings and emissions reductions, by providing a grant for heat pumps and increasing the funding for external insulation.

- The Better Energy Warmer Homes scheme delivers a range of energy efficiency measures free of charge to low income households vulnerable to energy poverty. I recently announced the expansion of the scheme to include internal and external wall insulation in order to increase the number of people that can receive upgrades and increase the energy savings and emissions reductions the scheme can achieve by enabling fuel switching.

- The Better Energy Communities scheme allows groups of buildings to apply for funding to improve their energy efficiency. This scheme has resulted in innovative approaches to renovation being developed, while also contributing to the overall reduction of energy usage and emissions from our building stock.

- The Warmth and Wellbeing Pilot Scheme, funded by my Department, is a joint policy initiative with the Department of Health, and is operated by SEAI and the HSE. It will measure the health and wellbeing impacts associated with improved energy efficiency. Increasing awareness of the multiple benefits of energy efficiency is critical to encourage people to invest in and make their contribution to action on climate change.

Broadcasting Sector

36. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to implement the recommendations of the Oireachtas Committee on Communications, Climate Change and Natural Resources to ensure greater investment in independent television production; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20007/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I requested the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Communications, Climate Action and Environment to examine the longer term issue of the future funding of public service media. The Committee published their report at the end of November 2017. The findings of the report were debated in the Dáil on 29 March, 2018. Both Public Service Broadcasters spend millions of euro each year on independently produced programming. This is vital in supporting a vibrant independent sector, including in the regions. As the Deputy may be aware, Section 116 of the Broadcasting Act 2009 provides that RTÉ make specific amounts available each year for the commissioning of television and radio programmes from the independent production sector. In 2017, RTE spent €39.7m on independent productions. A total of 726 hours (251 radio, 475 television) were commissioned across a range of programme categories. In addition, TG4 commissions the majority of its Irish language programmes from independent production companies throughout Ireland. In 2017, the broadcaster spent over €21.6m on independent productions, which was 88% of its annual programme budget for that year. I intend to bring proposals to Government in response to the Committee's report shortly.

Question No. 37 answered with Question No. 15.

Commission for Regulation of Utilities Remit

38. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to use his powers under the Electricity Regulation Act 1999 and issue a policy direction to the Commission for Regulation of Utilities concerning competition in the electricity supply market and its resultant affect on electricity prices for householders. [23937/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Responsibility for the regulation of the gas or electricity markets is a matter for the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU). One of its statutory functions is to carry out market monitoring to ensure that competition continues to develop and that customers benefit from competition. Two reports published by the regulator last year concluded that Irish energy markets are competitive, with the most recently available EU comparable electricity and gas supplier switching data also pointing towards a competitive Irish market. The CRU is an independent statutory body, and solely accountable to a committee of the Oireachtas for the performance of its functions. The regulation of retail market prices for electricity in Ireland ended in 2011 and for gas prices in 2014. The Government has no statutory function in the monitoring or setting of electricity prices, with the main thrust of Government policy on energy costs focused on the competitive market and supports for energy efficiency. Government policy has supported competition to drive down prices, and data from approved price comparison sites (*www.bonkers.ie* and *www.switcher.ie*) shows that consumers can make significant savings by switching energy suppliers.

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

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

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

Renewable Energy Generation

39. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the specific actions which have been taken recently to develop a wider portfolio of renewable energy sources particularly offshore wind and solar to increase renewable energy production here. [23940/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Energy White Paper presents a long-term strategic vision that is intended to guide the direction of Irish energy policy from now until 2030. It identifies the long-term strategic importance of diversifying Ireland's energy generation portfolio and largely decarbonising the energy sector by 2050. It does not set out targets for specific renewable technologies; rather it provides a framework to guide policy between now and 2030.

My Department is currently developing a proposed new Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) which will be designed to assist Ireland in meeting its renewable energy contributions out to 2030. The design of the new scheme included an extensive independent economic appraisal which compared the cost of supporting a range of commercial renewable technologies, at various scales to ensure that the new scheme delivers value for money for energy users whilst also delivering on the energy pillars of sustainability and security of supply. The assessment included analysis of the optimum financial support mechanisms for renewable technologies, in line with the 2014 EU State Aid Guidelines. The analysis indicates that a number of renewable technologies have converging and in some cases overlapping cost ranges, and I note with interest the continued falling costs of renewable technologies over the past year, such as offshore wind and solar PV. I expect to bring the final design proposals on the new RESS to Government shortly.

The 2014 Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan (OREDPA) sets out the Government's policy for the sustainable development of our abundant offshore renewable energy resources. The Strategic Environmental Assessment that underpinned the OREDPA found that 4,500 MW of offshore wind and 1,500 MW of wave and tidal generation could be sustainably developed in Irish waters in the period to 2030. An interim review of the OREDPA was recently published on my Department's website. The Offshore Renewable Energy Steering Group, which oversees the implementation of the OREDPA will now consider the recommendations of the review and continue the work of implementing the actions and enablers set out in the Plan.

It is widely recognised that Solar PV has a role to play in Ireland's renewable electricity generation portfolio over the coming decade. Solar PV emerges as a significant renewable electricity generating technology in all of EirGrid's 'Tomorrow Energy Scenarios' and, as well as providing opportunities for Solar PV under RESS, my Department supports the deployment of Solar PV through the SEAI led Better Energy Communities and pilot Deep Retrofit schemes. Solar PV will also be supported under a pilot scheme to promote micro generation, due to be launched this summer.

Question No. 40 answered with Question No. 15.

Illegal Dumping

41. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to address illegal dumping under the anti-dumping initiative; his views on whether local authorities need strengthened legislation to combat this environmental vandalism; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23212/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): My role, as Minister, is to provide the legislative and policy framework under which both local authority and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) enforcement action against illegal dumping is initiated. Local authorities have specific powers under sections 55 and 56 of the Act to require measures to be taken, or to take measures directly, to prevent or limit environmental pollution caused or likely to be caused by the holding, recovery or disposal of waste, and to mitigate or remedy the effects on the environment of any such activity.

Penalties for serious dumping offences provided for under the Waste Management Acts are substantial. Persons who are found to be responsible for, or involved in, the unauthorised disposal of waste are liable to a maximum fine of €5,000 on summary conviction and/or imprisonment for up to 12 months, and to a maximum fine of €15M on indictment and/or imprisonment for up to 10 years.

Notwithstanding this, my Department encourages a multi-faceted approach to tackling the problem, incorporating enforcement, public awareness and education. As such, I introduced an Anti-Dumping Initiative in 2017 to work in partnership with local authorities and community organisations in identifying high risk or problem areas, developing appropriate enforcement responses and carrying out clean-up operations. Such was the response from across the country that I doubled the initial financial allocation with €1.3M overall being provided to support 200 anti-dumping projects throughout Ireland.

Building on from the success of last year, I confirmed increased funding of €2M for the 2018 Anti-Dumping Initiative and in April, I announced the projects nationwide that have been approved for funding with the full list available on my Department's website: <https://www.dc-cae.gov.ie/en-ie/environment/topics/waste/enforcement/anti-dumping-initiative/Pages/default.aspx>.

The scope of the projects include:

- clean-up operations - removing illegal waste from across the country;
- household bulky waste initiatives – mattress/couch amnesties;
- awareness campaigns – social media campaigns and radio;
- preventative measures – installation of signage and fencing;
- surveillance operations – CCTV, drone and trail surveillance;
- SMART enforcement equipment and resources for waste enforcement officers.

In addition to the 200 plus projects that will receive funding from my Department, this year's Anti-Dumping Initiative includes a national pilot project undertaken by Sligo County Council aimed at tackling and addressing the source of illegal dumping through an Eircodes

investigation while funding is also being made available to support the Connaught/Ulster Waste Enforcement Regional Lead Authority in undertaking research on crime in the waste sector including an overview of the scale, cost and impact of waste crime in Ireland, and an assessment of illegal dumping identifying the socioeconomic and other factors leading to such activities.

EU Directives

42. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the changes that have come into effect since 9 May 2018 under European Directive 2016/1148; the way in which these changes will affect the National Cyber Security Centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23213/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): European Union Directive 2016/1148 concerning measures for a high common level of security of network and information systems places a number of significant responsibilities on the State and on critical infrastructure operators in respect of cyber security. The State is required to identify key critical infrastructure operators in a range of sectors, including energy, transport, health, drinking water supply and distribution and digital infrastructure. These operators will be required to meet a set of binding obligations in respect of security measures and incident reporting. The Directive also requires the State to apply a new regulatory regime on Digital Service Providers (DSPs) in the areas of cloud computing, online search engines and online market places. The Directive also places other obligations on the State in terms of ensuring that States can cooperate and share information in the event of a large scale incident affecting several countries and to ensure that every State has significant capacity of its own. These requirements include the designation of a National Computer Security Incident Response Team (CSIRT) with responsibility for risk and incident handling and the designation of a National Competent Authority (NCA) and a Single Point of Contact (SPoC).

In Ireland, the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) in my Department, which will be the National Competent Authority, has been working on transposition of the Directive for some time and this has included extensive engagement with industry. The NCSC has provisionally identified a set of critical infrastructure operators and has published a set of draft security measures which will apply to these operators. Regulations to transpose the Directive itself are at a very advanced stage. The NCSC has also been developing its own capacity internally, particularly with regard to the CSIRT which received international accreditation last year.

Question No. 43 answered with Question No. 15.

Question No. 44 answered with Question No. 19.

Question No. 45 answered with Question No. 28.

Citizens Assembly

46. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will report on his plans to implement the recommendations from the Citizens' Assembly. [22708/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I refer to the reply to Question No. 476 of 24 April 2018. The position is unchanged.

Question No. 47 answered with Question No. 16.

Defence Forces Strength

48. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the reason the personnel strength of the Defence Forces was lower at the end of February 2018 than at the end of February 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24051/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): As I indicated in my reply to Question No. 3 of 10 May 2018 on this matter, I am advised by the Military Authorities that the strength of the Permanent Defence Force, as at:

- 28 February 2018 was 9,057 (Whole Time Equivalent) personnel.

- 28 February 2017 was 9,070 (Whole Time Equivalent) personnel.

The overall difference in strength in February 2017 and February 2018 is a reduction of 13 personnel. Variations in strength figures are not an unusual occurrence and, particularly in the short term, are influenced by factors relating to timings of recruit intake and how this coincides with normal retirement patterns.

Given the unique and demanding nature of military life, there is understandably a relatively high level of turnover among Defence Forces personnel. This is not new and the Permanent Defence Force traditionally had a higher level of turnover than other areas of the public service.

An analysis of data going back a number of years shows the overall numbers departing the Permanent Defence Force in recent years are broadly consistent with the long term trend, with some exceptions. It should be noted that within these figures, on average approximately 22% of General Service recruits do not complete their induction training.

Defence Forces Personnel Data

49. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of personnel that have exited the Defence Forces, excluding mandatory retirements, to date in 2018; the overall number he anticipates for 2018, excluding mandatory retirements; his views on whether the pay and conditions of the Defence Forces is forcing personnel to consider employment in other areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24052/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The military authorities have advised me that, as of 30 April 2018, 147 members of the Defence Forces left on a voluntary basis. The Defence Forces have a higher level of turnover than other areas of the public service. This is not unusual and is a feature of military organisations internationally. Given their voluntary nature, it is not possible to accurately estimate non-mandatory retirements for the remainder of 2018.

Rates of pay and conditions of employment in the Permanent Defence Force have traditionally been set by, amongst other things, reference to levels of pay across the various sectors of the Irish public service. Defence Forces' pay is increasing in accordance with public sector pay agreements. The focus of these increases is weighted in favour of those on lower pay. The Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020 provides for further increases in pay ranging from 6.2% to 7.4% over the lifetime of the Agreement with the focus of the agreement once again being on the lower paid. The first 1% increase in annualised salaries due from 1 January 2018 has been paid to members of the Permanent Defence Force.

The Defence Forces offers competitive starting salaries and excellent career opportunities for any young person thinking about joining. Following successful completion of an initial 6 months training, a newly qualified three star private starts on €27,257 per annum inclusive of military service allowance (MSA). This is an increase of 25% in the last 12 months. After 15 months training a newly commissioned officer starts on €35,000 per annum (Inclusive of MSA); if newly commissioned officers are already graduates they start on €40,000 per annum (inclusive of MSA).

In General Service ranks, the pay scales for Corporals (including MSA) ranges from €37,000 to €41,000 per annum. The pay scales for Sergeants, including MSA, ranges from €39,000 to €44,000 per annum. In addition almost half of enlisted ranks are in receipt of technical pay and duty allowances are also payable.

Defence Forces Reorganisation

50. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if the 2012 restructuring of the Defence Forces will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24053/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): As has been outlined on a number of occasions, there are no plans to review the reorganisation of the Defence Forces. The White Paper on Defence, published in 2015, resulted from a comprehensive examination of Defence requirements over a ten year planning horizon and it specifically provides for the retention of the structures introduced in 2012. As a result of the reorganisation there has been an improvement in the deployability and sustainability of the Defence Forces, both at home and overseas, and it is clear that any return to previously outdated structures would cause a range of unnecessary inefficiencies, including a return to understrength units.

Defence Forces Medical Services

51. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the supports provided for members of the Defence Forces that undergo traumatic experiences while serving on UN mandated missions. [24054/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): As I indicated in my reply to Question No. 14 of 10 May 2018 on this matter, I can assure the Deputy that the Defence Forces are fully aware of the importance of providing robust supports for personnel who require them, whatever the reason.

A range of medical and non-medical services are provided to ensure that Defence Forces personnel are medically fit to undertake the duties assigned to them and to treat any medical condition that may arise.

Psychiatric and psychological services, as well as the Defence Forces Personnel Support Service (PSS) are made available to members of the Defence Forces. These provide for the diagnosis and treatment of psychiatric or psychological disorders through to counselling and critical incident stress management. Until recently, certain psychiatric services were provided on a contract for services basis. This contractual arrangement has now ended and the Defence Forces are identifying alternative options for the provision of these psychiatric services.

In response to any significant operational incidents at home or overseas, PSS personnel

trained in Critical Incident Stress Management are deployed to provide both one-to-one and group psychological support. Defence Forces personnel have, both while on a tour of duty and following their return home, access to a Primary Carer Medical Practitioner, either military (Medical Officer) or civilian (GP), whose role it is to assess, diagnose, treat and refer individuals as necessary. Personnel experiencing psychological issues can be referred for assessment and treatment as appropriate.

Commemorative Events

52. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to mark the 40th anniversary of Ireland's participation in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24055/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): This year, the United Nations celebrates the 70th anniversary of UN peacekeeping and 2018 also marks significant anniversaries in relation to Ireland's UN peacekeeping role. It will be the 60th anniversary of Ireland's first participation in a UN peacekeeping mission and it is the 40th anniversary of the first deployment of Defence Force personnel to Lebanon as part of the UNIFIL mission.

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

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

Ireland's long service with the UNIFIL mission over the last 40 years means that the names of towns and villages in Southern Lebanon are familiar to the Irish people. The forty thousand Irish soldiers who have served with UNIFIL since 1978 have brought back stories and great memories of the UNIFIL mission. Sadly, Irish soldiers have also died and are remembered monthly in a ceremony in Tibnin, Lebanon. I revisited the monument in the course of my recent visit and it was an opportunity to remember and honour the sacrifice made by Irish soldiers.

Appropriate commemorative events are being planned to mark this year's important milestones in the history of Ireland's participation in United Nations peacekeeping operations by the Defence Forces and An Garda Síochána and civilian personnel.

A State ceremony will take place in Dublin Castle on Sunday 24th June 2018. Arrangement are currently being finalised and details of this event will be published shortly. It is intended that the ceremony will be an occasion to show our pride in those who have served in our name in U.N. peacekeeping missions such as UNIFIL, while also calling to mind those who gave their lives so that others might know the gift of peace.

White Paper on Defence

53. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the progress of proj-

ects 5 and 22 of the 2015 White Paper on Defence; and if progress has been affected by low recruitment figures and an increased rate of resignations from the Defence Forces. [24060/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The 2015 White Paper on Defence sets the defence policy agenda over a ten year planning horizon and encompasses all work carried out by the Department of Defence, the Defence Forces and Civil Defence. It comprehends the Government’s policy on defence of the State from armed aggression, the defence contribution to domestic security, the defence contribution to international peace and security and a broad range of other “non-security” roles which the Government require the Defence Forces and Civil Defence to undertake. It considers the defence capabilities required so that the Defence Forces can successfully deliver on the roles assigned by Government. Finally, the White Paper also considers implementation and the actions required to ensure that defence planning and provision processes are further developed.

During scoping of the White Paper implementation programme, 88 actions or projects were specifically identified. These actions represent a subset of the totality of the work being carried out as part of the implementation programme for the White Paper. While it is currently intended to have all 88 projects initiated or completed by the end of the ten year implementation programme, work in certain areas will continue beyond 2025 in order to ensure that changes, improvements and actions envisaged in the White Paper are fully implemented and to assure that positive outcomes endure and are embedded in the day to day business of the Defence Organisation.

To date, 37 projects have been initiated with 10 more projects due to initiate during 2018. Of these, 5 projects have been completed and closed/transitioned to normal business including Projects 5 and 22.

The Permanent Defence Force has levels of personnel turnover that exceed other areas of the public service and there is ongoing recruitment to replace personnel who depart. This is not a new development and is a feature of military organisations. This has not impacted on either of the projects referred to.

The following sets out a progress summary in relation to projects 5 and 22.

Number	Project Name	Summary Statement
5	Engagement with the Connected Forces Initiative (CFI), the Planning and Review Process (PARP) and the Operational Capabilities Concept (OCC)	The project objective was for Ireland to continue to engage with the Partnership Interoperability Advocacy Group (formerly CFI), participate in the Planning and Review Process (PARP) and have joined the Operational Capabilities Concept, Evaluation and Feedback (OCC EandF) programme. As part of the OCC EandF programme, Ireland selected a unit for the inaugural force package for participation in OCC EandF assessment. This is the first step in a two - year programme in which the unit will undertake two evaluations. Ireland also completed a full cycle of the PARP process. A lessons learned exercise was also completed to identify and improve this process. Ireland continues to participate in the informal Partnership Interoperability Advocacy Group (PIAG) discussions and took over as PIAG Co-Chair in January 2018 for one year, and will fill the Executive Officer position from mid-2018 (July) to mid 2019.
22	Develop a new employment support scheme with the direct involvement of the Defence Forces	The White Paper gave a commitment to develop a pilot Employee Support Scheme (ESS). The pilot programme for the scheme was conducted by 2 Bde in Gormanston in 2016. Following successful evaluation of the pilot programme, the Minister approved a three year roll out of the Scheme (2017-2019), with up to 2 iterations of the programme to be scheduled each year. 2 iterations of the programme were held in mid and late 2017 (in Limerick and Gormanston). Another iteration is scheduled for summer 2018 (June in Cork) and the 2nd iteration for 2018 is currently provisionally scheduled for later this year. Funding has been secured from the European Social Fund for the iterations of the scheme outlined in the 3 year implementation plan. As part of the roll out, it was agreed that a full review of the Scheme be scheduled for 2020 which would comprehensively evaluate “Value for Money” in relation to the Scheme.

54. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to meet with the Iranian Ambassador; the previous occasion on which he met with him; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24000/18]

55. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of times the Irish Ambassador in Ankara has visited Iran in each of the years 2011 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24001/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 54 and 55 together.

Ireland, like other countries, uses secondary accreditations to carry on diplomatic relations with states where it does not have a resident mission. The Government has begun a programme to expand Ireland's diplomatic footprint around the world, but it will always be the case that many countries are covered through secondary accreditations.

The Embassy of Ireland in Tehran was closed in February 2012. Since that date, the Ambassador in Ankara has represented Ireland in Iran as a secondary accreditation. Certain functions are also carried out by the resident Irish Honorary Consul, who is an Iranian national.

The Ambassador in Ankara has visited Iran twice each year from 2012 with the exception of 2016, when there was one visit. He has not yet visited in 2018. The Ambassador also remains in contact with EU Embassies in Tehran, and reports on Iranian affairs from Ankara. Other Embassy staff have also made some visits to Iran.

I have met the current Ambassador of Iran at functions but have not had a formal direct meeting with him. He meets frequently with senior officials in my Department.

Diplomatic Representation

56. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of staff based in the Irish Embassy in Iran at the date of its closure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24002/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Irish Embassy in Iran closed on the 31 March 2012. Please see below the number of staff based in the Irish Embassy in Tehran, on that date.

Date	Mission	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Officers posted from HQ	Locally engaged (including agency) administrative, clerical and other support staff
31/03/2012	Tehran	1 Third Secretary	4 local staff

Diplomatic Representation

57. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of staff based in the Irish Embassy in Ankara, Turkey to date; the number of staff members based there at the date of the closure of the Irish Embassy in Iran; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24003/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Irish Embassy in Iran closed on the 31 March 2012. Below are the number of staff based in the Irish Embassy in Ankara on that date, and also the number of staff currently based in the

Embassy.

Date	Mission	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Officers posted from HQ	Locally engaged (including agency) administrative, clerical and other support staff
31/03/2012	Ankara	Head of Mission (vacant until 13 April 2012) ¹ First Secretary ¹ Third Secretary ¹ EO**	4 local staff
May 2018	Ankara	Head of Mission ¹ Assistant Principal Officer ¹ Development Specialist ¹ Third Secretary ¹ HEO** ¹ EO** ² CO's**	4 local staff

**Seconded into the Visa Office from the Department of Justice and Equality

Trade Relations

58. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the banking difficulties faced by Irish companies seeking to trade with Iran will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24005/18]

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 (known as 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 EU and the other parties to the JCPOA are continuing to implement the agreement, and so the UN and EU sanctions on Iran, which were directly in force in this country and which were removed under the JCPOA, will not be re-imposed. The US sanctions which had caused the most difficulty for Irish firms seeking to do business in Iran were those in the banking and 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 caution by many European banks, including Irish banks, in handling funds originating in Iran. This had undoubtedly slowed the regrowth of trade with Iran following the JCPOA. This will unfortunately continue to be a factor. EU Ministers have already discussed with Iran these potential difficulties, and at the Foreign Affairs Council this week Ministers discussed options for protecting EU companies to the greatest extent possible.

However, it cannot be ruled out that some business will be affected by US measures. In the banking sector in particular the problem is principally one of commercial decisions by the banks themselves, based on their own engagement in the US financial market and their assessment of the risks of the US financial measures.

Passport Applications Administration

59. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if passport applications by persons (details supplied) will be expedited in view of the fact the applications were submitted on time and their processing time has surpassed the guidelines; and if passports will issue in time for the scheduled travel date of 7 June 2018. [24086/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Applications for the persons named were registered with the Passport Service on 06/04/2018. I am

advised by my colleagues in the Passport Service that these applications have been processed and the passports should be received in the post shortly.

Passport Applications Administration

60. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if passport applications by persons (details supplied) will be expedited in view of the fact the applications were submitted in time and their processing time has surpassed the guidelines; and if passports will issue in time for the scheduled travel date of 7 June 2018. [24102/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Applications for the persons named were registered with the Passport Service on 25/04/2018. I am advised by my colleagues in the Passport Service that these applications have been processed and the passports should be received in the post shortly.

Banking Sector

61. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Finance if the difficulties ambassadors are facing in opening bank accounts with banks here will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24004/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The provision of banking services to customers is an independent commercial decision made by banks. The decision on whether to provide banking services to customers by a bank is dependent on a variety of factors, including their own risk appetite and regulatory requirements. In addition, it is important to note that banks are designated persons under the Criminal Justice (Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing) Act 2010, and consequently have Anti-Money Laundering/Countering the Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT) obligations to meet under that legislation. A strict compliance with international sanctions is essential in this regard.

In meeting their obligations, banks are required to adopt a risk based approach as to how they conduct their business and who they conduct it with. The Central Bank of Ireland, as an independent financial regulator, has no role in the making of commercial decisions by regulated entities and it would be inappropriate for it to interfere or attempt to influence such decisions.

While any difficulty experienced by an Ambassador or others is regrettable, as outlined above, it is not within my power or remit to intervene on a bank's risk based approach to business relationships.

Flood Risk Insurance Cover Provision

62. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Finance the progress being made to ensure persons in areas in which flood defences have been installed can avail of house insurance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24076/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am conscious of the difficulties that the absence or withdrawal of flood insurance cover can cause to homeowners and businesses, and that is one of the reasons the Government has been prioritising investment in flood defences over the last number of years.

However, 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. As Minister for Finance I have responsibility for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation, and neither I, nor the Central Bank of Ireland can interfere in the provision or pricing of insurance products or have the power to direct insurance companies to provide flood cover to specific individuals or businesses. 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.

Insurance Ireland has informed me that its members, since 1 June 2014, have factored data on all completed flood defence schemes, provided by the OPW, into their overall assessment of flood risk. This information has been provided as part of the information sharing arrangement entered into between OPW and Insurance Ireland (Memorandum of Understanding). The nature of this arrangement is such that it has led to a greater availability of flood cover in previously higher risk areas. For instance, the most recent Insurance Ireland survey of approximately 85% of the property insurance market in Ireland indicates that of the completed defence schemes, 90% of policies in areas benefiting from permanent flood defences include flood cover, while there has been an increase from 66% to 77% of policies in areas benefiting from demountable defences including flood cover.

In addition, the Deputy should note that the Insurance Ireland/OPW working group, which the Department of Finance attends, now meets on a quarterly basis to support the above information flow and to improve the understanding of issues between both parties. The working group allows for the sharing of relevant data on completed flood defence schemes. In this regard, the OPW has also provided a significant amount of detailed data in relation to adequacy and resourcing of flood warning systems, and mobilisation, efficacy, maintenance and development of demountable defences to Insurance Ireland. A sub-group has also been set up to explore the technical and administrative arrangements that may allow for the further sharing of data.

One of the outcomes of these discussions is that the insurance industry has now acknowledged that they accept that the demountable defences meet the desired 1:100 year standard. However it still maintains the view that while demountable defences are effective where correctly deployed, there are significant interdependencies, including human intervention, which increases the risk of failure. This is subject to ongoing discussions.

Finally, it is important to note that a consumer can make a complaint to the Financial Services Ombudsman in relation to any dealings with a Financial Services or Insurance provider during which they feel they have been unfairly treated. In addition, individuals who are experiencing difficulty in obtaining flood insurance or believe that they are being treated unfairly may contact Insurance Ireland which operates a free Insurance Information Service for those who have queries, complaints or difficulties in relation to insurance.

Pension Provisions

63. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance his Department's role in relation to A Roadmap for Pensions Reform 2018-2023; his views on the tax relief on pension contributions at the marginal rate; his further views on the retention of the tax relief at the marginal rate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24109/18]

69. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the membership of the working group set up by his Department to examine the tax relief on pension contributions; the terms

of reference of the working group; if the working group will assess the tax position on pensions in its entirety including taxation upon extraction by pensioners; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24226/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 63 and 69 together.

The Government published A Roadmap for Pensions Reform 2018 - 2023 in February this year and my Department was involved in contributing to the development of the Roadmap. The Roadmap takes a holistic view of pension issues and details specific measures presented under six strands.

While implementation of the Roadmap is primarily a matter for my colleague the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and her Department, the Interdepartmental Pensions Reform and Taxation Group (IDPRTG) was allocated a number of specific measures under the Roadmap. The IDPRTG is chaired by the Department of Finance and includes representatives from this Department as well as from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, Revenue and the Pensions Authority.

Strand 3 of the Roadmap is concerned with improving the governance and regulation of supplementary pensions to, among other things, achieve scale, improve standards and simplify the provision of pensions. The actions allocated to the IDPRTG under the Roadmap derive in the main from Strand 3, and the terms of reference of the Group reflects this focus.

Action 3.13 of the Roadmap provides for a review of the cost of funded supplementary pensions to the Exchequer in the context of the development of a new auto-enrolment scheme. The Deputy will be aware that relief on pension related tax relief represents a large and generous tax expenditure. Ireland operates an 'Exempt, Exempt, Taxed' or EET structure for pensions tax relief. Under EET, and subject to certain restrictions, pension contributions and investment returns on pension funds are exempted from tax but pension drawdown is taxed at prevailing tax rates through the income tax system in retirement. On this basis, it is considered that marginal relief represents a significant incentive to encourage pension savings and to a degree represents a deferral of taxation.

The IDPRTG is currently considering this issue and will report by the end of the third quarter. As Minister for Finance, tax policy is a matter for me and my Department, and the work of the IDPRTG will be considered in that context.

Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland

64. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the mechanism used by the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland to obtain the services of an intermediary in order to provide finance for businesses; his views on whether the SBCI is distorting the market for finance; his further views on whether there are state aid issues in relation to SBCI's use of intermediaries and specifically the use of one intermediary over another; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24186/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) is Ireland's national promotional institution. The purpose of the SBCI is to deliver effective financial supports to Irish SMEs that address failures in the Irish SME finance market as well as encouraging competition, innovation and the efficient and effective use of EU resources and financial instruments. The SBCI achieves this purpose through both on-lending and risk-sharing activities.

As the Deputy is aware, the SBCI does not lend directly, rather it acts as a wholesale financial institution providing low cost, long-term wholesale funding to both bank and non-bank finance providers. These partner financial institutions are known as on-lenders. These on-lenders must in turn pass on the benefit of that low cost finance to the final SME borrowers. This is a key requirement in order for the SBCI to comply with state aid rules.

I am informed by the SBCI that the process of engaging in an agreement with a new on-lender generally involves a potential on-lender completing a standard template business plan and due diligence questionnaire. The SBCI then conducts a thorough and detailed assessment of the potential on-lender, including a consideration of its financial strength and repayment capacity; underwriting ability and credit risk management; operational capacity; and management and governance track record. Ultimately, the final decision to enter in to an agreement with a new on-lender is made by the board of directors of the SBCI.

The Agriculture Cashflow Support Loan Scheme and the Brexit Loan Scheme that I announced in Budget 2016 and Budget 2017 respectively clearly demonstrate the SBCI's risk-sharing guarantee model. The finance providers chosen as financial intermediaries to deploy SBCI's risk-sharing guarantee schemes are selected via an open call process. In each case, the open call sets out a scoring system against which each applicant is assessed on a number of criteria outlined in the open call document. These eligibility criteria are determined by the requirements of the SBCI's funding providers, counter-guarantors, Government Departments involved in the scheme and relevant policy considerations.

The SBCI operates on a market neutral basis. The opportunity to obtain SBCI funding as an on-lender or act as a financial intermediary participating in the SBCI's risk-sharing guarantee schemes is open to any finance provider that can demonstrate that it fulfils the SBCI's requirements through the rigorous processes that I have outlined.

In this way, the SBCI aims to ensure on-lenders and financial intermediaries maximise the benefit and the service provided to Irish SMEs as well as protecting taxpayer money and the investment of both State and European institutions.

Central Bank of Ireland Reports

65. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the differences in reporting between the legal owner and the beneficial owner in terms of the mortgage arrears statistics published by the Central Bank when mortgage accounts are incorporated in a securitisation model; if, for example the legal owner is a regulated entity and the beneficial owner is not a regulated entity, the areas of the Central Bank's statistics in which this would be recorded; if this would be deemed to be a mortgage owned by an unregulated owner; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24187/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I have been advised by the Central Bank of Ireland, that in their quarterly published Residential Mortgage Arrears and Repossessions Statistics, reporting entities are classified in three ways:

- regulated banks,
- regulated retail credit firms, and
- unregulated loan owners.

Guidance is given to the reporting entities that data is to be reported on the basis of legal

ownership of the loan. In the example above, if the legal owner is a regulated entity, this would be reported to the Central Bank as either a regulated bank or a regulated retail credit firm.

Mortgage Data

66. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of Irish mortgages incorporated in a securitisation model; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24188/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department does not hold the information that is being sought. The Central Bank also advised that it does not collect data on the number of loans securitised by the breakdown requested. However, the Bank provided data on the outstanding stock in monetary terms of residential PDH and BTL loans securitised and serviced by Irish credit institutions since December 2013.

€ million	PDH	BTL
Dec 2013	32,065	6,988
Dec 2014	30,356	6,847
Dec 2015	26,722	6,678
Dec 2016	26,689	6,471
Dec 2017	21,438	5,722

The full table can be found at https://www.centralbank.ie/docs/default-source/statistics/data-and-analysis/credit-and-banking-statistics/private-household-credit-and-deposits/private-household-credit-and-deposits-data/ie_table_a-18-2_credit_advanced_to_irish_resident_private_households_for_house_purchase.xls?sfvrsn=15.

Mortgage Book Sales

67. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if the mortgage loans sold by a bank (details supplied) were sold using a securitisation model; if legal title moved to an unregulated loan owner; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24189/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I have been advised by the Central Bank of Ireland that it does not comment on specific transactions relating to regulated firms. However, further details on this portfolio sale are available on Danske's website at: <https://www.danskebank.ie/en-ie/Pages/Mortgage-Account-holders.aspx>.

Cycle to Work Scheme Data

68. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance if a review has taken place on the effectiveness of the bike to work scheme; the details of take-up of the scheme in each of the years since inception by area, work sectors, average cost to the Exchequer or other such breakdowns; if an analysis has been carried out on the impact the scheme has had on inflation in the market for new bicycles; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24202/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Cycle To Work scheme came into operation on 1 January 2009. The scheme operates on a self-administration basis, and relief is automatically available provided the employer is satisfied that the conditions of their particular scheme meet the requirements of the legislation. There is no notification procedure for em-

ployers involved. This approach was taken with the deliberate intention of keeping the scheme simple and reducing administration on the part of employers.

Accordingly, the Revenue Commissioners do not have statistics on the uptake of the scheme therefore I cannot give the Deputy an annual cost or any further breakdown of its impact.

It was estimated at the time of the introduction of the scheme that approximately 7,000 employees would avail of it over the first five-year period of its operation, the exemption may apply only once in any five year period in respect of any employee.

It should be noted that the purchase of bicycles and associated safety equipment by employers for employees or directors is subject to the normal Revenue audit procedure with the normal obligations on employers to maintain records (e.g. delivery dockets, invoices, payments details, etc.). The employer is also obliged to keep all salary sacrifice agreements entered into between the employer and employees/directors, together with all signed statements from employees/directors regarding use of the bicycles and safety equipment.

While I have not asked my officials to conduct any further specific analysis along the lines set out by the Deputy, I would advise her that all such schemes are reviewed in the context of the annual Budget and Finance Bill process.

Question No. 69 answered with Question No. 63.

Pension Provisions

70. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding pensions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24058/18]

71. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the position regarding a motion (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24082/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 70 and 71 together.

I refer the Deputy to my responses to PQ 54985/17 of 16 January 2018, and to PQ 13684/18 of 27 March 2018.

Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management Programme

72. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the timescale for the progression of the flood prevention programme in Ballina as per the recent CFRAM announcement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24083/18]

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 on 3rd May, 2018 of 29 flood risk management plans which proposed 118 new outline flood relief projects, in addition to 42 major projects already completed, and 33 major schemes within the existing capital works programme of the Office of Public Works (OPW). As it is not possible to

progress all 118 proposed new schemes at once, funding of €257 million for an initial phase of 50 flood relief projects throughout the country was also announced which would be progressed to detailed design and construction, including the five largest schemes identified in the Plans and 31 small or minor projects under €1 million which will be progressed directly by local authorities. Aside from the 5 largest schemes and the 31 small or minor projects, the remaining projects in the initial phase of implementation were selected on the basis of those projects which would provide the greatest benefit in terms of the largest number of properties protected on a regionally balanced basis.

The proposed flood relief scheme at Ballina, Co. Mayo has been identified by the CFRAM programme to be progressed at a projected cost of €8.2 million. This proposed scheme involves the construction of a number of new quay walls and flood defences walls, together with two pumping stations, to manage surface water and fluvial flooding behind the river walls. The scheme will protect 167 properties when completed. The proposed scheme is in the first tranche of projects to be progressed, and the OPW is currently writing to all local authorities regarding arrangements for the progression of these prioritised projects. While it is not possible to provide a definite timescale for the progression of the Ballina scheme, it is hoped that the process for appointment of consultants will be commenced in the near future.

Once consultants are appointed to progress the scheme, consultation with statutory and non-statutory bodies as well as the general public takes place at the appropriate stages to ensure that all parties have the opportunity to input into the development of the scheme.

Office of Public Works Projects

73. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the plans the OPW has for a maintenance plan on the Bulkaun river in Ballinrobe; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24132/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The Office of Public Works (OPW) carries out a programme of Arterial Drainage Maintenance to a total of 11,500 km of river channel and approximately 730 km of embankments. These maintenance works relate to arterial drainage schemes completed by the OPW under the Arterial Drainage Acts 1945 and 1995. The OPW is required to maintain these designated drainage schemes in proper repair and effective condition.

The Bulkaun river in Ballinrobe is part of the OPW arterial drainage scheme. The OPW carried out instream tree maintenance earlier this year. Further weed and vegetation cutting is scheduled for the end of June 2018, taking into account available resources and environmental conditions.

Flood Relief Schemes Status

74. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of the OPW plans to alleviate the flooding at the entrance to Turin, Kilmaine, County Mayo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24133/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): Local flooding issues are a matter, in the first instance, for each Local Authority to investigate and address, and County Councils may carry out flood mitigation works using their own resources. The OPW operates the Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protec-

tion Scheme to provide funding to Local Authorities to undertake minor flood mitigation works or studies to address localised flooding and coastal protection problems within their administrative areas. The scheme generally applies to relatively straightforward cases where a solution can be readily identified and achieved in a short time frame and which meet the criteria of the scheme

In 2014, an application under the Minor Works scheme for funding of €34,000 was received from Mayo County Council for a project at Turin, Kilmaine but this was not deemed eligible under the scheme criteria on cost benefit grounds.

It is open to Mayo County Council to bring forward new proposals under the Minor Works scheme for viable measures at this location which meet the scheme criteria.

Office of Public Works Projects

75. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the plans the OPW has for the preservation and restoration of Bunadubber Mill, Neale, County Mayo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24136/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): A Conservation and Management Plan is in place for Bunadober Mill National Monument, Co Mayo. The Plan recognises that, at a national level, the Mill is of considerable historic and cultural significance due to the survival of its waterwheels, machinery, artefacts and documentary records, together with the social history of several generations of the Moran family who operated the Mill.

The Office of Public Works has undertaken work at the site to conserve the buildings and their historic contents. This has involved the repair of buildings, recording of artefacts, and storing and the cataloguing objects that are in a vulnerable condition, while also keeping the grounds maintained and generally securing the site. Specialist advice has also been provided by external consultants in the areas of ecology, timber decay, industrial heritage and building preservation and this informs the conservation approach. Important tasks undertaken to date have included re-roofing, installation of new doors and windows, together with the challenging task of removing the millstones from their rotten timber frames and recording and dismantling key parts of the mill machinery.

The mill house garden and adjacent field are well-maintained, and recent works have been undertaken to remove silt and entrenched weed/organic matter from the mill pond and water-course that had, over time, taken hold. At present, the external of the main buildings is in a reasonable condition, but several areas in both the mill and the cottage will require further attention before the building can be opened to visitors.

The key waterworks elements of the Mill still require significant intervention to restore the wheels to their former function. An archaeologist has completed an inventory and a scope of works for the repair of the wheel and a detailed structural engineering assessment is underway to fully understand the challenges involved in progressing further with these elements.

National Monuments

76. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the OPW has plans to ensure public access to the national monument at the Hill of Carn, The Neale,

County Mayo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24140/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): Eochy's Cairn, a National Monument in the ownership of the State, sits on private property with no dedicated means of public access. Although the Monument is on private land, it can be accessed with the permission of the landowner. Typically, full public access to National Monument sites is best facilitated by the provision of a dedicated, reserved route in the ownership of the State. However, the Office of Public Works regards the current level of access at Eochy's Cairn as acceptable and has no plans to acquire any further property.

Teacher Retirements

77. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position in circumstances in which a person aged 65 years of age and employed as a SNA in a school wishes to continue their employment until they are 70 years of age; and his views on whether they should be given first refusal if a post or part of a post becomes available in the location in which they are employed. [24014/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): On 5 December 2017, the Government announced changes in respect of the retirement ages of public service staff recruited prior to 1 April 2004. In effect, this advised that the compulsory retirement age for public servants recruited before this date would be increased to 70 years.

My Department issued circular 27/2018 on 5 April 2018 to set out the interim measures to apply pending the enactment of legislation to give effect to the Government decision. The main provision of the interim arrangements is to permit public service staff recruited prior to 1 April 2004 to stay until they reach the Contributory State Pension age (currently 66 years), subject to certain conditions including that a continuing role is available for that employee for the duration of the retention period. Where staff currently have existing arrangements which allow them to work to the end of the school/academic year in which they reach the age of 65 (rather than retiring on the date that they reach 65), such staff who avail of the interim arrangements may work to the end of the school/academic year in which they reach the age of 66.

My Department has also issued a Frequently Asked Questions document to accompany circular 27/2018 which details arrangements in applying for retention beyond retirement dates and the impact of this on the employment conditions for staff who wish to avail of this option. In this regard, I wish to draw your attention to Point 17 of this document which notes that Special Needs Assistants do not retain their pre-retirement date seniority in such cases. Circular 27/2018 and the FAQs are available on my Department's website at the following links:

https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0027_2018.pdf.

https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0027_2018_faq.pdf.

Education Centre Network

78. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the proposal for a new site and building which was submitted by a centre (details supplied) in October 2017 will be approved; if same will be expedited as a matter of urgency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23994/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): There are 21 full time Edu-

cation Centres. Their principal activity is to facilitate the local delivery of national programmes of teacher professional development on behalf of my Department. They also organise a varied local programme of activities for teachers, school management and parents in response to demand. Each Centre has a Management Committee which is elected annually to manage the business of the staff and the centre.

Limerick Education Centre is situated in a building owned by Limerick and Clare ETB. A proposal has been received for the purchase of a new site.

I wish to clarify that the current priority, within the limited funding available, is the provision of essential classroom accommodation in areas where significant demographic need has been established to ensure that each child will have access to a physical school place. You will therefore appreciate that all applications for capital funding must be considered in the context of the existing challenging financial circumstances where funding must be prioritised for this purpose and to provide mainstream classroom accommodation where additional teachers are being appointed.

In this regard, the delivery of new schools together with extension projects to meet future demand will be the main focus of the School Planning and Building Unit's budget for the coming year.

Teacher Secondment

79. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a member of his inspectorate that is seconded as a director of an education centre on a calendar year basis will now have to revert to a school year basis in view of the regulations introduced in September 2017; if so, if the director's secondment tenure will not be reduced as a result of this regulation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23995/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Education Centres are statutory bodies recognised under Section 37 of the Education Act (1998) and are managed by local voluntary Management Committees which are elected annually. My Department arranges for the secondment of teachers from their teaching posts for the purpose of developing and providing CPD for teachers and for the appointment as Directors of Education Support Centres (ESC's). Members of my Department's inspectorate may also be seconded from my Department to take up positions as Directors of ESC's. Secondments are a temporary arrangement renewable on a year to year basis. While on secondment, teachers retain their school post, the terms and conditions that apply to teachers and receive their salary and a secondment allowance which are met in full by my Department.

In 2010, a new policy of secondment was agreed with the Department of Public Expenditure & Reform (DPER). The policy sanctioned a new limit on secondment numbers and established an upper limit of 5 years on the duration of a secondment, following which the Directors return to their posts either as a teacher or an inspector.

There are many benefits from the revised policy for teachers, their boards of management and the system as a whole. Because an upper limit of 5 years now applies to secondments, there is:

- confidence that the people involved in the delivery of CPD have recent experience of the curriculum and of the school environment
- certainty about secondment parameters which assist individual secondees and their em-

ployers (i.e. ETB/school/Department) in planning

There are more opportunities for people to take on career enhancing roles in the support services and the Centres. Teachers returning to their school after a period of secondment have the potential to enrich their school environment and they become eligible to take on subsequent secondment opportunities after a period back in their school.

Regular turnover of seconded teachers is now an established practice with teachers returning to enrich their schools so the investment in their skills is not lost. Since 2010, 11 Education Centres have successfully recruited new Directors and the work of the Centres has not been negatively affected.

Section 37 of the Education Act 1998 provides the legislative basis for the recognition and regulation of Education Centres. Section 37(6) of the Act makes provision to make regulations relating to a number of matters in Education Centres such as the appointment of management committees, funding, staffing, provision of information to the Department & other operational matters.

In September 2017, Regulation 394 for the appointment and secondment of directors of Education Centres were introduced. Appointments as Directors under these Regulations are made on a school year basis. Under the regulations, a person shall not be appointed as Director for more than 5 consecutive years whether or not the appointment was made before the coming into operation of the Regulations. A part of a school year shall count as a full school year for the purposes of any calculation under the Regulations.

Education Centre Network

80. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if financial assistance will be provided to a centre (details supplied) in finding a temporary solution to its parking problems while it awaits a response to its proposal for a new site and building; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23996/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): There are 21 full time and 9 part time Education Centres. The Education Centre network provides a national infrastructure for the delivery of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for teachers and Centres. Every centre has a locally elected Management Committee and a Director appointed on secondment.

My Department is the main funder of Education Centres through direct budget allocations for administrative staff pay and operating costs and local courses. In 2017, the Department provided funding of €436,948 to Limerick Education Centre and a similar level of funding will be provided in 2018.

Limerick Education Centre is situated in a building owned by Limerick and Clare ETB. The Centre has advised the Department that since September 2017 it has been experiencing car parking difficulties and has submitted a proposal with long term and interim solutions.

I wish to clarify that the current priority, within the limited funding available, is the provision of essential classroom accommodation in areas where significant demographic need has been established to ensure that each child will have access to a physical school place. You will therefore appreciate that all applications for capital funding must be considered in the context of the existing challenging financial circumstances where funding must be prioritised for this purpose and to provide mainstream classroom accommodation where additional teachers are

being appointed.

In this regard, the delivery of new schools together with extension projects to meet future demand will be the main focus of the School Planning and Building Unit's budget for the coming year.

Officials of my Department will continue to liaise with the Centre to see how best its car parking issue can be resolved.

Education Centre Network

81. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount of funding allocated to a centre (details supplied) to rent its building from the LCETB; the amount of funding allocated to the LCETB; his plans to net off the rental funding against the LCETB allocation in view of issues in regard to car parking allocations for the centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24009/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm that my Department allocates €120,000 per annum to Limerick Education Centre to rent accommodation from Limerick and Clare ETB (LCETB).

Separately, my Department provides funding to LCETB for the pay of certain ETB staff (including teachers), funding for the day-to-day running of schools, specific grants (e.g. book grant, transition year programme), targeted expenditure (e.g. DEIS funding), funding for student grants, funding for capital projects and head office running costs. The general non-pay budget is provided as a block grant and is made up of direct funding from the Department as well as certain receipts retained by the ETB.

ETBs also receive funding from sources other than my Department, for example through self-financing programmes or from other Departments and agencies, most notably for further education and training which is funded by SOLAS.

Details of funding under the various headings are provided in the Annual Financial Statements of the ETB which are laid in the Houses of the Oireachtas.

I understand that in 2016, LCETB erected a barrier in the car park which has reduced the parking spaces available to the Education Centre. It is a matter for LCETB to appropriately manage in line with best practice, all issues regarding upkeep, maintenance and security of any property including car parks under its remit. In those circumstances it would not be appropriate for me to net off the rental funding to Limerick Education Centre against the general funding allocated to LCETB.

DEIS Eligibility

82. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an update to the identification model for DEIS qualification has been carried out; if so, if a school (details supplied) will be included in the upcoming DEIS programme; and the criteria which a school must meet in order to qualify for inclusion on the programme. [24022/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The identification of schools for receipt of additional resources under the DEIS programme is informed by a scientific data based model which assesses levels of disadvantage in individual schools based on the

pupil cohort of the school. This model is applied uniformly across every school in the country.

The key data sources used in the DEIS identification process are the DES Primary Online Database (POD) and Post-Primary Online (PPOD) Databases, and CSO data from the National Census of Population as represented in the Pobal HP Index for Small Areas which is a method of measuring the relative affluence or disadvantage of a particular geographical area. Variables used in the compilation of the HP Index include not only single parent rate, but those related to demographic growth, dependency ratios, education levels, overcrowding, social class, occupation and unemployment rates. This data is combined with pupil data, anonymised and aggregated to small area, to provide information on the relative level of concentrated disadvantage present in the pupil cohort of individual schools.

A detailed document explaining the methodology used in the Identification process is available on the Department's website at <https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools-/DEIS-Identification-Process.pdf>.

An update of the DEIS Identification process is currently underway. This will take account of updated school data as provided by schools for the current school year combined with the Pobal HP Index of Deprivation, based on CSO Small Area Population statistics derived from the 2016 National Census. A detailed quality assurance process in respect of this is currently being carried out.

It is important to note that any adjustment to the DEIS status of a school, including the school referred to by the Deputy, will be based on the DEIS Identification process.

DEIS Eligibility

83. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a consultation process has been concluded with a school (details supplied); and if the DEIS status of this school will be adjusted as a result. [24025/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The identification of schools for receipt of additional resources under the DEIS programme is informed by a scientific data based model which assesses levels of disadvantage in individual schools based on the pupil cohort of the school. This model is applied uniformly across every school in the country. Therefore, my Department does not engage in any consultation process with individual schools regarding their inclusion in DEIS. It is important to note that any adjustment to the DEIS status of a school, including the school referred to by the Deputy, will be based on the DEIS Identification process.

As the Deputy may be aware, an update of the DEIS Identification process is currently underway. This will take account of updated school data as provided by schools for the current school year combined with the Pobal HP Index of Deprivation, based on CSO Small Area Population statistics derived from the 2016 National Census. A detailed quality assurance process in respect of this is currently underway.

Institutes of Technology

84. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the future options for an institute of technology (details supplied) in view of the fact that mandatory merger is still a requirement for institutes of technology to make an application for university status regardless

of meeting all other criteria; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24056/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 sets out the long-term vision for the development of the higher education sector in Ireland. The strategy recognises that a diverse range of strong, autonomous higher education institutions (HEIs) is essential to respond effectively to evolving economic and societal needs. The strategy includes the retention of institutional diversity as well as the consolidation of HEIs, as appropriate, including as technological universities, and increased collaboration between HEIs, both universities and institutes of technology, in regional clusters.

The Higher Education Authority (HEA) is allocating €12m in 2018 to institutes of technology for the development of technological universities and other higher education landscape restructuring projects. Not all Institutes of Technology are currently part of the consortia which are seeking to develop proposals to attain technological university status under the 2018 Act. Section 29 of the Technological Universities Act 2018 provides that two or more Institutes of Technology may apply for designation as a TU. Section 38 provides that an Institute of Technology and a technological university may apply for TU status.

It is a matter for individual Institutes of Technology as to their positioning over time within the diversity of the higher education landscape. This process is currently being undertaken within the higher education system performance framework 2018 - 2020 which allows HEIs to identify their strategic niche and agree a performance compact aligned with funding with the HEA.

However, there continues to be a key role for individual Institutes of Technology in the provision of high quality education and training, whether technical in nature, apprenticeship focused, creative, research based or in relation to lifelong learning and also with an emphasis on providing appropriate progression pathways for students. Many Institutes of Technology have a focus on, and a good track record in, research, development and innovation and the strong links they continue to forge with industry play a pivotal role in driving regional growth and jobs.

Summer Works Scheme Applications

85. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when an application by a school (details supplied) for the summer works scheme for 2018 will be decided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24059/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm to the Deputy that the school in question applied for funding under the Summer Works Scheme, under Category 10 - External Environment Works.

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

Over 700 applications in Categories 7-10, at a cost of just over €52 million have not been reached to date. However, almost €80 million has been approved under the current round of the Scheme categories 1-6, in respect of 635 school projects, 464 primary and 171 post-primary schools, for Gas, electrical upgrades, mechanical, sanitation and roof improvement works.. Details of the successful school applicants, are published on the Department's website www.education.ie .

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

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

The application from the school in question will be considered in this context.

School Accommodation

86. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 238 of 20 March 2018, if a report has been submitted by the inspector; when a decision will issue in the case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24062/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware my Department requested an Inspector to visit the school to consider the schools accommodation needs for special education and to prepare a report in this regard. My Department will be in further contact with the school authority when the report in the matter has been received and considered.

Pension Fund Fees

87. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason for the delay in processing a refund of pension contributions in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24063/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The person referred to by the Deputy is a member of the Superannuation (Education) Pension Scheme, a pension scheme for special needs assistants (SNA), and is in receipt of pension benefits since 2012.

Each year declaration forms are issued to a cohort of persons in receipt of pension benefits from my Department in order to verify the details of the person concerned and confirm their continued entitlement to the payment of benefits. The person referred to by the Deputy is one such person obliged to complete this form in 2018. This is a separate matter to that of the refund of contributions.

My Department has now received a completed application for a refund of pension contributions made in relation to employment after to 2012, and it is expected payment will shortly issue to the person concerned.

School Funding

88. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a school (details supplied) will be granted funding to allow it to build a new school gym in view of the fact its facilities are badly in need of replacement. [24074/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm that my Department received an application from the school in question for significant capital funding to construct a replacement PE Hall and classroom accommodation. As my Department's priority is the provision of essential classroom accommodation to meet demographic need, the element of the school's application relating to classroom accommodation was therefore prioritised for consideration. In this regard, my Department has approved funding to the school to construct 2 mainstream classrooms and a woodwork room. This building project has been devolved to the school authority for delivery.

Under the National Development Plan (NDP), increased funding has been provided for the school sector capital investment programme. This funding allows for a continued focus on the provision of new permanent school places to keep pace with demographic demand and also provides for an additional focus on the refurbishment of existing school buildings to include the building and modernisation of PE facilities in post-primary schools.

Under the Ireland Project 2040, we will invest €8.4 billion (compared to €4.9 billion in the previous decade) in primary and post primary school buildings. This will include the provision of 50 large scale school building projects and 20,000 school places in state of the art new buildings.

The immediate priority of my Department is providing 20,000 new and replacement school places each year, to ensure that every child has a school place. The government will focus in the medium term on the provision of PE facilities in schools.

Schools Building Projects Status

89. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a project (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24097/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department is currently awaiting the return of the completed tender report and when this is received and considered my Department will revert directly to the school regarding progression of the project to the next stage. Subject to no issues arising with the tender report or the supplementary tender report which will follow, it is anticipated that construction should commence in quarter 4 2018.

Schools Data

90. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of claims nationally that have been initiated with regard to primary school liability and personal injury claims taken by or on behalf of students; the monetary amounts awarded for successful claims in each of the years 2012 to 2016; the cost of the claims; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24104/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Primary school liability

and personal injury claims are a matter for the board of management of each primary school.

The Governance Manual for Primary Schools 2015-2019 requires each board of management of a primary school to put in place comprehensive insurance cover to safeguard the school, the Board and the Trustees.

Claims arising under such insurance policies are processed directly between boards and their insurers without recourse to my Department, and information on such claims is not collated centrally.

Capitation Grants

91. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the increase in capitation rates for primary schools and secondary schools respectively in each year since 2016; if he is satisfied with these increases; his plans to increase the rates in the coming two years; if so, the amount by which they will be increased; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24118/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I recognise the need to improve capitation funding for schools having regard to the reductions that were necessary over recent years. Restoring capitation funding as resources permit is one of the actions included in the Action Plan for Education.

Budget 2018 marked the second year of major reinvestment in the education sector, as we continue to implement the Action Plan for Education, which has the central aim to make the Irish Education and Training service the best in Europe within a decade. In 2018, the budget for the Department of Education increased by €554 million to over €10 billion. Through budget 2017 and Budget 2018, we are now investing €1 billion more in education.

While the capitation rates for Primary and Voluntary Secondary schools have not increased in the period since 2016 the process is underway for restoring grant funding that is used by schools to fund the salaries of ancillary staff. The ancillary grant was increased by €6 in 2016, €5 in 2017 and €5 in 2018, in order to enable primary schools to implement the arbitration salary increase for grant funded school secretaries and caretakers and to also implement the restoration of salary for cleaners arising from the unwinding of FEMPI legislation. A similar type approach in relation to improvements in grant funding was applied, as appropriate, at post-primary level.

Schools Site Acquisitions

92. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding a project (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24121/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy may be aware, the project to which he refers was announced as part of my Department's Six Year Capital Programme in 2015.

Officials in my Department are working closely with officials from the relevant Local Authority under the Memorandum of Understanding in relation to the acquisition of a suitable permanent location for the school in question.

A number of potential site options have been identified and these are currently under consid-

eration, in consultation with the local authority. Given the commercial sensitivities associated with land acquisitions generally I am not in a position to comment further at this time.

School Accommodation Provision

93. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application by a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24122/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm to the Deputy that the school in question recently wrote to my Department advising that it expects enrolments to increase in the coming academic year 2018/2019.

My Department contacted the school and advised the Principal that should enrolment increase to a level that would warrant the appointment of an additional teacher, it is then open to the school to submit an application for additional accommodation, under the Additional Accommodation Scheme, should the school's existing accommodation not be capable of accommodating the additional teacher. An application form can be accessed on www.education.gov.ie,

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

94. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the concerns of the community at a school (details supplied) in respect of the fact that the school will have no special needs assistant from September 2018 and will be the only special school in the country in such a position; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24127/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) for allocating a quantum of Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support for each school annually taking into account the assessed care needs of children qualifying for SNA support enrolled in the school.

The NCSE allocates SNA support to schools in accordance with the criteria set out in Department Circular 0030/2014, which is available on the Department's website at www.education.ie, in order that students who have care needs can access SNA support as and when it is needed. The Department's policy is to ensure that every child who is assessed as needing SNA support will receive access to such support.

In considering applications for SNA supports for individual pupils, the SENOs take account of the pupils' needs and consider the resources available to the school to identify whether additionality is needed or whether the school might reasonably be expected to meet the needs of the pupils from its current level of resources. SNAs are not allocated to individual children but to schools as a school based resource.

SNA allocations to all schools can change from year to year as children with care needs leave the school, as new children with care needs enrol in a school and as children develop more independent living skills and their care needs diminish over time.

I was very pleased to announce on Friday 18th May that 800 additional Special Needs Assistants will be allocated for the beginning of the next school year, with a further 140 expected to be allocated by the end of the year.

I was also pleased that the announcement was in keeping with the commitment made last year to inform schools of the September 2018 allocation before the end of May. In making this announcement at this time the Department is providing certainty to schools, parents and of course SNA's in relation to the posts that will be in place for the coming school year.

By the end of this year, there will be a total of 15,000 Special Needs Assistants working in our schools, a 42% increase on 2011.

The NCSE Appeals Process may be invoked by a parent or a school where it is considered that a child was not granted access to SNA support on the grounds that Department policy was not met in accordance with Circular 0030/2014.

Schools may also appeal a decision, where the school considers that the NCSE, in applying Department policy, has not allocated the appropriate level of SNA supports to the school to meet the special educational and/or care needs of the children concerned.

Where a school has received its allocation of SNA support for 2018/19, but wishes new enrolments or assessments to be considered, which were not taken into account when the initial allocation was made, they may continue to make applications to the NCSE. The closing date for receipt of any appeals in regard to SNA allocations is Friday, 28th September 2018.

As this question relates to a particular school I have referred the question to the NCSE for their direct reply.

Seirbhísí Oideachais trí Ghaeilge

95. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna cad é cúis na moille le cead a thabhairt do scoil (sonraí tugtha) dul ar aghaidh le togra tógála atá riachtanach don scoil; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [24130/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Mar is eol don Teachta, cheadaigh mo Roinnse deontas suntasach cineachta i Meán Fómhair 2014 don scoil i dtrácht le haghaidh leathnú buan agus oibreacha athchumraíochta a d'fhágfadh go bhféadfaí gach cóiríocht réamhdhéanta a bhaint de shuíomh na scoile.

Beidh a fhios agat go bhfuil an plean costais athcheartaithe, a fuarthas ó údarás na scoile mí Aibreáin seo caite, á scrúdú faoi láthair agus beidh mo Roinnse i dteagmháil leis an scoil mar gheall air go luath.

Schools Building Projects Status

96. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the length of time the provision of a replacement school is being considered for a school (details supplied); the reason for the delay with this project; the steps in the process it is hoped to complete in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24138/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm that building projects for the schools referred to by the Deputy are included in my Department's 6 Year Capital Programme.

The development of the project brief must have regard to the continuance of the existing schools whilst construction is underway. Due to the complexities of the schools existing site,

issues to be considered in the development of the project brief include identifying the preferred location of the buildings (having regard to the challenging site), decanting considerations and construction traffic access. My Department is in ongoing contact with the school authority in the matter.

Apprenticeship Programmes

97. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the methodology and the forecasting model used for registration targets for all craft based and consortia led apprenticeships under the Action Plan to Expand Apprenticeship and Traineeship in Ireland 2016-2020; and the specific methodology and models used in coming up with annual targets. [24190/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): As the Deputy is aware, apprenticeship is a demand driven educational and training programme, which aims to develop the skills of an apprentice in order to meet the needs of industry and the labour market.

SOLAS, through its Skills and Labour Market and Research Unit (SLMRU) and its Apprenticeship Services Unit, regularly conducts forecasts of apprenticeship requirements. The SLMRU has developed a comprehensive methodology to generate annual five-year forecasts of apprentice intake for construction trades. The methodology takes account of output forecasts, in money terms, for various segments of the construction industry, the CSO's Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) and the relationship between apprentice intake and employment trends in the sectors.

This Government is committed to doubling the number of new apprenticeship registrations by 2020 which will see 31,000 people starting an apprenticeship programme during the period. The Action Plan to Expand Apprenticeship and Traineeship in Ireland 2016-2020 sets out target new registrations for each of the years to 2020 and targets for new apprenticeship programmes to support these registrations. In addition, the Plan sets out various actions, such as an additional calls for apprenticeship proposals, an apprenticeship branding and marketing campaign and a review to barriers to participation in apprenticeship all designed to drive registrations into the future. To date 11 new apprenticeship programmes have been developed in various new sectors of the economy ranging from international financial services to hospitality. In addition, arising from our second call for apprenticeship proposals last year, 26 new programmes were approved for further development into national apprenticeship programmes which have added to the pipeline of apprenticeships that are in development and to be rolled out during this and future years. As well as developments in new apprenticeships, as the employment and economic situation continues to improve, we have seen strong growth in registrations across the craft trades nationally during 2017 with 4,508 at year end, which represents a 20% increase on 2016.

The annual targets for both craft and consortia led apprenticeships set out in the Plan in each of the years to 2020 were informed by the SLMRU forecasts in the craft trades and the Programme for Government commitments in the area. The targets for consortia-led apprenticeships in the early years of the Plan were also informed by information on planned registrations provided by consortia who had been approved in the 2015 call for proposals.

Skills Development

98. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the State training schemes, supports and requirements for training persons in the hospitality sector (details supplied). [24193/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): In 2015 the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN) carried out a study on the future skills needs of the hospitality sector including skill needs for chefs and cooks.

The objective was to assess demand arising within the sector in Ireland including hotels, restaurants, bars, canteens and catering over the period to 2020. The aim was to ensure that there will be the right supply of skills to help drive domestic hospitality sector business and employment growth. Key findings within the report related to the high replacement/exit rates in the sector which has implications for the ongoing skill requirements of the sector and also with regards to staff retention, including education and training, and workplace conditions and remuneration.

The Study assessed skills demand at all NFQ levels, with a particular focus on career progression opportunities for those at lower skilled levels to help fill anticipated job openings. The report provides a set of recommendations designed to address the skills requirements of the sector over the period to 2020, including the need to establish a National Oversight and Advisory Group, comprising of key hospitality stakeholders, to provide a forum for on-going collaboration to support the needs of the sector and oversee implementation of the EGFSN recommendations.

Established in 2016 and currently chaired by the Irish Hotels Federation the group identified five priority areas for progress on which significant progress has been made:-

- Promoting careers in the sector
- Audit of hospitality related courses and facilities in both HE and FET
- Development of apprenticeship and traineeship programmes
- Launch of a dedicated skillnet for the hospitality industry
- Making employment connections – DEASP/Jobsbridge etc

The group has published its first progress report which is available on the Skills Ireland website and work is currently underway on its second progress update. It has also published its report on the audit of both higher and further education courses providing a high level of analysis of the data available that shows the numbers of courses, enrolments and awards in the Hospitality sector to enable the Group to determine how it might address the skill sets required by the sector and to aid it in identifying gaps in the provision of courses.

Arising from Government's commitment to expand apprenticeship and traineeship education, a new Commis Chef Apprenticeship has been developed by the Apprenticeship Council, led by the Irish Hotels Federation and the Restaurants Association of Ireland working with Kerry ETB. To date, 66 people have been registered on this programme with an expected full year intake of around 160. The Apprenticeship Council also approved development funding for separate proposals to develop a Chef de Partie and Sous Chef Apprenticeship, with expected intakes this year of 48 and 16 respectively. It is expected that the Chef de Partie programme will be rolled out later this year. Separately, an Executive Chef apprenticeship is also in development.

In 2015 a new Career Traineeship initiative was initiated by SOLAS in collaboration with

the ETBs and enterprise to develop a more effective model of work-based learning, primarily at NFQ levels 4 and 5, incorporating best national and international research and practice. Networks have been created to facilitate partnerships between ETBs and employers to identify training needs, design training programmes, recruit learners and deliver training on and off the job. There are currently three hospitality traineeships available with further traineeships in development.

A Restaurant and Hospitality Skillnet was established in 2017 and, along with the Taste 4 Success Skillnet, will address skill needs in the sector. There were also almost 5,500 beneficiaries in 2017 of further education and training in the food and beverage and tourism areas.

All further education and training programmes on offer are fully accessible to all EU citizens.

Citizenship Ceremonies

99. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when a person (details supplied) will be called for a citizenship ceremony; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24021/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy, continues to be processed.

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.

Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service Administration

100. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the INIS will publish quarterly figures for student visa statistics as part of the international education strategy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24066/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I understand that there has been contact made with the Deputy by my officials seeking clarification in relation to this Question. A detailed response will issue when this clarification is received.

Programme for Government Initiatives

101. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the full year cost associated with the Programme for Partnership Government commitment to increase paid parental leave in the first year of a child's life. [24080/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): As the Deputy has referred to in their question, the Programme for Partnership Government includes a commitment to increase paid leave for parents during the first year of a child's life, as research shows that parental care is of particular importance during this time. The Government has established an interdepartmental working group to develop proposals to give effect to this commitment and I expect it to make its report in the next month.

In this context, the Deputy will appreciate that it would be pre-emptive of me to detail any costs outlined in the Report, as it is in the process of being finalised, the Government has not yet had sight of the Report and as such, has not yet had an opportunity to consider the proposals presented in the Report.

Law Reform Commission Recommendations

102. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the action he has taken in respect of each of the recommendations relevant to his Department made by the Law Reform Commission's Report on Harmful Communications and Digital Safety. [24115/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I can assure the Deputy that the Government recognises the importance of integrated actions across all relevant Departments to address online safety.

In March, Minister Naughten hosted an Open Policy Debate with a wide range of stakeholders to consider future actions in this area, including matters addressed in the Law Reform Commission Report. On foot of this, all relevant Government Departments with responsibility in this area are working together to develop a whole of Government approach in the form of an integrated Action Plan, and this work is being taken forward under the auspices of the relevant Cabinet Committee.

As Minister for Justice, my primary responsibility in this area relates to the development of effective responses under the criminal law and my Department has been working to bring forward additional legislation on foot of the LRC recommendations in this regard. However, I have recently accepted a Labour Party Private Member's Bill aimed at progressing these issues, along broadly similar lines to the legislation that was in the course of being drafted in my Department. Deputy Howlin's "Harassment, Harmful Communications and Related Offences Bill" completed second stage in the Dáil in January 2018 and was not opposed by Government. The main provisions of the Bill as published include:

- A new offence of non-consensual distribution of intimate images with/without intent to cause harm or distress (generally referred to as "revenge pornography").

- The existing offence of sending threatening or indecent messages will be extended to apply to all threatening, false indecent and obscene messages using any form of online or traditional method of communications.

- The existing offence of harassment will be extended to include all forms of communication, including through online or digital communications.

My officials will be meeting with Deputy Howlin in the coming weeks with the intention of bringing forward Government amendments to ensure the Bill is legally effective.

As Minister for Justice I am committed to working with colleagues across politics to ensure that we make rapid progress and enact legislation in line with these LRC recommendations at the earliest opportunity.

Garda Vetting

103. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position in relation to Garda clearance to work with children of persons that were incarcerated in Northern Ireland in the pre-1994 period for offences related to the Troubles in Northern Ireland and that have no criminal convictions otherwise; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24129/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Vetting for the purpose of employment with children or vulnerable adults is carried out by the Garda National Vetting Bureau in accordance with the provisions of the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Acts 2012-2016 and other relevant laws. The primary purpose of these vetting arrangements is to enhance protection for children and vulnerable adults. Neither I nor my Department has any role in the processing of such applications.

While the Garda National Vetting Bureau will make such enquiries within An Garda Síochána or with a Scheduled Organisation under the Acts as they deem necessary to establish whether there is any criminal record or specified information relating to a vetting applicant, the Vetting Bureau does not make decisions in respect of the suitability of an applicant for a position. This is, of course, the responsibility of the employer or other relevant organisation that is engaging a person to work with children or vulnerable adults.

What constitutes a criminal record and what constitutes specified information in relation to a person who is the subject of an application for a vetting disclosure is defined in the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Acts 2012-2016. Furthermore, the Criminal Justice (Spent Convictions and Certain Disclosures) Act 2016 sets out the arrangements in law whereby certain past convictions may not be disclosed. This Act made a series of amendments to the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012 in respect of the arrangements that must be followed for the disclosure or otherwise of past convictions in the context of the vetting process.

These provisions in the law are applied by the National Vetting Bureau in the context of processing all vetting applications, including those in respect of persons who may have previous convictions for offences related to the troubles in Northern Ireland.

Family Reunification Applications

104. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status an application for family reunification in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24150/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have been advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service of my Department that the person referred to by the Deputy has not submitted an application for family reunification as provided for in

the International Protection Act 2015. However, the person was approved as a family member in an application on the 30 January 2004 by the family reunification unit.

The Deputy may wish to note that queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to INIS by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been established specifically 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.

Immigration Status

105. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if consideration will be given to an application for long term residency status and or stamp 4 in the case of persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24151/18]

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 persons 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.

Leave to Remain

106. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if reconsideration of an application for permission to remain can be undertaken in the case of a person (details supplied); if their case can be considered on the basis set out; if permission to appeal under permission to remain can be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24152/18]

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 either the International Protection Office (IPO) or the International Protection Appeals Tribunal (IPAT) directly, as appropriate.

The IPO may be contacted 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. The International Protection Appeals Tribunal may be contacted either by email to *info@protectionappeals.ie*, by telephone at 01 474 8400 (or Lo-Call 1890 201 458), or in writing to Corporate Services Division, The International Protection Appeals Tribunal, 6-7 Hanover Street East, Dublin D02 W320.

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 Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (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

107. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when an application for naturalisation or permission to remain will be awarded to persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24154/18]

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 spouse and children of the person referred to by the Deputy. The spouse of the person referred to by the Deputy currently has permission to reside in the State until 2 March 2019. 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.

Immigration Status

108. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the case of a person (details supplied) will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24156/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the original documents submitted by the applicant will be returned immediately.

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

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

Naturalisation Applications

109. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the residency status and eligibility for long term residency and naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24158/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that there is no record of a current application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy. This person currently has permission to reside in the State until 11 January 2019. A determination on whether an applicant satisfies the statutory criteria attendant to naturalisation can only be made after an application is received. In order to make an application for Long Term Residency in the State the person concerned must have been legally resident in the State for a minimum of 5 years (i.e. 60 months) on work permit/work authorisation/working visa conditions.

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.

Deportation Orders Re-examination

110. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the file of a person (details supplied) will be reviewed in view of the fact they were ten years resident before a deportation order was made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24159/18]

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 25 August 2017. 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.

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.

Land Acquisition

111. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of files in respect of property arbitration before the arbitrator; the number of interactions between the regulator and the relevant authorities, including the local authorities; his views on whether urgent action is needed to ensure that delays are reduced to the minimum and that emergency measures will be taken if necessary to ensure a more rapid processing of applications with consequent benefit to the economy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24172/18]

112. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of files referred to each member of the property arbitration team in each of the past five years and to date in 2018; the number of decisions made; the number pending; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24173/18]

113. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the steps that can be taken to accelerate procedures in the property arbitration office with particular reference to the need for a rapid turnaround within two months of referral; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24174/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 111 to 113, inclusive, together.

As the Deputy is aware, when the State compulsorily acquires land for public purposes and there is a dispute between the vendor and the purchaser regarding the amount of compensation which should be paid, the vendor may apply to the Land Values Reference Committee (com-

prising the Chief Justice, the President of the High Court and the President of the Society of Chartered Surveyors of Ireland) for the appointment of a Property Arbitrator to arbitrate on the amount to be paid.

In order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have made enquiries and the Courts Service has informed me that the remit of the Land Value Reference Committee, established under the Acquisition of Land (Assessment of Compensation) Act 1919 and reconstituted under the Acquisition of Land (Reference Committee) Act 1925, is to appoint and maintain a panel of property arbitrators and to refer to that panel for arbitration the assessment of disputed claims for compensation arising under various statutory regimes authorising compulsory acquisition of land or rights relating to land.

The Courts Service has provided statistics on the number of the cases referred to the Property Arbitrators over the past 5 years and to date in 2018 as set out in the table below.

Year	Total Number of Cases	Number referred to the Property Arbitrator	Number referred to Part Time Temporary Property Arbitrators
2013	68	68	0
2014	42	42	0
2015	33	25	8
2016	60	2	58
2017	67	18	49
2018	8	5	3

The Courts Service has advised that the Committee has no oversight function in respect of the property arbitrators. Furthermore neither the Courts Service nor my Department has any function in relation to the work programme of property arbitrators who are appointed by the Land Values Reference Committee and so the further statistical data requested by the Deputy cannot be provided.

The remedies available to a party in the event that an arbitrator is in default in carrying out his or her functions depend on whether the arbitration is governed by the Arbitration Act 2010 or any other regime. The 2010 Act incorporates in Irish law, subject to the Act's provisions, the UNCITRAL Model Law on International Commercial Arbitration.

The Courts Service has further advised that it cannot be assumed that a delay in the completion of an arbitration is due to some default on the arbitrator's part. Delays in the completion of an arbitration can occur for other reasons outside the control of the arbitrator, for example, an ongoing court case.

The Courts Service has further informed me that there is currently one full-time property arbitrator and seven temporary part-time arbitrators available to be nominated to act in cases in which the property arbitrator is unable to act and that the Courts Service is satisfied that this is sufficient to meet the demand for services in this area.

Crime Prevention

114. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the action he is taking to help reduce the number of bicycles that are stolen. [24201/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will be aware

that matters such as this are operational issues for the Garda Commissioner.

However, I am advised by the Garda authorities that a crime prevention initiative entitled “Operation Chain” was put in place by local Garda Management in the Pearse Street Garda District, and is a targeted intelligence led operation focusing on pedal cycle theft. The initiative includes inter-agency co-operation with Dublin City Council and interested third parties, such as Dublin Cycling Campaign.

I am further advised that An Garda Síochána has a number of “bait” bikes which are deployed at hot spot locations throughout the South Inner City by the Community Policing Unit.

I understand that when these bicycles are deployed they are kept under surveillance by members of An Garda Síochána. The bicycles are locked in prominent positions and when an attempt is made to steal the bicycle, the members intercept the offender, arrest and detain them and recover the bicycle. During detention, follow up enquiries are conducted which may include liaison with online retailers to ascertain if the individual has been involved in sale of bicycles on line and follow up searches where warranted.

I am informed that between March 2017 and March 2018 bait bikes were deployed on 50 occasions with 16 persons arrested in connection with these deployments.

- 6 cases are before the Courts,
- 3 cases are still awaiting JLO recommendations,
- 7 cases are now finalised with outcomes,
- 3 persons received the Probation Act,
- 2 persons had charges taken into consideration,
- 1 person given community service,
- 1 person received an adult caution.

I am assured that Garda Management are continuously monitoring crime trends and hot spots to ensure intelligence led operations are put in place to target crimes of this nature.

IDA Ireland Jobs Data

115. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the percentage of IDA jobs located in the south east; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23990/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): IDA Ireland are working towards ambitious targets to ensure that employment and investment are distributed as evenly as possible across the country. The employment situation in the South-East, which covers Waterford, Carlow, Wexford, Kilkenny and South Tipperary, has been steadily improving in recent years with IDA client companies in the region creating 1,200 new jobs last year alone. This translates as an 9.2% increase when compared to 2016 figures.

The total employment in overseas companies in the region now stands at 14,785 people across 75 client companies. This figure represents 7% of all people employed in IDA client companies across the country. Furthermore just over 12% of all IDA jobs created outside of Dublin have been in the South-East region.

I am confident that the Agency will continue to build on this strong FDI employment base in the coming months and years.

Trade Agreements

116. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the status of the recent EU Council trade ministers meeting regarding the commencement of EU trade agreement negotiations with Australia and New Zealand; the offensive and defensive interests for Irish businesses and SMEs in this deal; if she will provide a sector by sector breakdown in terms of market access and removal of import tariffs or duties; and the timeline for same. [24194/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Negotiating Directives for Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with both Australia and New Zealand were agreed by EU Trade Ministers at the Trade Council on 22nd May 2018.

The draft negotiating directives were first published by the European Commission on the 13th September 2017. Since then my Department has been actively engaged at EU level, principally through the Trade Policy Committee, in working to arrive at a position whereby the negotiations for FTAs with New Zealand and Australia can begin. I am pleased that this has now been achieved with the Ministerial approval of the Negotiating Directives.

The EU Commission has “competence” on Trade matters under the Treaties and the EU Trade Commissioner, Cecilia Malmström, plans to travel to Canberra and Wellington in June to officially open negotiations, at political level, of separate EU Free Trade Agreements with Australia and New Zealand. The negotiating teams are then expected to meet in Brussels in July for the first round of negotiations.

As the negotiations have not yet begun it is not possible to provide details of specific offers on market access or details of tariff reductions. No offers have yet been made. The specific market access concessions and tariff reduction measures will be arrived at through the negotiation process. Officials from my Department will continue to be engaged, through the Trade Policy Committee, in working towards ambitious FTAs with these two important trading partners for both the EU and Ireland in order to achieve Agreements that remove barriers to trade and that provide opportunities for Irish businesses including SMEs.

As SMEs lack resources available to larger companies, non-tariff barriers such as differing regulatory frameworks affect SMEs more heavily. For this reason, an ambitious and comprehensive FTA will represent the best outcome if Irish SMEs are to reap the benefits.

The EU’s recent Free Trade Agreements include chapters specifically focussed on SMEs and this will be the aim with New Zealand and Australia. The proposed FTAs should also involve provisions that simplify customs procedures and administrative requirements that will benefit small exporters. Such measures are very important for the growth of SMEs and in enabling them to diversify into new markets in order to deal with, among other challenges, the impacts of Brexit.

Ireland, like all Member States, has defensive as well as offensive trade interests. We are mindful of the cumulative impact of EU FTAs on specific sectors like agriculture and the challenges they face. Maintaining the balance between defensive and offensive interests is a matter for the negotiations.

In 2017, Ireland’s good exports to Australia were €889m. Key goods exports include medi-

cal products and devices, pharmaceuticals, and computers and computer parts. Ireland's services exports to Australia have grown significantly in recent years from €203m in 2003 to €2,818m in 2016 (the most recent year for which CSO figures are available).

In 2017, Ireland's good exports to New Zealand were €109m. Services exports amounted to €232m in 2016, the most recent year for which figures are available. Key goods exports include medical products and pharmaceuticals products, industrial machinery and dairy products.

In the FTAs with Australia and New Zealand, we will seek to include a chapter on services that should aim to remove barriers to international trade in services that should facilitate further growth.

My Department is currently in the process of undertaking a comprehensive study which will examine in depth the economic impact and opportunities of existing and forthcoming EU Free Trade Agreements, including the Australia and New Zealand FTAs. The analysis from the study will inform the Department and relevant agencies in setting the policy framework required for Irish businesses to take full advantage of concluded trade agreements and preferential trade access, and to prepare for future opportunities; including Australia and New Zealand.

The EU is predicted to increase its exports to Australia and New Zealand by as much as one third if an ambitious and comprehensive Free Trade Agreement can be delivered.

EU exports to Australia of dairy and, to a lesser other food and beverages are expected to increase significantly. An EU-New Zealand FTA would result in a long-term increase of EU exports of non-ruminant meat e.g. pork; dairy; and to a lesser extent, other food and beverages.

The EU's Impact Assessment identified the main sectors in which EU businesses reported experiencing problems accessing the market in Australia and New Zealand. These included agriculture and food products (beef meat, pig meat, dairy, processed food products, and alcoholic drinks). While some agriculture products, in particular beef, are sensitive for Irish businesses the removal of these barriers to trade in Australia and New Zealand may also open export opportunities for Irish producers.

The EU's analysis indicates growth of exports for all sectors apart from minor decreases of EU exports of some agricultural sub-sectors (rice, cereals, fruit and vegetables and fibres and other crops - all of these have low EU trade volumes).

Both New Zealand and Australia were among the 11 countries that signed the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership in March 2018. In light of the benefits that CPTPP offers its signatories it is important that the EU conclude its own trade deals with participating countries in order to ensure that Irish businesses are not at a competitive disadvantage.

While it is not currently possible to specify the date at which any agreement might come into effect, such agreements usually take a number of years to negotiate and a further one or two years for the so-called "legal scrubbing" of the text of the agreement. In addition, depending on what is negotiated in respect of any particular sector or class of goods, there are often multi-annual phasing period for specific commitments.

Brexit Staff

117. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the additional staffing for her Department and other agencies to address Brexit and health and

safety at work as announced in budget 2018; the amount of the €3 million allocation that has been spent; the number of persons hired; the purpose of the hiring; the agencies to which the persons were allocated; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24213/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): In my Department, a dedicated Brexit Unit was established in 2016, led at Assistant Secretary level within the EU Affairs and Trade Policy Division, to coordinate and represent the Department and its Agencies response to Brexit. During 2017, this Unit increased its staffing complement to lead on engagements with a broad range of stakeholder to further inform and validate this response.

Given the wide mission my Department has, and the continuing impact on all policy matters, officers across all policy areas of my Department may deal with Brexit-related issues.

In this context, staff expertise has been drawn from across a number of different policy areas, and these staff have been assigned to a number of additional postings across the whole Department that have been most impacted by Brexit. We are continually prioritising the Brexit challenges and will actively keep the staffing requirements under review through workforce planning during 2018.

The State Agencies, listed below, received an additional pay allocation in Budget 2018 to manage the impact of Brexit. It is important to note however that the work of very many Business Units both within my Department and its Agencies are impacted by Brexit and are responding to it outside of the specific numbers mentioned below.

Enterprise Ireland

In 2018, Enterprise Ireland was allocated €1.3 million to recruit 18 additional staff members for Brexit related posts across the organisation. To date six positions have been filled and the Agency is actively recruiting the remaining positions.

IDA

Budget 2018 saw the IDA allocated an additional €700,000 to further reinforce its staffing levels as a result of Brexit. It is intended that the Agency will use this funding to create 10 new positions across a range of areas in the organisation. It will also be used to hire five more graduates who will be on fixed term rolling three year contracts. The IDA has also established a specific Brexit Committee to oversee its response to the opportunities and challenges arising from the UK's exit from the EU. The Agency also has a clear Brexit Plan, which includes one-to-one investor engagements and public relations and media campaigns.

Science Foundation Ireland

Science Foundation Ireland were allocated an additional €400,000 in Budget 2018 and has filled four posts which have some Brexit Related Activities attached to their roles. Three of these roles are within the Programmes & Investment Directorate and the Fourth is at Directorate level.

The Health and Safety Authority

The Health and Safety Authority received an allocation of €400,000 for Brexit related posts for 2018. Following a review of its Workforce Plan, a number of inspector posts were identified and business cases were submitted to the Department of Business, Enterprise & Innovation. Sanction has been given to fill seven inspector posts and the Authority has commenced the recruitment process for these positions with preliminary interviews scheduled to take place in

mid- June.

A recruitment process was also recently completed for an Accreditation Officer post and the successful candidate is taking up the position in early June. This role will assist the Irish National Accreditation Board to manage the increase in applications for accreditation from UK based enterprises and to support Irish enterprise expand their business in response to Brexit.

A business case has also been submitted for a Grade 1 Inspector role for market surveillance of chemical products which is where the Authority estimates the bulk of Brexit impacts will be for Irish businesses.

Research and Development Funding

118. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the status of the increased investment in research and development as outlined in budget 2018; the amount of the €5 million allocation that has been spent; the projects on which it has been spent; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24214/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy John Halligan): Innovation 2020, our national strategy for research and development, science and technology lays out our vision for Ireland to become a global innovation leader. Key to that is a commitment to increase public and private investment in research. The announcement in Budget 2018 of an additional €5m in investment in the R&D sphere is evidence of the Government's commitment to that strategy. Specifically, this additional funding will be targeted at further developing the network of Research Centres, building critical mass and addressing enterprise needs and expanding Ireland's participation in International Research Organisations.

Budget 2018 included an allocation of €4.25m to develop a new SFI research centre – the SFI FutureMilk Centre – in 2018. The new Research Centre will be led by Teagasc, in partnership with the Tyndall National Institute and universities and institutes of technology throughout the country. A total of €13.5m in funding has been committed by 46 industry partners to the new Centre. This new Centre will be an agent of growth for the Irish dairy industry by being a world leader in research for precision pasture-based dairying. Since the Budget announcement, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine has joined Science Foundation Ireland to co-fund the Centre. The Research Centre will be launched and funding drawdown will commence later in 2018.

In addition, as part of Budget 2018 Ireland committed to join the European Southern Observatory (ESO) in 2018. Negotiations were entered into in October 2017, Ireland's formal application is currently being set before the ESO Council. As we intend to join ESO in the final quarter of this year, from October 2018, our total contribution for 2018 is €0.75m. This includes the annual contribution on a pro rata basis.

The benefits of membership of ESO are significant and include the creation of advanced enterprise relevant skills in areas such as data analytics, software and photonics.

Hospital Waiting Lists

119. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Clare will receive an ENT procedure at University Hospital Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23993/18]

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

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

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

Hospital Appointments Administration

120. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health his views on the practice of the dermatology department of Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda requesting persons to reply by return of post to queries (details supplied) within seven days or be taken off the appointment waiting list [23997/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Good practice around the management of hospital waiting lists recommends periodic validation processes and in this context, the NTPF National Inpatient/Daycase Planned Procedure Waiting List Management Protocol sets out the national protocols for the management of waiting lists including validation and clinical suspensions.

In addition, I have asked the NTPF to put in place a standardised approach to validation of waiting lists across all hospitals.

The purpose of Validation is to:

- Maintain hospital-patient communication during the patient's waiting list journey;
- Update the patient record;
- Reduce the rate of patient non-attendance and/or patient cancellations; and
- Provide clean, accurate, up to date waiting list data which reflects the true demand for hospital services.

Administrative validation is the process whereby hospital administration contacts patients on inpatient and day case waiting lists at pre-planned intervals during the year to ensure that patients are ready, willing, suitable and available to attend a hospital appointment or wish to be removed. When a patient is removed from a waiting list due to non-response to a written validation cycle, notification must be sent to the referring clinician and the patient. A copy should also be placed in the patient's Health Care Record (HCR). If requested by the GP/referring clinician, patients can be reinstated back to their original place on to the Waiting List.

In addition, clinical validation is the process whereby the Clinician or delegate clinical team member conducts a review of the patients healthcare records and/or medical notes for patients on inpatient, day case and planned procedure waiting lists in excess of six months. Where there

is a requirement for clinical validation, patients are contacted by phone by the clinician or delegate as part of a virtual clinic. These reviews are carried out at pre-planned intervals during the year.

In respect of the particular issue raised, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy.

Departmental Correspondence

121. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if the case of a person (details supplied) raised in correspondence will be reviewed; if advice will be offered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24006/18]

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

Hospitals Data

122. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the number of attendances to a facility (details supplied) in each of the years 2010 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24007/18]

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.

Home Help Service Provision

123. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health when improved home help hours will be provided to a person (details supplied) that has a serious medical condition; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24008/18]

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

Mental Health Services Staff

124. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 318 of 6 February 2018, the net additional number of staff within mental health services on 1 January 2018 in comparison to 1 January 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24011/18]

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

Health Services Funding

125. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health the status of funding for the provision of a dietetic service in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24015/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): As this question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply.

Hospital Waiting Lists

126. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if the Sligo cataract scheme will be rolled out nationwide in order to address the growing waiting lists for public cataract surgery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24016/18]

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

Paediatric Services

127. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if a national eye care scheme will be introduced for all children up to 16 years of age in order to reform eye care here particularly in relation to children for which services are limited and on ad hoc basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24017/18]

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

Health Services Data

128. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the number of children under 12 and from 12 to 16 years of age that are waiting for ophthalmology services in counties Roscommon and Galway in each of the years 2013 to 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form; the length of time they have been waiting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24018/18]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

129. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons in counties Roscommon and Galway that are waiting for public cataract surgery in each of the years 2013 to 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form; the length of time they have been waiting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24019/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Reducing waiting time for patients for hospital operations and procedures is a key priority for the Government.

Cataract surgery is among the most common surgical procedures carried out in the Ophthal-

mology specialty. Through the work of the National Treatment Purchase Fund (or NTPF) and the HSE, the overall number of patients waiting for cataract surgery has fallen by 22% since July 2017, while the number of patients waiting more than 12 months has declined by 71% in the same period.

For 2018, under the Inpatient/Day Case Action Plan, all clinically suitable patients waiting for more than 9 months for a Cataract procedure will be offered treatment this year, with 5,000 NTPF funded procedures planned in both public and private hospitals.

Last year funding was allocated to provide additional capacity at the Royal Victoria Eye and Ear Hospital as a result and a cataract theatre is now operational three days per week. This year, in line with the Action Plan, the HSE is planning to open a dedicated Cataract theatre in Nenagh Hospital in July.

The information sought by the Deputy is provided in the attached tables:

IPDC Waiting List for Cataract Procedures by Area of Residence as at 31/12/2013

Sum of Total	0-3 Months	3-6 Months	6-9 Months	Grand Total
Roscommon	35	29	20	84
Galway	126	100	58	284
Grand Total	161	129	78	368

IPDC Waiting List for Cataract Procedures by Area of Residence as at 23/12/2014

Sum of Total	0-3 Months	3-6 Months	6-9 Months	9-12 Months	12-15 Months	15-18 Months	18+ Months	Grand Total
Roscommon	43	44	35	17	18	4	2	163
Galway	160	132	128	90	65	33	4	612
Grand Total	203	176	163	107	83	37	6	775

IPDC Waiting List for Cataract Appointments by Area of Residence as at 31/12/2015

Sum of Total	0-3 Months	3-6 Months	6-9 Months	9-12 Months	12-15 Months	15-18 Months	Grand Total
Roscommon	28	26	36	27	32	0	149
Galway	159	139	121	86	98	1	604
Grand Total	187	165	157	113	130	1	753

IPDC Waiting List for Cataract Appointments by Area of Residence as at 30/12/2016

Sum of Total	0-3 Months	3-6 Months	6-9 Months	9-12 Months	12-15 Months	15-18 Months	18+ Months	Grand Total
Roscommon	47	45	44	40	11	15	12	214
Galway	186	147	140	124	85	83	28	793
Grand Total	233	192	184	164	96	98	40	1007

IPDC Waiting List for Cataract Appointments by Area of Residence as at 29/12/2017

Sum of Total	0-3 Months	3-6 Months	6-9 Months	9-12 Months	12-15 Months	15-18 Months	18+ Months	Grand Total
Roscommon	66	40	36	45	24	7	6	224
Galway	256	193	131	155	59	19	28	841
Grand Total	322	233	167	200	83	26	34	1065

IPDC Waiting List for Cataract Procedures by Area of Residence as at 26/04/2018

Questions - Written Answers

Sum of Total	0-3 Months	3-6 Months	6-9 Months	9-12 Months	12-15 Months	15-18 Months	18+ Months	Grand Total
Roscommon	58	66	39	3	2	2	16	186
Galway	213	264	188	11	2	3	50	731
Grand Total	271	330	227	14	4	5	66	917

Orthodontic Services Provision

130. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when urgent orthodontic treatment will be provided in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24020/18]

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

Health Services Provision

131. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if the treatment provided to a person (details supplied) will be clarified; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24023/18]

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

Orthodontic Services Provision

132. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for orthodontic work for a person (details supplied) will be scheduled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24024/18]

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

Hospital Appointments Administration

133. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for a person (details supplied) will be scheduled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24026/18]

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.

Services for People with Disabilities

134. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health if the new assessment of needs system the HSE has proposed was approved by him; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24047/18]

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.

Ambulance Service

135. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if he will request the HSE and the National Ambulance Service to station an ambulance on a 24/7 basis at a health centre (details supplied) to ensure fast access to an ambulance in times of emergency during the construction work on the N2 between Corracrin and Emyvale (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24050/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service issue, I have asked the HSE to reply to you directly.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Eligibility

136. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Health the status of proposed changes to the fair deal scheme in relation to farmers and small businesses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24057/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): A review of the Nursing Homes Support Scheme (NHSS) was published in July 2015. Arising out of the review, a recommendation was made to examine the treatment of business and farm assets for the purposes of the financial assessment element of the scheme. The Programme for a Partnership Government also committed to reviewing the NHSS to remove any discrimination against small businesses and family farms.

At present, the capital value of an individual's principal private residence is only included in the financial assessment for the first three years of their time in care. This is known as the three year cap. This cap does not apply to productive assets such as farms and businesses except in

cases of sudden illness or disability where specific conditions are met.

It is proposed to amend the scheme to treat farm and business assets in the same manner as the principal private residence where a family successor commits to working the farm or business, i.e. to cap contributions at three years.

The Department of Health has been examining the potential for changes to the treatment of business and farm assets under the Nursing Homes Support Scheme. Any changes to the scheme, if approved by Government, will require amendment of the Nursing Homes Support Scheme Act 2009.

A Memorandum for Government setting out the details of the proposed policy change and seeking Government approval to draft the General Scheme of a bill to amend the Nursing Homes Support Scheme Act 2009 has been circulated to other Government Departments for observations.

Orthodontic Services Waiting Lists

137. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will commence orthodontic treatment at St. James's Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24087/18]

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

General Practitioner Services

138. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 273, 274 and 275 of 8 May 2018, the details of the rota in tabular form (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24088/18]

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

Health Services Staff

139. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 418 of 15 May 2018, if the funding necessary to fill the vacant post of a psychologist at a centre (details supplied) in County Mayo will be allocated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24089/18]

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.

Cancer Screening Programmes

140. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the number of women that have

been affected by the CervicalCheck scandal in counties Mayo and Galway by location; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24090/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In regard to the 209 women and families, given these overall numbers it is considered that to provide the breakdown sought by the Deputy would present a risk to maintaining the privacy of the women and families involved and their right to confidentiality.

Since 2008, some 3 million smear tests have been carried out by CervicalCheck for women throughout Ireland. Over 1,200 invasive cancers have been detected by CervicalCheck. In addition, 30,000 low grade abnormalities (CIN 1) have been detected and more than 50,000 women with high grade abnormalities (CIN 2 & 3) have been diagnosed and treated, considerably reducing their risk of developing cervical cancer.

Health Services Funding

141. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if a HSE section 39 application by a centre (details supplied) has been received within the required deadline; when confirmation of same will be communicated to the centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24098/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE confirms that a Section 39 Funding Application has been received from the East Galway and Midlands Cancer Support Centre.

The HSE advises that the application submitted by the East Galway and Midlands Cancer Support Centre is under consideration and that they will make direct contact with the centre before the end of June.

Health Services Funding

142. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if funding arrangements for HSE section 39 applications have been finalised for 2018; if so, the date on which the funding arrangements were completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24099/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): This matter has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

143. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health if the case of a person (details supplied) has been refused; and if it will be examined and the necessary equipment provided in order that they can return home. [24103/18]

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.

Home Help Service Provision

144. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health when home help will be provided for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24105/18]

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

145. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) can expect to receive an appointment with a rheumatologist at University Hospital Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24125/18]

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.

Medical Card Applications

146. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when a medical card will be awarded in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24155/18]

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

Organ Transplant Services

147. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be offered a kidney transplant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24161/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Deputy's question relates to service delivery matters and accordingly I have asked the HSE to respond directly to him.

Cancer Screening Programmes

148. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if outstanding information will be provided to a family (details supplied) [24196/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): A Serious Incident Management Team was established in April and reported on 25 May that 207 of the 209 women, or families, had been contacted. It has also reported that, sadly, 18 of these women are known to have died. I am advised that contact has been made with these families.

The HSE has informed the Department that while some cases pose individual challenges, every effort is being made to ensure that women and their next-of-kin seeking their medical records are responded to and provided with their data in a timely manner. My Department will liaise with CervicalCheck in relation to the particular case raised to ensure that the family's concerns are responded to.

Cancer Screening Programmes

149. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if CervicalCheck or the HSE have now contacted all of the 209 women or their families that were included in the Cervical-Check audit; the supports and services which will be available to these persons; and when they will be notified in this regard [24197/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has advised that as of 25 May, 207 of the 209 women, or their next of kin, have been contacted. Efforts are ongoing to contact the remaining two but the HSE has advised that some patients have not been contactable for a number of reasons e.g. they are abroad or their contact details have changed.

The Government agreed a comprehensive package of health and social care measures to support the 209 women who have been diagnosed with cervical cancer and whose audit result differed from their original smear test, and their families. 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;
- 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 child minding, where appropriate.

The HSE has appointed a central national co-ordinator to lead this service response and local liaison contacts have been appointed to link with the women and their families.

As of 28 May, 188 contacts had been made with those affected, and 75 meetings had been held to discuss people's needs. A further 44 meetings had been scheduled. It is important to note that in those instances where it has not been possible to make direct contact, it is often the case that a message (or messages) have been left for the individual concerned. In these circumstances, it is important that we allow women and families to contact the HSE in their own time and on their own terms.

State Claims Agency

150. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if all of the women or their legal representatives have been contacted in regard to the commitment to address legal cases associated with CervicalCheck by way of mediation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24198/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Deputy may note that the State Claims Agency, which comes under the aegis of the Department of Finance, has a statutory responsibility to manage clinical negligence claims under the Clinical Indemnity Scheme. I do not therefore have specific details on the Agency's communication with women, or their legal representatives.

In relation to the way in which the Agency liaises with the women and families affected by the issues surrounding CervicalCheck, the Agency acknowledges that its work frequently involves the management of difficult, complex and traumatic cases taken by persons who have suffered injury, sometimes a catastrophic injury. In managing these cases it is committed to placing a high priority on treating those who have made claims and their families with the dignity and the compassion they deserve. It recognises that it has a duty to manage each claim in a humane, sensitive, ethical and professional manner.

The State Claims Agency has informed the Department of Health that it will be actively engaging with the laboratories involved in any cases brought by any of the 209 women affected, to ensure expeditious resolution of the cases.

I have also been assured by the State Claims Agency that it remains committed to resolving cases relating to CervicalCheck in line with the principles outlined by the Government earlier this month.

Cancer Screening Programmes

151. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if a report (details supplied) will be made available to all of the women and families concerned in relation to the CervicalCheck issue as soon as it is completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24199/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): On 8 May, I set up a Scoping Inquiry to be undertaken by Dr Gabriel Scally, Professor of Public Health at the University of the West of England and the University of Bristol in relation to CervicalCheck. 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. It is my intention to bring the report to Government and to publish it thereafter.

This Inquiry has broad Terms of Reference but will put particular focus on direct engagement with any woman affected or her next-of-kin, who may wish to have an input.

Of course the report will be made available. A website has been established which provides a public-facing presence for the Inquiry and will enable it to communicate progress with those interested. The website, scallyreview.ie, went live on Wednesday 23 May.

Cancer Screening Programmes

152. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of women that developed cervical cancer but that were not included in the CervicalCheck audit; if the number of women in this cohort has been established; and when they will be contacted in this regard [24200/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The National Cancer Registry of Ireland (NCRI) has provided details of 1,631 cervical cancers diagnosed since 2008 to CervicalCheck and this data will be made available to the International Clinical Expert Review Panel which is being established.

The Review Panel will examine these 1,631 cases of invasive cervical cancer, as well as the cases included in the original CervicalCheck audit process, and identify those women who were screened by the programme. The Review will be led by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, with expert input from the British Association of Colposcopists & Cervical Pathologists.

A data matching process to determine the numbers involved is nearing completion. Arrangements for communicating with the women involved will be determined in conjunction with the Review Panel.

Forestry Sector

153. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which his Department has studied the extent to which the various species of trees grown here can contribute to carbon sequestration; if consideration has been given to the ability of species such as Sitka spruce or western red cedar which have shown particular properties in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24167/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Responsibility for carbon reporting and the submission of the National Inventory Report to the United Nations Framework on Climate Change (UNFCCC), primarily lies with the EPA. Forest carbon measurement is overseen by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine based principally on the results of the National Forest Inventory. Differences in species growth and productivity is captured in the National Forest Inventory (NFI) and reflected in the National Inventory Report. Results from the NFI indicate that the carbon stock in forest soils is the dominant component and accounted for 85.1% of the total carbon stock in the forest estate in 2012. Total living tree biomass amounts to 12.7% of the total carbon stock, while deadwood, including logs, stumps and standing dead trees along with litter constitutes the remaining 2.2 %. The total carbon stock in the living tree biomass in 2012 amounted to 48.5 million tonnes. The NFI results in 2012 indicate that Sitka spruce accounted for 53.8% of the carbon stock by species, Norway spruce 3.9%, pines 9.5%, Douglas fir 2.4%, Larch 3.2 % and other conifer species, which includes western red cedar, 1.4% . The National Forest Inventory is currently preparing results from the most recent survey and will be published in the near future.

Trade Missions

154. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to develop trade with Iran; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23999/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The pursuit and development of new markets for Irish agri-food exports is of course an ongoing and central

component of the strategic development of the agri-food sector, as evidenced by its placement right at the centre of Food Wise 2025, the industry's strategy for development over the coming decade. Indeed, this is all the more relevant after the UK's decision to leave the EU, which presents significant new challenges for the agri-food sector.

Food Wise 2025 outlines the potential for growth in agri-food exports to new and emerging markets, including in Asia, Africa and the Gulf region.

There has been strong interest from Irish food and drink exporters in what have been increasing opportunities in the Gulf region - a market that has grown by over a third in the last 5 years, to a value of over €400m in 2017. Iran, with a population of 80 million people and a relatively wealthy middle class, has been identified by Irish exporters as a market worthy of further exploration. Against that background, my Department led a trade mission to Iran, along with Bord Bia and a number of Irish food manufacturers, in 2016.

While at the moment I have no further plans to visit Iran at this time, the wider Gulf region does remain firmly in our sights. I led a trade mission to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in February of last year. Bord Bia, the body responsible for marketing Irish food, has an office in Dubai aimed at identifying and capitalising on opportunities for Irish food in the region, including Iran, on an ongoing basis. The Irish Ambassador in Ankara, Turkey, has also visited Iran frequently, working both bilaterally and in cooperation with the state agencies in order to assist Irish companies exploring opportunities there.

GLAS Payments

155. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the final 15% of a GLAS payment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24069/18]

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 October 2016. Payment for the 2016 scheme year and the 2017 advance payment have been made for this case.

In this case the required Commonage Management Plan for one commonage on the application has not yet been finalised and the case is therefore ineligible for further payments. Both the participant and their advisor have been advised of the requirement to submit this plan immediately to ensure further payments and indeed participation in the scheme.

Horse Racing Ireland Staff

156. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his attention has been drawn to the current member of the board of Horse Racing Ireland having applied for the position of chairperson in respect of the recent appointment of the chairperson; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24112/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The selection process for the position of chairperson of Horse Racing Ireland was conducted through the Public Appointments Service (PAS). All applications for this position were made through PAS.

Horse Racing Ireland Staff

157. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of applications received in respect of the recent appointment of the chairperson of Horse Racing Ireland; the number of those that were interviewed for the position; the number of names submitted to him by the Public Appointments Service for his consideration before he made an appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24113/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I have been informed by PAS that they received nine applications and that the gender breakdown was seven males and two females. The Assessment Panel examined and assessed the material submitted in the application letters and CVs of all the candidates and agreed that three candidates should be further considered and invited to be interviewed by a subgroup of the panel.

Following interview of the three candidates, two were considered to meet the published criteria for the position and these two names were put forward to the me for consideration for appointment.

Sheep Welfare Scheme

158. **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. [24119/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): An application was received under the Sheep Welfare Scheme from the person named on 26 January 2017. In this case 85% advance payment issued to the person named on 13 November 2017. The 15% balancing payment in respect of this application is due to issue shortly.

Agriculture Scheme Administration

159. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if farmers can complete and submit the animal movement permit online; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24137/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department engaged in a consultation process with ICMSA, ICSA and IFA this year on proposed changes to the procedures for issue of Certificates of Compliance for the movement of cattle from farm to farm prior to introducing a change to the process for movements of cattle for feeding purposes.

Currently keepers can apply for a Certificate of Compliance selecting one of two options being, the “the movement of cattle from a single holding to / from another holding for feeding purposes” or “the movement of cattle from a single holding to another holding “.

All movement applications made on or after 1 June 2018 will refer to, and be recorded as the “movement of cattle from a single holding to another holding “.

Keepers may apply online via the Department’s website using agfood.ie or via an approved farm management package to apply for a Certificate of Compliance.

If a farmer is not in a position to make an application online, the application form for a Certificate of Compliance referred to as the NBAS 31A is available on the Department’s website or from an RVO. A keeper can submit the NBAS 31A application form to the Department’s out-

sourced contractor referred to as Cattle Movement Notification Agency at their address: Cattle Movement Agency, PO Box 5000 Freepost, Clonakilty, Co. Cork.

Legislative Measures

160. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on a matter (details supplied). [24182/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Greyhound Industry Bill addresses governance issues in Bord na gCon, strengthens regulatory controls in the industry, modernises sanctions, improves integrity, includes the welfare of greyhounds as one of the statutory functions of Bord na gCon and provides it with powers to make regulations in relation to integrity, anti-doping, administration and traceability.

The General Scheme of the Bill is currently with the Office of Parliamentary Counsel for drafting into a Bill.

The vast majority of dogs that are moved from Ireland go to the UK. The rules on movement of dogs within the EU are set by the EU and not at national level. In this regard dogs moved to another EU country from Ireland must be accompanied by an EU pet passport, be micro-chipped, and have a valid rabies vaccination.

The premises exporting dogs must be registered with the Department in advance of the export. Before travel, dogs must undergo a clinical examination by an authorised veterinarian, who must verify that the animals show no obvious signs of disease and are fit to be transported. Dogs must also have a health certificate issued by a Department veterinarian. These procedures, including vaccination, ensure that only healthy dogs, over the age of 15 weeks, are allowed to be exported.

Exporters must also comply with EU law on the protection of animals during transport, while the transport of animals by air is also governed by the International Air Transport Association (IATA) regulations. In this context, I am aware that a number of airlines do not transport commercial consignments of greyhounds.

The Department has a close working relationship with animal welfare charities on all aspects of animal welfare. Officials of my Department have met with the welfare members of the International Greyhound Forum, which includes the Dogs Trust, the ISPCA and Bord na gCon, to consider issues surrounding the export of greyhounds.

Bord na gCon has stated that it does not support the export of greyhounds to destinations which do not conform with the standards in the Animal Health and Welfare Act, the Welfare of Greyhounds Act or its own Code of Practice and standards. I fully endorse this view.

Brexit Issues

161. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the Brexit loan scheme for the agrifood sector outlined in budget 2018; the amount of the €25 million allocated to the scheme that has been drawn down; the number of businesses that have been assisted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24208/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): One of my priorities is to improve access to finance for the agri-food sector. Food Wise 2025 identifies

competitiveness as a key theme and includes a recommendation that stakeholders work to “improve access to finance for agriculture, forestry and seafood producers and agri-food companies”.

Recently I launched the new “Brexit Loan Scheme” in cooperation with the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation and the Minister for Finance, which will provide up to €300 million of affordable, flexible working capital finance to Irish businesses that are either currently impacted by Brexit or who will be in the future. The Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) are administering the Scheme and use €23million in public funding, along with the EIB Group’s InnovFin SME Guarantee Facility, to leverage the loan fund. Given its significant exposure to the UK market, my Department has contributed €9million, ensuring at least 40% of the fund will be available to food businesses. This is the only sector that has ring-fenced funding.

The Scheme was opened on the 31st March 2018 and will remain open until 31st March 2020, or until it is fully subscribed. The SBCI receives and analyses loan data from the participating banks on a quarterly basis and have informed my Department that the first official data relating to the Scheme will be available on completion of its first quarter, i.e. to 30th June 2018.

This Scheme was modelled on the Agriculture Cash Flow Loan Support Scheme, through which I made €145 million of working capital finance available to farmers at low-cost interest rates of 2.95%. That Scheme was developed by my Department in co-operation with the SBCI in order to mitigate the effects of lower commodity prices in some agriculture sectors in 2016 and 2017 and the impact of the change in the sterling exchange rate arising from Brexit.

I announced in Budget 2018 that my Department is considering the development of potential Brexit response loan schemes for farmers, fishermen and for longer-term capital financing for food businesses and that €25 million is available for this purpose. These schemes are developed and delivered in cooperation with the SBCI and take time to develop and operationalise. Consideration and discussions are ongoing in this regard and I will announce further details on this as they become available.

Brexit Supports

162. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the grant aid for capital investment for food and drinks companies as outlined in budget 2018; the amount of the €5 million allocation that has been utilised; the number of companies that have availed of the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24209/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): As part of a number of responses to Brexit, which I have initiated to address the challenges facing Irish Agri-food companies in remaining competitive and innovative, I secured an additional €5m for capital investment in the 2018 Budget. This €5m fund is being administered on behalf of my Department by Enterprise Ireland through its Capital Investment Initiative, which is open to all Small and Medium Sized enterprises with the aim of helping them to improve their productivity and competitiveness through the acquisition of new capital equipment and technology and through innovation.

A total of five companies have now availed of the scheme to date in 2018 with total approved investment from this fund of €1.362 million. A further two companies are at application stage.

Agrifood Sector

163. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the investment in public sector research equipment and facilities for the prepared consumer foods sector as outlined in budget 2018; the amount of the €5 million allocation that has been utilised; the projects that have been completed as a result of the initiative; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24210/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Prepared Consumer Foods (PCF) sector plays a pivotal role in the Irish agri-food sector. It accounted for €2.8 billion in agri-food sector exports in 2017, having increased by 40% from 2012. The sector comprises of 500 manufacturing units spread across the State, directly employing more than 20,000 people.

In 2017, the UK accounted for 60% of PCF food and drink exports and the sector is therefore significantly exposed to the impact of Brexit. In addition, as 76% of PCF companies in Ireland are small, investment in research and innovation within the sector has traditionally been low.

As part of my Department's response to the challenges arising from Brexit, I secured €5m in Budget 2018 to assist PCF companies in adapting and optimising their production facilities to help them to address the challenges facing the sector .

The €5m capital funding is being invested in capital equipment, to build a shared research capability in the Prepared Consumer Foods Centre in Teagasc Ashtown, where industry can trial and pilot the equipment to assess the viability for scaling up their own production. In addition, it will facilitate piloting industry led collaborative research and innovation. This Centre will enable the sector to maximise value creation opportunities, and to enable the adaptation of technology to respond to consumer requirements and increase competitiveness and sustainability.

My Department, working with Teagasc, Enterprise Ireland, Bord Bia and the PCF sector, is working to operationalise this Centre by the last quarter of 2018. This timescale follows from the normal Government procurement measures that must be adhered to for the purchase of such capital equipment.

Bord Bia Funding

164. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the funding to support Bord Bia promotion and development work for Brexit as outlined in budget 2018; the amount of the €4.5 million allocation that has been spent; the purpose for which the money has been spent; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24211/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The funding allocated to Bord Bia in Budget 2018 is supporting them in their investment in market insight (through its 'Thinking House') and in market prioritisation initiatives which are aimed at identifying and developing potential diversification opportunities.

The amount of the allocation that has been spent and the purpose for which the money has been spent is an operational matter for Bord Bia. I have forwarded the Deputy's question to Bord Bia and have requested that they respond to the Deputy with 10 days. However the Deputy may wish to contact Bord Bia directly at the agreed Oireachtas contact address : *info@bordbia.ie*.

Food Industry Development

165. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the development of a national food innovation hub as outlined in budget 2018; the amount of the €2 million allocation that has been spent; the way in which it has been utilised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24212/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In line with the strategic recommendation in Food Wise 2025, a National Food Innovation Hub is being constructed at the Teagasc Food Research Centre in Moorepark, Co. Cork. Teagasc is overseeing the project, which will comprise up to 12 custom designed Research & Development units to be rented out to food companies at commercial rates. My Department is providing €8.8m in exchequer funding on a phased basis to end 2019 to fund the development. The allocation for 2018 is €2m. There has been no expenditure to date, as the project is at the planning and design phase. I understand that Teagasc has selected a design team following a public procurement exercise. The “Hub” is currently being designed and following completion of that process, and securing the necessary planning permission, Teagasc plan to appoint a main contractor before the end of 2018.

It's expected that the bulk of the expenditure will occur in 2019.

Farm Data

166. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 286 of 19 April 2018, if all the data has been compiled. [24227/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Knowledge Transfer is one of a suite of measures included under the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 and involves the formation of knowledge transfer groups across the beef, dairy, equine, sheep, tillage and poultry sectors. Department approved agricultural consultants acting as Knowledge Transfer Facilitators administer groups operating over a three year period.

Farmers may participate in a maximum of two KT Groups in different sectors. Participants who complete all of the requirements of the programme receive a reimbursement of €750 for their primary group while their KT Facilitator receives €500. Secondary participants who complete all of the requirements of the programme receive a reimbursement of €375 while their KT Facilitator receive €250.

The allocation for each of the 3 years in respect of the currently approved KT Groups is €23m.

A breakdown of participation and payments to farmers in Knowledge Transfer Programme to date is provided below:

-	Total	Beef	Dairy
No. of applications received in yr 1	20,252	10,072	4,258
No. of farmers in yr 2	19,522	9867	4129
No. of Groups active in KT Programme	1,189	582	268
No. of Farmers paid for Yr 1 (1/6/16 - 31/7/17)	17,973	9,117	3,414
Amt Paid to Farmers in respect of yr 1	€11,811,691	€6,183,477	€2,151,003

table ctd.

-	Sheep	Tillage	Poultry	Equine
No. of applications received in yr 1	4,310	885	248	479
No. of farmers in yr 2	4073	897	223	333
No. of Groups active in KT Programme	251	55	13	20
No. of Farmers paid for Yr 1 (1/6/16 - 31/7/17)	3,909	797	208	292
Amt Paid to Farmers in respect of yr 1	€2,606,966	€527,570	€151,500	€191,175

.In addition to the above payments to farmers, over €4.7m has also been paid to facilitators in respect of their completion of groups in Year 1. Further pay runs are currently in place, and remaining cases will be processed for payment as a matter of priority.

Trade Agreements

167. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the commencement of EU trade agreement negotiations with Australia and New Zealand; and the offensive and defensive interests for Irish agriculture in future discussions. [24228/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The development of Free Trade Agreements between the EU and Australia / New Zealand is at an early stage. Last week the European Council authorised the Commission to open trade negotiations with Australia and New Zealand, and adopted negotiating directives for each of the negotiations. My colleague the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation takes the lead in international trade negotiations.

Trade agreements with both countries would aim primarily at further reducing existing barriers to trade, removing custom duties on goods, and giving better access for services and public procurement in Australia and New Zealand.

Ireland already has strong relationships with both countries, and enjoys good cooperation on both a bilateral and multilateral level. We are also open to such trade deals. For example, Ireland would have strong offensive interests in Australia for pig meat and spirit drinks. However, and as with any trade deal, there are also defensive interests in any future negotiations, and these must be balanced and have due regard to special sensitive sectors for Ireland, such as beef, sheep meat and dairy.

From an Irish agri-food perspective I will aim to protect vulnerable sectors such as agriculture by maximising the benefits of market opening without harming Irish producers. The mandates as they are do not envisage full liberalisation of trade in agricultural products, which are foreseen as benefiting from specific treatment.

During the course of the upcoming negotiations I will, as with any Free Trade Agreement negotiations, insist that they are handled appropriately, and in a manner that safeguards the interests of the Irish agri food sector, particularly its most sensitive sectors such as beef and dairy. This stance will be even more important in the light of the on-going Mercosur negotiations. I also believe full account must be taken of the findings of the Commission's own assessment of the cumulative impact of trade deals on the agri food sector, and the potentially very damaging impact of Brexit on an already delicately balanced EU beef market.

168. **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 the 2017 balancing payment by county in tabular form; the number that have passed all payment approval checks and are awaiting the 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. [24233/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Balancing Payments for the GLAS scheme can 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. GLAS 2017 balancing payments commenced payment week ending the 18th May 2018 as per my Department's commitment at the beginning of the year.

To date, over 98% of eligible GLAS participants have received their balancing payment. A number cases remain ineligible for payment as the GLAS participant and/or their Advisor need to take action. 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 continue to be ineligible for further GLAS payments.

GLAS Payments to date in tabular form:

-			
County	Cases	Advance	Advance Amt
Carlow	271	265	€998,321.08
Cavan	901	888	€3,230,377.46
Clare	1598	1,571	€5,631,338.93
Cork	2121	2,076	€7,159,865.00
Donegal	1919	1,856	€6,153,270.32
Dublin	58	57	€206,476.66
Galway	3033	2,939	€10,503,483.47
Kerry	1758	1,694	€5,995,651.99
Kildare	239	228	€848,545.83
Kilkenny	423	414	€1,515,922.75
Laois	366	360	€1,296,621.92
Leitrim	1010	997	€3,584,399.31
Limerick	1039	1,022	€3,659,788.85
Longford	509	505	€1,824,869.10
Louth	147	135	€494,012.13
Mayo	2527	2,384	€8,429,049.07
Meath	418	409	€1,473,431.96
Monaghan	571	564	€1,859,104.38
Offaly	472	463	€1,636,225.63
Roscommon	1513	1,496	€5,443,286.72
Sligo	928	904	€3,179,147.25
Tipperary	1114	1,085	€3,981,400.38
Waterford	355	332	€1,174,313.26

Questions - Written Answers

Westmeath	639	632	€2,303,131.43
Wexford	746	724	€2,719,251.10
Wicklow	325	313	€1,187,906.80
TOTAL	25,000	24,313	€86,489,192.78

table ctd.

-	GLAS 1								
County	Advance+	Advance+ Amt	Balance	Balance Amt	Balance+	Balance+ Amt	Cases	Advance	Advance Amt
Carlow	6	€1,947.30	206	€135,341.29	€0.00	€0.00	125	118	€421,768.28
Cavan	16	€14,769.54	744	€483,471.59	€0.00	€0.00	428	417	€1,500,970.62
Clare	229	€323,941.73	1,285	€811,227.95	€0.00	€0.00	684	668	€2,440,960.52
Cork	177	€237,278.60	1,546	€938,715.52	€0.00	€0.00	993	950	€3,349,391.11
Donegal	117	€145,873.39	1,191	€687,222.03	€0.00	€0.00	993	953	€3,095,848.97
Dublin	2	€1,718.48	40	€25,353.74	€0.00	€0.00	17	17	€63,772.73
Galway	149	€147,385.35	2,173	€1,375,948.36	€0.00	€0.00	1,286	1,214	€4,162,459.13
Kerry	270	€333,400.23	1,065	€650,131.12	€0.00	€0.00	864	828	€2,992,003.14
Kildare	0	€0.00	161	€107,060.19	€0.00	€0.00	76	64	€226,328.10
Kilkenny	0	€0.00	339	€218,385.70	€0.00	€0.00	207	201	€754,015.49
Laois	17	€23,894.27	294	€187,303.24	€0.00	€0.00	191	184	€651,774.69
Leitrim	36	€45,925.05	836	€526,720.36	€0.00	€0.00	419	406	€1,474,117.59
Limerick	153	€228,515.70	919	€579,499.92	€0.00	€0.00	296	286	€1,014,037.13
Longford	1	€1,699.99	457	€291,151.55	€0.00	€0.00	341	332	€1,224,651.94
Louth	0	€0.00	86	€56,965.66	€0.00	€0.00	77	70	€243,188.58
Mayo	151	€117,142.56	1,693	€1,045,546.43	€0.00	€0.00	1,317	1,214	€4,144,076.37
Meath	0	€0.00	345	€219,171.98	€0.00	€0.00	195	192	€687,702.48
Monaghan	7	€7,438.53	455	€264,002.47	€0.00	€0.00	144	142	€484,904.20
Offaly	13	€17,320.84	378	€234,663.03	€0.00	€0.00	275	259	€982,934.93
Roscommon	5	€3,152.92	1,336	€853,369.74	€0.00	€0.00	547	525	€1,882,198.35
Sligo	13	€16,353.29	739	€462,257.93	€0.00	€0.00	362	351	€1,204,314.67
Tipperary	73	€98,975.23	896	€577,411.87	€0.00	€0.00	500	478	€1,773,773.93
Waterford	24	€28,756.02	249	€151,381.93	€0.00	€0.00	130	114	€403,956.67
Westmeath	4	€3,805.89	559	€359,719.26	€0.00	€0.00	263	254	€936,991.09
Wexford	7	€6,811.70	608	€402,741.56	€0.00	€0.00	263	244	€911,451.68
Wicklow	9	€5,554.46	218	€146,145.17	€0.00	€0.00	151	144	€562,673.25
TOTAL	1,479	€1,811,661.07	18,818	€11,790,909.59	0	€0.00	11,144	10,625	€37,590,265.64

table ctd.

-	GLAS2								
County	Advance+	Advance+ Amt	Balance	Balance Amt	Balance+	Balance+ Amt	Cases	Advance	Advance Amt
Carlow	0	€0.00	88	€55,623.20	€0.00	€0.00	127	125	€456,647.42
Cavan	15	€21,577.15	344	€217,055.51	€0.00	€0.00	535	521	€1,847,584.43
Clare	112	€156,050.29	531	€340,945.91	€0.00	€0.00	804	784	€2,779,471.87
Cork	115	€158,556.76	647	€403,072.90	€0.00	€0.00	931	891	€3,008,650.26
Donegal	119	€145,693.32	497	€288,474.15	€0.00	€0.00	1,409	1,358	€4,183,674.96
Dublin	1	€1,699.99	14	€9,014.30	€0.00	€0.00	19	19	€64,567.68
Galway	93	€100,205.14	798	€490,386.27	€0.00	€0.00	1,581	1,539	€5,288,709.40
Kerry	174	€209,578.51	475	€297,579.04	€0.00	€0.00	758	732	€2,530,323.72
Kildare	0	€0.00	51	€32,197.04	€0.00	€0.00	113	105	€393,946.49
Kilkenny	0	€0.00	168	€111,183.35	€0.00	€0.00	190	176	€668,811.37
Laois	8	€11,056.15	158	€97,763.42	€0.00	€0.00	231	219	€797,145.28

-	GLAS2								
County	Ad- vance+	Advance+ Amt	Balance	Balance Amt	Bal- ance+	Bal- ance+ Amt	Cases	Ad- vance	Advance Amt
Leitrim	38	€49,740.95	313	€200,393.40	€0.00	€0.00	525	515	€1,799,587.49
Limerick	42	€55,469.56	245	€153,419.19	€0.00	€0.00	402	394	€1,391,151.53
Longford	5	€5,745.69	299	€195,355.19	€0.00	€0.00	328	320	€1,155,992.78
Louth	0	€0.00	40	€25,842.10	€0.00	€0.00	93	91	€326,537.64
Mayo	128	€112,157.21	737	€442,396.42	€0.00	€0.00	1,653	1,578	€5,262,748.22
Meath	0	€0.00	163	€104,198.59	€0.00	€0.00	247	236	€844,287.30
Monaghan	5	€8,499.92	127	€76,671.22	€0.00	€0.00	335	333	€1,130,591.07
Offaly	16	€24,015.47	221	€146,789.04	€0.00	€0.00	294	283	€1,050,567.15
Roscommon	11	€7,013.98	455	€288,890.91	€0.00	€0.00	714	696	€2,486,931.58
Sligo	18	€21,852.76	252	€149,945.32	€0.00	€0.00	492	479	€1,684,478.79
Tipperary	43	€54,009.42	370	€240,707.04	€0.00	€0.00	497	482	€1,787,430.08
Waterford	6	€10,199.84	90	€57,114.87	€0.00	€0.00	120	111	€400,605.07
Westmeath	8	€9,325.55	230	€149,710.46	€0.00	€0.00	278	269	€994,108.86
Wexford	7	€7,953.33	208	€137,001.30	€0.00	€0.00	307	290	€1,114,250.37
Wicklow	15	€11,889.71	72	€48,299.26	€0.00	€0.00	199	191	€709,584.82
TOTAL	979	€1,182,290.70	7,593	€4,760,029.40	0	€0.00	13,182	12,737	€44,158,385.63

table ctd.

-	GLAS 3					
County	Advance+	Advance+ Amt	Balance	Balance Amt	Balance+	Balance+ Amt
Carlow	4	€3,647.76	39	25082.37	0	0
Cavan	12	€15,613.16	199	121439.78	0	0
Clare	68	€84,821.20	331	199849.92	0	0
Cork	63	€91,761.79	400	232082.99	0	0
Donegal	115	€140,235.26	465	246039.27	0	0
Dublin	0	€0.00	9	6126.53	0	0
Galway	92	€79,110.00	769	461898.69	0	0
Kerry	111	€123,544.14	326	195051.81	0	0
Kildare	4	€4,277.30	49	32310.19	0	0
Kilkenny	2	€1,959.03	75	49594.67	0	0
Laois	9	€12,309.57	44	29188.18	0	0
Leitrim	37	€44,494.27	162	97940.8	0	0
Limerick	25	€33,084.98	264	163130.5	0	0
Longford	1	€885.32	114	71387.47	0	0
Louth	1	€41.33	29	18657.81	0	0
Mayo	122	€90,211.43	520	307473.11	0	0
Meath	1	€1,700.00	47	29439.06	0	0
Monaghan	2	€1,792.95	143	82778.55	0	0
Offaly	17	€19,185.15	74	48558.35	0	0
Roscommon	15	€17,433.09	224	139844.75	0	0
Sligo	24	€22,214.86	100	60827.8	0	0
Tipperary	30	€45,657.22	150	94428.9	0	0
Waterford	11	€14,049.78	52	31168.23	0	0
Westmeath	3	€2,623.91	86	53614.35	0	0
Wexford	10	€13,595.60	72	47662.75	0	0
Wicklow	3	€3,647.25	32	21112.74	0	0
TOTAL	782	€867,896.35	4,775	€2,866,689.57	0	€0.00

Sheep Welfare Scheme Data

169. **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 the 2017 balancing payment by county in tabular form; the number that have passed all payment approval checks and are awaiting the 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. [24234/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The information requested by the Deputy is as follows:

Table 1 - farmers by county who have received a balancing payment under the Sheep Welfare Scheme.

County	Number of applicant's paid balancing as at 30th May 2018
CARLOW	297
CAVAN	290
CLARE	154
CORK	701
DONEGAL	2818
DUBLIN	61
GALWAY	1841
KERRY	1236
KILDARE	244
KILKENNY	211
LAOIS	161
LEITRIM	522
LIMERICK	50
LONGFORD	156
LOUTH	163
MAYO	2312
MEATH	377
MONAGHAN	117
OFFALY	183
ROSCOMMON	777
SLIGO	668
TIPPERARY	286
WATERFORD	154
WESTMEATH	301
WEXFORD	413
WICKLOW	625
Total	15118

Table 2 - Farmers in receipt of Sheep Welfare Payments who have yet to receive their 2017 balancing payments.

County	Number in receipt of Sheep Welfare Payments who have yet to receive a balancing payment.
CARLOW	145
CAVAN	150

County	Number in receipt of Sheep Welfare Payments who have yet to receive a balancing payment.
CLARE	65
CORK	327
DONEGAL	801
DUBLIN	45
GALWAY	613
KERRY	470
KILDARE	136
KILKENNY	93
LAOIS	99
LEITRIM	166
LIMERICK	43
LONGFORD	72
LOUTH	74
MAYO	729
MEATH	202
MONAGHAN	109
OFFALY	115
ROSCOMMON	286
SLIGO	225
TIPPERARY	190
WATERFORD	92
WESTMEATH	113
WEXFORD	183
WICKLOW	251
Total	5794

In relation to the farmers yet to receive their balancing payments, over 4,200 of the farmers in Table 2 have passed all payment approval checks and will be receiving their balancing payments shortly. The remaining cases will be processed as a matter of priority. In many cases, there are issues relating to outstanding sheep census returns which are stopping payment.

Cyber Security Policy

170. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the steps he is taking to protect Irish businesses at risk of cyber attacks in view of the fact that the US and UK are offering training to major public bodies and businesses in this area. [24192/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): My Department's remit includes the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC), which contains a Computer Security Incident Response Team (CSIRT-IE). The CSIRT-IE received international accreditation in 2017 and is actively engaged in a number of European and international organisations. The NCSC is responsible for acting as a conduit for information to constituents including operators of Critical National Infrastructure, businesses, Government Departments and Agencies, and also for providing expert advice and analysis on cyber security issues and for coordinating significant incidents. The NCSC acts as a central contact point in the event of a government or nation-wide cyber security incident affecting the State and con-

tinues to work with the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer and the Departments and Agencies that own these systems to mitigate and manage these risks. The expertise contained within the NCSC covers a broad range of capabilities including computer science, software engineering, malware analysis and information technology forensics. The unit also participates in international exercises. The NCSC is also engaged in a series of other actions to support organisations of different types and scales. For example, the unit has been heavily engaged in work to prepare for the EU Network and Information Security Directive, which will place binding security requirements on critical infrastructure operators and certain key Digital Service Providers. The Directive also places obligations on the State itself, in terms of ensuring that States can cooperate and share information in the event of a large scale incident affecting several countries and to ensure that every State has significant capacity of its own. Taken together, this will mean that the State will have coordinated system for the management of cyber related risk to Critical National Infrastructure, and for the assessment and response to incidents. Also, a new website for the NCSC has been launched – www.ncsc.gov.ie - and this will shortly be updated with information to assist individuals and small and medium sized businesses to protect their information systems.

North-South Interconnector

171. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on the concerns of communities in counties Cavan and Monaghan in relation to the North-South Interconnector particularly in relation to health, tourism, heritage and land and property devaluation; if the project will be undergrounded; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24037/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne): The North South Interconnector, as proposed as an overhead line, now has full planning permission in both Ireland and Northern Ireland. I have listened carefully to the issues raised in relation to this project, particularly those living in close proximity to the proposed project. In February and March 2017, two motions calling for an updated independent study into the north-south interconnector were passed by Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann. I met with the Monaghan Anti-Pylon Committee and North East Pylon Pressure Campaign, together with Oireachtas members from Cavan, Monaghan and Meath in February 2017. I subsequently met with Oireachtas members in May 2017 and most recently again in January of this year. In addition, my officials have held separate meetings with the Monaghan Anti-Pylon Committee and North East Pylon Pressure Campaign in March and April last year.

All of these engagements – together with the motions - were important in my decision to commission two independent studies into the project. The studies were designed to address the main points of the motions as well as key concerns expressed by those parties opposed to the development of an overhead line. Some impacts such as environmental and health concerns were not assessed since the statutory planning process is the appropriate method by which such impacts are assessed and evaluated.

The Consultants undertaking the two studies have finalised their reports and once considered in my department and submitted to me it is my intention that these will be brought to Government and made publicly available. This process will take some time to complete.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

172. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the timeframe for broadband services to be made available in counties Cavan and Monaghan; the status of fibre installation; and his views on the national broadband plan. [24038/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Government's National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to ensure high speed broadband access (minimum 30 megabits per second) to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location. The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector. Today, 7 out of 10 of the 2.3 million premises in Ireland have access to high speed broadband. By 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 NBP.

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

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

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

- The LIGHT BLUE areas represent eir's commercial rural deployment plans to rollout high speed broadband to 300,000 premises as part of a Commitment Agreement signed with me in April 2017.

There are approximately 42,000 premises in Cavan. Some 17,000 (40%) fall within the AMBER area and will be served under the State led Intervention. More than 20,000 (49%) of premises are in a BLUE area and are, or will be, served by commercial providers, while nearly 5,000 (11%) are LIGHT BLUE and fall to be served by eir's planned rural deployment.

There are approximately 33,000 premises in Monaghan. More than 15,500 (48%) fall within the AMBER area and will be served under the State led Intervention. Just over 15,500 (47%) of premises are in a BLUE area and are or will be served by commercial providers, while some 2,000 (5%) are LIGHT BLUE and fall to be served by eir's planned rural deployment.

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

Quarterly updates on eir's rural deployment are published on this website. Figures for Q1 2018 are now available.

Data for Q1 2018 recently submitted by eir to my Department indicates that the company has passed some 145,000 premises nationwide as part of its ongoing deployment. Eir has signalled that there would be likely knock-on effects to the 2018 milestone targets due to the severe weather impacts of both storms Ophelia and Emma. I have met with the senior management in eir and expressed to them the importance of implementing measures to catch up with

milestone targets as a priority.

For those premises currently awaiting access to high speed broadband, 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. The Department of Rural and Community Development maintain a list of Broadband Officers, a link to which is available 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>.

Illegal Dumping

173. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the steps he is taking to help county councils deal with incidents of illegal dumping; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24039/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Illegal dumping is first and foremost a matter of individual responsibility and compliance with the law. While enforcement action in this area is a matter in the first instance for local authorities, the Department encourages a multi-faceted approach to tackling the problem, incorporating enforcement, public awareness and education. Last year my Department developed the anti-dumping initiative to work in partnership with local authorities and community organisations in identifying high risk or problem areas, developing appropriate enforcement responses and carrying out clean-up operations. Overall, funding of €1.3 million was provided to local authorities under the 2017 anti-dumping initiative and further details of the funding provided to each local authority and the successful 200 projects nationwide is available on my Department's website at:

<https://www.dccae.gov.ie/en-ie/environment/topics/waste/enforcement/anti-dumping-initiative/Pages/default.aspx>.

This year, I announced an increased allocation of €2 million to build on the momentum that has now been created and to provide for an increased focus on identifying and prosecuting those who choose to dump illegally.

In April, I announced the projects nationwide that have been approved for funding as part of the 2018 ADI programme with the full list available on my Department's website at:

<https://www.dccae.gov.ie/en-ie/environment/topics/waste/enforcement/anti-dumping-initiative/Pages/default.aspx>.

The scope of the projects include:

- clean-up operations - removing illegal waste from across the country;
- household bulky waste initiatives – mattress/couch amnesties;

- awareness campaigns – social media campaigns & radio;
- preventative measures – installation of signage and fencing;
- surveillance operations – CCTV, drone and trail surveillance;
- SMART enforcement equipment and resources for waste enforcement officers.

In addition to the 200 plus projects that will receive funding from my Department, this year's Anti-Dumping Initiative includes a national pilot project undertaken by Sligo County Council aimed at tackling and addressing the source of illegal dumping through an Eircodes investigation. Funding is also being made available to support the Connaught/Ulster Waste Enforcement Regional Lead Authority in undertaking research on crime in the waste sector including an overview of the scale, cost and impact of waste crime in Ireland, and an assessment of illegal dumping identifying the socio-economic and other factors leading to such activities.

National Broadband Plan

174. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the measures in the national broadband plan which will ensure social inclusion on the basis of pricing for the service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24064/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Government's National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to ensure high speed broadband access (minimum 30 megabits per second) to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location. The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector. Today, 7 out of 10 of the 2.3 million premises in Ireland have access to high speed broadband. By 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 for those areas where commercial operators are unlikely to invest. The National Broadband Plan Intervention Strategy outlines various aspects of the proposed State led intervention. This document is available at <https://www.dccae.gov.ie/documents/Updated%20Strategy%20December%202015.pdf>.

The Strategy recognises that access to quality high speed broadband enables people to access information, services and opportunities that may otherwise be out of reach. To that end, the company appointed to build and operate the State led intervention network must deliver a wholesale high speed broadband network that is open on an equal access basis to retail service providers, with benchmarked and transparent pricing and conditions for access. It must also ensure that services are affordable, competitive and comparable to prices charged in areas outside the intervention area.

It is the intention that the wholesale prices charged by the company operating the network within the intervention area will be in line with the average published wholesale prices that prevail for comparable services in more competitive areas of the country or, in the absence of such published prices, prices already set or approved by the industry regulator, ComReg.

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

175. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if the upcoming renewable energy support scheme will prioritise wholly owned community projects above community led projects which may have up to 50% private ownership in the ringfenced community auction. [24092/18]

176. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the way in which the upcoming renewable energy support scheme will ensure that communities are provided adequate opportunity to invest in community led projects which may have up to 50% private ownership. [24093/18]

177. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the way in which the upcoming renewable energy support scheme will ensure community led projects with greater levels of community ownership are prioritised over those with lower levels of community ownership. [24094/18]

178. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if landowners with equity shares within a development will be considered as community investors or developers when evaluating the requirement for community led projects to have at least 50% community investors in the upcoming renewable energy support scheme. [24095/18]

179. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if wholly owned community projects will be processed for a grid connection under the non-GPA process rather than being forced to compete with developer led projects in the ECP process. [24096/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 175 to 179, inclusive, together.

The 2015 Energy White Paper presents a long-term strategic vision that is intended to guide the direction of Irish energy policy from now until 2030. It identifies the long-term strategic importance of diversifying Ireland's energy generation portfolio and largely decarbonising the energy sector by 2050.

To deliver on this ambition, my Department is currently developing a proposed new Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) which is being designed to assist Ireland in meeting its renewable energy contributions out to 2030.

A cornerstone of the new scheme will be the provision of pathways for increased community ownership, participation in and benefit from renewable electricity projects. The new scheme will deliver capacity building supports for community-led projects, including financial, technical and legal assistance, along with community benefit obligations, for projects looking for support under RESS. This approach will deliver on the 2015 Energy White Paper commitment to ensure communities and citizens are at the centre of the future energy transition in Ireland.

Communities are effectively being designed into the fabric of the new scheme and a comprehensive assessment of policies and support measures to increase community ownership from renewable electricity projects has been undertaken. This study was carried out in parallel with the economic analysis to underpin the new RESS, and it examined which policies and support measures would work best in an Irish context, to deliver these ambitions. The assessment looked at international best practice, and a renewable energy – community workshop was held, where barriers and opportunities related to renewable electricity projects were identified for further analysis. The study also looked at how these policies and support

measures could be best applied across a range of project archetypes, including developer-led, community-led and wholly owned community projects

Examples of support measures identified include a mandatory requirement for all projects supported under RESS to offer ownership or investment opportunities to the local population, facilitating grid access for community-led renewable projects, ring fencing dedicated capacity for community-led projects and putting in place structures which will support community groups overcome legal, financial and technical barriers to renewable electricity generation.

The Community Report as it is known, along with the Economic Appraisal to underpin the new RESS were both published by my Department last year for public consultation and are available on my Departments website at *www.dccae.ie*.

A final design proposal on RESS will shortly be brought to Government for approval, and subsequent to this a formal application for State Aid clearance with the European Commission will commence in line with 2014 EU State Aid Guidelines. The new scheme is expected to open in 2019. Over the coming months, my Department will work closely with all relevant stakeholder groups to ensure the delivery of the community commitments as far as possible as the scheme is developed.

Finally, the regulation of the electricity network, including the management of the grid connection process and related matters, is a matter for the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU), under the Electricity Regulation Act, 1999. The CRU is an independent statutory body, solely accountable to a committee of the Oireachtas, and I therefore have no function in the matter.

Law Reform Commission Recommendations

180. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the action he has taken in respect of each of the recommendations relevant to his Department made by the Law Reform Commission's Report on Harmful Communications and Digital Safety. [24116/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The recommendations contained in the Law Reform Commission's report on Harmful Communications and Digital Safety, which was published in 2016 can be divided into two parts. The first part concerns the reform of criminal law to provide for a range of new offences including "revenge porn", "upskirting" and "downblousing". My colleague, the Minister for Justice and Equality is preparing legislation to address this aspect of the LRC report.

The second part of the report concerns the establishment of an Office of a Digital Safety Commissioner. As the Deputy is aware, the Government did not oppose the Private Members' Bill introduced by Deputy Ó Laoghaire in February of this year, which sought to establish such an Office. The Dáil referred that Bill to the Select Committee on Communications, Climate Action and Environment for further consideration.

Earlier this year, I hosted an Open Policy Debate on Online Safety which was organised in cooperation with six other Government Departments. In opening that event, the Taoiseach announced that it was Government's intention to publish an action plan on Online Safety. My Department, along with all other Departments involved in the organisation of the Open Policy Debate are actively involved in the preparation of that plan.

Inland Fisheries Ireland

181. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his permission will be required for the proposed sale by Inland Fisheries Ireland of Ashleigh Lodge in south County Mayo; the reason for the proposed sale; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24134/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne): Aasleagh Lodge and the Erriff Fishery came into State ownership in 1982. The lodge and fishery were initially managed and developed by the Central Fisheries Board and then by the Western Regional Fisheries Board (predecessors of Inland Fisheries Ireland – IFI). The Lodge was used to accommodate visiting anglers (both domestic and overseas) availing of the fishery and other local amenities. Accommodation was on a B&B or half-board basis. IFI succeeded the fishery boards in 2010 and as part of a strategic review of both operations and property it was considered that operating a guesthouse was not part of the organisation’s core business. A tender process was undertaken for the accommodation facility to be operated on a commercial licence basis.

Following the tender process, IFI entered into a licence arrangement with a private company from 2015. It was intended that the income derived would contribute to fisheries conservation, protection and development. The Lodge (and the Erriff fishery) remained in State ownership. IFI retook possession of the Lodge in 2016 due to non-compliance with the licence terms by the licensee.

The Board of IFI then considered a number of options in relation to the property and communicated its preferred choice to sell the property and retain the Erriff fishery in State ownership. An examination by my Department of the options presented concurred with the Boards view. I indicated my support for the proposed sale in June 2017.

I would emphasise that retention of the Fishery as a State asset is, in my view, essential in view of the following:

- the Fishery is the National Sea Trout Index Catchment on which significant National and International scientific research is based;
- retention facilitates the provision of angling for Salmon and Sea Trout to domestic and visiting anglers at economic rates; and
- the scientific, amenity and community value of the Fishery.

IFI intends, in line with its property rationalisation plans, to establish a new operational base and updated scientific facilities, for the strategically important Erriff Fishery and the immediate area, on adjacent lands which it owns and are also being retained.

Renewable Energy Incentives

182. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the assistance available to small scale developers to access the national grid for the production and sale of solar power; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24141/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne): I am committed to exploring opportunities for micro generation further, as I believe micro generation not only offers customers protection from rising energy

costs, but also because micro generation could enhance broader social engagement with renewable energy projects across Ireland and enable the transition to a low carbon economy. Furthermore, micro generation will be required given the scale of our climate and energy ambition as laid out in the National Development Plan and Project Ireland 2040. While solar power is not supported by REFIT, my Department supports the deployment of Solar PV through the SEAI led Better Energy Communities and pilot Deep Retrofit schemes. Last year, my Department assessed micro generation, across a number of renewable electricity generating technologies (including solar PV), as part of the economic analysis to underpin the new Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS). The assessment identified technical and financial challenges which may need to be addressed before a broader support scheme for micro generation can be introduced. This is in line with international experience, including across the EU, where many member states who have introduced supports for micro generation have had to reform them or cancel them altogether.

The reality is that bringing micro generation on to a system designed for large generators is complicated. It impacts how we pay for the network, how we manage regulation and how we technically manage the system. My Department is continuing to work closely with the micro generation sector and the SEAI to better understand how to validate and further develop these policies in a fair and cost effective manner.

Solar PV and self-consumption among domestic customers will be supported under a pilot scheme to promote micro generation, due to be launched later this year. It is important that before a scheme like this is introduced, the likely demand for the scheme is understood and the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) are currently undertaking a study which will inform the final design of this pilot. It is equally important that safety, technical and training requirements are established in advance of this pilot scheme being rolled out.

The data gathered during the pilot scheme will inform potential future phases of support for micro generation in Ireland that may be appropriate, as we align with the ambition of the recast Renewable Energy Directive which recognises the rights, entitlements and obligations of renewable self-consumers. This pilot scheme will deliver on ambitions and commitments made in the Energy White Paper and the Programme for Government.

Question No. 183 answered with Question No. 17.

Climate Change Policy

184. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the extent to which his Department has identified and proposed action on the issue of climate change and the need to accelerate a programme to address the issues concerned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24163/18]

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

Under the Paris Agreement, the EU has committed, on behalf of its Member States, to a

reduction of at least 30% in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, to be achieved by reductions in the Emission Trading System (ETS) sector of 43% and in the non-ETS sector of 30%. The recently agreed EU Effort Sharing Regulation sets out binding annual greenhouse gas emission targets for each Member State for the period 2021 to 2030. Ireland's target under this Regulation will be for a 30% reduction in 2005 levels of non-ETS emissions by 2030.

Closing the gap on Ireland's EU targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 2020 and 2030 will be extremely challenging. The latest projections of greenhouse gas emissions, published by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) today, indicate that emissions from those sectors of the economy covered by Ireland's 2020 targets could be between 0% and 1% below 2005 levels by 2020, in the context of a target that emissions should be 20% below their 2005 levels. While this is very disappointing, it is not surprising given the recent pace of economic growth, and the consequent increases in emissions from the agriculture and transport sectors in particular.

The projected shortfall to our target is further exacerbated by both the constrained investment capacity over the past decade due to the economic crisis, and the extremely challenging nature of the target itself. In fact, it is now accepted that Ireland's 2020 target was not consistent with what would be achievable on an EU wide cost-effective basis. With this in mind it is crucial that the focus of our efforts must now be to ensure that we, at the absolute very least, meet our 2030 target.

As a means to addressing Ireland's emissions reduction challenge, I published Ireland's first statutory National Mitigation Plan in July 2017. It has established the framework for the development and implementation of medium-to-long-term policy options so as to achieve progressive emissions reductions in each of its four key sectors with the most significant contribution to national emissions (Electricity Generation; the Built Environment; Transport; and Agriculture, Forestry and Land Use). The Plan is a living document that will be updated as on-going analysis, dialogue and technological innovation generate more and more cost-effective sectoral mitigation options.

I subsequently published Ireland's first statutory National Adaptation Framework in January 2018. The Framework sets out the national strategy to reduce the vulnerability of the country to the negative effects of climate change and to avail of positive impacts. Under the Framework, seven Government Departments and Agencies, with responsibility for the twelve priority sectors identified in the Framework, will be required to prepare sectoral adaptation plans in line with the requirements of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015 and the Framework itself.

Implementation of both the National Mitigation Plan and National Adaptation Framework is overseen by a High Level Climate Action Steering Group, which I chair and which reports, in turn, to the Cabinet Committee on Infrastructure, Environment and Climate Action.

Building on these strategies, the publication in February of the National Development Plan, reaffirms the Government's commitment to transitioning Ireland to a low carbon, climate resilient economy and society. It will lead to a significant step change in funding available for climate action over the next decade. This funding commitment provides a clear opportunity for significant up-scaling in our investments to deliver deep emissions reductions in the coming decade and to further develop and implement the National Mitigation Plan and National Adaptation Framework.

Reflecting the strong commitment of Government on this issue, almost €22 billion will be directed, between Exchequer and non-Exchequer resources, to addressing the transition to a low-carbon and climate resilient society. In addition, the National Development Plan allocated

a further €8.6 billion for investments in sustainable mobility. This means that well over €1 in €5 spent under the National Development Plan will be on climate mitigation, and this capital investment will enable us to deliver a significant reduction in our greenhouse gas emissions over the period to 2030.

Both the National Mitigation Plan and the National Development Plan explicitly recognise that reliance solely on Exchequer expenditure schemes is neither affordable nor adequate to the scale of the challenge to be addressed, and climate mitigation action will require a targeted balance between Exchequer-supported expenditure, taxation measures, regulation and behavioural change. In certain cases, taxation policy may have a stronger role to play in changing individual or business behaviour and investment decisions, including harnessing non-Exchequer finance.

I will also shortly publish an update on climate mitigation policy to coincide with the *Empowering Communities for Climate Action* event on 20 June, which will reflect the significant policy developments since the National Mitigation Plan, in particular with the publication of the National Development Plan.

In terms of on-going climate mitigation policy development, the EU requires that we produce a draft National Energy and Climate Plan by end 2018, with the final plan to be developed by end 2019. This represents a further opportunity to build on the National Mitigation Plan and the National Development Plan to ensure Ireland moves to a pathway of long-term decarbonisation. Finally, I am required, under the 2015 Act, to bring forward a new National Mitigation Plan at least once every five years. The latest date by which this must happen is, therefore, July 2022.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

185. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the extent to which he is in contact with the Minister for Agriculture, Food and Marine with a view to identifying positive actions that can be taken to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the agrifood sector without damaging the industry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24164/18]

186. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the extent to which he in conjunction with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine has identified the most likely and realistic actions to be taken to reduce carbon emissions in line with EU targets and without negatively affecting the agrifood sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24165/18]

187. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the extent to which he in consultation with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine has identified substantial means of carbon sequestration with a view to ensuring compliance with EU carbon reduction targets without negatively affecting the agrifood business; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24166/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 185 to 187, inclusive, together.

The extent of the challenge to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, in line with our EU and international commitments, is well understood by the Government, as reflected in the National Policy Position on Climate Action and Low Carbon Development, published in April 2014, and now underpinned by the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015.

I published Ireland's first statutory National Mitigation Plan in July 2017. The objective of the National Mitigation Plan is to set out, on a whole-of-Government basis, what Ireland is doing and is planning to do to further our transition to a low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by 2050. The Plan reflects, in particular, the central roles of the Ministers responsible for the four key sectors with the most significant contribution to national emissions (Electricity Generation; the Built Environment; Transport; and Agriculture, Forestry and Land Use), and draws on the perspectives of a range of other Departments.

Furthermore, each Minister is responsible for implementing the sectoral mitigation measures within their own sectors and for taking forward the actions to further develop those measures. Each Minister is also directly accountable and must report to the Oireachtas, under the 2015 Act, on progress in their respective sectors.

The most recent list of measures currently in place in the context of National Mitigation Plan is set out in the 2017 Annual Transition Statement, which I laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas on 8 December last. This Statement details the key measures in place in the respective sectors, the objective for each measure, estimated mitigation potential and funding information, where appropriate.

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

Building on the National Mitigation Plan, the publication in February of the National Development Plan will lead to a significant step change in funding available for climate action over the next decade. Almost €22 billion will be directed, between Exchequer and non-Exchequer resources, to addressing the transition to a low-carbon and climate resilient society. In addition, the NDP allocates a further €8.6 billion for investments in sustainable mobility. This capital investment will enable us to deliver a significant reduction in our greenhouse gas emissions over the period to 2030.

I will shortly publish an update on climate mitigation policy to coincide with the *Empowering Communities for Climate Action* event on 20 June, which will reflect the significant policy developments since the National Mitigation Plan, in particular with the publication of the National Development Plan.

In terms of oversight and implementation, both the National Mitigation Plan and the National Adaptation Framework are overseen by a High Level Climate Action Steering Group, which I chair and which includes representation from relevant Government Departments and Agencies, including the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. This Steering Group reports, in turn, to the Cabinet Committee on Infrastructure, Environment and Climate Action.

In relation to the potential of carbon sequestration to contribute to compliance with our greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets, the recently-agreed EU Effort Sharing Regulation includes provision for net removals and emissions from deforested land, afforested land, managed cropland and managed grassland to be taken into account for a country's compliance with its targets, under certain conditions. On the basis of current estimates, under this provision, Ireland is expected to be able to account for up to 22 million tonnes in net removals over the 2021-2030 period in partial compliance with our targets under the Effort Sharing Regulation.

Mobile Telephony Services

188. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the steps that continue to be taken to ensure an improvement in mobile phone telephone coverage nationally with particular reference to the areas experiencing a low level of service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24168/18]

189. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the extent to which his Department directly or through the telecoms regulator has identified the areas throughout the country experiencing less than half the maximum signal in respect of their mobile telephone service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24169/18]

190. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he has issued an instruction or received communication from the telecoms regulator in regard to the extent and quality of mobile telephone service available nationally; the steps he will take to ensure a dramatic improvement in the areas enduring the poorest service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24170/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 188 to 190, inclusive, together.

I recognise the frustration felt by Irish consumers where telecommunications networks are not always delivering the services people expect. Accordingly, I specifically included in the Programme for Government a commitment to a Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce. The Taskforce worked with key stakeholders to produce a report in December 2016, available on my Department's website, which contained 40 actions to alleviate some of the deficits. The Implementation Group which I co-chair with Minister Kyne is overseeing implementation of the actions and comprises all key stakeholders responsible for delivery. This includes ComReg, which attends as both an action owner, and in an observer capacity in its role as the independent Regulator.

Minister Kyne and I published the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce Implementation Review 2017 on 21 February 2018, which comprehensively outlines the progress made in 2017 on the actions identified by the Taskforce. Of the 40 actions, 29 have been completed, with work on the remaining 11 carrying into the 2018 Work Programme. Following close engagement with stakeholders at the National Stakeholder Forum, an additional 23 new measures have been identified for delivery in 2018, that will lead to improvements for consumers across Ireland.

The fifth meeting of the Taskforce Implementation Group was held on 25 April 2018, and the Quarter 1 2018 Progress Report has since been published on my Department's website. This report offers progress updates on all Q1 actions.

In terms of addressing mobile coverage blackspots, various initiatives are under way:

- My Department and the Department of Rural and Community Development have worked to achieve a greater consensus around site selection for deployment of telecoms infrastructure and therefore improve mobile phone coverage.

- Both Departments also worked with a pilot group of local authorities to identify the issues associated with mapping local blackspots. This pilot exercise has been completed, with all local authorities having been asked to map local blackspots and identify infrastructure that could potentially be used to provide additional coverage on an economic basis. This exercise is on-

going under the 2018 Taskforce Work Programme. It is planned to have dedicated Geographic Information System (GIS) resources in place to support this.

- A review was conducted to identify recommendations to address blackspots. A focus group is continuing this work in 2018, to inform future policy development and initiatives. The work of this focus group will provide guidance on location categories where high quality mobile phone coverage should be made available as a priority, taking account of customer expectations.

- ComReg is also developing a composite national coverage map, which will, in tandem with its work on handset testing and awareness raising activities, allow people across Ireland to optimise the services available to them.

In tandem with the work of the Taskforce, the release by ComReg of the 3.6GHz radio spectrum band, which has been identified at EU level as a primary band suitable for 5G rollout, will also contribute to addressing increasing mobile data demands and improve mobile coverage. Mobile operators' commercial investment has also resulted in improved services, following ComReg's 2012 multi-band spectrum auction. At least one operator now has in excess of 90% 4G population coverage.

All of these initiatives should help enhance the quality of mobile phone and data services, particularly in rural areas.

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

Broadband Service Provision

191. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the extent to which progress continues in respect of the provision of high quality and high speed broadband in all areas; if action is progressing on the areas between the existing service area in which only a short distance separates consumers from areas receiving full service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24171/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I refer the Deputy to my earlier response to his question on the same matter. The Government's National Broadband Plan aims to ensure high speed broadband access of a minimum of 30 megabits per second to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location through a State led intervention and commercial investment.

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 NBP. The Map is colour coded and is searchable by address or eircode. I also signed a Commitment Agreement with eir in relation to its plans to provide high speed broadband to 300,000 premises in rural areas on a commercial basis. As of end March this year eir has passed 145,00 premises and has committed to completing this rollout. Information on eir's planned rural deployment is available at the fibrerollout.ie website.

The procurement process to select a company who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network in the State led intervention area is now in its final stages. My Department will engage with the successful company on the most efficient rollout of the network.

In the interim, high speed broadband services continues to be rolled out through significant commercial investment by commercial operators to a value of €2.75 billion in the last 5 years. By 2020, 9 out of 10 premises the length and breadth of Ireland will have access to high speed broadband.

For those premises awaiting access to high speed broadband, 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.

Energy Efficiency

192. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the €117 million allocated to energy efficiency as outlined in budget 2018; the amount of the allocation that has been spent; the way in which the moneys were spent; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24220/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The National Development Plan (NDP) 2018 -2027 recognises that improving the energy efficiency of the built environment is a central plank of Ireland's action on climate change. Energy efficiency will also realise benefits for air quality, health, social inclusion, business competitiveness and better public services, all of which will make a real and positive impact on people's lives. Ireland's White Paper on Energy Policy, *Ireland's Transition to a Low Carbon Energy Future 2015-2030*, National Mitigation Plan (NMP) and Long Term Renovation Strategy (LTRS) all recognise the fact that extensive renovation of our building stock will need to take place in order to meet both national and international targets for energy savings and emissions reduction by 2050. This must occur across all sectors.

I secured significant additional resources in Budget 2018 for energy efficiency investment. I allocated €117 million, of which €107m is capital, to the energy efficiency programmes to increasing energy efficiency across the residential, public and commercial sectors with a view to ramping up activity in order to address the ambition of the NDP. This represents an increase of over €50m since 2015 (or 34%). My Department works closely with the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, who administer the energy efficiency programmes, to profile spend across all programmes for the year. The bulk of spend on energy efficiency programmes has historically taken place in the second half of the year and I would expect this to be the case this year as well.

My Department and the SEAI are also working to further encourage the uptake of the respective programmes by engaging with various stakeholders. An important element of this is SEAI's new Behavioural Economics Unit which was established in 2017. Its focus is to better understand the motivations of key decision makers so policy interventions can take advantage of new communications insights. This Unit is already informing improved effective communication with target groups and has provided guidance to market players on how to more effectively communicate to decision makers the benefits of making more energy efficiency choices.

The spend to end April 2018 across these sectors is outlined below. Further spend has been approved but not yet paid out by SEAI.

Sector	Capital Spend for 2018 to end April - (€m)
Residential	15.268
Commercial	0.050
Public	0.028
Total	€15.346m

Energy Schemes

193. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the €17 million allocated to supporting the transition to a low carbon economy as outlined in budget 2018; the amount of the allocation that has been spent; the way in which the moneys were spent; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24221/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): In Budget 2018 €16.6m was allocated to support the transition to a low carbon economy via two measures, the rollout of the Support Scheme for Renewable Heat and supports to incentivise the uptake of electric vehicles. This spending has been allocated to the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland who will deliver these measures. An allocation of €6.8m was made to the Support Scheme for Renewable Heat of which €0.288m has been drawn down to date. The spend to date relates to preparing the administrative and organisational framework required to operate the scheme. The scheme is expected to become operational in the second half of the year at which point support payments to eligible projects under the scheme will commence.

An allocation of funding of €9.8 million was made to support the increased deployment of electric vehicles of which €3.294m has been drawn down to date. These supports include the funding of the electric vehicle purchase grant, the electric vehicle home charger grant, supports for public charging, and a new the Electric Vehicle Public Awareness Programme.

So far this year, the electric vehicle purchase grant has supported the purchase of 711 new electric vehicles drawing down €3.075m.

The electric vehicle home charger grant scheme commenced in January of this year to support the installation of home charge points for buyers of new and second-hand electric vehicles for which, to date, €0.141m has been drawn down.

The Low Emissions Taskforce, co-chaired by my Department and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, is examining options in relation to potential support measures for public charging for which, to date, €0.025m has been drawn down.

In April 2018, the SEAI launched the first phase of the Electric Vehicle Public Awareness programme which will raise the profile and understanding of electric vehicles. This campaign includes a website (www.DrivingElectric.ie) providing information on buying and driving an EV including the models available and links to dealers to arrange a test drive. There will also be an advertising campaign - "The Face of Driving Electric" - which will highlight how electric vehicles are compatible with virtually everyone's daily lives. Public road shows and fleet trials will be rolled out later in the year providing more people the opportunity to trial electric vehicles. Work is on-going in this area and to date €0.053m has been drawn down.

National Broadband Plan Funding

194. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the €15 million allocated to the national broadband plan as outlined

in budget 2018; if the figure has increased or is likely to increase in 2018; the amount of the allocation that has been spent; the way in which the moneys were spent; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24222/18]

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

My Department has an allocation of €15 million in 2018 for the NBP. Expenditure to date in 2018 is €2.882m. This expenditure principally relates to the cost of acquiring external expertise to support the procurement process for the NBP State Intervention.

The NBP procurement process is complex and is supported by a specialist team including external expertise and advisors. These include a range of national and international experts with commercial, economic, environmental, financial, insurance, legal, procurement, state aid, tax and technical, expertise and experience. The procurement process is now in the final stages.

Small and Medium Enterprises Supports

195. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the €5.6 million allocated to the support of small businesses to trade online and fund the provision of digital skills training for persons as outlined in budget 2018; the amount of the allocation that has been spent; the way in which the moneys were spent; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24223/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): My Department's Trading Online Voucher Scheme is a demand-led scheme designed to support micro businesses to develop their online trading capability. The scheme, which is developed and funded by my Department, is delivered throughout Ireland by the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs). I have allocated €3 million to support an additional 1,500 businesses to trade online in 2018. So far in 2018, €796,363 has been spent on the scheme. €715,529 has been paid to LEOs in respect of payments to successful applicants under the scheme with an additional €61,831 for delivery of information sessions, promotion and administration costs. A further €11,314 has been paid to Enterprise Ireland which administers the distribution of funding to the LEOs under the scheme. €7,689 has been spent on national promotion of the scheme.

Businesses who successfully apply for a voucher have 4 months to implement their proposal in line with the terms and conditions of the scheme. Payment by the LEO to the business is made on the basis of vouched expenditure following successful implementation of its proposal.

The scheme targets a broad range of businesses including retail, food, professional services, arts and crafts, and manufacturing. Since 2014 over 4,300 businesses have successfully applied and over 10,000 businesses have benefited from training delivered by the Local Enterprise Offices. Businesses, both urban and rural, who participate grow their sales on average by 21%, increase employment by 35% and 3 out of 5 begin exporting for the first time.

The Getting Citizens Online Programme promotes digital adoption among citizens through basic digital skills training for citizens who have never used the internet. Training is targeted

at people over 45, farming communities, small business owners, the unemployed, persons with disabilities and disadvantaged groups and is delivered in local communities across every county.

During 2018 my Department is committed to fund 12 community, voluntary and not-for-profit organisations to provide 25,000 citizens with 10 hours of free digital skills training, at a cost of over €2.2m. To date in 2018, €690,608 has been paid in accordance with the funding arrangements and provisions of the respective grant agreements.

Environmental Protection Agency Funding

196. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the €34.8 million allocated to the Environmental Protection Agency as outlined in budget 2018; the amount of the allocation that has been spent; the way in which the moneys were spent; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24224/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): A sum of €37.4 million has been allocated, through my Department, to the Environment Protection Agency (EPA) under Subhead F3 in the *Revised Estimates for Public Services 2018*. This is comprised of €34.8 million referenced in the Question and an additional €2.6 million, also specified in the *Revised Estimates* and sourced from unspent 2017 appropriations to capital supply services (capital carryover). In addition, a further €7.14 million in Exchequer funding is provided to the EPA through the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, primarily to facilitate and support implementation of the Water Framework Directive and associated activities.

The EPA draws down the funds provided by my Department on a monthly basis in line with an agreed annual expenditure profile. To date, €14.69 million has been drawn down by the Agency for current and capital expenditure. Current expenditure includes pay and pensions costs, and costs associated with the provision of secretariats to both the Climate Change Advisory Council and the National Dialogue on Climate Action. Capital expenditure items include the EPA Research Programme and upgrades to the national air monitoring network.

EPA resources and expenditure are overseen in the context of my Department's overall responsibility for the Agency's governance. As part of this governance responsibility, a draft Oversight Agreement and Performance Delivery Agreement, as required under the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies, are being finalised by my Department in consultation with the Agency and the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government.

Landfill Sites

197. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the €11 million allocated to address environmentally degraded landfill sites as outlined in budget 2018; the planned number to be addressed in 2018; the amount of the allocation that has been spent; the way in which the moneys were spent; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24225/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): My department has allocated funding for 18 sites across 12 Local Authority areas from the Landfill Remediation Programme 2018. It is proposed to progress the remediation of each of these sites during the current year. To date, just over €5m has been spent on 4 sites in 3 Local Authority areas. Major remediation works have been undertaken on two sites; Kerdif-

fstown Landfill in Kildare and Tymoole in Meath. Two other sites, Gowran and Ballyragget, both in Kilkenny have submitted Certification of Authorisation applications to the EPA in order to progress.

My department is in on-going discussions with the local authorities to ensure that the allocations made will be utilised during the year, and the sites identified which require funding in 2018 are progressed on schedule. Any surplus will be allocated to other sites identified to progress their investigations in preparation for full remediation.

My department continues to work with the Waste Management Planning Lead Authorities to develop a long-term plan for the remediation of other sites in need of attention around the country.

Motor Tax

198. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to reform the motor tax system to link the rate of motor tax payable to the value of the vehicle in view of the much higher rates liable on vehicles registered prior to 2008 in comparison with newer cars; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24065/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Motor tax for private vehicles is charged on the basis of engine size for vehicles registered prior to 2008, and on the basis of carbon dioxide emissions for vehicles registered since 2008. I have no plans at present to move away from charging motor tax on the basis of carbon dioxide emissions, which has proven to be very effective in reducing emissions levels, or to introduce an additional tier based on the price of a vehicle to the basis of charging motor tax.

Adjustments to the relative rates within the parameters of the existing system is a matter for consideration in a Budgetary context.

Greenways Provision

199. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the time-frame for completion of the greenway from Athlone to Galway; and the budget in place for same. [24075/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): A decision was taken in 2015 to pause the development of the Galway to Dublin greenway west of the Shannon to allow all stakeholders to reflect on the issues raised locally and to consider how best to progress this project, especially in terms of route selection and landowner consultations. The decision to pause was informed by a report submitted by Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) following intensive consultation with landowners along the preferred Galway/Roscommon segment of the route.

Since 2015 progress has been made on other greenway projects, namely the sections of the Galway to Dublin Greenway in Kildare and Meath, and the opening of the Waterford Greenway. The high standard of accommodation works provided to adjacent landowners on the Waterford Greenway have demonstrated how measures can be put in place to significantly mitigate potential impacts on operational farm holders.

With this in mind I recently requested TII and the Steering Group managing this project to look again at the route options report to see if a route can be identified that works locally and

has the support of key landowners. While the work of TII and the Steering Group is ongoing I am not in a position to comment on either the timeframe or budget required to construct the greenway between Athlone and Galway.

Tribunals of Inquiry

200. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the Moran Inquiry is being decommissioned; and if so, the final cost of same. [24077/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Judge Moran presented his Report to officials of my Department on Monday, the 12th of June 2017, which can be considered the completion date of his Inquiry.

The total cost of the Moran Inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the receipt, distribution and sale of tickets for the Rio Olympic Games and ancillary matters amounted to €312,765. There are no outstanding amounts to be paid.

Tribunals of Inquiry Recommendations

201. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has implemented the recommendations of the Moran Inquiry. [24078/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As these recommendations, set out in Chapter 12.2 of the Moran Inquiry Report, are essentially related to governance arrangements in the Olympic Council of Ireland (O.C.I.), the primary implementation responsibility rests with that organisation. The O.C.I. is an independent, autonomous sporting organisation.

In the context of the State's funding of the O.C.I., which was suspended in 2016 and resumed in the latter part of 2017, I sought to ensure that the necessary reforms were undertaken in order to address the Moran Inquiry recommendations. In particular, I was satisfied that all twenty five recommendations in the Deloitte report, as referenced in Report from Judge Moran, were addressed. Additionally, the conclusion of the O.C.I.'s commercial relationship with the THG company drew a line under the unacceptable ticketing arrangements detailed in Judge Moran's Report. In summary, I believe that there has been a complete transformation in the openness, transparency and accountability of the O.C.I. when compared to the situation before the Rio Games.

As with all sporting organisations, in receipt of State funding or otherwise, it will of course be necessary for the O.C.I. to maintain its commitment to the highest governance standards and to ensure that it puts athletes at the forefront of their thinking and planning. I am confident that the significant reforms already undertaken by the OCI will deliver a vastly different and better experience for Team Ireland at Tokyo 2020.

Judge Moran commented on the extensive resources of the O.C.I.'s parent body, the International Olympic Committee (I.O.C.), in relation to future State funding of the O.C.I. I understand that the Board of Sport Ireland would take this into consideration in regard to the allocation of funding. In that context, the Deputy may wish to note that it is an aim of the O.C.I.'s Strategic Plan 2018-2024 to become financially independent.

Irish Aviation Authority

202. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason for the decision to split the IAA into two, that is, regulation and safety and air traffic control; the analysis that was carried out; the consultation that was conducted; if legislation is needed; and if so, the timeline for same. [24079/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Government Decision to separate the IAA's regulatory functions from its for-profit, commercial air traffic control service is in keeping with broader Government policy on modernising sectoral regulation. The current regime dates from the 1990s, and it perhaps reflects norms from that era which are increasingly out of line with modern developments in EU and international aviation regulation. There are very few examples remaining in Europe of institutional structures that jointly provide air navigation services and oversee industry regulation.

The objective of the reform initiative is to create a single national aviation regulator responsible for economic, safety and security regulation, and separately a sole commercial air traffic control service. There is inherent conflict in the IAA's current dual role as a commercial air navigation service provider and an independent regulator of the airline industry, including regulator of air navigation services. This reform initiative is about implementing best practice regulatory arrangements. It is intended to further promote Ireland's position to the forefront of change and development in the aviation sector. It will further improve the existing high level of safety oversight as borne out by the audits of the IAA undertaken by the International Civil Aviation Organisation.

I recognise that such structural reform involves a number of complexities and I am mindful of the need to manage the transition to the new arrangements carefully, including the enactment of supporting legislation in as diligent and expeditious a manner as possible. It is important to ensure that affected workers and the broader industry stakeholders are kept informed, and regular consultation to that end will be a feature throughout. It is equally important to pursue the implementation of policy that represents clear best practice, all the more so when safety is at issue, rather than shy away from necessary change in favour of the status quo or vested interests.

EU Regulations

203. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will report on the new EU regulation from 2021 in relation to the mandatory requirement of advanced driving safety features in cars and other vehicles being manufactured, imported and sold in the EU; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24085/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The European Commission's road safety policy framework 2021-2030 is only a proposal at this point in time, therefore I am unable to report on any forthcoming Regulation that has not yet been drafted. However, please be assured that road safety is a major priority for me and my Department and that Ireland will continue to support all measures that aim to enhance the safety of road users.

Mountain Rescue Service

204. **Deputy Hildegard Naughton** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if funding will be provided for an organisation (details supplied) for the purposes of training

volunteers in view of the fact that the Department of Health is preparing legislation to make it mandatory for all first aid provided here to be done under PHECC; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24111/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Mountain Rescue Ireland receives funding in the region of €18k annually under the Coastal Inshore Mountain and Cave Grant scheme administered by my Department. The grant is intended to support the current expenditure of the organisation. Cost of training for volunteers can be offset using this grant. I have asked my officials to consider implications of the proposed legislation from the Department of Health once it is available.

State Bodies Code of Conduct

205. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the awarding by CIÉ of a contract to a company (details supplied) to develop a site adjacent to Ceannt Station, Galway city; if CIÉ will retain full ownership of the site post development; if CIÉ undertook due diligence regarding the companies engaged to conduct the development of the site pre-awarding of the contract; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24128/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Section 13(1) and 13(3) of the Transport Act 1950 and section 11 of the Transport Act 1964 provide CIÉ with the statutory power to acquire, dispose or develop property subject to the consent of its Board. There is no statutory requirement for Ministerial consent; CIÉ's Board is the sole statutory decision-maker.

However, Section 8.22 of the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies states that the Chairperson of the Board should seek the approval of the relevant Minister and the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform in advance of any material acquisition or disposal of land, buildings or other material assets proposed by a State Body.

Section 8.23 of the Code also states that in addition to any specific guidelines which may apply to a particular State body, any acquisition or disposal of property must be conducted in accordance with Circular 17/2016 on Policy for Property Acquisition and for Disposal of Surplus Property.

Both the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform and I conveyed our approval in June 2017, in accordance with paragraphs 8.22 and 8.23 of the Code of Practice, to allow CIÉ commence disposal of the property referred to by the Deputy.

I have forwarded the Deputy's question to CIÉ for direct reply in relation to the specific issues raised regarding the conduct of the tender process. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Driver Licensing Exchange Agreements

206. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a person (details supplied) can exchange a French driver licence for an Irish driver licence without taking the driver test here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24157/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Any EU driving licence, including a French licence, is directly exchangeable for an Irish equivalent, without the

need to take a test.

Under EU law, Member States issue driving licences to those normally resident in their jurisdiction, and all EU driving licences are interchangeable. When a person who holds a driving licence issued by one Member State takes up residence in another they can - and should - exchange it for the equivalent from their new state of residence.

Road Traffic Accidents Data

207. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of cyclist fatalities in each of the past five years and to date in 2018; the principal causes of such fatalities; and the steps he is taking to ensure the number of fatalities are reduced. [24203/18]

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.

Road Traffic Accidents Data

208. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of serious injuries suffered by cyclists in each of the past five years and to date in 2018; the principal causes of such serious injuries; and the steps he is taking to ensure the number of serious injuries are reduced. [24204/18]

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.

Road Traffic Accidents Data

209. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of injuries suffered by cyclists involving Luas tracks and that required hospital treatment in each of the past five years and to date in 2018; and the steps he is taking to ensure the number of injuries are reduced. [24205/18]

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 Policy

210. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the way in which the prevalence of cycling here is monitored; the knowledge of his Department of the trends in the prevalence of cycling here; his strategy to increase the number of persons cycling here; and the number of persons commuting by bicycle. [24206/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I would like to advise the Deputy that my Department uses various data sources to monitor the prevalence of cycling

and the resulting trends. The Central Statistics Office (CSO) provides statistical information on cycling, including the National Travel Survey which illustrates the prevalence of cycling and the trends in cycling numbers.

My Department also monitors cycling numbers and trends using information collated by Dublin City Council and the National Transport Authority and published in the annual Canal Cordon Report. This report provides data on trends in mode share of vehicles and people crossing the Canal Cordon including the number of cyclists who pass the canal cordon in Dublin between 7.00am and 10.00am; The recently published report shows an upward trend of cyclists crossing the canal that continued between 2016 -2017 with numbers increasing by 3%. There has been a steady year on year growth in the number of cyclists crossing the cordon since 2010. In 2017 almost 12,500 cyclists crossed the cordon in the AM peak period. This represents an increase of 157% when compared with 2006, and represents an increase of over 57% in the last five years. Clearly cycling numbers have shown a steady increase in recent years.

I am pleased to inform the Deputy that as part of my Departments overall strategy to increase the numbers cycling I have secured 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. 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. .

Furthermore, investment in 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. NTA calculate, that through BusConnects, over 200 kms of cycle tracks/lanes will be either built or current lanes improved upon.

In addition to funding for the provision of infrastructure, my Department continues to be active in promoting behavioural change to encourage more people to take up cycling and to cycle safely. Funding is provided on an annual basis to the NTA for the delivery of behavioural change programmes such as Workplace and Campus Travel Programme and the Green Schools Travel Programmes. My Department also engaged Cycling Ireland to develop a new national cycle training standard - “Cycle Right” – which was rolled out in January 2017. My Department also 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 support and lead to a further increase in the numbers cycling safely, thereby easing congestion, im-

proving 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.

Cycling Facilities Data

211. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount spent on cycling infrastructure in each of the past five years by areas of spending; the five biggest projects covered in this spend; and the percentage of his Department's capital budget and current budget devoted to cycling projects in each of these years. [24207/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy may be aware, investment in cycling infrastructure over the period in question was delivered under a number of different programmes and schemes, namely the Smarter Travel Programme, Sustainable Transport Measures Grants (STMG) Programme and the Regional Cities Programme.

Projects funded under the Smarter Travel Programme, funded directly by the Department, 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.

Given the overarching scope of these programmes, it is not possible to isolate specific expenditure on cycling infrastructure over the period in question. Having said that, please see the table below which outlines total capital and current funding allocated to these programmes as a percentage of my Department's capital budget and current budget devoted to cycling projects in each of these years.

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Total Capital Spend (€ million)	32.66	31.55	39.72	31.51	19.29
Total Current Spend (€million)	1.47	1.58	1.51	1.65	1.65
% of Department Capital budget (net) spent on cycling	5.2%	4.4%	6.0%	3.8%	2.2%
% of Department Current budget (net) spent on Cycling	0.2%	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%

In relation to the five biggest projects covered in this spend and noting the NTA's responsibility in the matter, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for a more detailed reply. Please contact my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Early Childhood Care and Education Funding

212. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of capital funding for a school (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24100/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): A total of 1,959 applications for funding were received this year under the 2018 Early Years and School Age Capital programmes.

The appraisal process of these applications was a large-scale, fair and impartial process carried out by Pobal on behalf of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, in which each application was assessed individually on its own merits.

The results of the appraisal process are currently being finalised and decisions, whether successful or unsuccessful, will be communicated directly to providers following completion of this.

Early Childhood Care and Education Data

213. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the wage structures in all early childcare facilities; and the rate of pay made and the geographical spread of same in tabular form. [24043/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): There is no formal wage structure in operation in the early years sector. Rates of pay are primarily a matter for childcare practitioners and their employers. However, the annual Early Years Sector Profile, published by Pobal, contains useful information on pay including pay rates for the various positions in the sector and county breakdowns of pay rates. The profile also includes information on staff qualifications, staff turnover and the length of time staff spend in a service. A copy of the most recent Early Years Sector Profile is available to read and download on the Pobal website www.pobal.ie under the “news and events” section.

As part of the Early years sector Profile, each service which took part was asked to provide the average hourly wage for each staff member. The results are presented in the table below.

Area	Average Hourly Wage
Dublin City	€12.81
Cork City	€12.41
Dun Laoghaire Rathdown	€12.36
Cork County	€12.27
South Dublin	€12.17
Fingal	€12.17
Wicklow	€12.08
Mayo	€11.99
Waterford	€11.95
Limerick	€11.90
Galway	€11.87
Kerry	€11.83
Kildare	€11.77
Clare	€11.75

Area	Average Hourly Wage
Meath	€11.73
Tipperary	€11.70
Leitrim	€11.69
Kilkenny	€11.62
Offaly	€11.53
Longford	€11.48
Wexford	€11.47
Westmeath	€11.47
Louth	€11.43
Sligo	€11.30
Roscommon	€11.21
Donegal	€11.19
Monaghan	€11.14
Cavan	€11.14
Carlow	€11.05
Laois	€10.95

On the broader issue of pay rates, I am conscious of the need for improvements to be made and, in this regard, I have suggested to the sector that one approach which might be considered is to apply for a Sectoral Employment Order (SEO) through the Labour Court.

Under a SEO process, organisations substantially representative of employers and employees come together to agree a way forward and submissions are sought from key stakeholders. My Department would not be a party to the SEO process, however, as a significant funder, and with policy responsibility for quality, would be well placed to make a submission to the Court once it publishes its notice in relation to the matter of the application for a SEO for the sector. I have indicated that I will be very supportive of any reasonable measures aimed at improving pay and conditions of the Early Years sector.

Further, the Programme for Government includes a commitment to carry out an independent review of the cost of providing quality childcare. The ‘Independent Review of the Cost of Delivering Quality Childcare’ which is currently being carried out is examining the costs faced by childcare providers in delivering quality childcare, including a survey of childcare providers. Following completion- the review is intended to be used to strengthen the evidence base underpinning future policy development and investment in early years. As such, it will feed into future policy development, including in relation to levels of payments to services.

The contract to undertake this Review was awarded to Crowe Horwath in September 2017. Since then, a literature review, stakeholder engagement and an online survey has been completed. The closing date for receipt of completed surveys was 13th April. Over 800 completed surveys were received and analysis of these data has commenced. A report from this Review is expected in late June 2018. It is intended to publish this report thereafter.

Child Care Services Expenditure

214. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the cost to provide all staff working with children at least three hours paid time per week to plan their work. [24044/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department provides funding to childcare services for the delivery of a range of subvented childcare schemes to support families to engage in work or training (CCS and TEC). These scheme subsidies are deducted from the cost to the parent of the childcare they require. The ECCE / pre-school scheme provides early years care and education to 117,000 children approximately per annum. DCYA is not the employer of staff in the sector and makes no payments directly to them. Childcare services are delivered predominantly by private businesses and about 30% by community / not for profit services.

The subvention rates for the September 2017 measures which were introduced as an interim measure in advance of the ACS were increased substantially in September 2017, by as much as 50% in some instances. The rate of capitation for ECCE will increase by 7% from September 2018, up to a maximum of €80.25 per child per week for services receiving the Higher Capitation rate. The subsidies for the Affordable Childcare Scheme which is in development were designed to include all overhead costs (face to face time with children, admin costs etc.).

An important point to note is that my Department made €18 million in Programme Support Payments (formerly known as ‘non-contact time’ payments) to Early Years providers in 2017 and has secured this in our base for 2018. We plan to administer this payment again in the coming weeks.

I have commissioned the first Independent Review of the Cost of Delivery of Quality Childcare, which is currently being conducted by Crowe Horwath. The outcomes of this review will inform us re all costs associated with delivering childcare and will be critical to future Estimates processes relating to early years care and education.

Notwithstanding the general position set out it is estimated that the cost of providing an additional 3 hours paid time, based on the numbers working in the formal, settings based, early years sector and having regard to current pay rates in the sector, would be in the region of €50m.

Early Childhood Care and Education

215. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the engagement she has had with third-level institutions on the needs for graduates of courses relating to early childcare; and if those concerns are being addressed by her Department. [24046/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): As the Deputy will be aware, my Department introduced a qualifications minimum standard into the Early Years sector in Ireland, through the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016.

This was enabled in part by a minimum qualification threshold having already been a requirement of Early Years services offering the universal pre-school provision, known as the ECCE programme.

While it was necessary to establish further education qualifications as the appropriate regulatory standard, my Department welcomes the growing number of graduates who are specialised in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). My Department has been keenly aware of the robust progression of ECEC as an academic discipline in Ireland, which is now far more firmly established in Irish third level institutions than at any previous time.

The rapid growth of ECEC in recent years is partially attributed to my Department’s provision of an additional payment to graduate-led Early Years services who offer the ECCE pro-

gramme, and it is to the credit of the third level institutions and ECEC academics that they have responded so proactively to the increased demand for degree level ECEC programmes in Ireland. My Department anticipates that the Early Years sector in Ireland is very near to being 50% graduate led.

Throughout the various changes brought forward by my Department in the Early Years sector in Ireland in recent years, my Department has maintained regular contact with third-level institutions who offer Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) programmes, through various forums. My Department works very closely with the Department of Education Early Years Policy Unit, who are currently undertaking a review of the award standard for ECEC degrees, and have done so through extensive consultation with the third level sector, including groups such as PLÉ (Pedagogy, Learning and Education Association of Ireland).

My Department is aware, (through third level education providers; associated academic groups; and other stakeholders such as the County / City Childcare Committees (CCCs)) of the challenges facing third level students in ECEC programmes, particularly those who do not qualify for Student Universal Support payments. To further support ECEC graduates, in January 2017 my Department began to offer a bursary payment for recent ECEC graduates, which has continued into 2018. My Department is also examining other means of offering support to ECEC undergraduates who fall outside the mainstream financial supports for students. Officials from my Department are also in regular contact with ECEC undergraduate students, as many apply to my Department for permission to work in the sector outside of their academic placement work, a permission that my Department is pleased to provide, subject to application and some key criteria.

Early Childhood Care and Education Expenditure

216. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the estimated amount it would cost to bring all staff in the early childcare sector up to professional wage standards. [24048/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): A precise and accurate answer to this question is difficult owing to the many variables involved in defining and calculating the various elements.

To assist in answering the question, we have used data from the latest Pobal Early Years Sector Profile. This indicated that some 27,000 staff work in the formal childcare sector, half of which are working full time, and that the average hourly rate of pay in the sector is €11.93. If we were to take the mid-point of the Teacher salary scale as a benchmark for professional wage standards, the estimated cost of introducing such standards to all staff in the centre based / formal childcare sector would be in the region of €605m per annum.

The allocation for schemes in 2018 totals €411m. On the estimated basis that 70% of this amount contributes to pay costs, the additional funding required would be approximately €320m per annum.

Several important considerations must be noted alongside this analysis. While the Department is a significant funder of the childcare sector, the Department is not the direct employer of childcare workers. The costings above relate to formal childcare settings only and not to the estimated 38,000 childminders working in home based childcare. The costings do not include pensions.

It should be noted that any move to impose or change pay levels to any degree would need

to be the subject of a wide ranging negotiated process with employers, the sector, and other relevant stakeholders.

Affordable Childcare Scheme Expenditure

217. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the projected full year cost of the affordable childcare scheme in each of the next three years; the additional benefits and the broadening of eligibility criteria planned under the scheme for each of those years; the number of additional children that are expected to be accommodated in each of the years as a result of these changes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24108/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The start date for the Affordable Childcare Scheme (ACS) has not yet been confirmed. The procurement process for the external IT developer for the project is nearly complete, and when the developer is in place and has been able to validate the timeline for completion of the project, I will then announce the planned start date.

I have already publicly stated that the existing childcare schemes, including the benefits which were fast-tracked in September 2017, will remain in place for the programme-year starting this September. As the Deputy may be aware, these have been very successful and our target has been exceeded. Almost 77,000 children are now benefiting from these schemes; the target had been 70,000.

The most recent estimates for the full-year childcare costs of the ACS were presented in the Regulatory Impact Analysis, which was published in December 2017. The Regulatory Impact Analysis noted that there remains considerable uncertainty over the likely costs of the ACS, especially because of uncertainty about the scheme's impact on the demand for childcare.

According to the Regulatory Impact Analysis, if there is no increase in demand for childcare, then it is estimated that the full-year costs will lie between €127m and €149m. Taking into account potential increases in demand, international evidence suggests that the full-year cost of the scheme could rise to somewhere between €165m and €193m. However, such an impact on demand may only materialise fully over a period of several years, as parents begin to participate more in the labour market in response to improved access to affordable childcare. Increase in demand may also be caused by parents changing their childcare choices towards regulated childcare.

The introduction of the ACS will see a significant change in eligibility criteria for childcare subsidies. Whereas eligibility for childcare supports under the current schemes depends on possession of a Medical Card / GP Visit Card, or receipt of one of a range of social welfare payments, or participation in a relevant education or training course, the level of subsidy under the ACS will primarily depend on income. In addition, a universal subsidy was introduced in September 2017 for 6-36 month olds, which will remain in place under ACS.

I have no immediate plans for changes in ACS eligibility criteria, but the scheme has been designed to give flexibility to adjust both income-thresholds and subsidy-rates each year as part of the budgetary process. This ensures that the ACS can act as a sustainable platform for increasing investment in childcare in Ireland over the years ahead.

In line with the costings published in the Regulatory Impact Analysis, it is estimated that the number of beneficiaries of ACS on its introduction could rise to more than 82,000, but is likely in the first instance to be between 70,000 and 80,000, with the precise level depending on the impact on the demand for childcare. As income-thresholds and subsidy-rates are changed over

time, the number of beneficiaries will change accordingly.

Community Childcare Subvention Programme

218. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of children receiving the benefit of the September measures; and the percentage this represents of children resident here in the age groups covered by the measures by year of age (details supplied). [24114/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The ‘September Measures’ relates to the introduction of the Community Childcare Subvention Universal (CCSU) payment and the increase in band rates across the different strands of the Community Childcare Subvention (CCS) and the Training and Employment Childcare (TEC) Schemes. The increases in supports to Childcare providers which have been provided from September 2017, for the next programme year, represents a major step towards accessible affordable quality childcare after decades of neglect and under-investment by successive Governments. These ‘September measures’ include the following supports which are being rolled out under the CCS and TEC Schemes;

(1) A new (non-means tested) universal subsidy is available for all children aged between 6 months and 3 years of age (or until they qualify for ECCE) in registered childcare. This amounts to as much as €20 a week or €1,040 per year for children in full time childcare.

(2) Enhanced supports of up to €7,500 per year to assist families to return to employment and/or training and education.

As of week ending Friday 25th May 2018 a total of 76,933 children have benefited from these measures. A detailed breakdown of this total is provided in the following table:

Programme Call	Unique approved children
ASCC 2017	345
CCS 2017	17,833
CCSP	17,601
CCSRT	432
CCSU	36,694
CEC 2017 (AS)	797
CEC 2017 (PS)	806
CETS 2017	2,425
Total	76,933

I regret that I am unable to provide the further breakdown requested by the Deputy because the data is not compiled in a way which makes this possible.

Child and Family Agency Services

219. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to improve services and provide additional facilities in counties Cavan and Monaghan for victims of domestic abuse; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24180/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla, the Child

and Family Agency, has statutory responsibility for the provision of care and protection to victims of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence.

In 2018, Tusla is providing €23.8 million in funding to domestic, sexual and gender based violence services, an increase of €1.7m over 2017 funding. This includes funding for some 58 services throughout the country.

The development of services for victims of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence nationally is guided by the *Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention)*, as well as the *Second National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence (2016-2021)*. Among the priorities for Tusla, in this regard, is to expand the regional distribution of services.

As previously highlighted to the Deputy, I am aware that there are no refuges located in counties Cavan and Monaghan. However, there are three refuges situated in counties Louth and Meath, which provide emergency domestic violence accommodation to women based in the North East region. This includes 21 family units of emergency refuge accommodation.

As part of its commissioning approach to developing services, Tusla has carried out a number of needs analysis projects in order to identify gaps in service provision and to prioritise service developments. All future service developments, whether based in the North East region or elsewhere, will be informed by Tusla's commissioning approach. Tusla is currently working with stakeholders in the sector in order to implement the priority actions identified through its needs analysis projects.

At all times, Tusla's key priority is to ensure that the needs of victims and survivors of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence are met in the best way possible, with due attention to the quality, accessibility, and outcome of services.

Child and Family Agency Funding

220. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of the €40 million allocated to Tusla as outlined in budget 2018; the amount that has been spent; the way in which the moneys were spent; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24218/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): In 2018, Tusla, the Child and Family Agency received a budget allocation of some €753 million from my Department's voted expenditure, which includes an extra €40.6 million over its 2017 allocation.

Late last year, I issued Tusla with its 2018 Performance Statement in line with the provisions of the Child and Family Agency Act, 2013. Tusla prepared its Business Plan for 2018, on foot of the 2018 Performance Statement, setting out its proposed main areas of spending.

In the 2018 Performance Statement, I indicated my priorities to Tusla for this year including:

- actions to support mandatory reporting under the Children First Act, 2015,
- addressing gaps in out of hours services, and
- further investment in Family Resource Centres in local communities that deliver services to families, especially in disadvantaged areas across the country.

I am not in a position to inform the deputy what amount or proportion of the extra funding has been spent at this time. However, I am pleased that the extra funding secured will also allow Tusla to recruit over 300 additional staff, reduce the number of unallocated cases, improve its ICT infrastructure, and advance further developments in areas such as Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence services, adoption, aftercare, and homelessness supports.

I strongly support the work of Tusla and I am committed to providing resources to meet the growing needs of children and families. The increased funding, which I have secured for Tusla in 2018, means that resources are available to meet key priorities in the years ahead.

Early Childhood Care and Education Funding

221. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of the €20 million allocated to early years care and education as outlined in budget 2018; the amount that has been spent; the way in which the moneys were spent; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24219/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Department secured an additional €20m of Early Years Care and Education funding in Budget 2018. This funding was obtained to improve the quality, accessibility and affordability of Early Years Care and Education, through the following policy measures:

- Expand ECCE entitlement from an average of 61 weeks to two full programme years (76 weeks) for all qualifying children.
- Increase both ECCE capitation rates by 7%.

As both measures are due to be introduced from September 2018 no costs have been incurred thus far.

Tourism Project Funding

222. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the funding that will be made available to a tourist amenity (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24179/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I have received a number of enquiries in recent months about the amenity referred to by the Deputy. I previously indicated that the Donegal LEADER Local Action Group (LAG), through its Implementing Partner, was engaging with the community in the affected area with a view to identifying whether LEADER support might be of assistance to this facility.

However, I understand that it has now been clarified that the beneficial owner of the facility in question is the Local Authority, which is a public body. Public bodies are not eligible to apply for funding under the LEADER programme. However, the Local Action Group, through its Implementing Partner, continues to be available to explore other options in respect of this and other amenities in the area.

I will shortly be announcing the launch of the 2018 Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme which provides funding for the development of new outdoor recreational infrastruc-

ture or the necessary maintenance, enhancement or promotion of existing outdoor recreational infrastructure in Ireland. The scheme will accept applications from Local Authorities, State bodies and Local Development Companies on a competitive bid basis. I will be particularly welcoming collaborative approaches to initiatives under the scheme. The relevant bodies in Co. Donegal may wish to examine the details of the scheme when it is launched to see if it has the potential to support the amenity - or parts of the amenity - in question.

Departmental Funding

223. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the 2018 allocation to schemes (details supplied); the amount of expenditure allocated for each scheme in the 2018 fiscal year; and the amount of capital expenditure allocated for each scheme whereby this amount is rolled out over four years per EU fiscal rules in tabular form. [24229/18]

225. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the amount by current and capital expenditure allocated in 2016 and 2017 to schemes (details supplied); and the amount of funding drawn down and expended in both years for each scheme in tabular form. [24231/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I propose to take Questions Nos. 223 and 225 together.

Based on clarifications provided by the Deputy's office, I understand that the Deputy is primarily enquiring about the funding which has been made available under a number of schemes and the timeframe within which the funding is expected to be drawn down.

Table 1 below provides details of capital allocations made under schemes referred to by the Deputy since 2016 and the amounts drawn down under those schemes each year. In general, these schemes are implemented through the Local Authorities.

The Town and Village Renewal Scheme, the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme and the CLÁR programme operate over a 12-18 month period from the time of the allocation of funding to successful projects. Projects under the Local Improvement Scheme are expected to be completed in the fiscal year in which the funding is allocated. My Department engages with all funding recipients on an on-going basis to ensure that funding is spent as efficiently as possible and in accordance with the original project proposals.

The 2018 CLÁR scheme was launched in March of this year and in excess of 400 applications were received and are currently being assessed. I expect to announce successful allocations under that scheme in the coming weeks.

The 2018 Town and Village Renewal Scheme was launched in April and the closing date for applications is the end of June. The 2018 Outdoor Infrastructure Scheme will be launched very shortly.

Funding for the 2018 LIS scheme was allocated to the Local Authorities in April and projects are expected, for the most part, to be completed by the end of July 2018.

In addition to the schemes listed on the table below, expenditure on the Walks Scheme amounts to approximately €2 million per annum in current funding. This scheme provides funding for the maintenance of sections of 39 trails that traverse private lands. The scheme is managed and administered by 16 Local Development Companies around the country on behalf

of my Department. The scheme also has a small capital allocation of approximately €50,000 per annum to cover materials used for small capital works in the maintenance and repair of the trails.

Table 1 - Capital allocations and drawdown 2016-2018

Scheme	2016 Funding allocated	2016 Funding drawn-down to date	2017 Funding allocated	2017 Funding drawn-down to date	2018 Funding allocated	2018 Funding drawn-down to date
Town and Village Renewal Scheme	€9.88 m	€9.88 m	€21.64 m	€4.12 m*	N/A	N/A
Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme	€7.44 m	€7.44 m	€11.4 m	€4.01 m*	€2.20 m**	€0.493m***
CLÁR Programme	€8.3 m	€8.3 m	€6.91 m	€5.88 m*	N/A	N/A
Local Improvement Scheme	N/A	N/A	€17.4 m	€16.96 m	€10.84 m	€0

* Funding drawdown in both 2017 and to date in 2018, in respect of funding allocated in 2017.

** Funding allocated in January 2018 in respect of the 2017 scheme.

*** Funding drawdown in 2018, in respect of funding allocated in 2017 and 2018.

Departmental Schemes

224. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of applications that were received by each local authority and various stakeholder organisations for funding for schemes (details supplied) in each of the years 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form. [24230/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): My Department delivers a suite of programmes referred to by the Deputy which provide direct financial support for the sustainable development of rural areas. These programmes are highlighted in the Action Plan for Rural Development which focuses on supporting sustainable communities, enterprise and employment, maximising rural tourism and recreation potential, fostering culture and creativity in rural communities, and improving rural infrastructure.

Applications for funding under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme, the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme, the CLÁR programme and the Local Improvement Scheme (LIS) are accepted through the Local Authorities and various stakeholder organisations.

My Department does not receive details of all the applications received by each Local Authority or the various stakeholder organisations, as they submit only their prioritised applications to the Department. However, details of final projects approved for each of these schemes since 2016 are available on the Rural Development pages of my Department's website - www.drcd.gov.ie. Further approvals made during 2018 will also be published on the website.

The LEADER programme is administered by Local Action Groups (LAGs) which deliv-

er funding in accordance with Local Development Strategies that have been agreed for each LEADER area. €220 million of the €250 million approved for LEADER under the Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020 has already been allocated to each LAG area. Each LAG is responsible for deciding how their allocation is distributed to LEADER projects over the duration of the programme, based on the objectives in their Local Development Strategies.

As of 21st May 2018, 973 projects with a value of €28 million had been approved for LEADER funding by the LAGs while a further 342 projects with a value of €19 million are at various stages in the approval process. Details of individual projects approved are available on my Department's website on a county by county basis.

The Walks Scheme is currently operating on 39 trails supported by 1,905 landowners. The scheme is managed and administered by 16 Local Development Companies around the country on behalf of my Department. A maximum sum of €2,480 per annum is paid to each of the private landowners participating in the scheme for the maintenance of approved trail that traverse their lands.

Question No. 225 answered with Question No. 223.

Leader Programmes Data

226. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the breakdown between funds expended on administration costs and the amount spent on project costs on the Leader programme in each year of the RDP 2014-2020 and to date in 2018, in tabular form. [24232/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): LEADER is a multi-annual programme for the period 2014-2020 and has a total budget of €250 million. €220 million of this funding has already been allocated to the Local Action Groups (LAGs) throughout the country who deliver the LEADER programme. The remaining €30 million is available for schemes which will be delivered at a national level. The allocation for each sub-regional area is provided for the duration of the Programme rather than on an annual basis. This provides greater flexibility to the LAGs in managing their resources.

Table 1, below, details the expenditure incurred nationally each year to date under the LEADER 2014 - 2020 Programme. This expenditure commenced in 2015 and relates to the costs incurred by the LAGs to develop their Local Development Strategies (Preparatory Support), the administration costs of the LAGs and the costs of their engagement with communities to generate projects - also referred to as "animation" costs. The table also shows expenditure incurred on projects.

The level of project activity has increase significantly in recent months and I understand that approximately 1,000 projects have now been approved for funding of over €28 million, while a further 300 project applications requesting an additional €19.2 million are at various stages in the approval process. I expect the level of expenditure on projects to increase substantially in the coming months as these projects are implemented and the promoters submit claims for payment.

Table 1: LEADER 2014-2020 Expenditure broken down per year

Year	Preparatory Support	Administration and Animation	Projects	Total
2015	€1,251,185.25	€0.00	€0.00	€1,251,185.25
2016	€119,785.45	€1,141,135.00	€0.00	€1,260,920.45
2017	€97,141.59	€11,364,865.35	€661,844.12	€12,123,851.06
2018 (to date)	0	€3,269,534.05	€1,943,819.05	€5,213,353.10

Parental Leave Expenditure

227. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the cost of extending parental leave by three months. [24045/18]

231. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the full year cost of introducing one week's entitlement to paid parental leave based on the rate of maternity benefit and based on both parents being eligible and if the entitlement is being restricted to one parent or shared between them. [24081/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 227 and 231 together.

The Department of Justice and Equality has policy and legislative responsibility for maternity, paternity leave and parental leave. My Department has responsibility for any associated social welfare payments.

Maternity benefit and paternity benefit are paid by my Department and are based on payment of PRSI contributions while working. The current entitlement to paid maternity leave is 26 weeks and paid paternity leave is 2 weeks for which the Government has provided funding of approximately €264 million and €16 million respectively for in 2018.

The estimated full year cost of introducing an additional week's entitlement to paid parental leave based on the rate of maternity benefit which could be taken by either parent would depend on the cohort of parents who would avail of it. For example, one additional week of maternity benefit would cost approximately €9.6m while one additional week of paternity benefit would cost €5.2m. If the leave could be taken by either parent then the estimated cost would be between €5.2m and €9.6m. Similarly, the cost of extending this paid leave by three months (13 weeks) would cost would between €67.8m and €124.8m.

These estimates are based on the cost for a full year at the current minimum rate of €240 per week for both maternity and paternity benefit and assume that any increase in duration is implemented from the beginning of the year.

This costing is subject to change in the context of emerging trends and associated revision of the estimated numbers of recipients for 2018. It should also be noted that there are additional costs to the Exchequer as these estimates do not include the costs of salary top-ups for public/civil servants.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Working Family Payment Data

228. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of Defence Forces personnel in receipt of the working family payment. [24061/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Working Family Payment (WFP) is an in-work support, which provides an income top-up for employees on low earnings with children. WFP is designed to prevent in-work poverty for low paid workers with child dependants and to offer a financial incentive to take-up employment. There are currently over 56,000 families with almost 127,000 children in receipt of WFP. The estimated spend on WFP this year is approximately €431 million.

To qualify for WFP, a person must be engaged in full-time insurable employment, which is expected to last for at least 3 months and be working for a minimum of 38 hours per fortnight or 19 hours per week. A couple may combine their hours of employment to meet the qualification criteria. The applicant must also have at least one qualified child who normally resides with them or is supported by them. Furthermore, the average family income must be below a specified amount, which varies according to the number of qualified children in the family.

The figures for Defence Forces families in receipt of WFP are as follows:

Year	Number of Recipients
2018	163*

*as at 30th May 2018

It is important to note that the figures for 2018 above are based on the amount of families in receipt of WFP for the relevant week - figures may go up or down depending on the week in the year.

Invalidity Pension Appeals

229. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a decision will be made in relation to an invalidity pension appeal by a person (details supplied) that was submitted to the Social Welfare Appeals Office in August 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24067/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The gentleman referred to has been awarded invalidity pension with effect from the 15 June 2017. Payment will issue to his nominated bank account on the 14 June 2018. Any arrears due from 15 June 2017 to 13 June 2018 (less any overlapping social welfare payment) will issue in due course. The gentleman in question was notified of this decision on the 30 May 2018.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Employment Rights

230. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the code of practice that exists in relation to trial periods of employment being offered to new workers; if there are legislative guidelines requiring that these trials would be paid or other protocols regarding same; her plans to review the matter; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24068/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Ireland has a comprehensive body of employment, equality and industrial relations legislation with which the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) is mandated to secure compliance.

Ireland's employment rights legislation protects all employees who are legally employed on an employer-employee basis.

There is no exemption under employment rights legislation, including minimum wage legislation, for work trials. All hours worked, including those on trial, must be paid at the minimum wage or above. People on work trials are also covered by the *Health Safety and Welfare Acts 2005 – 2014*, which provides for safe working conditions as well as the *Employment Equality Acts 1998 -2015*, which provides against discrimination or harassment.

Any persons with questions or complaints regarding their rights under employment legislation should contact Workplace Relations Customer Service on lo-call 1890 80 80 90 or information can be found on their website www.workplacereactions.ie. Making a complaint to the Workplace Relations Commission is straightforward by means of an online form. The WRC recovered €1.8million in wages for employees in 2017 (Source: WRC Annual Report 2017).

Question No. 231 answered with Question No. 227.

Child Benefit Data

232. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of children aged one and two years of age respectively for which child benefit payments are made; the total and average cost of the payments; and the cost of the payments by each extra euro the benefit is raised. [24084/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Child Benefit is a monthly payment made to families with children in respect of all qualified children up to the age of 16 years. The payment continues to be paid in respect of children up to their 18th birthday who are in full-time education, or who have a disability. Child Benefit is currently paid to 628,688 families in respect of some 1.2 million children, with an estimated expenditure of over €2 billion in 2018.

Child Benefit is paid at a rate of €140 per month for each child. For twins, Child Benefit is paid at one and a half times the normal monthly rate for each child. For triplets and other multiple births, Child Benefit is paid at double the normal monthly rate for each child.

Currently Child Benefit is paid in respect of 62,216 one year olds and 65,261 two year olds at a total annual estimated cost of €214.2 million.

A one euro increase per month for this cohort would cost in the region €1.5 million per year.

Working Family Payment Eligibility

233. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason a person (details supplied) was refused a family income supplement; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24091/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): An application for Working Family Payment (formerly Family Income Supplement) was received from the person concerned on 27th April 2018.

To determine entitlement to Working Family Payment (WFP), an applicant must provide any information, documents, certificates or evidence so that an application may be processed.

A Deciding Officer (DO) recently assessed the application but could not determine entitlement as the applicant's spouse/partner had a current Jobseekers Benefit (JB) claim pending. The applicant failed to provide the necessary information relating to the JB claim.

As the person concerned did not satisfy the above requirement, the application for WFP was refused on 18th May 2018.

However, a DO recently reviewed the WFP application as the spouse/partner's JB claim was subsequently disallowed and closed.

Following a revised decision, the person concerned has been awarded WFP with effect from 26th April 2018 to 24th April 2019.

The first payment will issue to their nominated bank account on Thursday, 31st May 2018 and any arrears owing will also issue on this date.

The person concerned was notified on 28th May 2018 of this decision.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Pensions Reform

234. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if there is a working group tasked with implementing A Roadmap for Pensions Reform 2018-2023; if so, the membership of such a working group; the terms of reference of the working group; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24110/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): In its 'Roadmap for Pensions Reform 2018-2023', the Government detailed specific measures under six strands that, taken together, will modernise our pension system while continuing to target resources at those most in need. These six strands are:

Strand 1 - Reform of the State Pension including the Total Contributions Approach;

Strand 2 - A New Automatic Enrolment Retirement Savings System;

Strand 3 - Improving Governance and Regulation including the EU IORPS II Directive;

Strand 4 - Measures to Support Defined Benefit Scheme Sustainability;

Strand 5 - Public Service Pension Reform; and

Strand 6 - Supporting Fuller Working Lives.

From these strands stem a total of 43 individual actions, each action having a specified owner and date of delivery. Given the wide breadth of actions included under the plan, action owners separately include three Government Departments, two Government agencies, a public body and some interdepartmental structures (where policy responsibilities span a number of departments). Accordingly, a number of governance structures have been developed to oversee progress with development and implementation.

Ultimately these individual arrangements and progress generally on the implementation

of these reforms is being overseen by Government through Cabinet Committee A – Economy, which is chaired by the Taoiseach and consists of Ministers with responsibility for pension related matters. As is normal, this is supported in turn by a Senior Officials Group comprising senior officials from the relevant Departments.

In delivering on the actions contained within the reform plan, extensive engagement will be undertaken with sectoral interests including employer and employee representatives, advocate groups, the pensions industry and the general public. To this end, I can confirm that separate national consultation processes will be undertaken in relation to the two most fundamental reforms contained in the Roadmap. These are the introduction of the ‘Total Contributions Approach’ for the State pension contributory from 2020 and the development of a new automatic enrolment retirement savings system for employees without supplementary pensions coverage. This process has already been initiated with the recent launch of the Total Contributions Approach national consultation. It is anticipated that submissions and feedback received from all interest groups over the coming months will help inform the design of both of these systems.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Appeals Status

235. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an appeal by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24120/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was referred to an Appeals Officer on 29 May 2018, who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Jobseeker’s Allowance Payments

236. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when the full rate of jobseeker’s allowance will be restored in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24160/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): As outlined in replies to Questions 36815-16, 17382-18 and 19501-18 the person concerned is in receipt of a jobseekers allowance at a reduced rate. The reduced rate arises from an assessment of means arising from rental income. The decision was upheld by a Social Welfare Appeals Officer and the person concerned was advised by the Social Welfare Appeals office of the decision on 12/10/17. A letter issued from the local Intreo Office on 24/10/17 advising the person concerned of the award of her claim and a further letter issued on 26/10/17 advising the detail of an arrears payment of €3,448.00. Any change in circumstances, particularly with regard to rental income, should be brought to the attention of the local Intreo Centre.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension Appeals

237. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if an application for an invalidity pension now under appeal will be expedited for a person (details supplied). [24184/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The lady referred to has been awarded invalidity pension with effect from the 08 February 2018. Payment will issue to her nominated bank account on the 14 June 2018. Any arrears due from 08 February 2018 to 13 June 2018 (less any overlapping social welfare payment) will issue in due course. The lady in question was notified of this decision on the 30 May 2018.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension Data

238. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 456 of 8 May 2018, if the figures for invalidity pension are built into the existing fiscal base or if they represent an additional cost to the Exchequer for the five year period ahead. [24191/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The deputy is referring to the extension of Social Insurance Benefits to the self-employed as set out in the Actuarial Review of the Social Insurance Fund .

Projections of Social Protection expenditure are on a ‘no policy change’ basis and include only demographic pressures, as set out in the IGEES paper, ‘Budgetary Impacts of Changing Demographics 2017 – 2027.’ Demographic costs for the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection are inclusive of Pensions, Children and Disability and Carers. Any changes to payment rates or eligibility criteria would be considered a policy decision and thus are not included in current projected costs.

Local Authority Housing Funding

239. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the level of funding provided for the enhanced long-term social housing leasing scheme in 2018; the amount expected to be provided for the scheme in 2019; the position regarding the invitation for bids and expressions of interest for the scheme; when a decision will be made; the number of housing units expected to be completed and inhabited in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23991/18]

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 leasing 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 Leasing Scheme. All homes delivered under leasing arrangements will be funded under my Department's Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme (SHCEP). Exchequer funding for SHCEP in 2018 is €115m – an increase of €31m over 2017. It is intended that up to 2,000 units will be leased by Local Authorities in 2018 through the range of leasing schemes in place.

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 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.

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. The rollout of this scheme will result in no additional costs to the Exchequer, with costs being met from existing budgetary allocations for Rebuilding Ireland.

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. This document sets out the various assessment stages and the expected minimum associated timeframes (Appendix 4). 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.

I understand from the Housing Agency that of the 33 submissions received: 3 are proceeding to Independent Valuation; 12 are currently awaiting further information from the proposers; 14 are not proceeding due to failure to meet with the minimum requirements of the scheme; and 4 are not proceeding due to being invalid submissions / failure of suitability test.

The total number of units proposed and delivery dates are 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 be available when the individual proposals have been assessed, marked and accepted in accordance with the terms and methodology set out in the Calls for Proposals document.

Housing Adaptation Grant Applications

240. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the reason payment for occupational therapist assessments recommendations and reports in relation to housing adaptation grants for county councils is now restricted to €200 per case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23992/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): There has been no change in the amount that an applicant under the Housing Adaptation Grants schemes for Older People and People with a Disability can be refunded for engaging the ser-

vices of a private occupational therapist.

I understand that both HSE and private occupational therapists are routinely engaged by local authorities to assess the needs of applicants for grants under the grant schemes. When an applicant engages a private occupational therapist, the cost can be refunded to them as part of the total grant paid, subject to a limit of €200 per assessment.

Approved Housing Bodies

241. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of housing schemes bought by charitable organisations (details supplied) in each district in County Wexford; the unit cost per house; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23998/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): It is recognised that Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) make an important contribution in social housing delivery, building on their track record in terms of both housing provision and management. Last year, the AHB sector delivered over 2,000 additional units for social housing use across the country and there is a strong delivery pipeline for 2018. This demonstrates the sector's commitment to work in partnership with local authorities to deliver the Government's ambitious targets set out in Rebuilding Ireland.

Through local authorities, AHBs can access a range of funding streams to assist with the delivery of social housing, for example the Capital Advance Leasing Facility (CALF) with a Payment and Availability Agreement (P&A) or the Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS). All funding schemes seek to secure value for money for the Exchequer and the highest quality social housing home for those on local authorities' waiting lists, including by ensuring that the local authority is fully supportive and approves of the project, necessity for independent valuations and a separate independent financial appraisal in the case of CALF proposals.

AHBs, with the assistance of local authorities, are securing single and multiple new build properties on a turnkey basis from developers. Similarly, where it is value for money to do so, AHBs will purchase vacant existing properties, on the basis that such a purchase does not interfere with the local market. In all cases, such purchases must be supported by the local authority and represent value for money in the context of local housing need.

The following tables provide information specifically on the AHB turnkey and acquisition projects comprising multiple units in one development, which were delivered through AHBs in the administrative area of Wexford County Council for 2016 and 2017. The capital costings of the units are averaged as a development could include a mix of unit type and size, e.g. two or three bed units, which are priced differently:

Table 1 - AHB Turnkeys - construction projects on private land

AHB	Nr. of projects	Total number of units	Average Capital cost of unit	Year of delivery
CHI [^]	1	12	€106,000	2016
CHI	1* (Phases 1 & 2)	18	€175,710	2016
CHI	1*(Phase 3)	20	€175,710	2017
Tuath	1	11 (6 are Part V)	€204,825	2017

*One project with phased delivery

[^]Co-operative Housing Ireland

Table 2 - AHB Acquisitions (of existing built units)

AHB	Total nr. of units	Average Capital cost of unit	Year of delivery
Camphill	3	€135,333	2016
Cluid	19	€77,421	2016
CHI	4	€76,032	2016
CHI	2	€160,000	2017
CHI	2	€75,000	2017

Electoral Reform

242. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the steps he will take to enforce a neutral space at polling stations within 50 metres of polling stations in view of reports of posters and the display of religious iconography in the vicinity and inside polling stations during the most recent polling day. [24010/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): Electoral law provides for a prohibition on the display or distribution of any notice, sign or poster, (other than a notice, sign or poster displayed by the returning officer) or card, circular or other document relating to a referendum, within 50 metres of a polling station. Contravention of this provision is an offence. I do not have a role in the enforcement of this matter. Complaints in the first instance should be made to the Local Returning Officer. Enforcement is then a matter for the Gardaí.

During the recent referendum some queries were raised with my Department in relation to the presence of bibles at polling stations. The reason that bibles are available in polling stations is that the electoral code provides for the taking of oaths or affirmations by voters in certain circumstances, such as, for instance, confirmation of a voter's identity.

If a voter is asked by a presiding officer to take such an oath or an affirmation it is up to the voter to decide which to take. The availability of the bible is simply a measure of administrative efficiency to facilitate this process of taking an oath. An elector may make an affirmation if they object to taking an oath on the ground that he or she has no religious belief or that the taking of an oath is contrary to his or her religious belief.

Irish Water

243. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he is satisfied that workers' rights protections are built into the upcoming tendering process of contractors for Irish Water. [24042/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Since 1 January 2014, Irish Water has statutory responsibility for all aspects of water services planning, delivery and operation at national, regional and local levels.

Neither I nor my Department have a role in relation to procurement by Irish Water which is an operational matter for which Irish Water as contracting authority is wholly responsible.

I understand that Irish Water has a procurement policy in place which is focused on the key areas of securing value for money, ensuring compliance with all legal and governance requirements and minimising business risks. I am also advised that a fair wages clause is a standard

provision in all construction contracts entered into by Irish Water.

Irish Water has established a dedicated team to deal with representations and queries from public representatives. The team can be contacted via email at oireachtasmembers@water.ie or by telephone on a dedicated number, 1890 578 578.

River Basin Management Plans

244. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will address concerns raised in correspondence (details supplied); if an investigation into the matter will be initiated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24072/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Government has recently published Ireland's River Basin Management Plan 2018-2021 which is required under the EU Water Framework Directive. The Plan sets out the actions that Ireland will take to improve water quality and achieve 'good' ecological status in water bodies (rivers, lakes, estuaries coastal waters and ground waters) by 2021. The Plan is available at: www.housing.gov.ie/water/water-quality/river-basin-management-plans/river-basin-management-plan-2018-2021.

The Plan provides a coordinated framework for improving the quality of our waters, protecting public health, the environment, water amenities and sustaining water-intensive industries, including agri-food and tourism, particularly in rural Ireland. The Plan sets out national policies and additional regional measures which are implemented on a prioritised basis.

An enhanced evidence base has been developed to guide national policies and the targeting of priority measures. Technical assessments of 4,829 water bodies have been carried out, examining their status (quality) and whether they are 'at risk' of not meeting status objectives in the future. Informed by this work, a collaborative workshopping process involving the EPA, senior local authority personnel and all relevant stakeholders was set up to identify, at a regional level, those water bodies that should be prioritised for action during this planning cycle. Arising from this work, the Lough Sheelin catchment has been designated as a Prioritised Area for Action.

Under the governance structure for the implementation of the EU Water Framework Directive, local authorities are the competent authority for the implementation of the programme of measures contained in Ireland's River Basin Management Plan. In particular, the Local Authority Waters and Communities Office (LAWCO) is working with local groups and communities to help them play their part in protecting their waters. As such, LAWCO is the most appropriate body through which the Deputy's concerns should be pursued. LAWCO can be contacted via the www.watersandcommunities.ie website, or by email to info@lawco.ie.

Water Charges

245. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to introduce an incremental instalment payment plan to assist persons in paying the cost of water connection charges that would be considered excessive or are in excess of a predetermined threshold; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24107/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Water Services Acts 2007-2017 set out clearly the arrangements in place for the delivery of water and wastewater services by Irish Water, and for the scrutiny and oversight provisions that

apply in respect of these arrangements. Responsibility for the independent economic regulation of the water sector is assigned to the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) and the CRU is required to perform its functions in a manner that best serves the interests of customers of Irish Water.

Under the Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 (the Act), and since the 1st January 2014, Irish Water has been responsible for charging for the cost of connections to the water and wastewater network. Before Irish Water was established local authorities were responsible for connection charging arrangements.

The Act provides that Irish Water shall collect charges from its customers in receipt of water services provided by it in accordance with a water charges plan, to be approved by the CRU. Section 22(5) of the Act provides that a water charges plan may provide for charges in respect of the provision of services connections to premises. These are responsibilities that are assigned to Irish Water and to the CRU and I do not have a role in directing how any specific payment plan arrangements by individual customers may apply.

I understand that in 2016 the CRU requested Irish Water to submit a proposal for an enduring Connection Charging Policy for customers seeking a connection to the network. In January 2018, the CRU held a public consultation on the development of the Policy for domestic and non-domestic connections to Irish Water's network, known as a National Connection Charging Policy. The Policy will be aimed at developing a more harmonised methodology for connections to the public water and wastewater network.

The CRU as regulator is independent in this matter and will come to its own independent assessment of the appropriate Water Connections Charging Policy, having heard the view of interested parties through the public consultation process. As Minister, I must respect the statutory powers and functions which the Oireachtas has conferred on the CRU in this matter. It is anticipated that the new Water Connections Charging Policy will be finalised by the CRU in the coming months.

Home Loan Scheme

246. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the value of a site can be taken into account when assessing the 10% deposit under the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme as is the case with other lenders; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24117/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The low rate of fixed interest associated with the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan provides first-time buyers with access to mortgage finance that they may not otherwise have been able to afford at a higher interest rate. One of the key conditions of the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan is that prospective applicants must demonstrate that they have had inadequate loan offers from two commercial lenders.

To support prudential lending and consistency of treatment for borrowers, a Loan to Value ratio of 90% applies to the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan as per the Central Bank's prudential lending guidelines. Therefore, in order to avail of the loan, applicants must have a deposit of funds equivalent to 10% of the market value of the property.

In the case of a self-build property, a loan can be made up to 90% of either the construction cost, or in the case where the site is also being purchased the construction cost plus the cost of purchasing a site. However, in both these instances, 90% of the loan being sought is the maxi-

mum amount that will be approved.

Applicants must provide bank or similar statements (such as post office, credit union, etc.) for a 12-month period immediately prior to making an application, clearly showing a credible and consistent track record of savings. The cash savings should be no less than 3% of the market value of the property. Gifts are permissible up to 7% of the market value of the property, where their source is verified. In the instance of a self build, it will be 3% of either the construction cost, or the construction cost plus the cost of purchasing a site.

Decisions by local authorities as to whether to advance a loan to an individual are taken on a case-by-case basis, within the criteria as set out in the credit policy. Each local authority must have in place a credit committee which makes the final decision on applications for loans. There is also an appeal procedure in each local authority so that those who are not satisfied with a decision regarding their application can have the decision reviewed.

For prospective purchasers of new-build or self-build properties, such as in the example suggested, the applicant may also be eligible for the Help to Buy Initiative for first-time buyers through the Revenue Commissioners. This could provide additional assistance of up to 5% of the purchase or construction price of relevant properties, which represents a significant contribution towards the relevant deposit requirements. A range of eligibility criteria applies to applications under the Help to Buy Initiative, and full details are available on the website of the Revenue Commissioners at <https://revenue.ie/en/property/help-to-buy-incentive/index.aspx>.

Vacant Sites Levy

247. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the position regarding plans to apply the vacant site levy from 2019; the nature of the sites that the levy will be applied to; the position in relation to zoned land being used for active farming; the position in relation to zoned land in which there is a reasonable prospect of the land being developed in the near future; the role of the local authorities in relation to the tax; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24124/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015 introduced a new measure, the vacant site levy, which is aimed at incentivising the development of vacant, under-utilised sites in urban areas for residential or regeneration purposes.

Under the Act, planning authorities are required to establish a register of vacant sites in their areas, beginning on 1 January 2017. Planning authorities will be issuing notices to owners of vacant sites by 1 June 2018 in respect of vacant sites on the register on 1 January 2018, indicating that the levy will apply to those sites on 1 January 2019.

Planning authorities are empowered to apply an annual vacant site levy of 3% of the market value of relevant vacant sites, where a site exceeds 0.05 hectares in area, was, in the planning authority's opinion, vacant or idle in the preceding year, and is in an area identified by the planning authority in its development plan or local area plan for residential or regeneration development.

The implementation of the vacant site levy provisions is a matter for each local authority, including the identification of residential and regeneration land as underpinned by the development plan process, and the identification of individual cases in accordance with the criteria set out in the legislation.

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

My Department, in consultation with planning authorities, keeps implementation of the vacant site levy under regular review, assessing whether additional clarification guidance or other reforms are required to ensure a consistent application of the levy. In this regard, and following an information seminar held earlier this month with all local authorities on experiences and best practice approaches in implementing the levy, my Department is preparing to issue further clarification, either through legislative amendment and/or specific guidance as appropriate, to planning authorities in the coming weeks, in relation to the application of the vacant site levy to farmland.

Local Electoral Area Boundary Committee Report

248. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when he plans to publish the local electoral boundaries for the 2019 local elections; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24146/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): I established two independent Local Electoral Area Boundary Committees on 13 December 2017 to review and make recommendations on local electoral areas having regard to, among other things, the results of Census 2016 as well as the commitment to consider reducing the size of territorially large local electoral areas as set out in A Programme for Partnership Government (May 2016). The reviews are to be completed well in advance of the next local elections which are scheduled for mid-2019. In this regard, the Committees are tasked with reporting to me within six months of their establishment, that is by 13 June 2018, after which the necessary arrangements will be made to publish their reports.

Electoral Commission Establishment

249. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when he plans to publish an electoral commission Bill; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24147/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): The 2016 report of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Environment, Culture and the Gaeltacht on the establishment of an electoral commission is informing the implementation of the commitment in A Programme for a Partnership Government on establishing an electoral commission and the preparation of an Electoral Commission Bill to give effect to that. Work is ongoing in my Department in preparing, in the first instance, a Regulatory Impact Analysis for the Bill, which is expected to be completed in the Autumn.

Planning Guidelines

250. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Gov-

ernment his plans to revise planning guidelines for temporary pop-up kitchens; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24148/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): No guidelines have issued to planning authorities under section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 relating specifically to temporary pop-up kitchens and I have no proposals to issue such guidelines.

Rental Sector

251. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when he plans to publish guidelines on short-term lettings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24149/18]

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

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

The Working Group completed guidance for local authorities on planning applications relating to short-term lettings and my Department issued a circular on the matter last October. The circular is available on my Department's website at the following link: www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/circular_p110_aph3_2017.pdf.

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

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

Departmental Properties

252. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the person or body that owns an island (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24012/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): The island in question is not owned by my Department. It is a privately owned Nature Reserve and is designated as a Nature Reserve under Statutory Instrument 110/198 (Nature Reserve) Recognition Order, 1989.

Ministerial Meetings

253. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of times she has met with the head of a local authority regarding a project (details supplied). [24049/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): I have not met with the person to whom the Deputy refers in relation to the project referred to. My officials are however in contact with the local authority on an ongoing basis in relation to the project.

Appointments to State Boards

254. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the steps she will take to ensure that there is a regional and gender balance on the new board of An Chomhairle Ealaíon; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24131/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): The Arts Act 2003 requires there to be a statutory gender balance on the Arts Council. Section 11(7) of the Arts Act 2003 states that “Of the members of the Council, not less than 6 of them shall be men and not less than 6 of them shall be women”. This legislation also requires members of the Council to have a special interest or knowledge in relation to the arts or matters concerned with the functions of the Minister or the Council.

In line with Government policy, all Ministerial appointments to State boards under my remit including the Arts Council are made following an open application process via the Public Appointments Service (PAS).

The dedicated website, www.stateboards.ie, is the channel through which the PAS advertises vacancies on State Boards. It is also the means through which accomplished, experienced and qualified people, including people who might not previously have been identified as available for appointment, can then apply to be considered for particular vacancies.

The Arts Council currently has a number of vacancies with further ones arising over the next 12 months including the Chair of the Arts Council. Under the PAS process, expressions of interest were invited from members of the public to join the Board of the Arts Council.

The call for expressions closed on 25 May 2018. The PAS will convene a panel to review the applications received and a short list of names will be submitted to me for final selection and appointment.

This process aims to achieve a balance of different skills and qualifications needed for each board, whether these be in the Cultural, Heritage or Gaeltacht areas, or in more general areas of expertise such as corporate governance, finance, risk management, philanthropy, etc. I will also consider regional balance in making appointments.

Seirbhísí Oileán

255. D’fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Cultúir, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta an bhfuil aon chead tugtha i scríbhínn do Chomhairle Contae na Gaillimhe pleananna a réiteach do chéim 2 agus 3 d’fhorbairt Ché Inis Meáin; cad é méid an chaiteachais mheasta ar an togra atá ceadaithe le dearadh; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [24139/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Depu-

ty Joe McHugh): Bíonn cruinnithe rialta idir oifigigh mo Roinne agus Comhairle Chontae na Gaillimhe ag a bpléitear forbairt Ché an Chalaídh Mhóir. Anuas air sin, tá forbairt na cé seo luaite sa Phlean Forbartha Náisiúnta 2018-2027, rud a léiríonn dáiríreacht mo Roinne maidir leis an togra a bhrú chun cinn.

Tá na féidearthachtaí maidir lena forbairt pléite le coiste na cé ar roinnt ócáidí agus táthar ag éisteacht lena gcuid mianta. Táthar anois ag tógáil céimeanna chun aontú a fháil maidir le scóip na forbartha, i gcomhthéacs na n-acmhainí airgeadais a bheidh ar fáil do mo Roinn sna blianta amach romhainn agus na n-éileamh éagsúla ar na hacmhainí sin. Agus é sin déanta, déanfar an cás a mheas, faoi réir théarmaí an Chóid um Chaiteachas Poiblí, chun comhairleoirí a cheapadh le tabhairt faoi dhearadh na n-oibreacha.

Údarás na Gaeltachta Expenditure

256. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Cultúir, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta an raibh plé aici le hÚdarás na Gaeltachta ar na riachtanais chaipitil do 2019; an bhféadfadh an tÚdarás €12 milliún a chaitheamh sa bhliain sin ar thograí caipitil; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [24142/18]

257. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Cultúir, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta cad é an líon post breise a d'fhéadfadh Údarás na Gaeltachta a chruthú sna blianta 2019, 2020 agus 2021 dá mbeadh €12 milliún ar fáil dóibh do chaiteachas caipitil sna blianta sin; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [24143/18]

258. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Cultúir, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta cén méid airgid a chuir an Ghníomhaireacht Forbartha Tionscail agus Fiontraíocht Éireann ar fáil d'Údarás na Gaeltachta i ngach bliain ó 2009 i leith; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [24144/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh): I propose to take Questions Nos. 256 to 258, inclusive, together.

I dtús báire ní miste dom a rá go mbíonn plé ar bhonn rialta ag Oifigigh mo Roinne agus go deimhin agam féin le hÚdarás na Gaeltachta maidir le réimsí éagsúla lena n-áirítear riachtanais chaipitil na heagraíochta.

Tuigim go maith go bhfuil sé mar sprioc straitéiseach ag Údarás na Gaeltachta a bhuiséad caipitil a mhéadú thar tréimhse ama go €12m in aghaidh na bliana. Ár ndóigh, mar is eol don Teachta, tá gealltanais tugtha sa Phlean Forbartha Náisiúnta 2018-2027 go méadófar, ar bhonn céimiúil, allúntas bliantúil caipitil an Údaráis ó €7m go €12m. Déanfar cinneadh maidir le hamchlár an mhéadaithe seo agus na spriocanna fostaíochta a bhainfidh leis le linn an ghnáth-phróisis meastacháin agus pleanála ghnó sna blianta atá amach romhainn. Tuigfidh an Teachta go ndéanfar soláthar airgid don Údarás don bhliain 2019 a mheas tríd an bpróiseas meastacháin agus cáinainnéise níos déanaí i mbliana.

Maidir leis an gceist faoin méid airgid a chuir an tÚdarás Forbartha Tionscail nó Fiontraíocht Éireann ar fáil don Údarás, tá deimhnithe ag an eagraíocht nach gcuireann ceachtar don dá eagraíocht sin aon airgead ar fáil dóibh. Is amhlaidh, mar thoradh ar chomhoibriú agus socrú atá déanta ag Údarás na Gaeltachta le Fiontraíocht Éireann go bhfuil an tÚdarás ábalta tacaíochtaí agus scéimeanna áirithe a thairiscint dá chliantchomhlachtaí a bhíonn ar fáil do chomhlachtaí taobh amuigh den Ghaeltacht (mar shampla An Scéim Taighde & Forbartha). Sna cásanna seo, bíonn na deontais íoctha ag Údarás na Gaeltachta lena chuid cliant agus ansin faigheann an tÚdarás aisíocaíocht ó Fiontraíocht Éireann ina leith. Tá an méid airgid a bhain

cliantchomhlachtaí an Údaráis tairbhe as faoi na scéimeanna sin i ngach bliain ó 2009 i leith leagtha amach sa tábla thíos.

Bliain	€
2009	1,862,176
2010	2,203,830
2011	3,520,607
2012	370,000
2013	1,447,255
2014	1,169,417
2015	0
2016	0
2017	684,985
2018 go dáta	0
Iomlán	€11,258,270

Creative Ireland Programme

259. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the status of the investment of €8.5 million in Creative Ireland as outlined in budget 2018; the amount of the allocation that has been spent; the way in which the funds have been spent; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24215/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): A budget of €6m was provided as part of Budget 2018 to further the implement the Creative Ireland Programme. This will ensure that the Department can build on the work accomplished in 2017, continue to drive the implementation of the Programme at local level and fund specific actions and priorities which further the wider aims of the Programme.

€1.15m of the above budget has been allocated to the implementation of Creative Youth: A plan to enable the creative potential of every child and young person in the country, launched in December 2017. This is a wide-ranging and ambitious plan that puts culture and creativity at the heart of education. The Department of Education is also providing over €1m for this Plan in 2018.

In addition to this commitment to implementing Creative Youth, the allocation from my Department to each local authority will be doubled to €2m for 2018 to enable them commence the implementation of their long-term Culture and Creative Strategies due to be launched very shortly. An additional €1m has been provided by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government.

€0.8m has been allocated to Cruinniú na nÓg which will take place on the 23 June 2018 and which aims to get as many young people involved in creative activities as possible with an emphasis on making, doing, seeing and experiencing. Every local authority has been allocated €10,000 to fund a programme of local activities while there will be a special programme of activities across Dublin City.

A sum of €0.7m has been allocated to the new Creative Ireland Programme Scheme launched in May 2018. This will significantly add value and/or scale to the implementation of the programme and will help inform policy and/or cross-sectoral development in the area of culture, creativity and wellbeing. The scheme focuses on three areas, individual and collective wellbeing, innovation and connecting communities. Further information on the scheme can be found

on <https://creative.ireland.ie>.

A full breakdown of how the budget has been allocated is outlined in the table below.

Area of Expenditure	Amount €m	Deliverables
Local Authority Partnership (Pillar 2)	€2.8	Development and publication of Local Authority Cultural Strategies and 2018 Activity Plans and roll out of Cruinniú na nÓg across the country on the 23 June 2018
Creative Youth (Pillar 1)	€1.15	Implementation of actions contained within Creative Youth Plan
Creative Ireland Programme Scheme	€0.7	Funding pilot projects and new proposals under this open funding scheme
Citizen Engagement/Web Development/Digital Content	€0.5	Multimedia communications and awareness programme across various media platforms aligned to deliverables
Administrative/Operational Costs	€0.5	Costs associated with operating Project Office including, for example, design, printing, launches, workshops as well as the salaries of contract staff.
Research Programme	€0.15	Pilot Creative Ireland Research Programme looking at how the arts, culture and creativity contribute to individual, community and national wellbeing
Contingency Fund	€0.2	Contingency funds to support unforeseen initiatives or costs that may arise
Total	€6m	The overall allocations to each of the above elements are approximate and may vary as the Creative Ireland Programme evolves throughout 2018.

While allocations have been made under the Programme in 2018 most expenditure will arise in the second half of the year as costs are claimed. To date, approximately €250k has been expended on a range of initiatives under the Programme. The Deputy will appreciate that expenditure figures at this point are provisional and that fully verified and audited expenditure figures will be ultimately be published in the Department's Appropriation Account.

National Biodiversity Plan

260. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the status of the heritage initiatives, including Waterways Ireland biodiversity action plans and invasive species county mitigation plans, as outlined in budget 2018; the amount of the €2 million allocation that has been spent; the way in which the moneys were spent; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24216/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): I recently announced that my Department would be accepting applications for two new funding schemes specifically aimed at local authorities. These schemes are a grant scheme to assist local authorities in implementing actions contained in the National Biodiversity Action Plan 2017-2021 (NBAP) through biodiversity-led projects in their areas, and an additional scheme to assist local authorities in tackling invasive alien species (IAS). In their initial year, €250,000 has been allocated to the NBAP scheme and €150,000 to the IAS funding stream.

Local authorities were notified of the NBAP and IAS schemes on 08 May 2018 and 24 May 2018 respectively. The closing dates for receipt of applications is 05 June 2018 for the NBAP and 15 June 2018 for the IAS funding stream.

Both schemes are administered by the National Parks and Wildlife Service of my Department and are an important part of the ongoing implementation of Ireland's National Biodiversity Action Plan, particularly with regard to raising biodiversity awareness at the local level.

There are a number of heritage and biodiversity initiatives being implemented as part of the Waterways Ireland Heritage Plan 2016-2020 including the commission of updated baseline ecological datasets of the Royal and Grand Canal in order to inform maintenance and capital projects, commencement of Invasive Species Strategy and Biosecurity Protocols for Waterways Ireland, the commission of 8 Digital Media Heritage features called 'Stories from the Waterways' in partnership with the County Heritage Officers and the development of a community biodiversity toolkit for waterways communities.

The Budget allocated by Waterways Ireland to this set of initiatives for 2018 is €78,500 (some projects are still in progress and therefore all 2018 monies have not been spent yet).

Irish Language

261. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the status of the €2.5 million allocated to the 20 Year Strategy for the Irish Language and other Irish language supports as outlined in budget 2018; the amount of the allocation that has been spent; the way in which the moneys were spent; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [24217/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): I assume the Deputy is referring to the €2.65m allocated specifically in Budget 2018 to further support the implementation of the 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030 and the language planning process, as set out under the Gaeltacht Act 2012.

Given that the implementation of the language planning process is now gathering momentum, with language plans moving to the implementation stage in 2018, the entire allocation will be directed towards its implementation this year. In addition to the funding of language plans, a number of specific new measures will be introduced to support centrally both the language planning process and the Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017-2022, both of which are key drivers of the 20-Year Strategy. The allocation of funding within the overall funding envelope is currently being finalised and I will be announcing the funding arrangements for the various measures over the coming weeks.

The language planning process is now underway in all 26 Gaeltacht areas and the first six language plans have been approved. Six further plans are currently being assessed by the Department with the expectation of approving them in the near future. An allocation of up to €100,000 will be provided over a 12 month period in respect of each area in order to begin implementing the plans. An additional €50,000 will be allocated in respect of 5 specific language planning areas due to particular challenges associated with these areas.

The preparation of plans is in hand in relation to the Gaeltacht Service Towns of Letterkenny and Daingean Uí Chúis, and the cities of Galway and Cork, while it is anticipated that work will begin this year to prepare plans in respect of Dungarvan, Tralee, An Clochán Liath and Castlebar.

Preparation of plans continues in relation to the Irish Language Networks of Ennis, Loughrea and Clondalkin, with plans expected to be submitted for approval by end of year.