

Written Answers.

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

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

Questions Nos. 12 to 23, inclusive, resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 24 to 34, inclusive, answered orally.

Rental Sector

35. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if legislation will be introduced to protect residents at a location (details supplied) who face eviction by a vulture fund and other tenants that find themselves in similar situations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26807/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Security of tenure provisions under the Residential Tenancies Acts 2004-2016 apply once a tenant has been in occupation of a dwelling under tenancy for a continuous period of 6 months, with no valid notice of termination having been served during that time. If a landlord is terminating the tenancy on the grounds that he or she intends to substantially refurbish or renovate the dwelling in a way that requires the dwelling to be vacated for that purpose, the notice of termination must include a statement:

(a) specifying the nature of the intended works and providing a copy of any related planning permission. Where planning permission is not required, the notice or statement must specify the name of the contractor and the proposed dates for the works; and

(b) that the landlord is required to offer to the tenant a tenancy of the dwelling if it becomes available for re-letting within a period of 6 months, subject to certain conditions.

Notice periods for the termination of a tenancy by a landlord vary, depending on the duration of the tenancy, but periods of up to 224 days are required.

On 23 November 2017, the RTB published a comprehensive set of guidelines on what constitutes substantial refurbishment or renovation for the purposes of a section 34 ground for tenancy termination. These guidelines are available on the RTB website. I have asked my Department to keep the implementation of the guidelines under review and I am open to placing them on a statutory footing, if experience suggests that this is necessary.

Vacant Properties

36. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the work his Department has carried out to allow the change of use of vacant commercial properties in cities, towns and villages including vacant or underutilised areas over ground floor premises into residential units as outlined in point 6 of the Action Plan for Rural Development; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [25720/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): Action 5.9 of the Government's Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness and Action 6 of the Action Plan for Rural Development committed to reviewing planning legislation to allow the change of use of vacant commercial units in urban areas, including vacant or under-utilised areas over ground-floor premises, into residential units without having to go through the planning process.

To give effect to this action, my Department brought forward the necessary revisions to the planning regulations through the Planning and Development (Amendment) (No.2) Regulations 2018 which were signed and brought into operation on 8 February 2018.

The planning exemptions under these Regulations, which have a two-fold purpose in facilitating urban renewal and increased housing supply, operate for a limited period until 31 December 2021 and apply to commercial buildings which have been lying vacant for at least two years. The exemptions relate primarily to works to the interior of such buildings and a number of restrictions apply to these works, including that a maximum of 9 residential units can be provided in any one building, and that certain minimum standards relating to floor areas, storage space and the provision of natural light are met for each unit.

In addition, development works undertaken need to comply with the requirements of the Building Control Regulations, such as fire safety, structural stability and ventilation etc. Additional work is being progressed in my Department on further streamlining, and providing guidance on, the building control regulatory requirements in relation to the conversion of vacant premises, including vacant spaces over retail units, into residential use. I expect this updated guidance to be finalised next month.

Local Authority Housing Provision

37. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the degree to which he has identified land in each local authority area which is deemed suitable for the provision of local authority houses in the short-term, with particular reference to the local authorities in the greater Dublin area; the extent to which he expects their respective housing programmes to accelerate henceforth in view of the fact that an increasing number of families are becoming homeless and that the local authorities do not have adequate and available emergency housing; if he will issue instructions to ensure the provision of emergency housing in line with the need; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26868/18]

88. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of local authority houses under construction in each local authority area; the corresponding number of housing applicants on the relevant local authority's housing list; the extent to which he has received correspondence from the local authorities indicating progress in dealing with the housing situation; if he has issued specific instructions to the local authorities to utilise their existing lands for the provision of local authority houses as opposed to providing the funding to housing bodies; if there are particular reasons some local authorities

have not been able to progress their housing programme in line with the urgency of the housing situation in their respective areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26867/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 37 and 88 together.

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

Last October, I made it clear that the orientation of local authority social housing delivery was to shift towards greater construction activity, including the utilisation of lands in local authority ownership. Good progress has been made in this regard - at the end of 2017, the social housing construction programme included 846 schemes (or phases), delivering over 13,400 homes – a very substantial increase on the 8,430 homes in the programme at end 2016.

Earlier this year, I advised all local authorities of revised minimum Social Housing Targets both for 2018 and also for the multi-annual period to 2021. The targets are based on the proportion of the Summary of Social Housing Assessments (SSHA) appropriate to each local authority. The results of the 2017 summary show that there were 85,799 households deemed qualified for, and in need of, social housing support, which is a decrease of 6.3% (5,801) in net need compared to the 2016 summary.

In 2018, I expect to see nearly 26,000 households having their housing need met, with over 4,400 new build social housing homes to be delivered through local authorities and approved housing bodies, including through the Part V mechanism. As the ambition for social housing construction activity is targeted to continue to increase significantly, it is critical that local authorities, working with AHBs, focus on developing expanded pipelines of new social housing build projects. In order to support local authorities and AHBs to deliver, my Department has streamlined its approval processes, established a Delivery Office to provide technical advice, as well as supporting local authorities in acquiring additional staffing resources.

Homelessness, particularly family homelessness, remains a key priority of Government. In 2017, 4,729 individuals exited homelessness, which was a 54% increase on the previous year. There are now 21 Family Hubs in place and these are the preferred first response in terms of emergency accommodation, rather than hotels. Through the dedicated efforts of exit teams, 2,080 families left hotels last year, the majority of them moving into homes rather than hubs. While the supply of social housing is ramping up, we will continue to work to find the most suitable and appropriate solutions for homeless families and individuals.

Housing Estates

38. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the work ongoing to develop a policy to expedite the taking in charge of housing estates with developer provided water services infrastructure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26863/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The taking-in-charge of housing developments is a matter for the relevant local authority under section 180 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended). My Department launched the National Taking-in-Charge Initiative (NTICI) in April

2016 to trial new approaches and working methods in supporting and accelerating overall national and local action on the taking-in-charge process of housing estates, including estates with developer-provided water services infrastructure (DPI).

Under the terms of the NTICI, which was underpinned by €10m in funding, developments subject to valid taking-in-charge applications were eligible for inclusion in the associated call for funding proposals. Ultimately, €7.7 million of the allocated funding was paid to local authorities in respect of 330 developments, containing some 13,400 homes.

Findings and recommendations from the NTICI process will be included in a report on the initiative that I intend to publish shortly. The publication of the NTICI report will be of value to local authorities and other stakeholders in applying the lessons from the pilot authorities, in a more general roll-out of a streamlined approach to taking-in-charge. I expect that the initiative will contribute to further streamlining of the taking-in-charge process, through, for example, securing coordination with capital works by Irish Water.

In addition, the recently published National Development Plan includes provision of €31 million for the period 2018-2021 for developer-provided infrastructure. This is clear evidence of the Government's commitment to transition from the pilot phase under NTICI to a programme phase, commencing with an estimates provision of €3m in 2018 on which further details will be announced in due course.

Housing Policy

39. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on whether the reliance on for profit private developers to supply social and cost rental models of housing and so on will not deal with the housing emergency now or into the future and that a rights based housing programme, such as that in Finland, should be the model that he pursues in view of the recent visit and comments of the UN Special Rapporteur on adequate housing, Leilani Farha; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26610/18]

59. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on whether the right to housing must be inserted into the Constitution as a sign of intent to tackle the housing crisis into the future in view of the recent visit and comments of the UN Special Rapporteur on adequate housing, Leilani Farha. [26609/18]

84. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on providing for a legally enforceable right to adequate housing either through statute or by way of a referendum; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26828/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 39, 59 and 84 together.

A motion to refer the Eighth Report of the Convention on the Constitution, which dealt with economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to housing, to the Joint Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, and Taoiseach, was passed by the Dáil on 28 September 2017 and by the Seanad on 11 October 2017. This Committee will consider the issues raised by the Deputies.

In relation to the delivery of social housing, strong progress on implementation of the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan is already being made. Almost 26,000 households had their housing needs met in 2017- that is equivalent to 100 households each working day of the week. Furthermore, the number of social housing homes built in 2017 was more than three times the

number built in 2016.

Following a Review of the Plan in 2017, the overall target for social housing delivery was increased to 50,000 housing units and there is now an increased emphasis on direct builds under the Plan. To underpin the increased ambition, additional capital funding was secured under Budget 2018, increasing the overall funding from €5.35 billion to €6 billion.

In relation to affordable housing, I have now commenced the relevant provisions of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009, the effect of which is to place the new scheme for affordable purchase on a statutory footing. From engagements with the local authorities in Dublin, the wider Greater Dublin Area, as well as Cork and Galway cities, their initial estimates suggest that they have lands with the potential to deliver some 4,000 new affordable homes. My Department is continuing to work with the key local authorities and the Housing Agency to identify sites which would see the level of ambition increase to at least 10,000 new affordable homes, and that analysis is progressing well.

With regard to cost rental, I am determined for it to become a major part of our rental landscape in the future. It is clear that there is a gap between social housing and the rental market that needs to be filled, making a sustainable impact on housing affordability, national competitiveness, and the attractiveness of our main urban centres as places to live and work.

The Housing Agency, Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council and a number of Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) have been working to get our first cost rental pilot, at Enniskerry Road, ready for tenders to issue shortly. In parallel, Dublin City Council, my Department and the National Development Finance Agency are undertaking detailed modelling and financial appraisal on a major site, at St. Michael's Estate in Inchicore, to assess its suitability for a significant cost rental development. The work of that multi-disciplinary team is progressing well and should be concluded shortly.

In order to support local authorities to get their sites ready for affordable housing, I have decided to provide additional funding for enabling infrastructure via the Serviced Sites Fund. Given that housing-related infrastructure will now be able to avail of funding under the €2 billion Urban Regeneration and Development Fund, I am re-directing the €50m funding for Phase 2 of the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund to the Serviced Sites Fund, increasing the scale of the fund from the previously announced €25m to €75m. When local authority co-funding is included, an overall minimum investment of €100 million will be provided to those sites that require infrastructural investment in order for them to be brought into use for affordable housing. In order to drive early activity, I will be inviting applications for funding under the Serviced Sites Fund by the end of next week.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

40. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the progress being made to develop affordable homes and affordability schemes for those that find it difficult to access the housing market. [26864/18]

60. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on whether there is an issue with land hoarding and property speculation that is having a negative impact on the delivery of public and affordable housing; his plans to deal with the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26885/18]

79. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the affordable purchase scheme will fully commence; the number of affordable

purchase scheme units to be provided in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26731/18]

85. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the reason his Department has not rolled out an affordable housing scheme; his views on the impact this has had on the delivery of public housing on public land; his plans to introduce an affordable housing scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26886/18]

87. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when a national affordable housing scheme will be in place and operational (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26672/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 40, 60, 79, 85 and 87 together.

Ensuring that we have a supply of housing that is affordable, particularly for households on low to moderate incomes, is a major priority for this Government. Recognising that people want a choice of affordable purchase and rental, depending on their stage of life and circumstances, both are being progressed through a range of initiatives.

In order to underpin progress in this area, I have now commenced the relevant provisions of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009, the effect of which is to place the new scheme for affordable purchase on a statutory footing. From engagements with the local authorities in Dublin, the wider Greater Dublin Area, as well as Cork and Galway cities, their initial estimates suggest that they have lands with the potential to deliver some 4,000 new affordable homes. My Department is continuing to work with the key local authorities and the Housing Agency to identify sites which would see the level of ambition increase to at least 10,000 new affordable homes, and that analysis is progressing well. Significant progress has been made on individual projects, such as the O'Devaney Gardens and Oscar Traynor Road sites in the Dublin City Council area.

With regard to cost rental, I am determined for it to become a major part of our rental landscape in the future. It is clear that there is a gap between social housing and the rental market that needs to be filled, making a sustainable impact on housing affordability, national competitiveness, and the attractiveness of our main urban centres as places to live and work.

The Housing Agency, Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council and a number of Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) have been working to get our first cost rental pilot, at Enniskerry Road, ready for tenders to issue shortly. In parallel, Dublin City Council, my Department and the National Development Finance Agency are undertaking detailed modelling and financial appraisal on a major site, at St. Michael's Estate in Inchicore, to assess its suitability for a significant cost rental development. The work of that multi-disciplinary team is progressing well and should be concluded shortly.

In order to support local authorities to get their sites ready for affordable housing, I have decided to provide additional funding for enabling infrastructure via the Serviced Sites Fund. Given that housing-related infrastructure will now be able to avail of funding under the €2 billion Urban Regeneration and Development Fund, I am re-directing the €50m funding for Phase 2 of the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund to the Serviced Sites Fund, increasing the scale of the Fund from the previously announced €25m to €75m. When local authority co-funding is included, an overall minimum investment of €100 million will be provided to those sites that require infrastructural investment in order for them to be brought into use for affordable housing. In order to drive early activity, I will be inviting applications for funding under

the Serviced Sites Fund by the end of next week.

In relation to Adamstown, South Dublin County Council is the specified Development Agency for the Strategic Development Zone (SDZ) in that area and is committed to working with the landowners to ensure the successful implementation of the SDZ Planning Scheme. This will contribute to the construction of a mix of tenure types, the creation of an attractive place for people to live at more affordable prices and rents, and the creation of a sustainable, integrated community. Arising from agreements made under the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund, Adamstown will deliver 2,000 homes by 2021, including houses at more affordable price points.

While delivery from the State's land bank is a critical instrument in increasing the supply of affordable housing, the Government has also taken measures to incentivise development on privately owned sites and to discourage land hoarding. The planning process has been de-risked and streamlined through the new Strategic Housing Development process and the number of new homes granted planning permissions in Q1 2018 are up by 80% compared to Q1 2017.

In addition, the vacant site levy is playing an important role in countering land hoarding and ensuring that key sites are developed without delay. This will be strengthened shortly through new legislation to increase the maximum annual levy from 3% to 7% from 2019 and I will be continuing to keep the operation of the levy under review.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

41. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of enhanced leasing scheme units due to be operational in 2018; when the scheme will be open to interested parties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26729/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The first call for proposals for the Enhanced Long Term Social Housing Leasing Scheme was launched on 31 January 2018 and the Housing Agency accepted submissions from interested parties until 12 April 2018.

A total of 33 submissions were received from interested parties, which represents strong interest from the market. The Housing Agency is currently reviewing the proposals and will complete the initial review process in the coming weeks.

Detailed information with respect to the numbers and locations of the units proposed for leasing under the Scheme will only be available once the individual proposals have been assessed, marked and accepted in accordance with the terms of the scheme and the respective Local Authorities have signed any Agreements for Lease arising.

The first call for proposals was primarily aimed at new to the market or yet to be built properties and, as such, the lead-in time for occupation is likely to extend beyond 2018 in the majority of cases. Any opportunities for 2018 delivery will be pursued as a priority.

My Department is currently working with the Housing Agency on a second call for proposals and it is expected that this will open in July 2018.

Mayoral Election

42. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if a plebiscite for the election of directly elected mayors in Dublin, Cork and other cities will take place; and the timeline for a decision in this regard. [26873/18]

47. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the concept of directly elected mayors will be rolled out for the 2019 local elections; the number of local authorities that will be selected for participation in such elections; and if the scope of powers for directly elected mayors has been determined. [26870/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 42 and 47 together.

The Programme for a Partnership Government includes a commitment to consider directly elected mayors in cities as part of a broader range of local government reform measures aimed at strengthening local democracy. In response to this commitment, work on a policy report on directly elected mayors for cities is at an advanced stage of preparation in my Department. I expect to be in a position to have this report submitted to Government in the coming weeks, and subject to Government approval, the intention is that the report would then be forwarded to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government for consideration.

The report will examine the range of functions which might be assigned to directly elected mayors, the cities in which they could be established, and governance arrangements underpinning the role. While the policy on directly elected mayors is still at development stage, I intend that provision for plebiscites will be included in the Local Government Bill 2018. The General Scheme of that Bill was approved by the Government on 6 June 2018 and it is currently being drafted with a view to its publication as soon as possible.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

43. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the outcome of his recent discussions with Dublin City Council, a group (details supplied) and his departmental officials regarding plans for public housing on the site of the former St. Michael's Estate, Inchicore, Dublin 8. [26805/18]

44. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if a social and affordable public housing scheme will be publicly funded at locations (details supplied). [26815/18]

54. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will meet with the community organisers of an area (details supplied) to discuss their cost rental proposals for affordable housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26877/18]

63. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if consideration is being given to fully funding the building of 100% social and affordable rental on the site of the former St. Michael's Estate, Inchicore, Dublin 8; and when a final decision will be made. [26806/18]

71. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the local organisations campaigning for an estate (details supplied) to be developed in line with the cost rental model will be supported; and the timeline for a decision to be made in relation to the estate. [26890/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 43, 44, 54, 63 and 71 together.

St. Michael's Estate is one of three significant sites being brought forward by Dublin City Council under its housing land initiative, HLI, the aim of which is to ensure the delivery of mixed-tenure homes in the Dublin City Council functional area. All three sites under the HLI are identified as strategic development and regeneration areas within the Dublin City Development Plan 2016-2022.

Mixed-tenure developments are an important policy objective of Rebuilding Ireland and uphold the principle of sustainable mixed communities, where housing needs are not subject to rigid segregation based on income levels. They also provide an opportunity to see major sites developed more quickly, and integrated into existing communities and areas.

The approach which the City Council is taking to the St. Michael's project envisages the potential to yield over 400 mixed-tenure homes and the City Council has determined that the homes will be provided on the basis of a 30% social, 20% affordable, and 50% private tenure mix. The council has also agreed the methodology for community consultation, as set out in the feasibility study presented through a community consultative forum.

In line with good governance procedures, a project board, which includes representation from my Department and the National Development Finance Agency, has been established and is working to progress the development of this site.

As regards the delivery of affordable homes from this site, while it is ultimately a matter for the City Council to decide whether these are to be affordable homes to purchase or are delivered as cost-rental homes, I firmly believe that there is a need to ensure that the rental sector, particularly in our cities and major urban areas, is accessible and affordable. In order to do this, we need to invest in a different type of rental offering, a so called cost-rental sector which operates between the social and private market sectors. In that regard, we are learning from pilot projects and the examination of similar models operating elsewhere.

Dublin City Council, my Department and the NDFA have at this point carried out detailed modelling and financial appraisal on this site, to assess its suitability for a significant cost rental development. The work of that multi-disciplinary team is at an advanced stage.

In addition, Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council has under consideration the development of in excess of 500 homes at their Shanganagh Castle site, comprising a mix of tenures, including social and affordable homes. This ambitious proposal can deliver a new residential neighbourhood, including houses, apartments and duplexes and all associated infrastructure, including roads, footpaths, services and landscaping on the site.

My Department has met with the Council on a number of occasions over recent months with regard to progressing this development. It should be noted that I have also committed almost €5m under the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF) to build public infrastructure, which will assist in opening up the site for early development.

My Department will continue to engage proactively with the two local authorities involved in order to support early progress through procurement and onwards to construction on both of these significant sites.

Development Contributions

45. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to review and reform the levy contribution scheme applied by local authorities (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26433/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Under sections 48 and 49 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, planning authorities may attach conditions to planning permissions charging development contributions in respect of public infrastructure and facilities provided by, or on behalf of, the local authority that benefit development in the area.

Development contributions are levied by planning authorities on the basis of a development contribution scheme, approved by the elected members, which sets out how contributions are to be applied in their respective functional area. The level of contribution, and the types of development to which development contributions should apply, is therefore determined at local authority level in accordance with the powers vested in elected members, having regard to the governing legislative and policy framework.

In essence, the charging of such development contributions is intended to partly fund the provision of essential public infrastructure and the servicing of land for private development, without which development could not proceed. The money collected in this regard must be ring-fenced and used to fund public infrastructure and facilities servicing new development, for example, roads, footpaths, public lighting and open spaces.

My role as Minister is to provide the necessary legislative and policy framework within which individual development contribution schemes are adopted by each local authority. In this context, my Department issued statutory guidelines to planning authorities in January 2013 under section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 on the implementation of development contribution schemes to which planning authorities are required to have regard in the performance of their planning functions. The 2013 guidelines updated and supplemented non-statutory guidance previously issued to local authorities by my Department by way of Circulars PD 4/2003 and PD 5/2007.

The 2013 guidelines, inter alia, emphasise the importance of promoting development through the application, where feasible, of reduced development contributions to facilitate development and promote economic activity and job creation in local areas with a particular focus on supporting town centre development and incentivising activity in the areas prioritised for development in the relevant core strategy.

In accordance with section 48(5) of the Act, planning authorities are required to forward a copy of any draft development contribution scheme prepared to the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, who may make recommendations to the planning authority regarding the terms of the draft scheme. In this context, the development contribution system is monitored and kept under review by my Department and where the need for further planning guidance for development contribution schemes is identified, my Department will develop such guidance as appropriate.

Departmental Agencies Funding

46. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of his discussions with the Minister for Finance regarding Home Building Finance Ireland; the input his Department will have in the State agency; his views on the fact that the agency will be staffed by NAMA employees; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[26822/18]

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

As part of Budget 2018, the Minister for Finance announced the Government's intention to establish Home Building Finance Ireland (HBFI) to provide funding to viable residential development projects in the State, whose owners are experiencing difficulty obtaining debt funding. With a fund of up to €750 million, HBFI will have the capacity to fund the supply of approximately 6,000 additional homes in the coming years, thereby making a meaningful impact in addressing the supply shortfall. The HBFI Bill was published on 18 June and is a priority piece of legislation for the Government.

The establishment of HBFI has been modelled on the successful operation of NAMA's residential funding team which has facilitated the delivery of circa 7,300 homes since 2014. Given this experience, I understand that existing NAMA staff may be reassigned to HBFI to ensure that HBFI can benefit from the considerable experience and skills in residential delivery amassed in NAMA. Once HBFI is operational, NAMA will no longer have any role and any staff reassigned from NAMA to HBFI will no longer have any reporting line to NAMA to ensure that there are no conflicts of interest. Ultimately, it will be for the Board of HBFI, once constituted, to determine its precise staffing requirements, having regard to its functions.

HBFI will play an important part in the Government's overall strategy to increase the supply of new housing. Together with the comprehensive set of actions laid out in Rebuilding Ireland, I am confident that HBFI will help provide a further impetus for the continued increase in home building across the country.

Question No. 47 answered with Question No. 42.

Local Authority Housing Data

48. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of direct builds by each of the 31 local authorities in 2017; his views on the fact that 11 local authorities built zero homes; his further views on whether there may be an over reliance on private sector turnkey units; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26823/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): In 2017, local authorities and approved housing bodies delivered 2,297 build homes across the country. This comprised 1,014 homes delivered by local authorities, 761 build homes delivered by approved housing bodies and a further 522 Part V homes were delivered by local authorities and approved housing bodies. In addition, a further 1,757 social homes were provided for new tenants under the Department-funded voids programme.

The significant expansion of the social housing build programme is evident in the Quarter 4 2017 Social Housing Construction Status Report, which was published on 19 April 2018. The programme includes 846 schemes (or Phases) at the end of last year, delivering 13,400 homes, a very substantial increase on the 8,430 homes in the programme a year earlier. At end 2017, 2,592 homes were completed, with another 3,646 under construction and a further 1,912 homes about to go on site. The full report can be accessed on the Rebuilding Ireland website at:

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

Given that the scale and pace of local authority building activity are targeted to continue to increase, additional resources, including technical resources which during the inactive years

had been lost to local authorities, continue to be replenished. Streamlined approval processes for capital projects have also been put in place, including a revised single stage approval process.

Local authorities and approved housing bodies are being asked to actively utilise turnkeys, along with all other delivery mechanisms. Turnkeys are a good source of social housing that can often be quickly delivered, at value for money prices. In many cases, these projects would not go ahead without the certainty of the end purchaser and they are of particular use where the local Authority or approved housing body have limited or no lands available for housing in an area.

Home Loan Scheme

49. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the outcome of all applications to the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme; the reason there is such a high refusal rate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26726/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan Scheme is operated by the local authorities. As is currently the case, my Department will continue to publish information on the overall number and value of (i) local authority loan approvals and (ii) local authority loan drawdowns. Information up to Q3 2017 is available on the Department's website at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/house-prices-loans-and-profile-borrowers/local-authority-loan-activity>, and this information will be updated on a quarterly basis as additional data is compiled.

The Housing Agency provides a central support service, for the local authorities, which assesses valid loan applications that are made to the local authorities and makes recommendations to the authorities as to whether loans should be offered to applicants. I have asked the Agency to centrally compile figures of the numbers of applications that it has assessed and the most recent figures, as at the end of May, indicate that the Agency had received a total of 1,499 applications for assessment from local authorities, 1,150 of which were deemed to be valid. Of these valid applications, 876 had been assessed and 52% of the valid applications that had been assessed by the Agency had been recommended for approval.

Each local authority must have in place a credit committee which makes the final decision on applications for loans, in accordance with the Regulations, the statutory credit policy issued in accordance with the Regulations and having regard to the recommendations made by the Housing Agency.

The purpose of the scheme is to enable credit-worthy first-time buyers to access sustainable mortgage lending to purchase new or second-hand properties in a suitable price range, where they have been unable to obtain sufficient mortgage finance from a commercial lender. However, in accordance with the statutory credit policy, as with any other loan, potential borrowers must be credit-worthy and must demonstrate that they have the ability to repay the loan. It would be irresponsible to give individuals approval for loans that may see them placed under undue financial strain. The credit-worthiness checks that are part of the approvals process for the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan, and which may result in individuals being refused, help to safeguard against this eventuality and assist in protecting both the applicant and the Exchequer.

Homeless Persons Data

50. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will report on the parameters of classifying homeless figures and statistics; the reason some persons with homeless priority are not included in the overall monthly figures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26507/18]

69. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the rationale for recent changes in the way in which homeless figures are calculated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26878/18]

73. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his Department's definition of homelessness for the purposes of accessing housing; the criteria that deems a person or family to be homeless as interpreted by the local authorities in view of the fact that it would appear that individuals and families that are without a home and receiving temporary shelter with friends or family are not included under the terms of the definition of homelessness in its current form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26611/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 50, 69 and 73 together.

My Department's role in relation to homelessness involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of housing authorities in addressing homelessness at local level. Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of accommodation and related services rests with individual housing authorities, with the criteria for assessing homelessness set out in section 2 of the Housing Act 1988.

My Department publishes a monthly report, which sets out in the number of individuals accessing emergency accommodation during the last full week of each month. There have been no changes to this process. However, during the course of the compilation of the March and April reports, my Department identified that some individuals who had been reported as being in emergency accommodation were in houses and apartments, and a number of local authorities amended their figures to reflect this, following consultation with my Department.

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

My main priority and focus over the coming weeks and months, will continue to be to tackle and reduce the number of individuals and families experiencing homelessness.

Land Availability

51. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of publicly owned lands suitable for residential units; the number of residential units built on publicly owned land in each of the past five years; the steps he has taken to further enhance the construction of residential units on public land; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21671/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The development of any residential land in housing authority ownership is in the first instance a matter for the local authority concerned, including its elected members. I want to see local au-

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

The active management of the publicly owned housing land bank is part of a range of complementary actions being progressed under the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, designed to accelerate and increase housing output. Details of some 1,700 hectares of land in local authority and Housing Agency ownership have been published on the Rebuilding Ireland Housing Land Map as available at <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/rebuilding-ireland-land-map/>.

To date, State-led residential construction has focused primarily on helping to meet the needs of households in the lowest income brackets, through the social housing programme. With increased investment to deliver 50,000 new social homes by 2021, the significant expansion of the social housing build programme is evident in the Quarter 4 2017 Social Housing Construction Status Report, which was published on 19 April. The programme includes 846 schemes (or phases) at the end of last year, delivering over 13,400 homes, a very substantial increase on the 8,430 homes in the programme a year earlier. The full report can be accessed at <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-publishes-social-housing-construction-status-report-q4-2017/>.

Work is ongoing to update the Rebuilding Ireland Housing Land Map to reflect the relevant elements of the Q4 2017 Social Housing Construction Status Report and the PPP Programme and details will be published on the Map, at the link referred to above, once finalised.

Details on the number of properties purchased and built in each local authority area are available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/node/6338>.

I have also advised all local authorities of their minimum Social Housing Targets both for 2018 and also for the multi-annual period to 2021, details of which can be accessed on my Department's website at: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/minister-murphy-publishes-quarter-4-2017-social-housing>.

In order to underpin progress on affordable housing delivery, I have now commenced the relevant provisions of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009, the effect of which is to place the new Scheme for affordable purchase on a statutory footing. From engagements with the local authorities in Dublin, the wider Greater Dublin Area, as well as Cork and Galway cities, their initial estimates suggest that they have lands with the potential to deliver some 4,000 new affordable homes. My Department is continuing to work with the key local authorities and the Housing Agency to identify sites which would see the level of ambition increase to at least 10,000 new affordable homes, and that analysis is progressing well. Significant progress has been made on individual projects, such as the O'Devaney Gardens and Oscar Traynor Road sites in the Dublin City Council area.

With regard to cost rental, I am determined for it to become a major part of our rental landscape in the future. It is clear that there is a gap between social housing and the rental market that needs to be filled, making a sustainable impact on housing affordability, national competitiveness, and the attractiveness of our main urban centres as places to live and work.

The Housing Agency, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council and a number of Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) have been working to get our first cost rental pilot, at Enniskerry Road, ready for tenders to issue shortly. In parallel, Dublin City Council, my Department and the National Development Finance Agency are undertaking detailed modelling and financial appraisal on a major site, at St. Michael's Estate in Inchicore, to assess its suitability for a significant cost

rental development. The work of that multi-disciplinary team is progressing well and should be concluded shortly.

In order to support local authorities to get their sites ready for affordable housing, I have decided to provide additional funding for enabling infrastructure via the Serviced Sites Fund. Given that housing-related infrastructure will now be able to avail of funding under the €2 billion Urban Regeneration and Development Fund, I am re-directing the €50m funding for Phase 2 of the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund to the Serviced Sites Fund, increasing the scale of the fund from the previously announced €25m to €75m. When local authority co-funding is included, an overall minimum investment of €100 million will be provided to those sites that require infrastructural investment in order for them to be brought into use for affordable housing. In order to drive early activity, I will be inviting applications for funding under the Serviced Sites Fund by the end of next week.

From a longer-term strategic perspective, as part of Project Ireland 2040, the Government announced on 16 February its intention to establish a new National Regeneration and Development Agency, which will have a role in managing the State's wider publicly-owned land bank to ensure that overall development needs, including housing, are met. The new Agency will work closely with local authorities, Government Departments, Agencies and other State and semi-State bodies to secure the best use of public lands and ensure the delivery on the objectives of the National Planning Framework and the National Development Plan.

Tenant Purchase Scheme

52. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the review of the tenant purchase scheme will be finalised; when he plans to amend the conditions of the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26840/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme came into operation on 1 January 2016. The Scheme is open to eligible tenants, including joint tenants, of local authority houses that are available for sale under the Scheme. To be eligible, tenants must meet certain criteria, including having a minimum reckonable income of €15,000 per annum and having been in receipt of social housing support for at least one year.

In line with the commitment given in Rebuilding Ireland, a review of the first 12 months of the Scheme's operation has been undertaken. The review has incorporated analysis of comprehensive data received from local authorities regarding the operation of the scheme during 2016 and a wide-ranging public consultation process which took place in 2017 and saw submissions received from individuals, elected representatives and organisations.

The review is now complete and a full report has been prepared setting out findings and recommendations. In finalising the report some further consultation was necessary and due consideration had to be given to possible implementation arrangements. These matters are now almost completed and I expect to be in a position to publish the outcome of the review shortly.

Building Regulations

53. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on whether those who bought their homes at the height of the boom and later discovered significant latent defects should be left to pay the cost of remediation. [26817/18]

55. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the supports that will be made available to homeowners with houses that are a fire trap hazard. [26841/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): I propose to take Questions Nos. 53 and 55 together.

Firstly, I acknowledge the stressful circumstances which the owners and residents of buildings face when defects occur in their homes. In response to the building failures that have emerged over the last decade, my Department has advanced a robust and focussed Building Control Reform Agenda, including:

- Amendments to the Building Control Regulations;
- Establishment of a shared services National Building Control Management Project; and
- The ongoing development of new legislation through the Building Control (Construction Industry Register Ireland) Bill.

These reforms have already brought and will continue to bring a new order and discipline to bear on construction projects, creating an enhanced culture of compliance with the Building Regulations.

However, it is important to note that under the Building Control Acts 1990 to 2014, primary responsibility for compliance with the requirements of the Building Regulations rests with the owners, designers and builders of buildings. As such, in general, building defects are matters for resolution between the contracting parties involved, i.e. the homeowner, the builder, the developer and/or their respective insurers, structural guarantee or warranty scheme. It is incumbent on the parties responsible for poor workmanship and/or the supply of defective materials to face up to their responsibilities and take appropriate action to provide remedies for the affected homeowners.

While my Department has overall responsibility for establishing and maintaining an effective regulatory framework for building standards and building control, it has no general statutory role in resolving defects in privately owned buildings, including dwellings, nor does it have a budget for such matters.

However, I and my predecessors, have supported homeowners through a number of expert reports and investigations into legacy problems such as the Report of the Pyrite Panel (June 2012) and the Report of the Expert Panel on Concrete Blocks (June 2017). I also published a Framework for Enhancing Fire Safety in Dwellings (August 2017), which is intended to be used as a guide by the owners and occupants of dwellings where fire safety deficiencies have been identified, or are a cause for concern. The Framework is also of assistance to professional advisors, both in developing strategies to improve fire safety and in developing strategies to enable continued occupation in advance of undertaking the necessary works to ensure compliance with the relevant Building Regulations.

Where apartment buildings that are defective from a fire safety perspective come to the attention of the local authority fire services, they work with management companies and other stakeholders to ensure that appropriate levels of fire safety are achieved to minimise the risk to life. Actions are taken on the basis of case by case fire safety assessments.

Finally, following the Grenfell Tower tragedy, and in recognition of fears expressed for fire safety, the National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management in my Department was tasked with co-ordinating a high-level Task Force to lead a re-appraisal of fire safety in Ireland.

The Task Force's report, which was published recently, is available at the following link:

http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/fire_safety_in_ireland_-_report_of_the_fire_safety_task_force.pdf.

The report makes a number of recommendations in relation to fire safety in apartment buildings, including, including:

- the registration of fire stopping sub-contractors;
- the roles and responsibilities of Building Management Companies e.g. to review and maintain fire safety arrangements, to keep a Fire Safety Register, to advise residents on what to do in the event of a fire alarm (in particular the evacuation arrangements); and
- that local authority Fire Services should offer training to Building Management Companies on key life safety issues.

The National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management has been mandated to carry through the recommendations of the report which are within my Department's remit and to oversee and report on the implementation of the report's other recommendations.

Question No. 54 answered with Question No. 43.

Question No. 55 answered with Question No. 53.

Social and Affordable Housing

56. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if housing assistance payment, HAP, and rental accommodation scheme, RAS, tenancies will be redefined in a way that acknowledges that these tenancies are not the same as local authority tenancies (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26888/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Demand for social housing is met in a variety of ways including through the private rental sector under schemes such as the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) and the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme. Using a variety of mechanisms to deliver social housing makes social housing supports more responsive and flexible, ensures a better mix between private and social housing and creates more sustainable communities.

A key principle of the HAP scheme is that eligible households source their own accommodation in the private rented sector, which best suits their needs, in their area of choice. This is distinct from RAS, which is a different type of social housing support, where the tenant may not always find their own accommodation and instead are allocated a dwelling in accordance with Section 22 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009. Unlike HAP, where a RAS tenancy is ending, the local authority retains the responsibility to source further accommodation for that household.

Both RAS and HAP provide over 56,000 households with more security than rent supplement and they also facilitate those households to increase their household income without the risk of losing their housing support. Both HAP and RAS supported households also have access to the local authority transfers lists, which form part of each local authority's Scheme of Letting priorities. This provides those in receipt of social housing support with the opportunity to transfer to another tenancy, including dwellings owned by local authorities and approved

housing bodies.

I am satisfied that the contractual arrangements underpinning RAS and HAP tenancies, which meet the social housing need of so many households across the country, serve those households well.

Local Authority Housing Data

57. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of houses acquired or purchased by Cavan and Monaghan county councils in each of the years 2013 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26872/18]

62. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of houses built by Cavan and Monaghan local authorities in each of the years 2013 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26871/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 57 and 62 together.

Details of the number of houses that have been built and acquired by local authorities, including in counties Cavan and Monaghan, in each of the years 2013 to 2017, are published and available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordble/overall-social-housing-provision>. These details in respect of 2018 will be published on a quarterly basis as soon as the collection and validation process for the statistics is completed.

Home Loan Scheme

58. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of Rebuilding Ireland home loans processed by the Housing Agency to date; the number granted and refused, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26732/18]

70. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of home loans that have been applied for; the number approved and drawn down under the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme; the number in relation to figures (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26673/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 58 and 70 together.

As with the previous local authority home loan offerings, loan applications under the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan are made directly to the local authority in whose area the property proposed for purchase is situated. My Department does not directly collect information on the number of enquiries to local authorities regarding the loan or the number of loan applications received by local authorities.

However, as is currently the case, my Department will continue to publish information on the overall number and value of (i) local authority loan approvals and (ii) local authority loan drawdowns. Information up to Q3 2017 is available on the Department's website at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/house-prices-loans-and-profile-borrow>

ers/local-authority-loan-activity, and this information will be updated on a quarterly basis as additional data is compiled.

The Housing Agency provides a central support service which assesses valid loan applications that are made to the local authorities and makes recommendations to the authorities as to whether loans should be offered to applicants. I have asked the Agency to centrally compile figures of the numbers of applications that it has assessed and the most recent figures, as at the end of May, indicate that the Agency had received a total of 1,499 applications for assessment from local authorities, 1,150 of which were deemed to be valid. Of these valid applications, 876 had been assessed and 52% of the valid applications that had been assessed by the Agency had been recommended for approval.

Each local authority must have in place a credit committee which makes the final decision on applications for loans, in accordance with the regulations and having regard to the recommendations made by the Housing Agency.

With regard to the values of the loans approved to date, figures are not available concerning the breakdown of amounts approved in the manner referred to. However, the Housing Agency have advised that the average loan amount for the 458 applications recommended for approval by the end of May was €189,133.

Question No. 59 answered with Question No. 39.

Question No. 60 answered with Question No. 40.

Rental Sector Strategy

61. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the expert group report on a company (details supplied) will be finalised; his views on the way in which the company's lettings are proliferating at the expense of traditional lettings in city centres; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26808/18]

81. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when new legislation or regulations to restrict short-term lettings will be introduced in order to prevent such use on a full-time basis of properties that would otherwise be available as homes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26826/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 61 and 81 together.

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:

http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/circular_pl10_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 as 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 without delay.

Question No. 62 answered with Question No. 57.

Question No. 63 answered with Question No. 43.

Housing Policy

64. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his policy in relation to the building of single rural council houses on land provided at a nominal cost by the applicant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26428/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): As housing authorities, local authorities are responsible for the identification of the social housing need in their area and for the development of appropriate responses to the need identified.

Local authorities now have substantial pipelines of new social housing projects, details of which can be seen in the quarterly Social Housing Construction Status Reports published by my Department. The most recently available report sets out the position as at end 2017 and is available on the Rebuilding Ireland website at the following link: *<http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-publishes-social-housing-construction-status-report-q4-2017/>*.

As can be seen in this report, my Department is supporting local authorities in the delivery of a range of social housing schemes from small to larger scale developments. This includes single rural dwellings where the authorities concerned have prioritised such projects as part of their overall work to meet their social housing targets and respond to local housing need.

Building Energy Rating Compliance

65. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to introduce new regulations to end the use of fossil fuel heating systems in new homes. [26874/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015 sets out the national objective of transitioning to a low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy in the period up to 2050. It requires the publication of a national low carbon transition and mitigation plan every five years. In this regard, my Department is required to identify and develop sectoral mitigation measures for the built environment.

Ireland's National Mitigation Plan published in 2017 takes account of the measures to be implemented in the buildings sector that are required to meet the EU's energy related targets.

These measures include reductions in the use of fossil fuel systems and an increase in the use of renewable energy.

It should be noted that my Department has lead responsibility for implementing the EU Energy Performance of Buildings Directive. This Directive sets the requirements at an EU level for Member States to improve the energy performance of buildings and to make an important contribution to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. Article 9(1) of the Directive requires Member States to ensure that by 31 December 2020, all new buildings are nearly zero-energy buildings.

The Directive defines a Nearly Zero Energy Building, or “NZEB”, as a building that has a very high energy performance and that the nearly zero or very low amount of energy required should be covered to a very significant extent by energy from renewable sources, including energy from renewable sources produced on-site or nearby. This definition was incorporated in the Building Regulations 1997 – 2017 last year through the Building Regulations (Amendment) Regulations 2017.

My Department has progressively updated Part L of the Building Regulations, relating to the Conservation of Fuel and Energy in Dwellings, over the last decade in order to improve the energy and carbon dioxide emissions performance of all new dwellings to achieve these “NZEB” performance levels. These incremental improvements have effectively eased the transition and minimized the additional effort required to achieve the NZEB performance for dwellings.

In 2007, Part L was revised to achieve a 40% improvement in the energy and carbon dioxide emissions performance over 2005 performance levels for new dwellings and, in addition, a mandatory renewables requirement for new dwellings was also introduced. This review also introduced a requirement that new and replacement fossil fuel boilers should be energy efficient condensing boilers, where practical.

In 2011, Part L of the Building Regulations was further revised to achieve an improvement of 60% in the energy and carbon dioxide emissions performance over 2005 standard for all new dwellings.

In addition, I have recently published a public consultation on further improvements to Part L of the Building Regulations to achieve the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive NZEB performance requirements. My Department is currently reviewing the results of this consultation, and when implemented, it will represent an improvement of 70% in energy and carbon dioxide emissions performance over 2005 standards for all new dwellings commencing construction from early 2019, subject to transition arrangements.

Under current regulations a typical new dwelling is built to an A3 Building Energy Rating (BER). The new Part L performance requirement will equate to a typical new dwelling having a BER of A2. The amended Part L Building Regulations will stipulate that new dwellings can achieve the new standards by making provisions that represent : -

- A 70% improvement in energy efficiency for new dwellings (relative to 2005 base year standards)
- A 70% reduction in CO₂ emissions (again relative to the 2005 base year standards), and
- 20% renewables as a percentage of total building energy use.

These requirements make it more attractive for builders and homeowners to further incorporate renewable technologies and move away from traditional fossil fuels.

It is estimated that the cumulative improvements to regulations mean that a dwelling built to the 2011 regulations requires 90% less energy than the equivalent dwelling built in 1978 to deliver the same standards of heat, hot water and light. Very significant progress has, therefore, been made in this area, even before the new initiatives outlined above.

Arising from further improvements to Part L, the move from fossil fuels to renewable energy is expected to accelerate and will contribute significantly to meeting Ireland's climate change commitments.

Water and Sewerage Schemes

66. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the review of the demonstration scheme for group sewerage schemes; when a report will be available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26865/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Multi-Annual Rural Water Programme 2016-2018 was developed through a working group of key stakeholders involving local authorities, the Water Services Transition Office, Irish Water and the National Federation of Group Water Schemes, as well as my Department. The programme provides for the funding of demonstration group sewerage schemes, through measure 4(d), where clustering of households on individual septic tanks is not a viable option, particularly from an environmental perspective.

Local authorities were invited in January 2016 to submit bids under the programme. The invitation envisaged no more than two demonstration group sewerage projects being brought forward under the measure in any one year of the three-year programme. The demonstrations will allow my Department, over the course of the programme, to determine the appropriate enduring funding levels and relationship with the current grant scheme.

My Department is currently addressing the recommendations contained in the April 2017 report of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Future Funding of Domestic Water Services as they relate to the rural water sector. In this regard, in April 2018, I established a Working Group to conduct a wider review of the investment needs of rural water services. In addition to my Department, the Working Group comprises: the Department of Rural and Community Development, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Health Service Executive, the National Federation of Group Water Schemes and the County and City Management Association.

The Working Group, which has met twice to date, is considering how best to position and resource water services in rural areas so that they can contribute further to the development and long-term sustainability of a comprehensive and cohesive rural water sector that will have the capacity to produce quality outcomes comparable to those available to customers of public water services.

The Working Group is focusing on the actions required to improve and sustain rural water services, and will consider issues such as governance, supervision and monitoring of the sector, in addition to capital investment priorities and requirements across all elements of rural water services. In keeping with the Joint Oireachtas Committee's recommendation this Working Group is considering the investment needs of all elements of rural water services including Group Sewerage Schemes.

The terms of reference of the review provide that there will be a two-strand approach to the considerations of the Working Group. Strand 1 will consider the composition and distribution of funding for the Multi-Annual Rural Water Programme from 2019 up to 2021, while Strand

2 will consider the more complex longer-focus issues surrounding the long-term future resourcing of the rural water sector. It is intended that by the end of July the Working Group will produce a summary report on Strand 1 of its deliberations which will outline the rationale for funding priorities for the next cycle of the Multi-Annual Rural Water Programme up to 2021. At that time the Working Group will also set out time frames for its consideration of, and reporting, on the more complex longer-focus Strand 2 matters.

An Bord Pleanála Remit

67. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the steps he plans to take to ensure all of An Bord Pleanála decisions are taken expeditiously; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26429/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Under section 126 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, An Bord Pleanála has a statutory objective to determine planning appeals within 18 weeks. Where the Board does not consider it possible or appropriate to reach a decision within 18 weeks (e.g. because of the particular complexities of a case or the requirement to hold an oral hearing), it will inform the parties of the reasons for this, and will indicate when it intends to make its decision.

The compliance rate with the statutory objective period has been reduced over the past year due to a number of factors. Firstly, there was a reduction in Board capacity in mid-2017, arising from a time interval between the departure of five outgoing Board members, whose terms of office had expired in April and May, and the five new replacement Board members taking up their posts. While, by September 2017, the Board complement had been fully replenished, this time interval significantly impacted on the Board's case work output over the whole year.

In addition, An Bord Pleanála is also implementing a major ICT strategy which will facilitate the introduction of on-line planning services as part of a complete upgrade and replacement of core systems. In this regard, a new case management system was installed and became operational in Q4 2017. As is to be expected with such a fundamental and integrated project, the transition to the new system has caused some initial disruption to the processing of cases, resulting in a further increase in the backlog of cases on hand. However, measures have been put in place to ensure that the new system is bedded down and becomes operational at an optimal level as soon as possible.

Furthermore, during this period, there has been a general increase in cases received by the Board. For example, there was an increase of almost 12% on normal planning appeals received in 2017 compared to 2016; this upward trend has continued into 2018. The intake of normal planning appeals in the four months to end-April 2018 was 17% greater than the intake over the corresponding period to end-April 2017.

Now that the Board's full complement has been restored, combined with the measures that are being put in place in relation to the new ICT systems, it is expected that the backlog of cases will begin to reduce over the coming months, with an associated improvement in the compliance rate with the statutory objective period for the determination of cases.

My Department liaises closely with the Board to ensure that it has appropriate resources in relation to the performance of its functions. In mid 2017, the Board acquired additional functions in determining planning applications for strategic housing developments. A new Strategic Housing Division of the Board was established to decide on these applications, involving the recruitment of an additional dedicated 10 professional and administrative staff members in

2017. Two additional Board members have also been sanctioned to serve this Division, with the appointments being made in February and June this year.

The Board now has a complement of 11 members and has over 150 staff employed. I am satisfied that the Board has sufficient and necessary resources to deliver effectively and efficiently on its important statutory mandate and functions.

Local Authority Housing Eligibility

68. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the income thresholds for local authority housing will be reviewed in view of the fact that some families that are on a low income are being prevented from applying; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26812/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011 prescribe maximum net income limits for each local authority, in different bands according to the area, with income being defined and assessed according to a standard Household Means Policy.

The income bands and the authority area assigned to each band were based on an assessment of the income needed to provide for a household's basic needs, plus a comparative analysis of the local rental cost of housing accommodation across the country. It is important to note that the limits introduced at that time also reflected a blanket increase of €5,000 introduced prior to the new system coming into operation, in order to broaden the base from which social housing tenants are drawn, both promoting sustainable communities and also providing a degree of future-proofing.

As part of the broader social housing reform agenda, a review of income eligibility for social housing supports has commenced. The Housing Agency is carrying out the detailed statistical work on behalf of my Department and I expect the results of this review to be available for publication in late Summer 2018.

Question No. 69 answered with Question No. 50.

Question No. 70 answered with Question No. 58.

Question No. 71 answered with Question No. 43.

Land Availability

72. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he is considering a land use plan to assist in the development of environmental, housing, transport and regional development goals. [26891/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The National Planning Framework (NPF) was published in February 2018 as part of Project Ireland 2040, which integrates and co-ordinates high-level objectives for environmental, housing, transport, regional development and related matters and sets a strategic context for sectoral investment and land use planning strategies at the more appropriate levels of the regions and local authorities.

For example, the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport is undertaking a strategic

assessment of transport policies and approaches to support the implementation of the NPF through its Planning, Land Use and Transport Outlook (PLUTO) 2040, identifying required infrastructure and service provision to meet the needs of Ireland's population between now and 2040.

Regional Assemblies are preparing more detailed Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies to further develop and elaborate on the high-level policies in the NPF and it is anticipated that they will be published in draft format for public consultation in the coming months. The housing and land management objectives of the NPF are being further developed and implemented by work underway in establishing the new funding sources for urban and rural regeneration and the establishment of the National Regeneration and Development Agency.

The above demonstrates that the Government has already developed a framework for the co-ordination and implementation of environmental, housing, transport and regional development goals and for the addressing of such goals in a land use planning context through the existing statutory processes for planning at regional and local levels.

Question No. 73 answered with Question No. 50.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

74. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the steps he is taking to accelerate the process of approval for new social housing projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26813/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Social housing projects funded by my Department, like all publicly-funded construction projects, must comply with the Government's Capital Works Management Framework (CWMF), the objectives of which are to ensure greater cost certainty, better value for money and financial accountability.

While there are nine points of review within the CWMF, my Department has combined these to just four for capital-funded social housing construction projects. The social housing construction schemes progressing through the 4-stage approval process are reviewed at each stage by my Department's Social Housing Delivery team, including architectural and quantity surveyor advisors. The 4 stages are:

Stage 1 – Capital Appraisal submission to establish the business case;

Stage 2 – Pre-planning submission and cost check;

Stage 3 – Pre-tender approval and cost check;

Stage 4 – Tender approval.

These approvals themselves represent only a small proportion of the time taken in advancing a construction project onto site. The approach that is followed means that local authorities forward design proposals and costings to my Department sequentially, as the local authorities advance the projects through their own planning work. Therefore, projects continue to be advanced while stages are cleared and the approval process does not negatively impact on the overall delivery.

However, it is important that we continuously strive for efficiency in the delivery of social housing. Accordingly, a review was undertaken during 2017 of the procedures for such projects,

involving both my Department and the County and City Management Association. This review identified an overall target programme of 59 weeks for progressing a typical social housing construction project from initial capital appraisal submission by the local authority (Stage 1), to construction contract award. Once the construction contract is awarded, the time taken to build and tenant the homes varies depending, in particular, on the size of the development, the site conditions and other construction-related factors.

My Department and local authorities also operate a single-stage approval process for projects up to €2m in value, while rapid build approaches are also increasingly being used which can save time in relation to design, procurement and construction of new social housing.

Housing Adaptation Grant Data

75. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of housing adaptations that have been carried out by local authority in each of the past five years and to date in 2018; the average wait times for houses to be assessed for adaptations; the steps he is taking to accelerate the funding provision for housing adaptations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26727/18]

76. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the works in lieu scheme is still operational; if it is directly funded by his Department or local authority budget funded; the steps he will take to have the scheme activated in counties in which it is not being utilised as a solution to housing provision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26435/18]

227. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his Department or the local authority determines the works in lieu policy for local authorities. [26947/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 75, 76 and 227 together.

Under the Disabled Persons Grants Scheme (DPG's), my Department provides funding to local authorities for adaptations and extensions to the existing social housing stock to meet the needs of local authority tenants.

This scheme is also used to provide funding to local authorities for Improvement Works In Lieu (IWIL's) to enable them to repair, improve or extend privately owned houses that are occupied or intended to be occupied by approved housing applicants, as an alternative to the provision of local authority housing. This allows people to remain in private housing while their housing need is met without increasing the strain on current social housing stock and also reduces the numbers of persons who might otherwise find themselves homeless.

Exchequer funding meets 90% of the cost of DPG's/DPG Extensions and IWIL's, with the local authority providing the remaining 10%. While my Department has responsibility for setting the policy for this scheme, local authorities have delegated authority in respect of the use of the funding and they prioritise allocations based on need.

Funding recouped to local authorities by my Department has steadily increased in recent years, from over €7m in 2013, to over €13m last year, when improvements in over 1,300 homes were supported. Over 1,000 homes were improved or adapted in 2016; my Department did not compile central data on the number of units improved or adapted prior to 2016. The utilisation of allocated funding and managing needs, including waiting times, is a matter for individual

local authorities.

Local authorities have submitted to my Department details of their work proposals and related funding requirements for this scheme in 2018. These proposals have now been evaluated and funding allocations will be confirmed to the local authorities shortly. In order to ensure that there were no delays for priority and urgent cases, all local authorities were advised that they may undertake works of up to 65% of their 2017 allocation in advance of the notification of their 2018 allocation. This allowed them to plan and progress works under the scheme and allows for the full utilisation of the 2018 allocation throughout the year.

It is open to local authorities to seek additional funding over and above this initial allocation and such requests will be facilitated where funding availability allows. I welcome the efforts being made by all local authorities to improve the quality of life for those with disabilities and those affected by over-crowding. These works will greatly improve the housing conditions for our older tenants and those living with disabilities and addresses issues of overcrowding in existing social housing stock. Improvement works on private homes in lieu of social housing will also provide an alternative for those currently experiencing overcrowding in private accommodation.

Water and Sewerage Schemes Provision

77. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on the wait times for Irish Water to acknowledge, process and communicate final decisions regarding pre-connection applications for sewerage and water; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26820/18]

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, including pre-application for sewerage and water services, and further set out the scrutiny and oversight provisions that apply in respect of these arrangements. Since 1 January 2014, Irish Water has statutory responsibility for all aspects of the planning, delivery and operation of water and wastewater services at national, regional and local levels, and is independent in the exercise of its statutory functions and in relation to day to day operational matters.

The Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 provides that responsibility for the independent economic regulation of the water sector is assigned to the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) which has statutory responsibility for protecting the interests of customers. An important aspect of the CRU's work is ensuring that Irish Water's revenue is spent appropriately to improve services for customers. To facilitate this, in November 2016, the CRU (formerly known as the Commission for Energy Regulation) outlined a framework of 19 key performance metrics against which it would monitor Irish Water's performance and progress over time. The metrics cover customer service, environmental performance, quality of service for water supply, security of water supply and sewerage service. Monitoring Irish Water's performance relative to these metrics will facilitate an evaluation by the CRU in this regard. It also ensures that transparent data becomes available to customers through the publication of performance data.

The position therefore in relation to pre-connection applications for sewerage and water services, is that such applications are an operational matter for Irish Water, subject to independent oversight by the CRU as appropriate.

If Deputies have any queries on specific issues in relation to water services, Irish Water has

established a dedicated team to deal with representations and queries from public representatives. The team can be contacted via email to oireachtasmembers@water.ie or by telephone on a dedicated number, 1890 578 578.

Vacant Sites Data

78. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of the 31 local authorities that have set up a vacant site register; the number that have not; the number that have and the register remains empty; his views on the fact that certain local authorities are ignoring the provisions of the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015; the steps he is taking to force local authorities to comply; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26824/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): 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. Under the Act, planning authorities are required to establish a register of vacant sites in their areas, beginning on 1 January 2017. Planning authorities have issued notices to owners of vacant sites by 1 June this year in respect of vacant sites included on their respective registers on 1 January 2018, indicating that the levy will apply to those sites on 1 January 2019.

While all 31 local authorities have established vacant site registers, not all registers have been populated to date as local authorities are undertaking the necessary preparatory work in this regard, i.e. identifying qualifying vacant sites, their registered owners and commissioning the market valuations of such sites.

My Department does not maintain a central register of vacant sites as each local authority administers the vacant site register in respect of their functional area. However, on foot of a recent review of the on-line vacant site registers across all local authority areas, I understand that 14 authorities have populated their vacant site registers to date, of which 11 had sites on their registers in 2017 and before 1 January 2018, with three other authorities populating their registers during January 2018.

My Department has actively engaged with local authorities in relation to the implementation of the vacant site levy in order to ensure a consistent application of the levy provisions across all city and county areas and to facilitate the sharing of best practice. My Department has provided guidance and advice and also organised three separate information seminars for local authorities, most recently on 1 May 2018, which was attended by officials from every local authority.

My Department will continue to monitor implementation of the levy to ensure that it is being fully used, in line with its intended purpose of incentivising the development of vacant or under-utilised sites in urban areas.

Question No. 79 answered with Question No. 40.

National Economic and Social Council

80. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will report on the Urban Development Land, Housing and Infrastructure:

Fixing Ireland's Broken System report recently published by the National Economic and Social Council, NESC. [22696/18]

89. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on the most recent National Economic and Social Council, NESC, report, particularly its comments on State owned lands being available for housing. [22610/18]

220. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he has had engagement with the National Economic and Social Council since the publication of its report Urban Development Land, Housing and Infrastructure: Fixing Ireland's Broken System. [22710/18]

221. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the recently published NESC report entitled Urban Development Land, Housing and Infrastructure: Fixing Ireland's Broken System. [25389/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 80, 89, 220 and 221 together.

I very much welcome the National Economic and Social Council's (NESC) report, Urban Development Land, Housing and Infrastructure: Fixing Ireland's Broken System, published last month and I commend NESC on their contribution to evidence-based policy-making in publishing this excellent report.

In developing this report, NESC consulted with my Department on both current and planned policy measures in relation to active land management and there will be continued engagement with regard to the issues and recommendations raised therein. In addition, as the report was brought to the attention of all my Cabinet colleagues, its publication and findings are very timely, given the whole-of-Government focus on achieving a more effective, strategic approach to land management for residential and infrastructural development.

The report is very much consistent with the Government's approach to housing supply and land management, and in particular the Council's emphasis on the importance of not returning to the speculative and unstable system of home building that we have previously witnessed in this country. Moreover, the report addresses a number of challenges identified in the Government's long-term spatial strategy, Project Ireland 2040, including the provision of more affordable homes to buy or rent for a growing proportion of the population and a sustained increase in the level of investment in public infrastructure.

NESC also points out that public institutions need a strong developmental mandate, political authorisation, and executive capacity to drive housing supply and sustainable urban development, and endorses the NPF commitment to establish new National Regeneration and Development Agency as a positive step in this direction. It is envisaged that the Agency will act as a national centre of expertise, working with and supporting local authorities, public bodies and other interests, to harness public lands as catalysts to stimulate regeneration and wider investment and to achieve compact, sustainable growth, with a particular emphasis on complex regeneration projects. The Government is currently working on finalising arrangements for the establishment of the Agency.

Question No. 81 answered with Question No. 61.

Emergency Accommodation Provision

82. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will report on the availability of emergency accommodation, in particular the emergency accommodation that can cater for larger families that are increasingly not accepted by hotels and bed and breakfasts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26889/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department's role in relation to homelessness involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of housing authorities in addressing homelessness at local level. Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of accommodation and associated services for homeless persons rests with individual housing authorities. The matter raised by the Deputy is an operational issue in the day-to-day delivery of services and is a matter for the relevant housing authority.

Emergency Accommodation Provision

83. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the quality standards and inspection regime for all emergency accommodation. [26816/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department's role in relation to homelessness involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of housing authorities in addressing homelessness at local level. Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of accommodation and related services for homeless persons rests with individual housing authorities. This includes operational issues such as ensuring that contracted services are delivered in a professional manner, that inspections take place and that homeless families/individuals can report issues to the relevant authority.

In this regard, the Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE) has been overseeing the development of a quality standards framework, coordinating this work in consultation with an advisory group, which includes representation from various housing authorities, service providers, Tusla, clients and other stakeholders, with a view to having the finalised standards adopted on a national basis by individual housing authorities. The draft standards have been piloted in a number of selected services across the country and positive feedback has been received.

My Department has had recent discussions on this subject with the DRHE and I understand that the DRHE is preparing a final draft quality standards framework for formal submission to my Department. On receipt of this, along with any recommendations with regard to implementation from the DRHE and the advisory group, I will give consideration to how such standards could be applied on a national basis by housing authorities.

Question No. 84 answered with Question No. 39.

Question No. 85 answered with Question No. 40.

Local Authority Housing Data

86. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of properties brought back into use under the repair and leasing scheme and the buy and renew scheme of pillar 5 of Rebuilding Ireland in each of the local authority areas by the most recent returns available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26827/18]

93. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the anticipated number of repair and lease scheme units due to be operational in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26728/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 86 and 93 together.

The Repair and Leasing Scheme (RLS) and the Buy and Renew Scheme have been developed to assist local authorities or Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) to harness the accommodation potential that exists in certain vacant dwellings across Ireland.

The RLS is targeted at owners of vacant dwellings, who cannot afford or access the funding needed to bring their dwellings up to the required standard for rental property. Subject to the suitability of the dwelling for social housing, and the agreement of the property owner, the cost of the necessary repairs will be met upfront by the local authority or an AHB.

At the end of 2017, a total of 820 applications had been received under the scheme. Local authorities were engaging with the property owners in relation to 573 properties, 31 agreements for lease had been signed and 9 homes had been delivered and tenanted. A detailed breakdown of the RLS scheme data up to end Q4 2017 is available on my Department's website at the following link:

<http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision>.

It is clear from the end 2017 output that RLS has not yet delivered the level of new social housing homes envisaged. I have reviewed the operation of the scheme, as part of the review of Rebuilding Ireland, and I have concluded that the scheme has significant potential but there are areas where it can be improved to make it more attractive and effective. At the second Housing Summit held on 22 January 2018, I announced a number of key changes to the scheme which took effect from 1 February 2018. These include:

- a reduction in the minimum lease term required from 10 to 5 years;
- an increase in the proportion of market rent available to property owners where they take on more responsibilities under the tenancy, meaning that up to 92% of market rent will be available; and provision of additional funding for property owners, over and above the current €40,000 limit, where the dwelling is a bedsit type dwelling being brought into compliance with the Standards for Rented Houses Regulations and made available for social housing.

I am making €32 million available for the scheme in 2018 and I expect local authorities and AHBs to continue to implement the scheme locally.

Over the period 2016 to 2021, the national target is for the delivery of an additional 50,000 social housing homes through Build, Acquisition and Leasing Schemes. The ambition is for 33,500 of these homes to be delivered through new build programmes including Part V; for 6,500 to be delivered through Acquisition programmes including the Housing Agency Acquisition Programme; and for the remaining 10,000 homes to be delivered under a range of leasing initiatives including the RLS. Out of the total 10,000 homes to be delivered under Leasing, it is expected that 2,000 will be leased by local authorities in 2018 under a range of leasing initiatives, including the Repair and Leasing Scheme, long term leasing and the new Enhanced Lease.

I wrote to all Local Authorities on 18 April 2018 setting out their social housing delivery targets for build, acquisition and leasing for 2018, and for the period 2018-2021. The targets are

published at the following link:

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

The RLS data for end Q1 2018 are currently being collated and will be published shortly.

In the case of the Buy and Renew Scheme, funding is made available by my Department to facilitate local authorities in acquiring and remediating vacant properties that may be suitable for social housing.

As with standard acquisitions, local authorities have delegated responsibility to utilise the Buy and Renew Scheme, as part of the blend of property acquisitions, as appropriate to their area, given housing need and the availability of properties of different types. To date, my Department has supported the purchase and remediation of over 90 such homes under the scheme, details of which are set out in the following table.

Local Authority	Number of homes
Clare County Council	1
Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown County Council	12
Fingal County Council	11
Kerry County Council	14
Kildare County Council	2
Limerick City & County Council	16
Meath County Council	14
Monaghan County Council	16
Offaly County Council	1
Tipperary County Council	1
Waterford City & County Council	6
TOTAL	94

Question No. 87 answered with Question No. 40.

Question No. 88 answered with Question No. 37.

Question No. 89 answered with Question No. 80.

Water and Sewerage Schemes Status

90. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the waste water deficiencies in County Wexford; the number of locations in which untreated raw sewage is discharged in the county; if he is satisfied that Irish Water is doing everything possible in regard to this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26821/18]

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. This delivery is set in the context of overall Government policy in relation to water services as outlined in the recently published Water Services Policy Statement, which includes the focussing of the programme to meet relevant public health and environmental standards as a priority for strategic investment planning.

The EPA's latest Urban Waste Water Treatment Report identifies the following areas in Wexford as discharging untreated sewage:

- Arthurstown
- Ballyhack
- Duncannon
- Kilmore Quay

Irish Water is prioritising investment and works on a country-wide basis to address the worst of our waste water deficiencies. Their programme of work includes projects in Wexford.

Information on the progression of projects to address these issue is available from Irish Water, which has established a dedicated team to deal with representations and queries from public representatives. The team can be contacted via email to oireachtasmembers@water.ie or by telephone on a dedicated number, 1890 578 578.

Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund

91. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the reason all bids for local infrastructure housing activation fund, LIHAF, building must demonstrate high levels of affordability (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26887/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund was designed to activate housing supply by putting in place enabling public infrastructure to facilitate large-scale development on key sites.

I have given final approval for 30 projects under the fund and these will stimulate development of approximately 20,000 housing units across 14 local authorities in areas of high housing need by 2021. This will not only mean a significant increase in supply of housing to the market but also increase the supply of social housing under Part V. In addition, 13 of the projects will support the development of housing on State-owned sites which will provide additional social and affordable housing.

Under Pillar 3 of the Rebuilding Ireland plan, LIHAF is designed to specifically address the issue of housing supply and that increase in supply is an important factor in terms of moderating house prices. In addition, the infrastructure being built is all public infrastructure for public use and the new roads, bridges and parks that are being built will bring benefits to the wider communities in those areas. I have also sought to leverage the State's investment in public infrastructure under LIHAF to achieve a dividend in terms of making the housing on the associated sites more affordable than it would otherwise have been.

The target referred to by the Deputy was part of the original circular letter which issued in August 2016 with the call for proposals. However, this was subsequently amended in September 2016 to allow for project-specific cost reductions and affordability schemes. The clarification recognised that the original blanket requirement was quite narrow and did not allow for appropriate calibration against the level of investment in infrastructure and therefore could negatively affect the viability of housing projects, particularly in Dublin where the supply issue is most urgent.

Local authorities were required to secure local agreements with developers and landowners

in advance of finalising grant agreements with my Department. These local agreements set out commitments from developers and landowners with regard to housing delivery and an appropriate cost reduction on housing. Summary details of these commitments were published on the Rebuilding Ireland website in March 2018 and are available to view, together with the circular and clarification, at the following link: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/lihaf/>.

Land Availability

92. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the legislation for the national regeneration and development agency will be brought forward to Dáil Éireann; if the acquisition of land for social housing will include private sites in suitable locations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26434/18]

94. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the anticipated launch date of the national regeneration and development agency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26730/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 92 and 94 together.

Project Ireland 2040, published in February 2018, signals a significant policy shift towards securing more compact and sustainable urban and rural development, which requires significantly more effective land management in key development areas. Against that background, it is proposed to establish a National Regeneration and Development Agency to assist in ensuring a more effective approach to strategic land management, particularly in terms of publicly owned land.

The Agency will act as a national centre of expertise, working with and supporting local authorities, public bodies and other interests, to harness public lands as catalysts to stimulate regeneration and wider investment and to achieve compact, sustainable growth, with a particular emphasis on complex regeneration projects and the provision of affordable housing.

Detailed arrangements in relation to the functions, powers and mechanisms and legislative arrangements for the establishment of the Agency are currently being developed by my Department, in conjunction with the Department of An Taoiseach and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, with a view to their early finalisation. The current work in this area will inform the functions, resource needs, budgetary requirements and location of the Agency.

Question No. 93 answered with Question No. 86.

Question No. 94 answered with Question No. 92.

Local Authority Funding

95. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if additional funding will be provided to local authorities in 2018 for house improvement grants such as the housing adaptation scheme and the disabled persons grant scheme in view of delays in having applications approved and the importance of these schemes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26839/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Increased funding is being provided to local authorities in 2018 in respect of the Housing Ad-

aptation Grants for Older People and People with a Disability. Details of the 2018 allocations to all local authorities are available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/special-housing-needs/minister-english-announces-eu6625-million-funding-improve-homes-older>. Funding for these schemes has increased year on year since 2014 and the 2018 funding represents an increase of some 11% on the 2017 allocation.

My Department works closely with the local authorities to achieve a full drawdown of their allocations and there is careful scrutiny of spend as the year progresses, with any underspend redistributed to those local authorities with high levels of grant activity who sought additional funding.

Online Safety

96. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Taoiseach the status of the preparation and publication of an action plan which his Department is co-ordinating further to the open policy debate on online safety held earlier in 2018. [26977/18]

The Taoiseach: The Action Plan for Online Safety being developed by a cross-Government team is well advanced. I expect it to be submitted to Government in the coming weeks for approval and publication.

Defence Forces Remuneration

97. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his views on recent failures related to the payroll system in the Defence Forces leaving members with late payment of wages and late distribution of payslips. [27028/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Since 2017, payrolls for the Defence Forces are processed by the Department's payroll provider, the National Shared Services Office (NSSO). Payments to Defence Forces personnel are made by the NSSO using electronic funds transfer. Also, as part of the move to the NSSO, online payslips were introduced to replace the paper payslips then in use.

My Department has not been made aware of any recent late payments of wages to members of the Defence Forces or late provision of online payslips but if the Deputy can forward any details I will have the matter examined further.

Ministerial Meetings

98. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he met Prince Charles when he visited Ireland; and if so, the issues that were discussed. [26879/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I had the privilege of welcoming the Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall to Ireland for their fourth visit in as many years. Although we did not have a formal meeting, we did have the opportunity, at various points during their programme in Cork, to discuss a number of issues of interest, including our mutual interest in marine issues, and the wider British-Irish relationship. I assured the Royal couple that they would always be welcome in Ireland, and that we hope to see them here again.

Gender Equality

99. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of the work of his Department's sub-committee of the management board on gender equality, equality and diversity established in 2016; the details of the events it has organised or participated in to celebrate and support equality and diversity domestically and through his Department's mission network overseas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26980/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department is fully committed to ensuring that our staff are representative and reflective of the people and society we serve. The Department's Management Board Sub Committee on Gender Equality, Equality, and Diversity was first established in 2012 to provide momentum and leadership to efforts to improve gender balance in the Department. In 2017, the Sub Committee's remit was formally expanded to include broader diversity and equality issues as outlined in the Employment Equality and Equal Status Acts, together with the issue of discrimination on socio-economic grounds. The Sub Committee (supported by a Gender Equality Action Plan Working Group and a Working Group on Equality and Diversity) is the governance structure for the consideration of equality and diversity issues; policy on these issues is of course led and managed by the Department's human resources team and informed by central Civil Service policies. The Department also works closely with the Civil Service Management Board in the development of new approaches to gender equality. Work on gender equality is structured through the Department's Gender Equality Action Plan which sets out a number of key objectives to help improve gender balance at all grades, at home and abroad. Important initiatives taken under the Action Plan include the roll-out of unconscious bias training, mentoring and coaching for women in leadership roles, and the establishment of a Gender Equality Network which organises seminars and discussions on gender open to all staff.

Efforts have specifically been made to ensure gender balance in promotions and particularly at senior positions where inequalities are historically most evident. In 2012, at the establishment of the Sub-Committee, 27% of Counsellors/Principal Officers in the Department were female. As of 2018, the percentage of female Counsellor/Principal Officers is 34%, highlighting the success of efforts made by the Department to address inequalities, while also evidencing the need to continue efforts already being implemented.

The Working Group on Equality and Diversity has now developed a complementary Action Plan which will be launched shortly and which will drive initiatives around inclusion, equality, and diversity in our human resources approach and in our external and internal communications. As part of the Action Plan, I will shortly be launching the Department's LGBT+ Staff Network. This Network aims to be a supportive space for LGBT+ staff, secondees and their spouses at home or overseas.

There are regular events at the Department's Headquarters to promote gender equality, equality and diversity. In 2017, six events were held and to date there have been four events on issues on gender equality, equality and diversity in 2018. Events have included topics such as 'Inclusion and Disability', 'Gender Equality in Leadership', 'LGBT+ History', and 'Diversity in the Diplomatic Service'. As Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, I am committed to communicating our values to our partners around the world and to visible demonstrations of our support for human rights and equality. The Department's diplomatic network and the Irish Aid programme work directly, and in cooperation with, other EU Member States to engage with Governments on a range of governance and human rights issues, including gender equality and the rights of the LGBT+ community. The Human Right Unit in my Department supports embassies in their engagement on these issues, including the provision of appropriate training to staff in advance of their postings overseas.

In March this year Ireland also chaired the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, leading to the adoption of Conclusions which focused on gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls.

In May 2018, to mark the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia, I launched a social media awareness campaign on Twitter reiterating Ireland's commitment to the rights of LGBT+ individuals and encouraging our global network to show solidarity by supporting the hashtag #FollowTheRainbow.

Many of our embassies have also participated in annual Pride events including most recently Embassies Warsaw, Washington and Zagreb.

Human Rights Cases

100. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the fact that a person (details supplied) has been imprisoned under an administrative detention order since 2 July 2017 and has reportedly been denied the right to a fair and public trial; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27021/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am aware of the case of the person concerned, whose administrative detention order has just been renewed for a further period reported to be four months. She has been in administrative detention without trial for a year, having already been detained, under administrative detention and a conviction whose basis was very unclear, for much of the period since April 2015. I understand that she is a member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, which is an outlawed group in Israel and considered a terrorist group by the EU. However, no real and credible imputation of personal involvement in violent activities has been made against her.

My view on this case, and on the practice of administrative detention generally, is very clear. While no-one can doubt the particular threats and security concerns which Israel faces, administrative detention should only be used, if at all, in the most serious of cases and in the face of serious and immediate threat. In all other cases, persons should be charged and tried in the courts, able to hear and challenge the evidence against them. No evidence of such a serious and immediate threat has been presented, in a way which would allow the person in question to address it, in this case.

In general, there is serious concern that administrative detention is being applied on an increasingly routine basis against people who are politically active and critical of the occupation of the Palestinian territory, without any evidence being made available to indicate that these individuals constitute a security threat. Such periods of detention are often rolled over and extended indefinitely.

All of these criticisms have been conveyed to the Israeli authorities, most recently in the context of the Universal Periodic Review of Israel at the Human Rights Council in January of this year, when Ireland reiterated that detainees must have the right to be informed of the charges underlying any detention, have access to legal assistance, and receive a fair trial. Ireland has also been instrumental in having them included in EU Council Conclusions on the situation in Israel and Palestine.

It is incumbent on Israel to charge this person with credible and evidence-based offences, or to release her. I note that a leading article in one of the main Israeli newspapers yesterday made the same call.

Human Rights

101. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the Government's position on the new policy of the United States Government in respect of the removal of undocumented children from their parents; if his attention has been drawn to reports of the conditions of the detention centres in which these children are being held; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27107/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Irish people have been rightly appalled by the images which have recently emerged of immigrant children being separated from their parents at the southern US border and held in detention by the US authorities. I have no desire to become involved in a US domestic debate about immigration. Clearly, every state has the right, indeed the duty, to police its own borders and to enforce its immigration laws. This duty should, however, be discharged in the case of all countries in line with their international obligations and with respect for the human rights of all involved, especially children.

Ireland, as a State party to the Convention to the Rights of the Child, is of the view that in all actions that involve children, the best interests of the child should have primary consideration.

I therefore urge the US government to immediately reverse this policy of separation.

Capital Expenditure Programme

102. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Finance if his Department will cost a capital plan for each of the years 2019 to 2023 with the national development plan, NDP, for the same period (details supplied). [26942/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy is aware, in order to assess the impact of capital smoothing of the proposed voted capital expenditure model the actual capital expenditure in 2016 and 2017 along with that planned for 2018 have to be included in the calculation, as these impact on 2019, 2020 and 2021.

The following table takes this into consideration and, combining it with the plan as submitted, results in the following amounts of capital expenditure recognised under the expenditure benchmark each year:

Expenditure	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Exchequer capital expenditure, € millions	8,500	8,900	9,618	10,118	10,618
Amount after capital smoothing applied, € millions	981	952	1,030	1,080	530
Exchequer capital expenditure, per cent of GNI* ^	3.8	3.8	4.0	N/A	N/A
Exchequer capital expenditure, per cent of GDP ^	2.6	2.6	2.7	N/A	N/A

^Nominal GDP and GNI* out to 2021 were published in annex 2 of the Stability Programme Update 2018. These series have not been estimated beyond 2021.

In regards to the request to cost the National Development Plan - in my response to PQ 160 on 27 February I set out the impact on net fiscal space for the years 2019 -2021. This detailed response takes into account the Exchequer and non-Exchequer impact as well as the issue of capital grants versus gross fixed capital formation.

Table 3 of the 2018 Summer Economic Statement takes these details into consideration in the calculation of fiscal space under the expenditure benchmark.

Excise Duties

103. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to reduce or remove the emergency tax placed on fuel after the economic crash a decade ago in view of the rising petrol and diesel prices; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26949/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The financial crisis brought about increases to fuel excise duties to raise badly needed revenues in the face of a decreasing tax yield. However, excise duties applying to petrol and diesel have remained static since 2012.

The table below shows how Irish fuel excise duties ranks in EU terms over the last decade.

Year	Petrol	Diesel
2008	12th	9th
2009	11th	3rd
2010	11th	4th
2011	10th	4th
2012	11th	4th
2013	11th	4th
2014	11th	5th
2015	12th	6th
2016	12th	7th
2017	11th	7th
2018	12th	10th

Source: EU Commission Excise Duty Tables

Excise on diesel in Ireland was the 3rd most expensive in the EU in 2009 and, arising from the fact that there have been no increases since 2012, is now the 10th most expensive. Similarly, many Member States apply higher excise duties on unleaded petrol than Ireland.

It is the long standing practice of the Minister for Finance not to comment on measures which may or may not be included in the upcoming budget.

Insurance Compensation Fund

104. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Finance when the Insurance (Amendment) Bill will be published, which will include a provision to give effect to full compensation to third-party claimants of a company (details supplied) by way of a balance payment of 35% by the State to those that have settled their claims. [26950/18]

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

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

The Deputy will also be aware of my decision in principle that the State will ensure that Setanta third party claimants are compensated in full, which was announced on 30 January. I am pleased to confirm that a provision giving effect to this decision has been included in the Insurance (Amendment) Bill, which was published on 19 June.

I am hoping that, with the cooperation of Members of the House, the Bill will pass all Stages in an efficient manner. Once enacted, it will allow for the payment of 100% of the compensation due to Setanta third party personal injury motor insurance claimants including the additional 35% to those who have settled their claims and have already received compensation of 65% of their claim. The same principle of full payment will apply to third party property motor insurance claimants subject to a limit of €1.22m (in line with Motor Insurance Bureau of Ireland limits).

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

Insurance Costs

105. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Finance if consideration will be given to the issues raised by an organisation (details supplied) in relation to insurance reform; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27019/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I welcome the proactive role that the Alliance for Insurance Reform is taking in regard to the issue of the cost of insurance, particularly for businesses. I can assure the Deputy that my Department and I are both very conscious of the impact that the volatility in insurance prices in the last few years has had on consumers and businesses and am well aware of the issues raised by the Alliance. The Alliance has featured prominently in the media and put its viewpoints across at Joint Oireachtas Committee appearances, while its members have submitted a large number of representations to the Department, both directly and through TDs and Senators. Moreover, the Minister of State for Financial Services and Insurance, Mr. Michael D'Arcy T.D., has formally met with the Alliance, and relevant issues were discussed to some level of detail.

With regard to the '10 asks' of the Alliance in particular, most of the issues which have been raised by it were considered in detail by the Cost of Insurance Working Group in the course of its work to produce its two reports namely, the Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance and the Report on the Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance. A number of these issues are in the process of being implemented such as amending section 8 of the Civil Liability and Courts Act 2004 and linking sections 25 and 26 so that exaggerated and misleading claims are automatically referred to the Gardaí for investigation. There are other recommendations however such as changing the approach to calculating the Book of Quantum where we have clearly indicated to the Alliance that there are constitutional issues which need to be first considered thus explaining why we have referred the matter to the Law Reform Commission for examination.

I have also pointed out to the Alliance that reinstating the "Blue Book" is a matter for the Central Bank of Ireland and as Minister, this is not an issue I have any influence over. Notwithstanding this, my Department remains open to maintaining constructive engagement with the Alliance on its key 'asks'.

Finally, it is important that the Cost of Insurance Working Group continues to focus on implementing the recommendations of the two Reports so we can see what impact the completion of all the actions have on the cost of insurance before looking to introduce more changes. As I have stated previously, I believe that the cumulative effects of the implementation of all the recommendations should include increased stability in the pricing of insurance for consumers and businesses and improved availability of insurance generally.

Tax Rebates

106. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Finance the reason a full refund of PAYE was not paid to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27075/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that a full refund of PAYE tax is generally not made until after the end of the tax year when the full earnings of the taxpayer are known.

However, given the difficult health circumstances of the person in question, Revenue will review their year to date tax situation and will expedite any repayment due to them. A Revenue official will make direct contact the person in the coming days to advance matters.

Living City Initiative

107. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of units available of the relief in each year since May 2015 by special regeneration area, by owner occupier residential relief, rented residential landlord relief and commercial relief, by cost to the State; the number that were for conversion; the number of each of the three reliefs that were for refurbishment in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27098/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I assume that the Deputy is referring to the Living City Initiative (LCI).

I am advised by Revenue that applications are only required to be made to the relevant local authority under the owner-occupier and rented residential elements of the scheme. Applications are not required to be made to the local authority under the commercial element of the scheme. Based on the most recent information received by Revenue from the City and County Councils, the number of applications received per eligible city since LCI commenced in May 2015 is as follows:

City	Applications Received
Dublin	45
Cork	36
Limerick	14
Waterford	16
Kilkenny	9
Galway	2

Information in relation to the amount actually claimed, the cost to the Exchequer and the number of claimants for the 2015 tax year is as follows:

Questions - Written Answers

Year	Number of claimants	Amount claimed€M	Maximum tax cost assumed at 41% for Inc. Tax and 12.5% for CT €M
2015	12	0.3	0.1

Revenue inform me that claims for the 2016 tax year are currently being analysed and updates of this information should be published shortly in the ‘Certain Property Based Tax Exemptions’ table, located on their website at the following link:

<https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/documents/statistics/tax-expenditures/property-reliefs.pdf>

Finally, I am informed by Revenue that due to the low number of taxpayers claiming this relief, and Revenue’s obligation to observe the confidentiality of taxpayer information, it is not possible to provide further breakdowns as requested by the Deputy. Also, the information on tax returns is not submitted in a format that allows the collection of data by area or by whether the units were for conversion or refurbishment.

Tax Rebates

108. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the cost per year of the hybrid VRT rebate; if the cost is being retained in the expenditure base for 2019 in view of the fact that it is scheduled to expire at the end of 2018; his plans to extend the rebate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27099/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the amount of VRT remitted/repaid for new and used Hybrid electric and plug-in Hybrid electric vehicles is provided in the following table. Please note that figures provided for 2017 are provisional and may therefore be subject to revision. Figures for 2018 reflect data for January to May only.

Year	Cost € Millions
2001	€ 0.06
2002	€ 0.04
2003	€ 0.03
2004	€ 0.98
2005	€ 1.65
2006	€ 5.00
2007	€ 8.39
2008	€ 8.63
2009	€ 1.27
2010	€ 2.54
2011	€ 0.95
2012	€ 1.13
2013	€ 1.37
2014	€ 1.83
2015	€ 3.00
2016	€ 6.08
2017 (provisional)	€10.34
2018 (to May)	€ 0.11

It is the long standing practice of the Minister for Finance not to comment on measures which may or may not be included in the upcoming budget.

VAT Rebates

109. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if a VAT reclaim is being considered on petrol vehicles for businesses; the full year cost of a VAT reclaim on petrol for companies; his views on whether there would be additional anti-avoidance issues with VAT reclaim on petrol over a VAT reclaim on diesel; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27100/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Irish VAT law does not provide for a VAT rebate for diesel or petrol. The different treatment of VAT as regards petrol and diesel relates to the VAT input deductibility entitlement of VAT registered taxpayers. Businesses who make supplies that are charged to VAT are entitled to claim input VAT on their business expenses. VAT registered persons are entitled to claim the cost of VAT on the purchase of diesel used in the course of their business, as is the case with most business costs. However, section 60 of the VAT Consolidation Act 2010 prohibits VAT deductibility by businesses on certain goods and services which, by their ubiquitous nature, are not easily distinguishable from general non-business use. This is for anti-avoidance reasons.

Expenditure on petrol, as well as expenditure on food, drink, accommodation, and entertainment, is specifically excluded from deductibility entitlement, even where the petrol or other goods and services are acquired or used for the purpose of a taxable business.

Under Article 176 of the EU VAT Directive, Ireland can retain certain restrictions on VAT deductibility that were in place before 1979. As VAT input deductibility has been restricted on petrol since 1972, Ireland can retain that block on deductibility. While it is legally possible to apply the normal rules of VAT deductibility to petrol, once the block on deductibility is eased or removed it would not be possible to re-introduce it. There is a case for petrol and diesel to be treated equally in terms of input deductibility entitlements as there is a greater level of diesel run personal motor vehicles in operation today than in the past. However, the provisions of Article 176 prohibit the application of a new deductibility restriction on diesel expenditure. As anti-avoidance concerns regarding petrol expenditure deductibility continue, the restriction on VAT deductibility remains valid.

The information available on tax records does not allow petrol purchases by businesses to be separately identified. Therefore, it is not possible to furnish an estimate of the cost to the Exchequer of allowing a VAT reclaim on petrol for businesses.

Tax Code

110. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if a benefit in kind incentive is being considered for the use of hybrid electric vehicles and plug in hybrid electric vehicles; the estimated full year cost of such an incentive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27101/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Energy and Environmental Tax Strategy Group Paper will examine the issue of the tax treatment of private cars when provided by an employer to an employee.

It is the long standing practice of the Minister for Finance not to comment on measures which may or may not be included in the upcoming budget.

Office of Public Works Properties

111. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when maintenance work will be carried out on a property (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26961/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I have been advised by the Commissioners of Public Works that they have noted the requirement for maintenance works at the Garda Station at Lorrha. Remedial works to improve the visual condition of the property are scheduled to commence shortly.

Public Procurement Contracts

112. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the Office of Government Procurement will consider the introduction of a mandatory seasonal disconnect of gas facilities in schools in order to save money during the summer months when the schools are on summer break and do not require a gas connection; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27014/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Procurement is a key element of the Government's Reform agenda. The Office of Government Procurement (OGP) was established to drive the reform agenda, adopt a strategic approach to public procurement, leverage the State's spending power and deliver savings for the State.

Framework agreements are one of a number of ways in which the OGP engages with the market to achieve value for money in the delivery of much-needed public goods and services. Framework agreements are established through competitive procurement processes and are agreements with suppliers or service providers which set out terms and conditions under which specific contracts can be made during the term of the agreement.

There is ongoing engagement between the OGP and our public sector clients so that the necessary contracts and frameworks are put in place to meet their requirements.

The OGP has established a Multi-Supplier Framework Agreement for the supply of Natural Gas to Public Service Bodies in Ireland. This Framework Agreement was put in place following consultations with representatives from the Education, Central Government, Local Authority, Health and the Security Services Sectors.

The OGP is currently working on the next generation Framework Agreement for the supply of Natural Gas to Public Service Bodies in Ireland. In this regard, it has sought input from the Sectors. Any proposals, including cost saving initiatives, that are put forward and that are feasible will be taken into consideration.

While the OGP is facilitating the procurement process, it should be noted that the management of schools is a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Education and Skills.

Public Sector Staff Data

113. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of bilingual officers that are proficient in and willing to deliver a service to the public in Irish and English that have been recruited to the Civil Service through competitions organised by the Public Appointments Service, PAS, in the past 12 months in respect of grades (details supplied). [27033/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, The Public Appointments Service (PAS) is an independent statutory recruitment body for the civil service. PAS carry out general service competitions for the Civil Service and in many cases establish Irish language streams in those competitions.

Information relating to the number of assignments from PAS to Civil Service Departments and offices for functional bi-linguals is set out in the table.

PAS have informed me that there is current, limited availability on a number of panels, and that a bi-functional competition for Clerical Officers will be advertised in the next few weeks. PAS also intend to run a bi- functional competition at Executive Officer level later in 2018.

Grade	2017	2018	Totals
CO	20	2	22
EO	4	0	4
AO	4	0	4
HEO	1	0	1
AP	2	0	2
Totals	31	2	33

TLAC do not establish Irish panels but job advertisements for senior grades may have a requirement for Irish if required by a department or office but such information is not readily available.

Public Consultation Process

114. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of the commitment in A Programme for A Partnership Government on providing an accessible portal to provide the public information regarding consultations in relation to events occurring in their communities. [26884/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that the Public Consultations Portal, which was included in the Programme for a Partnership Government, will be launched shortly.

The Portal will provide a single mechanism by which people can access information on consultations at local, regional and national levels.

The portal has been developed by the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer in consultation with the Open Government Unit in my department. It will allow people who access it to search for consultations by policy area and organisation, such as a Government Department, Local Authority or Public Body. Users will be able to receive email notifications of new consultations by policy area or organisation and share consultations on social media or by email.

A lot of work has been put into making sure the user interface is simple and easy to use and

that the portal will be kept up to date with all live consultations across central and local government.

We hope that the Portal will help to promote meaningful citizen engagement in policy making.

Home Tuition Scheme Provision

115. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if home tuition will be facilitated for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26964/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy will be aware that the purpose of the Home Tuition Scheme is to provide a compensatory educational service for children who, for a number of reasons, are unable to access a school placement.

As always, the preferred approach is that, where possible, children with special educational needs are educated in school settings where they may have access to individualised education programmes, fully-qualified professional teachers, special needs assistants, the appropriate school curriculum with the option, where possible and appropriate, of full or partial integration and interaction with other pupils.

Accordingly, Home Tuition is provided as an interim measure only and should not be regarded as an optional alternative to a school placement.

The child referred to by the Deputy is currently in receipt of home tuition. My officials have advised that the child is enrolled in a school placement for the forthcoming school year.

Schools Building Projects Status

116. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of school extensions (details supplied) due in Newbridge, County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26979/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The building project for the school referred to by the Deputy includes an extension to the Junior and Senior schools, a new build General Purpose Hall and a Special Needs Unit. Refurbishment works will form part of the overall project.

The Junior School will be provided with a new two storey building providing nine classrooms and support spaces with floor area of 531sqm, new double height general purpose hall and support spaces with a floor area of 272 sqm and reconfiguration and refurbishment of seven classrooms and associated spaces in the existing school building.

The project is currently at Stage 2B of Architectural Planning. Planning Permission has been received and the Disability Access Certificate and Fire Safety Certificate have been granted.

The Stage 2B report has been received and the Department's comments have been provided to the Design Team for follow up. Providing no other issues arise, the Department expects to be in a position to authorise the project to proceed to pre-qualification of contractors shortly.

The Department has written to the school outlining the timeframe for progression of the proj-

ect to tender and construction stage and the steps involved.

Special Educational Needs

117. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application by a person (details supplied) for a device; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26985/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) is responsible for processing applications from schools for special educational needs supports. SENOs also make recommendations to my Department where assistive technology/specialised equipment is required. The NCSE operates within my Department's criteria in making recommendations for support, which is set out in my Department's Circular 0010/2013.

In order to qualify for equipment under the assistive technology scheme, a student must have been diagnosed with a physical or communicative disability and must also have a recommendation in a professional assessment that the equipment is essential in order to allow the student to access the curriculum. It must also be clear that the existing I.T. equipment in the school is insufficient to meet the child's needs.

No application for assistive technology to support the student referred to by the Deputy has been received by the NCSE or my Department to date.

It is open to the school of the student concerned to make an application for support to the NCSE. All schools have the names and contact details of their local SENO. Parents may also contact their local SENO directly to discuss their child's special educational needs, using the contact details available on www.ncse.ie.

Special Education Review

118. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a child (details supplied) is not exempt from the study of Gaelige for second level in view the child's severe language difficulties which also prevent them studying foreign languages. [26991/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Exemptions from the study of Irish are granted in accordance with the provisions of Departmental Circular 12/96 for primary schools and Circular M10/94 for post-primary schools. The criteria provides that exemptions may be granted by school authorities for certain categories of students with special educational needs as set out in these Circulars.

If a school is uncertain as to whether a pupil's circumstances fall within the criteria of the relevant circular or where exceptional and significant circumstances arise it is open to either the school or parent to seek advice from my Department as to the application of the criteria for an exemption to a particular case.

In respect of the case referred to by the Deputy the position is that the school have recently written to my Department seeking advice in relation to this application. Following full consideration of all documentation submitted my Department will issue its advice to the school and parents.

School Services Staff

119. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to address the contracts of primary school secretaries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26999/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): To answer the Deputy, the majority of primary and voluntary secondary schools in the Free Education Scheme receive capitation grant assistance to provide for secretarial, caretaking and cleaning services. Capitation related grants are issued to the majority of primary and post-primary schools to employ such staff. Within the capitation grant schemes, it is a matter for each individual school to decide how best to apply the grant funding to suit its particular needs.

Where a school uses the capitation grant funding to employ a secretary, such staff are employees of individual schools. My Department has no plans to develop an alternative scheme for schools to employ primary school secretaries separate to the current system of capitation grant assistance.

Notwithstanding that, in 2015 my Department agreed to engage with the union side in relation to the pay of school secretaries (and caretakers) who are employed using grant funding, and to enter an arbitration process. The Arbitrator recommended a cumulative pay increase of 10% between 2016 and 2019 for school secretaries (and caretakers) comprehended by the terms of the arbitration process and that a minimum hourly pay rate of €13 for such staff be phased in over the period 2016 to 2019. Grant funding used by schools to fund the salaries of ancillary staff is also being improved on a phased basis between 2016 and 2019 following the arbitration process. These increases are in order to enable schools implement the arbitration outcome for grant funded secretaries (and caretakers).

In December 2017, my Department published circular letter 0078/2017 for primary schools and circular letter 0079/2017 for voluntary secondary schools, setting out the application of the third phase increases of the Arbitrator's recommendations. The circulars are available at:

Circular 0078/2017: https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0078_2017.pdf

Circular 0079/2017: http://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0079_2017.pdf

The increases recommended by the Arbitrator are binding and must be applied by all schools who employ staff to whom the Arbitrator's recommendation applies.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

120. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a special needs assistant will be provided for a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27009/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible 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 De-

partment 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.

In considering applications for SNA supports for individual pupils, the NCSE 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.

My Department's policy is to ensure that every child who is assessed as needing SNA support will receive access to such support. In line with this policy, I announced last month that 800 additional SNAs 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.

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 support 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 child I have referred the question to the NCSE for their direct reply.

National Educational Psychological Service

121. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal will receive an appointment for an assessment from the National Educational Psychological Service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27010/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can inform the Deputy that my Department's National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) provides educational psychological support to all primary and post-primary schools involving direct access to a NEPS psychologist for responses to queries arising, access to support and development work to build school capacity to support students, direct support in the event of a critical incident and access to individual pupil casework input via a NEPS psychologist or through the Scheme for the Commissioning of Psychological Assessments. (SCPA).

In common with many other psychological services and best international practice, NEPS has adopted a consultative model of service. The focus is on empowering teachers to intervene effectively with pupils whose needs range from mild to severe and transient to enduring. Psychologists use a problem solving and solution oriented consultative approach to maximize positive outcomes for these pupils. NEPS encourages schools to use a continuum based assessment and intervention process whereby each school takes responsibility for initial assessment, educational planning and remedial intervention for pupils with learning, emotional or behavioural difficulties. Teachers may consult their NEPS psychologist should they need to at this stage in the process. Only in the event of a failure to make reasonable progress, in spite of the school's best efforts in consultation with NEPS, will the psychologist become involved with an individual child for intensive intervention or assessment.

This system allows psychologists to give early attention to urgent cases and also to help many more children indirectly than could be seen individually. It also ensures that children are not referred unnecessarily for psychological intervention.

Should the parents of the child, the subject of the Deputy's question, have specific concerns about his educational progress they should, in the first instance, speak to the Principal of the school concerned, with a view to raising these concerns with the local NEPS service.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

National Educational Psychological Service

122. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a school (details supplied) will avail of the National Educational Psychological Service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27011/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can inform the Deputy that my Department's National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) provides educational psychological support to all primary and post-primary schools. This involves direct support in the event of a critical incident, access to national and regional support and development work to build school capacity to support students, access to a NEPS psychologist for responses to queries arising, and access to individual pupil casework via a NEPS psychologist or through the Scheme for the Commissioning of Psychological Assessments. (SCPA).

By way of clarification NEPs psychologists are recruited via regional panels formed from national recruitment competitions administered by the Public Appointments service. The assignment of a NEPS psychologist to the school to which the Deputy alludes in his question, was the subject of a vacancy and the school was given access to the SCPA process in relation to its pupils casework needs. While every effort was made by PAS to fill the post from the existing panel in the region these ultimately proved unsuccessful and the panel has now been exhausted.

I can inform the Deputy however that a new national competition will be launched very shortly from which new regional recruitment panels will be formed with a view to filling vacancies in the coming academic year including the vacancy in the NEPS North-Western Region .

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Third Level Admissions Data

123. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of

places available through the CAO for persons who completed a post leaving certificate course to get into a nursing course in each university; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27027/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The CAO website outlines the quota of places reserved for QQI FET/FETAC applicants by third level institution on nursing courses in 2018. The information can be assessed at <http://www2.cao.ie/fetac/FETACNursingQuota.pdf>

Schools Building Projects Status

124. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of school projects that have experienced difficulty or delay due to issues with construction contractors on an annual basis in 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018; and the name of each project by county in tabular form. [27045/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I refer the Deputy to the following table, which gives a breakdown of the major school building projects that have experienced difficulty due to building contractors going into examinership or liquidation processes from 2016-2018. This did not apply to any projects in 2016. In 2017, there were issues with two projects and to date in 2018, seventeen projects have been affected.

County	School	Roll Number	Year
Cork	St Colman's College, Middleton	71050P	2018
Cork	Colaiste an Chraoibhin, Fermoy	70990M	2018
Kildare	Maynooth Post-Primary School	70700A	2018
Kildare	Maynooth Community College	76193Q	2018
Louth	Scoil Ui Mhuiri, Dunleer	71780G	2018
Meath	Ratoath College	76088T	2017
Carlow	Tyndall College	70420R	2018
Carlow	Carlow Institute of Further Education	76514K	2018
Meath	Eureka Secondary School, Kells	64410F	2018
Wicklow	Colaiste Raithin, Bray	70821M	2018
Wicklow	Ravenswell Primary School, Bray	07246U	2018
Wexford	Loreto Secondary School	63660A	2018
Dublin	Scoil Mhuire and St Brigid's Haddington Road	17279S	2017
Dublin	Gaelscoil Bhaile Munna	20015B	2018
Dublin	Gaelscoil Bharra, Cabra	20047O	2018
Laois	Portlaoise Amalgamation	20270R and 20480F	2018
Offaly	Tullamore College	72560C	2018
Wicklow	Arklow Community College	70740M	2018
Wexford	New Ross Jnr and Snr Schools	20481H and 20482J	2018

Education and Training Boards

125. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will report on the findings of the investigation into the Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board, ETB, and the withdrawal of ISME members from the ETB; the matters which were referred to An Garda Síochána; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27106/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In exercise of my powers under Section 40 of the ETB Act 2013, I appointed Richard Thorn, President Emeritus of Sligo Institute of Technology, to carry out an investigation into the performance by Kildare and Wicklow ETB of its functions particularly in relation to public procurement, usage and disposal of assets and propriety matters. I took this action following issues raised in an audit by the Comptroller & Auditor General and subsequent correspondence between my Department and the ETB.

Dr. Thorn has submitted his report to the Department but he is currently updating it to include some clarifications sought by the Department. The matters investigated are of serious concern and the Department has referred them to An Garda Síochána. The Department is also considering legal advice. Therefore comment on the specific issues raised would not be appropriate at this time.

The matters investigated are of serious concerns to me and in light of those concerns my officials arranged for the issues to be referred to An Garda Síochána. My Department is also considering legal advice in relation to the issues. In the circumstances therefore the Deputy will appreciate that I cannot comment on any of the matters raised.

In relation to the correspondence from ISME I plan to respond to them on the issues raised.

I take governance and accountability of bodies in the education sector very seriously and it was in that context that I commissioned the first statutory investigation under Section 40 of the ETB Act 2013. My Department is continuing to work with KWETB, the C & AG, An Garda Síochána and other bodies as appropriate on the issues raised, including in the broader context of improving accountability and governance in the sector.

Northern Ireland

126. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of his Department's interaction with the four member international oversight body established under the Fresh Start agreement to monitor paramilitaries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26959/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Fresh Start Agreement was concluded on 17 November 2015 following 10 weeks of talks co-chaired by the Irish and British Governments and involving the political parties of the Northern Ireland Executive. Among other issues, the Agreement addressed the implementation of aspects of the 2014 Stormont House Agreement along with the additional issue of tackling the continuing impact and legacy of paramilitarism in Northern Ireland.

To facilitate monitoring of the implementation of measures aimed at ending paramilitary activity in Northern Ireland, the Agreement provided for the establishment by the two Governments of the Independent Reporting Commission. An international agreement between Ireland and UK establishing the Independent Reporting Commission was signed in Dublin on 13 September 2016 and it was given effect to by legislation in both jurisdictions allowing for the appointment of the Commission.

The Commission's functions are to:

- report annually on progress towards ending continuing paramilitary activity connected with Northern Ireland (or on such further occasions as required);

20 June 2018

- report on the implementation of the relevant measures of the three administrations – critical here will be the NI Executive’s Strategy to tackle paramilitary activity and associated criminality; and

- consult the UK Government and relevant law enforcement agencies, the Irish Government and relevant law enforcement agencies and, in Northern Ireland, the Executive, PSNI, statutory agencies, local councils, communities and civic society organisations.

The Commission has been actively engaged in carrying out its functions since its appointment, engaging with a range of relevant stakeholders, North and South, including with my Department. I will be meeting with the Commission tomorrow to hear further on its progress with its work. I look forward to the Commission’s first report which it is intended will be provided later this year.

Data Protection

127. **Deputy Louise O’Reilly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 542 of 12 June 2018, if further information will be provided on the level of engagement to date that his Department has had with the European Commission to clarify issues relating to section 30 of the Data Protection Act 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26978/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The position is that my Department has consulted with the European Commission on issues relating to the compatibility of section 30 of the Data Protection Act 2018 with the General Data Protection Regulation. A reply is currently awaited.

Citizenship Status

128. **Deputy Fiona O’Loughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the definition of an Irish citizen. [27026/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Under the provisions of the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended, an Irish citizen is defined as a citizen of Ireland. Entitlement to Irish citizenship is governed by the above-mentioned Act. The Act provides that subject to Section 6A every person born in the island of Ireland is entitled to be an Irish citizen. The Act also provides that if either of a child’s parents was, at the time of that child’s birth, an Irish citizen, that child is an Irish citizen irrespective of the place of birth.

Section 6A of the Act provides that a child born in the island of Ireland on or after 1 January 2005 has an entitlement to Irish citizenship if, at the time of the birth of the child, one of his or her parents had, during the period of 4 years immediately preceding the person’s birth, been resident in the island of Ireland for a period of not less than 3 years or periods the aggregate of which is not less than 3 years. Periods of unlawful residence, periods of residence which were for the sole purpose of having an application for refugee status determined or periods of residence where permission was granted for the purposes of study are excluded under the Act from the determination of periods of reckonable residence.

Where a child born in the State did not at birth have an entitlement to Irish citizenship, the parent or guardian or person who is in loco parentis to the child may lodge an application for naturalisation on behalf of the child if and when the conditions for naturalisation are satisfied,

including a requirement to have 5 years residence in the State. Detailed information on citizenship and the naturalisation process, including the relevant application forms, is available on the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) website at www.inis.gov.ie.

Prison Service Staff

129. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the date the last person to be assigned to the statutory role of Governor, not operational Governor, of Portlaoise Prison, was so assigned; and the date upon which the person ceased to occupy the role. [27029/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by my officials in the Irish Prison Service that the post holders referred to in PQ 24350/18 held or currently hold statutory responsibility as the Governor of Portlaoise Prison.

Work Permits Eligibility

130. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his attention has been drawn to the decision on the case of a person (details supplied); if he will consider making an exemption to allow them to continue working in their job, particularly in view of the fact the increased demand for career guidance staff following the restoration of 500 of these jobs in September 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27036/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will appreciate that her question primarily concerns the issue of eligible and ineligible categories of employment for employment permit purposes, which is a policy matter for the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation. My Department has no function in the matter.

However, I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person's application for permission to remain in the State has been considered and that the person concerned has been notified of the decision.

The original application was received from the person concerned on 2 November 2017 and a decision letter issued on 17 January 2018.

On 22 March 2018 a review of the original application was requested as an exceptional measure. A decision letter in response to this exceptional request for a review of the original application was issued on 28 May 2018.

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

Garda Data

131. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí that have graduated in the fraud and e-crime investigation postgraduate certificate in UCD; the number undertaking the course at present; the cost to An Garda Síochána in 2017 and

to date in 2018 of running the qualification and sending gardaí to study the course; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27046/18]

132. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí that graduated in 2017 in the fraud and e-crime investigation postgraduate certificate in UCD; the number that have assumed roles in the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau and the Garda National Cyber Crime Bureau; the number that have been assigned to regular Garda posts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27047/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 131 and 132 together.

As you will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who has statutory responsibility for carrying on and managing and controlling generally the administration and business of An Garda Síochána including training and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter

The information requested by the Deputy cannot be provided in the time available. I have requested the information sought from the Garda Commissioner and I will write to the Deputy on receipt of same.

Immigration Policy

133. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to change the conditions applying to a stamp 0 visa for persons that wish to retire and live here, particularly from the United States of America, in order that the thresholds of income and savings would be reduced to a realistic level in view of the statement issued by him in autumn 2017 in relation to the matter. [27051/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): A review of the policy to grant an immigration permission to qualifying Non-EEA Retirees who wish to retire to Ireland has recently been completed, and a revised scheme for non-EEA retirees is currently undergoing interdepartmental consultations. I hope to launch the revised non-EEA retirees scheme in the coming months. The full details of the scheme will be made available at that time.

Workplace Relations Commission

134. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the case of a person (details supplied) dismissed from their employment will be examined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27058/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As Minister, neither I nor my Department have responsibility for the terms and conditions of employment of a person (including the person concerned) by a company or contractor providing services to the Department. All such employments are matters between the contractor and the employee. Terms and conditions must be in full accordance with the law and any issues arising on that front should be referred to the relevant authorities. Typically, employer/employee disputes are handled by the Workplace Relations Commission.

Human Rights Cases

135. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if further consideration will be given to a request by a person (details supplied) to remain here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27076/18]

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 23 April 2009.

The statutory criteria which must be considered in relation to a decision to make a deportation order under Section 3(6) of the Immigration Act 1999 include national security and public policy, the character and conduct of the person concerned and the common good. In determining whether to make a deportation order, in addition to the factors set out in Section 3(6) of the Immigration Act 1999, the Minister of the day must also consider all relevant constitutional and international human rights arising including those enshrined in the Refugee Convention, the UN Convention Against Torture and the European Charter of Human Rights. The question of not returning a person to a place where certain fundamental rights would be breached (or non refoulement as it is referred to) is fully considered in every case when deciding whether or not to make a deportation order. This involves consideration of whether returning the person would result in the life or freedom of that person being threatened on account of his or her race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, or whether the person would be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

I have met the family involved and am fully aware of the circumstances of the case. I have already made a statement in the Dáil last week that, when the court proceedings conclude, I will use my powers as Minister to consider this case fully, including from a humanitarian point of view.

Data Protection Commissioner

136. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if the Data Protection Commissioner is obliged to fully explain decisions his office takes on cases of alleged data protection breaches, specifically sections 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 13, 21, 22, 29 and, consequently, section 30 in circumstances in which he decides to reclassify a complaint or recategorise sections 2, 4 and 6 only; and if she will request the Commissioner to do so in a case (details supplied). [26971/18]

137. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the timeframe in which the Data Protection Commissioner will respond and act upon section 4 requests; the reason in a case (details supplied) the person initially raised the challenges in 2015 and made specific section 4 requests since April 2016 which is still ongoing; the circumstances in which an investigation under section 10 is necessary in relation to section 4 requests; and the reason section 10 was initiated to a section 4 request in the case. [26972/18]

138. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if a full explanation will be forthcoming from the Data Protection Commissioner as to the reason enforcement of the Revenue Commissioners' Data Code per section 13 of the Acts has been obstructed in a case (details supplied). [26973/18]

139. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation when the investigation of a case (details supplied) will commence; and the timeframe to complete an investigation whereby there are no standards set out in either the legislation or customer service standards regarding the length of time it will take to complete an investigation. [26974/18]

140. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the reason a person (details supplied) has recorded delays of 49 weeks between responses in relation to a case; and the reason no explanation has been provided by the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner. [26975/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 136 to 140, inclusive, together.

The Data Protection Commission was established following the enactment of the Data Protection Bill by the Minister for Justice and Equality on 25 May 2018. The newly established Data Protection Commission succeeded the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner on this date.

The Department of Justice and Equality has advised my Department that the questions tabled by the Deputy relate to operational matters in the Data Protection Commission, which is completely independent in the exercise of its powers and performance of its functions. In the circumstances, therefore, I cannot provide any further information in this matter.

IDA Ireland Data

141. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of new IDA client companies that have been set up by county in each of the years 2009 to 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27008/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Government is working hard to achieve the most even possible distribution of foreign direct investment (FDI) across the country. IDA Ireland is focused on that same goal, with the Agency targeting an increase of investment of 30% to 40% in every region as part of its 2015-2019 strategy.

The Agency's 2017 results demonstrate that significant progress is being made towards these objectives, with 45% of all new IDA client company jobs created last year being outside Dublin. There are now over 122,000 people employed across 649 firms in IDA client companies outside the capital. In total, there are currently 210,443 people employed across 1,384 IDA Ireland client companies with 279 new FDI companies establishing themselves in Ireland since 2009.

The following table outlines the number of IDA client companies in each county from 2009 to 2017. The figures for 2018 will not be available until my Department's Annual Employment Survey (AES) is carried out in November 2018.

Table A: Total number of IDA Client companies by County 2009-2017.

IDA County	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Carlow	9	7	7	7	7
Cavan	6	7	7	6	7
Clare	60	62	66	66	66
Cork	138	137	135	141	148
Donegal	14	12	12	13	13
Dublin	522	524	539	563	609
Galway	54	57	62	63	63

Questions - Written Answers

IDA County	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Kerry	15	16	13	14	13
Kildare	30	31	29	29	28
Kilkenny	4	4	3	5	5
Laois	4	4	2	2	3
Leitrim	6	6	5	5	5
Limerick	39	39	41	44	43
Longford	7	6	6	6	6
Louth	20	20	20	23	23
Mayo	17	17	17	18	18
Meath	17	17	16	15	15
Monaghan	6	6	6	6	6
Offaly	10	10	11	11	11
Roscommon	9	8	8	8	9
Sligo	21	21	21	21	23
Tipperary North Riding	4	3	3	3	3
Tipperary South Riding	11	11	9	8	8
Waterford	35	34	32	31	30
Westmeath	15	15	15	14	14
Wexford	13	13	14	14	14
Wicklow	19	20	18	18	18
Total	1,105	1,107	1,117	1,154	1,208

Table ctd.

IDA County	2014	2015	2016	2017
Carlow	7	7	7	7
Cavan	7	7	7	7
Clare	66	69	69	68
Cork	148	148	157	158
Donegal	13	12	12	12
Dublin	641	679	740	735
Galway	65	65	70	75
Kerry	13	13	14	14
Kildare	25	25	27	28
Kilkenny	5	5	5	6
Laois	2	2	2	2
Leitrim	5	5	5	5
Limerick	46	51	55	56
Longford	6	5	4	5
Louth	25	21	22	24
Mayo	18	18	18	16
Meath	16	16	18	17
Monaghan	6	5	5	5
Offaly	10	9	10	10
Roscommon	10	10	10	10
Sligo	22	24	23	23
Tipperary North Riding	3	3	4	4

IDA County	2014	2015	2016	2017
Tipperary South Riding	8	9	8	7
Waterford	32	35	37	37
Westmeath	14	15	13	17
Wexford	15	16	17	18
Wicklow	18	17	19	18
Total	1,246	1,291	1,378	1,384

Work Permits Eligibility

142. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to reinstate career guidance on the list of critical skills employment permits due to the shortage of guidance counsellors and due to the upcoming restoration of 500 guidance posts in September 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27035/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): At my request, my Department is currently conducting a review of economic migration policies underpinning the current employment permits system to ensure that our policies are fully supportive of Ireland's emerging labour market needs, be they skills or labour shortages in certain sectors. A full report on the review is due by end June. Following on from that Report, it is expected that a review of the Lists of Occupations for Employment Permits will be conducted in the second half of this year.

Where specific skills prove difficult to source within the State and wider EEA, an employment permit may be sought by an employer to hire a non-EEA national. The employment permits system is managed in part through the operation of the highly skilled and ineligible lists for the purpose of grant of employment permits. At present, 'Career Guidance Teachers' are listed on the Ineligible List of Occupations (ICEL) for employment permits.

Changes to access to the Irish labour market for specific occupations via the employment permits system are made on the basis of research undertaken by the Expert Group of Future Skills Needs and, coordinated by the National Skills Council, the annual National Skills Bulletin and the annual Vacancy Overview Report in tandem with a public consultation process. The recently published Vacancy Overview Report indicates that despite recent employment growth, vacancy notifications for this sector remain limited to a small number of roles such as lecturers, TEFL teachers and instructors/trainers.

In order to consider removing an occupation from the ICEL, organisations in the sector should engage with the relevant lead Department, the Department of Education and Skills with regard to this matter, in the preparation of a detailed business case setting out the necessary data to substantiate a case for removal from the ICEL.

Work Permits Eligibility

143. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to remove career advisers and vocational guidance specialists (details supplied) from the ineligible categories of employment for employment permits list in view of the severe shortage of guidance counsellors here and in further view of the fact that many persons that have studied for the profession here are only eligible to work here; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27049/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): At my request, my Department is currently conducting a review of economic migration policies underpinning the current employment permits system to ensure that our policies are fully supportive of Ireland's emerging labour market needs, be they skills or labour shortages in certain sectors. A full report on the review is due by end June. Following on from that Report, it is expected that a review of the Lists of Occupations for Employment Permits will be conducted in the second half of this year.

Where specific skills prove difficult to source within the State and wider EEA, an employment permit may be sought by an employer to hire a non-EEA national. The employment permits system is managed in part through the operation of the highly skilled and ineligible lists for the purpose of grant of employment permits. At present, 'Career Adviser/Guidance Counsellor' are listed on the Ineligible List of Occupations (ICEL) for employment permits.

Changes to access to the Irish labour market for specific occupations via the employment permits system are made on the basis of research undertaken by the Expert Group of Future Skills Needs and, coordinated by the National Skills Council, the annual National Skills Bulletin and the annual Vacancy Overview Report in tandem with a public consultation process. The recently published Vacancy Overview Report indicates that despite recent employment growth, vacancy notifications for this sector remain limited to a small number of roles such as lecturers, TEFL teachers and instructors/trainers.

In order to consider removing an occupation from the ICEL, organisations in the sector should engage with the relevant lead Department, the Department of Education and Skills with regard to this matter, in the preparation of a detailed business case setting out the necessary data to substantiate a case for removal from the ICEL.

Citizens Assembly

144. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health the status of the outstanding recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly. [26883/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Deputy will be aware, on Friday the 25 May 2018, the people of Ireland voted overwhelmingly in favour of deleting Article 40.3.3 in its entirety, and substituting an article in the Constitution, the object and effect of which is to articulate clearly the principle that laws may be enacted by the Oireachtas to provide for the regulation of termination of pregnancy.

On the 29 May, Government approved the drafting of legislation to regulate termination of pregnancy. This legislation will be based on the General Scheme of a Bill to Regulate Termination of Pregnancy approved by Government on the 27 of March and published on my Department's website.

The provisions of the General Scheme are based on the recommendations of the Joint Committee on the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution, which was established to consider the report and recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly.

HSE Reports

145. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to a report by the HSE (details supplied); and if he will request the HSE to publish the

report [26940/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I am advised that the report of the Working Group on a Model of Care for Lymphoedema and Lipoedema Treatment in Ireland established by the HSE is being finalised and I expect that it will be published in the coming months.

Hospital Appointments Status

146. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Clare will have a procedure carried out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26941/18]

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, since 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.

Legislative Process

147. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health if he expects the abortion Bill following the May referendum on the eighth amendment to go through Second Stage before the summer recess. [26880/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Thirty-Sixth Amendment of the Constitution Bill 2018 seeks to delete Article 40.3.3 of the Constitution and substitute it with wording confirming that the Oireachtas may make laws for the regulation of the termination of pregnancy. The Bill passed all stages in the Houses of the Oireachtas on 28 March 2018.

The Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government made a Polling Day Order for a referendum to be held on 25 May 2018 and the referendum was passed. A certificate with the provisional result of the referendum was published in *Iris Oifigiúil* on Tuesday, 29 May 2018.

Once the provisional result of the referendum was published, there followed a seven day period during which applications to make petitions could be received. Three applications for permission to challenge the result of the referendum have been made to the High Court under section 42 of the Referendum Act 1994. The High Court has fixed 26 June to hear the three applications. It is possible that the hearings may run over a number of days, after which a decision will be made by the Court.

The bringing of the legal challenge by way of referendum petition has meant that, on a number of occasions, the introduction of proposed legislation into the Oireachtas has been de-

layed pending the determination of a referendum petition. For example, following the marriage referendum, the introduction of the Marriage Bill into the Oireachtas was delayed until the 15 September 2015 when the applications for leave to bring the referendum petitions to challenge the result of the marriage referendum were finally determined on appeal and leave to bring a petition was refused on 30 July 2015.

It remains my absolute determination to have the legislation to regulate termination of pregnancy finalised by mid-July. However, it is not possible to initiate this legislation in the Oireachtas until the Court proceedings have concluded, the result of the referendum has been confirmed, and the President has signed the Thirty-sixth Amendment of the Constitution Bill 2018.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Reports

148. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Health if a report on child and adolescent mental health services operated by HSE South East Community Healthcare services, including current staffing levels and vacancies at all grades and urgent recruitment efforts, will be provided. [26952/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): On Tuesday 19 June 2018 I met with national and local HSE representatives (from Waterford and Wexford) to discuss the current situation with regards to CAMHS services in the South East region. They have provided me with a report with regard to the issues arising in that area and the steps being taken to ensure ongoing delivery of services in the South East. I have arranged a further meeting with these officials to take place in early July to report on progress.

I will also be responding to statements in the Seanad this evening on this matter to provide an outline of the situation to the members.

Mental Health Services Staff

149. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Health the contingency plans in place should consultant psychiatric posts in the south east not be taken up within a reasonable time-frame in view of the difficulty in filling such vacancies nationally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26953/18]

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.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Provision

150. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Health the waiting lists and waiting times for child and adolescent psychiatric services within the HSE's South East Community Healthcare services; the way in which these compare with national averages and best practice indicators; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26954/18]

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.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Funding

151. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Health the capital and operational investment in child and adolescent psychiatric services in the south east over the past five years; the level of expenditure in this area indicated in future funding programmes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26955/18]

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

Orthodontic Services Provision

152. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the status of the case of a person (details supplied); and when an appointment for orthodontic treatment will be expedited. [26956/18]

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

Medical Records

153. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if medical records will be released to a person (details supplied) as a matter of urgency. [26957/18]

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

Home Help Service Provision

154. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if home help hours will be allocated to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26965/18]

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

155. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if home help hours will be allocated to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26966/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): As the Deputy's 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.

Ambulance Service Data

156. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health if a schedule of each emergency transfer request to the National Ambulance Service from St. Luke's Hospital, Kilkenny to St. James's Hospital will be provided detailing the time of ambulance service request raised at St. Luke's; the time of clinical handover to the ambulance team in St. Luke's; the time of clinical handover at St. James's for each request made in each of the years since 2013 to 2017 and to date in 2018, distinguishing between echo and delta responses in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26967/18]

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

Ambulance Service Data

157. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health if a schedule of each emergency transfer request to the National Ambulance Service from Wexford General Hospital to St. James's Hospital will be provided detailing the time of ambulance service request raised at Wexford General; the time of clinical handover to the ambulance team in Wexford General; the time of clinical handover at St. James's for each request made in each of the years 2013 to 2017 and to date in 2018, distinguishing between echo and delta responses in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26968/18]

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

Ambulance Service Data

158. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health if a schedule of each emergency transfer request to the National Ambulance Service from University Hospital Waterford, UHW, to Cork University Hospital, CUH, will be provided detailing the time of ambulance service request raised at UHW; the time of clinical handover to ambulance team in UHW; the time of clinical handover at CUH for each request made in each of the years 2013 to 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26969/18]

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

Ambulance Service

159. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health if he is satisfied with the performance of the National Ambulance Service on a county basis and NUTS3 regional basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26970/18]

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

National Stroke Programme Implementation

160. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Ques-

tion No. 166 of 30 May 2018, the way in which it is envisaged that community rehabilitation will be delivered to stroke survivors in the same way as other persons with neurological conditions in view of the fact that early supported discharge replaces hospital based care (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26976/18]

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 a service issue, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Assisted Animal Reproduction

161. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if there has been cross-departmental collaboration between his Department and the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection with respect to proposed amendments or policy changes to the registration of births and birth certificates and the introduction of surrogacy services; if he will address concerns (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26982/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Deputy will be aware, the Government approved the drafting of a Bill on assisted human reproduction (AHR) and associated areas of research in October last year. In the context of developing the General Scheme of the AHR Bill, officials in my Department engaged with colleagues from a number of other Departments, including the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, to ensure that the proposed legislation is developed in a coherent way within the existing legislative framework.

The surrogacy provisions in the General Scheme set out a court-based mechanism through which the parentage of a child born through surrogacy may be transferred from the surrogate (and her husband, if applicable) to the intending parent(s). If a Parental Order is granted by the court, the intending parents would be declared to be the legal parents of the child and they would subsequently be issued with a "surrogacy certificate" that would replace the original birth certificate. This is a similar procedure to the mechanism which deals with the civil registration of children who are adopted, whereby an adoption certificate replaces the original birth certificate.

Home Help Service Provision

162. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if extra home help hours will be provided in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26986/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): As the Deputy's 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.

Home Help Service Expenditure

163. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health the financial allocation in 2018 for home support, home help and home care packages in counties Leitrim, Sligo and Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26992/18]

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 Expenditure

164. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health the initial financial allocation in 2017 for home support, home help and home care packages in counties Leitrim, Sligo and Donegal; the expenditure incurred to year end in the programmes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26993/18]

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.

Psychological Services

165. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health when an appointment will be made for a person (details supplied) for primary care psychology services for ongoing support; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26994/18]

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

Psychological Services

166. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health the funding and positions provided for regarding primary care psychology services in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26995/18]

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

Hospital Staff Recruitment

167. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health when an appointment will be made to fill the vacant position in the pain management unit in the South Infirmity Victoria University Hospital, Cork; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that this position has been vacant for over three years since the previous person retired and the effect this vacancy is having on public waiting lists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26996/18]

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.

Hospital Procedures

168. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when a required kidney transplant will take place at the National Kidney Transplant Centre at Beaumont Hospital in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26997/18]

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.

Hospital Appointments Status

169. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27003/18]

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, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

Hospital Appointments Status

170. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be seen in Waterford University Hospital in view of the fact that they are over two years on a waiting list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27004/18]

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, since 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 sched-

uled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

Medicinal Products

171. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health the details of ephedrine and its use here; the resources available through the aegis of his Department to raise awareness of the effects of drugs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27007/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): Ephedrine is currently controlled in Ireland as a drug precursor under EU drug precursors legislation and as a prescription medicine under the medicines legislation.

Drug precursors are chemicals that are primarily used for the legitimate (legal) production of a wide range of products, such as medicines, perfumes, plastics, cosmetics etc. However, they can also be misused for the illicit (illegal) production of drugs such as methamphetamines, heroin or cocaine.

Ephedrine is a substance that, whilst it has legitimate uses, is also known to be used in the illegal manufacture of narcotic or psychotropic substances. As a consequence, there are control systems in place that require an operator to be licenced to possess and import it.

The Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) is responsible for ensuring that operators within Ireland who manufacture, supply, possess and/or use precursor chemicals operate in compliance with European legislation for certain activities. The Health Products Regulatory Authority is responsible for;

- licensing of operators
- registration of operators
- import/export authorisations
- annual reporting to the International Narcotics Control Board
- inspection of operators within Ireland

Ephedrine may also be present in an authorised medicine, in which case it is supplied to a patient through a pharmacy or in a hospital. Every authorised medicine includes a Package Leaflet which provides detailed information on safe use of the medicine for patients, carers and other members of the public.

The HSE maintains a detailed online resource regarding drug misuse and the effects that drugs can have on human health. The HSE also provides funding to drugs.ie, Ireland's national drug information and support website which provides a comprehensive range of information and supports related to substance use.

The HPRA is responsible for monitoring the safety and side effects of authorised medicines. The Authority regularly runs campaigns and workshops to ensure that the public are made aware of any safety issues concerning particular medicines.

It should be noted that the Department of Health works closely with other Government De-

partments and agencies to address the wider effects of drug misuse.

HSE Staff Remuneration

172. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Health when a gratuity payment due to certain home help workers will be made in lieu of pension payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27012/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Deputy is referring to Home Help workers who are employed by voluntary providers of home help services which are funded under section 39 of the Health Act 2004.

I advised the Deputy previously that as these home help workers are not employed by the HSE, the HSE and the Department have no role in determining the salaries or other terms and conditions applying to these staff including any pension arrangements.

In addition, the Deputy is aware that a joint working group was established, as agreed as part of the 2015 Lansdowne Road talks, to consider a number of issues in relation to section 39 organisations. Unfortunately it was not possible to reach an agreement between the parties on the issue of gratuity payments.

Services for People with Disabilities

173. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the progress being made in relation to the drafting of primary legislation for a new transport support scheme to assist those with a disability to meet their mobility costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27015/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Deputy will be familiar with the background to the closure of both the Mobility Allowance and Motorised Transport Grant schemes in February 2013. Since the closure of the Mobility Allowance, the Government has directed that the Health Service Executive should continue to pay an equivalent monthly payment of up to €208.50 per month to the 4,046 people in receipt of the Mobility Allowance, on an interim basis, pending the establishment of a new Transport Support Scheme.

The Government decided that the detailed preparatory work required for a new Transport Support Scheme and associated statutory provisions should be progressed by the Minister for Health. The Programme for a Partnership Government acknowledges the ongoing drafting of primary legislation for a new Transport Support Scheme to assist those with a disability to meet their mobility costs. The Health (Transport Support) Bill is on the list of priority legislation for publication in the Spring/Summer session 2018. I can confirm that work on the policy proposals for the new Scheme is at an advanced stage. The proposals seek to ensure that:

- There is a firm statutory basis to the Scheme's operation;
- There is transparency and equity in the eligibility criteria attaching to the Scheme;
- Resources are targeted at those with greatest needs; and
- The Scheme is capable of being costed and is affordable on its introduction and on an ongoing basis.

My colleague, the Minister for Health and I recently brought a Memorandum to Government for proposals for a new Transport Support Payment Scheme. Following consideration of the matter, it was decided to withdraw the Memorandum from the Cabinet Agenda on 8 May last. I intend to revert to Government with revised proposals to reflect the discussion at Cabinet, in due course.

With regard to the Motorised Transport Grant, this scheme operated as a means-tested grant to assist persons with severe disabilities with the purchase or adaptation of a car, where that car was essential to retain employment. The maximum Motorised Transport Grant, which was payable once in any three year period, was €5,020. Following the closure of the scheme in February 2013, no further Motorised Transport Grants have been payable.

It is important to note that the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers scheme operated by the Revenue Commissioners, remains in place. This scheme provides VRT and VAT relief, an exemption from road tax and a fuel grant to drivers and passengers with a disability, who qualify under the relevant criteria set out in governing regulations made by the Minister for Finance. Specifically adapted vehicles driven by persons with a disability are also exempt from payment of tolls on national roads and toll bridges. Transport Infrastructure Ireland has responsibility for this particular scheme.

There are improvements in access to a range of transport support schemes available to persons with disabilities in the State and on-going work is being carried out by Government Departments, agencies and transport providers to further improve access to public transport services. Under the National Disability Inclusion Strategy, the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport has responsibility for the continued development of accessibility and availability of public transport for people with a disability.

Speech and Language Therapy Provision

174. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Health when a child (details supplied) will be called for speech and language therapy. [27017/18]

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

Speech and Language Therapy Waiting Lists

175. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Health the waiting times for a child to access speech and language therapy in County Meath. [27018/18]

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

Home Care Packages Provision

176. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the status of an application by a person (details supplied) for a homecare package. [27024/18]

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

177. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Health when extra home help hours will be facilitated for persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27059/18]

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

Medicinal Products Availability

178. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) will be provided with Versatis patches. [27103/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Medicines play a vital role in improving the health of Irish patients. Securing access to existing and new and innovative medicines is a key health service objective. However, the challenge is to do this in a safe and sustainable manner. Treatment must be appropriate and proportionate and clinical decision-making, such as prescribing, should be based on both patient needs and sound medical evidence.

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

Clinical concern arose when, from 2012 on, usage increased significantly, to the point where more plasters were being used in Ireland than in the entire UK National Health Service. In such situations, it is important and appropriate for clinicians to review usage and, in 2016, the HSE Medicines Management Programme (MMP) reviewed the use of the plasters. The review estimated that only 5-10% of prescribing was for the licensed indication.

From September 2017, following the clinical review, the HSE introduced a new reimbursement approval system for the patches, to support appropriate use and patient care. Under these arrangements, the patient's GP or consultant applies to the MMP for reimbursement approval on behalf of the patient. If an application is refused, the clinician may submit an appeal, making a clear clinical case for the patient, to the MMP. Information for patients and practitioners is on the HSE MMP website at: hse.ie/yourmedicines.

The decision to introduce a new reimbursement approval process is a matter for the HSE and you will appreciate that, as Minister for Health, I cannot intervene in individual cases. However, I fully support the objectives of the HSE Medicines Management Programme.

Medicinal Products Availability

179. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if he will engage with an organisation (details supplied) and the pharmaceutical industry to ensure new medicines are available to

persons with multiple sclerosis. [27104/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has statutory responsibility for medicine pricing and reimbursement decisions, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013. As Minister for Health, I do not have any statutory power or function in relation to the reimbursement of medicines. The Act specifies the criteria for decisions on the reimbursement of medicines.

In line with the 2013 Act, if a company would like a medicine to be reimbursed by the HSE pursuant to the Community Drugs scheme, the company must first submit an application to the HSE to have the new medicine added to the Reimbursement List.

As outlined in the IPHA agreement, and in line with the 2013 Act, the HSE will decide, within 180 days of receiving the application (or a longer period if further information is sought from the company), to either add the medicine to the reimbursement list or agree to reimburse it as a hospital medicine, or refuse to reimburse the medicine.

HSE decisions on which medicines are reimbursed by the taxpayer are made on objective, scientific and economic grounds, on the advice of the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE).

The NCPE conducts health technology assessments (HTAs) for the HSE, and makes recommendations on reimbursement to assist HSE decisions. The NCPE uses a decision framework to systematically assess whether a drug is cost-effective as a health intervention.

The HSE strives to reach a decision in as timely a manner as possible. However, because of the significant monies involved, it must ensure that the best price is achieved, as these commitments are often multi-million euro investments on an on-going basis. This can lead to a protracted deliberation process.

I am keen to engage with Industry and to explore ways in which new medicines might be more easily introduced in Ireland. However, any innovative approaches that may be tabled must be compatible with the statutory provisions which are in place and must also recognise the fundamental pricing/funding issues in the context of finite Exchequer resources.

I have indicated willingness to meet with MS Ireland and my office is in contact with the organisation to arrange a mutually convenient date.

Home Help Service Provision

180. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health if home help hours will be provided for a person (details supplied) [27105/18]

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.

Commencement of Legislation

181. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health when the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 will be commenced to allow both parents in a same sex marriage the same rights with regard to their children; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27109/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): A number of technical drafting issues have come to light in relation to Parts 2 & 3 of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015. Consideration of a resolution to these issues and the likely need for primary legislation are close to conclusion and I expect to be in a position to progress shortly.

Medicinal Products Availability

182. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) will be provided with Versatis patches. [27121/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Medicines play a vital role in improving the health of Irish patients. Securing access to existing and new and innovative medicines is a key health service objective. However, the challenge is to do this in a safe and sustainable manner. Treatment must be appropriate and proportionate and clinical decision-making, such as prescribing, should be based on both patient needs and sound medical evidence.

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

Clinical concern arose when, from 2012 on, usage increased significantly, to the point where more plasters were being used in Ireland than in the entire UK National Health Service. In such situations, it is important and appropriate for clinicians to review usage and, in 2016, the HSE Medicines Management Programme (MMP) reviewed the use of the plasters. The review estimated that only 5-10% of prescribing was for the licensed indication.

From September 2017, following the clinical review, the HSE introduced a new reimbursement approval system for the patches, to support appropriate use and patient care. Under these arrangements, the patient's GP or consultant applies to the MMP for reimbursement approval on behalf of the patient. If an application is refused, the clinician may submit an appeal, making a clear clinical case for the patient, to the MMP. Information for patients and practitioners is on the HSE MMP website at: hse.ie/yourmedicines.

The decision to introduce a new reimbursement approval process is a matter for the HSE and you will appreciate that, as Minister for Health, I cannot intervene in individual cases. However, I fully support the objectives of the HSE Medicines Management Programme.

Basic Payment Scheme Applications

183. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the case of a person (details supplied) who has had parcels deleted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26962/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In relation to the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) application of the person named, a dual claim arose in respect of the land in question after the processing of his 2017 BPS payment.

My Department contacted the person named in writing concerning this dual claim. A reply to this correspondence has now been received from the person named, and the parcels concerned have again been claimed by the person named under the 2018 BPS. The reply received and all other relevant documentation are currently being examined with a view to resolving the dual claim identified.

Inland Fisheries

184. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his Department is preparing a report regarding the escape of some 20,000 farmed salmon from a site (details supplied) in Mulroy Bay, County Donegal in July 2017 as requested by Inland Fisheries Ireland; when the report will be finalised; when the report was first requested; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26987/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): As the Deputy is aware, my Department's records indicate that in July 2017 a salmon farm operator notified my Department, the Marine Institute and Inland Fisheries Ireland of a fish escape incident at a salmon farm located at Glinsk, Mulroy Bay, Co. Donegal. My Department's records further indicate that all relevant stakeholders, including Inland Fisheries Ireland, were informed in accordance with the applicable aquaculture licence conditions.

On 4 April 2018 my Department received a request from the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment seeking certain specific information in relation to the incident. On 6 April 2018 my Department forwarded the specific information requested to the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment.

As all appropriate action has been taken by my Department and by the operator no further action is considered necessary at this time.

Aquaculture Regulation

185. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 47 of 30 May 2018, if the record will be corrected to accept farmed stock was taken to Inland Fisheries Ireland in 2017 as per the response of the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 1035 to 1038, inclusive, of 12 June 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26988/18]

186. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason neither his Department nor the Marine Institute have sought further information from Inland Fisheries Ireland with regard to the findings of the Report on the Occurrence of Farmed Atlantic Salmon in Rivers in the Western River Basin District in August/September 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26989/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 185 and 186 together.

My Department is aware of the Report on the Occurrence of Farmed Atlantic Salmon in Rivers in the Western River Basin District August/September 2017 and Press Release issued by Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) on Friday 16 February 2018.

As the Deputy has been advised, during 2017 my Department also noted media reports of salmon being found in rivers on the western seaboard which may have been from farmed stock. My Department advised IFI that where anglers or officers of IFI suspected that they had collected salmon from farmed stock that the fish should be sent to the Marine Institute for analysis, with a view to determining whether they were, in fact, from farmed stock.

The Marine Institute has confirmed that it received no stock for examination from anglers or from IFI. In addition the Marine Institute did not receive any request from IFI to examine salmon that appeared to be from farmed stock.

Departmental Legal Cases

187. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the progress to date in relation to a case (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27020/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): As previously outlined to the Deputy in my response to Parliamentary Question No. 880 in November 2017 and No. 1147 in January 2018, the case has been prioritised by my Department. This is a complex case involving a number of interested parties and a number of legal issues which are being progressed with the Chief State Solicitor's Office who have been in correspondence with the solicitors for the persons referred to by the Deputy. In addition my Department has had discussions with Donegal County Council on issues surrounding access to the property.

Horse Racing Industry

188. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 187 of 25 April 2018, when a response from Horse Racing Ireland is likely to be forthcoming. [27032/18]

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

Horse Racing Ireland inform me that they will furnish a direct reply to the Deputy in relation to the information requested in the coming days.

Coillte Teoranta Activities

189. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if Coillte can be compensated to plant small areas of forestry on its lands by farmers and landowners that require their lands after felling trees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27050/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The replanting obligation, which is a condition of a felling licence, is the responsibility of the forest owner and any proposed alternative site must form part of the felling licence application. The proposed alternative site must also receive approval for afforestation before any felling licence issues. Furthermore, in line with my Department's Felling and Reforestation Policy, conversion of forest land to agriculture is only considered in limited instances, having regard to the scale and character of the area proposed for deforestation. There are no plans to change this policy.

Coillte was established as a private commercial company under the Forestry Act, 1988 and day-to-day operational matters, such as land transactions with third parties, are the responsibility of the company.

Proposed Legislation

190. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if amendments will be accepted as submitted by an organisation (details supplied) as part of the pre-legislative scrutiny of the greyhound industry Bill; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[27067/18]

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. A number of the suggestions in the Dogs Trust submission have been included in the current draft General Scheme.

In relation to exports 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.

Citizens Assembly

191. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the outstanding recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly. [26883/18]

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

I welcomed the submission to the Oireachtas, on 18 April, of the final report of the Citizens' Assembly on how the State can make Ireland a leader in tackling climate change.

The final report includes a total of 17 recommendations, which address a range of Government policies and activities across a number of sectors and Ministerial functions. The report

reflects the deliberations of the Citizens Assembly over two weekends last Autumn informed, in turn, by a public consultation and by the contribution of a range of expert presentations to the Assembly.

As I have previously indicated, I was pleased to note that many of the recommendations adopted by the members of the Assembly, as reported on during the conclusion of this module of the Assembly's work, are already being addressed in the National Mitigation Plan and in the implementation of the Energy White Paper, but I have also acknowledged that other recommendations will need further consideration by Government.

It will now be a matter for the Oireachtas, in the first instance, to consider how it will take forward consideration of the Assembly's report. The Government will study the Assembly's report and recommendations and will provide its response in the context of the agreed mechanism in the Oireachtas for further consideration of the report.

Waste Disposal Charges

192. **Deputy Noel Greally** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the provision of an annual support towards the cost of pay by weight bin changes for homes which have a family member using incontinence pads; when details of this scheme will be announced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26945/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): An annual support of €75 per person is being made available for persons with lifelong or long-term medical incontinence. This will help people meet the average annual cost for the disposal of medical incontinence products. My Department is in discussion with the Department of Health, the Health Service Executive, and the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner regarding the administrative details and arrangements of the support, as well as engaging with the relevant stakeholders. I can assure the Deputy that I am committed to finalising the details for this support as soon as possible. In line with the commitments set out in *A Resource Opportunity - Waste Management Policy in Ireland*, published in 2012, and in the interest of encouraging further waste prevention and greater recycling, flat-rate fees for kerbside household waste collection are being phased out over the period autumn 2017 to autumn 2018, as customers contracts come up for renewal. The necessary regulatory steps have been put in place to give effect to this measure.

It is worth noting that this measure is not 'new' for about half of kerbside household waste customers, who are already on an incentivised usage pricing plan, i.e., a plan which contains a per lift or a weight related fee.

As announced in mid-2017, mandatory per kilogramme 'pay by weight' charging is not being introduced. Allowing for a range of charging options, which encourage householders to reduce and separate their waste, provides flexibility to waste collectors to develop various service-price offerings that suit different household circumstances.

The Price Monitoring Group has considered eight months of data to date. While fluctuations in prices and service offerings have been observed, the overall trend is relative price stability. 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'.

Taxi Regulations

193. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to allow taxi driver applicants to undergo the Garda vetting process at application stage rather than after the small public service vehicle, SPSV, licence has issued; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26960/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I do not have any plans in this respect as the regulation of the small public service vehicle (SPSV) sector is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the provisions of the Taxi Regulation Act 2013. Also, under this Act, An Garda Síochána (AGS) is responsible for the granting of SPSV driver licences, which includes the administration of the associated Garda vetting process.

While decisions regarding the detail as to how these procedures are administered by the NTA and An Garda Síochána respectively are clearly not for me or for my Department, I am aware that my Department has had discussions with taxi industry representatives in relation to a number of matters, including specifically the stage in the overall licensing process at which the Garda vetting process commences for SPSV applicants. Following that engagement, my Department has given a commitment to discuss this issue as raised by industry representatives with the NTA within the context of the Department's regular liaison with the NTA regarding taxi matters generally.

Public Consultation Process

194. **Deputy Kate O'Connell** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the cost of the public consultation process for MetroLink. [27039/18]

195. **Deputy Kate O'Connell** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the methods used to advertise the public consultation process to those in areas affected by MetroLink. [27040/18]

196. **Deputy Kate O'Connell** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if notices of the public consultation and proposed route were posted directly to residents in the areas most affected by MetroLink. [27041/18]

197. **Deputy Kate O'Connell** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if notification was sent to those living along the route of the impact they will face during the construction phase of MetroLink. [27042/18]

198. **Deputy Kate O'Connell** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if each person that is likely to be affected by a CPO in the building of MetroLink has been directly contacted. [27043/18]

199. **Deputy Kate O'Connell** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the relevant experts which were consulted and ultimately used in the drafting of the current MetroLink proposal; and the way in which and when their input was sought. [27044/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 194 to 199, inclusive, together.

As the Deputy is aware the National Transport Authority (NTA) has responsibility for the development and implementation of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA), including light rail. Recently the NTA and Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII)

20 June 2018

launched a public consultation on the details in relation to the “Emerging Preferred Route” for the MetroLink Project, which extends between Swords and Sandyford.

The Emerging Preferred Route is the proposal which has been identified as the likely optimal scheme from a technical design perspective, without the benefit of public consultation and input. It is not a finalised and selected scheme – the final layout will only be determined after consideration and evaluation of the issues raised during the consultation process.

Following receipt of all of the submissions, the issues and concerns identified will be carefully considered by TII and the NTA in determining the final scheme proposal and a report will be prepared on the consultation process. It is envisaged that the public consultation report will be published later this year.

I understand the concerns raised by affected stakeholders including residents, local amenities and schools. I believe there are many benefits the Metro project can bring. The NTA and TII, through the consultative process they have underway, are working collaboratively to address concerns identified and to develop mitigating proposals. Their aim is to find a way of delivering the MetroLink project, while maintaining good routes that interchange with other public transport and doing it in such a way that respects the social and community life of our city.

Noting their responsibility with regards to this matter, I have referred your queries to TII and NTA for their consideration and direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Road Network

200. **Deputy Patrick O’Donovan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the N24 through Oola, County Limerick will be resurfaced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27066/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and operation of individual roads is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

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

Departmental Correspondence

201. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if matters raised by a person (details supplied) in correspondence will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27077/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Deputy is referring to correspondence dated 14 June, 2018 from the St. Margaret’s Concerned Residents Group, which sets out the Group’s objections to Fingal Country Council being nominated as the Competent Authority for the purpose of EU Regulation 598/2014.

I will be responding to the Group directly in the coming days.

After-School Support Service Provision

202. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if a community organisation can provide after school childcare to preschool children as part of its provision of after school childcare to primary school children under the CCSP; if so, if it needs to be registered as a preschool with Tusla; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [26948/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla, through the Early Years Inspectorate (EYI), is the independent statutory Regulator of early year's services in Ireland and has a responsibility for inspecting pre-schools, playgroups, nurseries, crèches, day-care and similar services which cater for children aged up to six years. The Tusla EYI role is to promote the quality, safety and appropriate care of children by robust inspection of the sector. In accordance with the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) (Amendment) Regulations 2016 published in December 2016, any new service wishing to become established as an Early Years Service must first be placed on the Tusla Early Years Statutory Register.

At this time, there are no regulations under this act for school aged children's services. However, if the service in question wishes to provide childcare places to pre-school aged children they are required to be registered with Tusla as all pre-school aged services are subject to Tusla inspection in line with the above regulations.

Also, as the service in question is seeking to provide childcare places under the Community Childcare Subvention Plus Scheme (CCSP), there is a requirement for the service to be registered with Tusla as stated in The Rules for DCYA Funding Programmes 2017, clause 3.2.13:

'CCS Plus providers must be registered with Tusla for the places being provided'.

A service can become registered by making an application to Tusla Early Years Inspectorate using the Registration Application Form (RAF), which can be obtained from Tusla Early Years Inspectorate's Registrations Office. The service can contact their local Community Childcare Committee for support with the registration process.

Family Resource Centres

203. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to the inequity of funding for family resource centres and that the Ballymun Child and Family Resource Centre receives less funding than the 11 new centres recently brought into the programme; if this anomaly in funding will be corrected; the reason this disparity in funding exists; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [26998/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, administers the Family Resource Centre Programme.

Acting as a focal point within their communities, Family Resource Centres provide a holistic service of child, family and community support and advocacy to all children and families in their communities.

I have been advised by Tusla that the Ballymun Family Resource Centre has been allocated funding of €120,542 in 2018, which is an increase of €10,000 over 2017.

Tusla has advised that funding for individual Family Resource Centres can differ, depending on a range of factors, including:

- the size and population of the catchment area,
- the degree of economic disadvantage in the area, and
- the existing distribution of services in the area.

At the end of 2017, there were 109 Family Resource Centres in receipt of funding from Tusla. Tusla was provided with additional funding of some €3m in 2018 for the Family Resource Centre Programme. This investment has enabled Tusla to expand the Programme with the inclusion of 11 additional centres, bringing the total number of Family Resource Centres to 120. Additional funding of up to €10,000 was also allocated to existing Family Resource Centres this year.

Decisions with regard to funding levels in 2019 will be taken in the context of the Estimates process. It is not possible therefore at this stage to advise on what level of funding will be available to the Family Resource Centre Programme next year.

I strongly value the work of Family Resource Centres in communities throughout Ireland, and I will be making the case for a continued investment in the centres in 2019 and beyond. I will continue to support the centres in the valuable work they do, working with vulnerable children and families, particularly in areas of disadvantage.

Family Resource Centres

204. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the reason for the disparity between the 11 new family resource centres recently established and some of the existing resource centres (details supplied) in which the level of disadvantage and need is extremely high; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27108/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, administers the Family Resource Centre Programme.

Acting as a focal point within their communities, Family Resource Centres provide a holistic service of child, family and community support and advocacy to all children and families in their communities.

Tusla has advised that funding for individual Family Resource Centres can differ, depending on a range of factors, including:

- the size and population of the catchment area,
- the degree of economic disadvantage in the area, and
- the existing distribution of services in the area.

I have been advised by Tusla that the centre to which the Deputy refers has been allocated funding of €120,542 in 2018, which is an increase of €10,000 over 2017.

A number of Family Resource Centres which fall under the remit of Tusla's Family Resource Centre Programme are working with people who are experiencing homelessness and many have developed local responses to the needs of families in emergency accommodation. The range of services provided include family fun days, homework support, after school programmes, play therapy and transport services.

In 2017, there were 109 Family Resource Centres in receipt of funding from Tusla. Tusla

was provided with additional funding of some €3m in 2018 for the Family Resource Centre Programme. This investment has enabled Tusla to expand the Programme with the inclusion of 11 additional centres, bringing the total number of Family Resource Centres to 120. Additional funding of up to €10,000 was also allocated to the existing 109 Family Resource Centres this year.

Decisions with regard to funding levels in 2019 will be taken in the context of the Estimates process. It is not possible therefore at this stage to advise on what level of funding will be available to the Family Resource Centre Programme next year.

I strongly value the work of Family Resource Centres in communities throughout Ireland, and I will be making the case for a continued investment in the centres in 2019 and beyond. I will continue to support the centres in the valuable work they do, working with vulnerable children and families, particularly in areas of disadvantage.

Charitable and Voluntary Organisations

205. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of Pobal's proposed review into its charity status; if the review will be conducted in-house; the timeline for completion of the review; if his Department or the Office of the Attorney General has an input into the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27118/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): Pobal is a not for profit company limited by guarantee. Charitable status was granted to the company by the Revenue Commissioners on the 20th November 1996. In accordance with Section 40 of the Charities Act, 2009, Pobal was entered onto the Register of Charitable Organisations automatically on 16 October 2014.

Notwithstanding this, Pobal has informed my Department that it has engaged a firm of Solicitors to conduct an independent review of its charitable status. The work is now underway and it is expected that the review will take 3-4 months.

The board of Pobal will communicate the outcome of the review to my Department through the existing corporate governance and oversight arrangements. The Charities Regulator has been informed of the process.

Charitable and Voluntary Organisations

206. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if his Department has had contact with the Charities Regulator with regard to its review of State agencies that also hold charitable status; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27119/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Seán Kyne): The Charities Regulator is an independent authority and was established in October 2014 under the Charities Act 2009. The key functions of the Regulator are to establish and maintain a public register of charitable organisations operating in Ireland and ensure their compliance with the Charities Acts. I have no function in this matter.

In line with section 40 of the Charities Act 2009, all organisations which had been granted charitable status by the Revenue Commissioners when the Charities Regulator was established in October 2014 were automatically entered on the Register of Charities. I understand that there

are a number such charities on the Register of Charities which currently provide government services and/or which are statutory bodies.

Under its business plan for 2018 the Charities Regulator plans to carry out a number of targeted sector reviews, which may include charities which are statutory bodies.

The Charities Regulator's 2018 business plan also includes the publication of a sectoral report, based on an analysis of data held on the Charities Register. This report will analyse issues such as the income and expenditure of the sector, overall economic and social impacts, legal structure and governance, and charitable donations. This report is scheduled for publication during the third quarter of 2018.

Social Welfare Benefits Expenditure

207. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the full year cost of increasing all social welfare payments by €5, €10, €15 and €20, respectively, by payment type, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27000/18]

211. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated full year cost of increasing all working age payments by €5, €10, €15 and €20 by payment type, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27037/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 207 and 211 together.

The costings sought by the Deputy are detailed in the following table.

Cost of varying increases in social welfare payments

-	Full year cost of a €5 increase	Full year cost of a €10 increase	Full year cost of a €15 increase	Full year cost of a €20 increase
Scheme	€m	€m	€m	€m
Working Age Payments				
Social Insurance Schemes				
Widow/er's or Surviving Civil Partner's (Con) Pension	7.98	15.96	23.94	31.92
Deserted Wife's Benefit	1.08	2.16	3.24	4.32
Invalidity Pension	15.44	30.88	46.32	61.76
Guardian's Payment (Contributory)	0.28	0.56	0.84	1.12
Disablement Pension	1.28	2.56	3.84	5.12
Illness Benefit	14.49	28.98	43.47	57.96
Injury Benefit	0.42	0.84	1.26	1.68
Incapacity Supplement	0.28	0.56	0.84	1.12
Jobseeker's Benefit	8.53	17.06	25.59	34.12
Carer's Benefit	0.71	1.42	2.13	2.84
Health and Safety Benefit	0.02	0.04	0.06	0.08
Maternity & Adoptive Benefit	5.35	10.7	16.05	21.4
Paternity Benefit	0.31	0.62	0.93	1.24

Questions - Written Answers

-	Full year cost of a €5 increase	Full year cost of a €10 increase	Full year cost of a €15 increase	Full year cost of a €20 increase
Scheme	€m	€m	€m	€m
Social Assistance Schemes				
Blind Pension	0.34	0.68	1.02	1.36
Widow/ers or Surviving Civil Partner's (Non-Con) Pension	0.36	0.72	1.08	1.44
Deserted Wife's Allowance	0.03	0.06	0.09	0.12
One-Parent Family Payment	10.17	20.34	30.51	40.68
Carer's Allowance	11.35	22.7	34.05	45.4
Half Rate Carer's Allowance	3.11	6.22	9.33	12.44
Guardian's Payment (Non-Contributory)	0.13	0.26	0.39	0.52
Jobseeker's Allowance	38.23	76.47	114.87	153.1
Jobseeker's Allowance - for those aged 18 to 24 years of age	4.15	8.3	12.44	16.59
Jobseeker's Allowance - for those aged 25 years of age	0.72	1.44	2.17	2.89
Pre-Retirement Allowance	0.05	0.1	0.15	0.2
Disability Allowance	39.67	79.34	119.01	158.68
Farm Assist	2.33	4.66	6.99	9.32
Back to Education Allowance	2.08	4.16	6.24	8.32
Back to Work Enterprise Allowance	2.33	4.66	6.99	9.32
Community Employment	6.02	12.04	18.06	24.08
TÚS	1.8	3.6	5.4	7.2
Rural Social Scheme	1.11	2.22	3.33	4.44
Gateway	0.0	0.01	0.01	0.02
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	4.57	9.14	13.71	18.28
Total Working Age Payments	184.72	369.46	554.35	739.08
Pension Payments				
Social Insurance Schemes				
State Pension (Contributory)	110.16	220.32	330.48	440.64
Widow/er's Contributory Pension (Aged 66 and over)	22.23	44.46	66.69	88.92
Deserted Wife's Benefit (Aged 66 and over)	0.57	1.14	1.71	2.28
Death Benefit Pension (Aged 66 and over)	0.09	0.18	0.27	0.36
Social Assistance Schemes				
State Pension (Non Con)	25.14	50.28	75.42	100.56
Carer's Allowance (Aged 66 and over)	0.66	1.32	1.98	2.64
Half Rate Carer's Allowance (Aged 66 and over)	1.57	3.14	4.71	6.28
Total Pension Payments	160.42	320.84	481.26	641.68

-	Full year cost of a €5 increase	Full year cost of a €10 increase	Full year cost of a €15 increase	Full year cost of a €20 increase
Scheme	€m	€m	€m	€m
Total for Social Assistance and Social Insurance	345.14	690.30	1,035.61	1,380.76
Other Payments or Supplements				
Domiciliary Care Allowance	2.43	4.85	7.28	9.71
Child Benefit	73.79	147.58	221.37	295.17
Carer Support Grant	0.56	1.12	1.68	2.24
Household Benefits	26.27	52.54	78.81	105.08
Fuel Allowance	50.76	101.52	152.28	203.04
Telephone Support Allowance	33.02	66.04	99.06	132.08
Increase for Qualified Child	87.89	175.78	263.67	351.56
Living Alone Allowance	54.99	109.98	164.97	219.97
Over 80s Allowance	42.89	85.78	128.67	171.56
Other Payments Total	372.6	745.19	1,117.79	1,490.41
Overall Total	717.74	1,435.49	2153.40	2,871.17

The costs shown above are on a full year basis and are based on the estimated number of recipients in 2019. It should be noted that these costings are subject to change in the context of emerging trends and associated revision of the estimated numbers of recipients for 2019.

It should also be noted that these costings include proportionate increases for qualified adults and for those on reduced rates of payment, where relevant.

Social Welfare Benefits Expenditure

208. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated full year cost of paying a 100% Christmas bonus; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27001/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Last December, an 85% Bonus was paid to some 1.2 million long-term social welfare recipients, including pensioners, people with disabilities, carers, lone parents and the long-term unemployed, at a cost of €218.6 million. The cost of a 100% Bonus is estimated at circa €257 million in 2018.

As was the case in previous years where a Bonus was subsequently paid (2014 to 2017 inclusive), there is no provision in the 2018 Revised Estimates for the payment (at any rate) of a Christmas Bonus in 2018. Any decision taken regarding the payment of a Bonus in 2018 will have to be consistent with the legal requirements set out in the domestic Fiscal Responsibility Acts 2012 and 2013 and the targets set for Ireland by the EU Stability and Growth Pact.

Jobseeker’s Benefit Payments

209. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated full year cost of equalising jobseeker’s benefit rates and bringing payments for persons under 26 years of age in line with the current rates of payments for other age groups;

the estimated cost equalising jobseeker's benefit payments factoring in a €5 increase; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27013/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The jobseeker's schemes provide income support for people who have lost work and are unable to find alternative full-time employment. The 2018 Estimates for my Department provide for expenditure this year on the jobseeker's schemes of €2.17 billion.

The current weekly maximum personal rate of jobseekers benefit is €198. Where a claimant has average weekly earnings of less than €300 in the relevant tax year they are paid a graduated rate. The relevant tax year for 2018 is 2016. The estimated full year cost of equalising the personal rate would be approximately €22 million. This cost would increase by a further €10 million factoring in a €5 increase.

The estimated full year cost of increasing the jobseekers allowance under 26 rates for all recipients would be approximately €94 million. The Deputy should be aware that the reduced rates of jobseekers allowance do not apply to recipients with a qualified child, those making a linked claim within the previous 12 months to which the maximum personal rate applied or those transferring directly to jobseekers allowance from disability allowance. The reduced rates also do not apply to 18 to 24 year olds who were in care before they reached the age of 18.

The costings provided are subject to change in the context of emerging trends and associated revision of the estimated numbers of recipients for 2018. Any changes to the jobseekers schemes would have to be considered in a budgetary context and within the scope of the overall resources available for welfare improvements.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Payments Waiting Times

210. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the waiting time for social welfare payments (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27016/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The information (where available) requested by the Deputy is detailed in the following tabular statement.

Average Weeks to Award	May 2018
State Pension Contributory	6
State Pension Non-Contributory	13
Jobseeker's Benefit	1
Jobseeker's Allowance	2
Maternity Benefit	6
Disability Allowance	13
Illness Benefit	1
Invalidity Pension	7
Carer's Allowance	15
Domiciliary Care Allowance	10
Partial Capacity Benefit	14

Question No. 211 answered with Question No. 207.

Social Welfare Appeals

212. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when an application by a person (details supplied) will be processed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27048/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an Appeals Officer, having fully considered all of the available evidence including that adduced at the oral hearing, has decided to allow the appeal of the person concerned. The person concerned has been notified of the Appeals Officer's decision.

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.

Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility

213. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a dental benefit application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27057/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Qualification for dental benefit is based on satisfying certain PRSI conditions, which vary depending on the age of the person concerned. In this case, the person concerned would need to have paid 260 PRSI contributions at Class A, E, H, P or S, since first starting work, and also have at least 39 qualifying contributions paid at the correct rate, or credited, in the relevant tax year/s on which the claim is based.

While she has 260 PRSI contributions paid since first starting work, she does not have 39 contributions paid or credited in any year between 2013 and 2016; the relevant the tax years on which the current eligibility check is based. As a result, she does not qualify for dental benefit at this time.

However, if the customer has a Medical Card, she should contact her local HSE office, who will be able to advise her on her entitlements under the HSE scheme.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Appeals

214. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a decision will issue to a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27063/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an Appeals Officer, having fully considered all of the available evidence, has decided to disallow the appeal of the person concerned by way of a summary decision. The person concerned has been notified of the Appeals Officer's decision.

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.

Departmental Funding

215. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if matters raised in correspondence by a person (details supplied) will receive a reply; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27080/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Under the programme my Department provides funding for local sponsoring organisations to provide training, upskilling and educational opportunities for jobseekers and other vulnerable groups in the community.

This funding is granted under an annually renewable legal agreement/contract between the sponsoring organisation and the Department. Article 3 of the agreement/contract states that, “The Sponsor shall at all times be an independent contractor for all purposes and the relationship of principal and agent shall not exist between the parties and all persons recruited by the sponsor shall be their/her/his sole responsibility.” The supervisor is legally in the employment of the local sponsoring organisation. Their contracts of employment list the sponsor as the employer. They are not employees of my Department, nor are they public servants.

The focus on the development of individuals on schemes is captured by the supervisor in the Individual Learner Plan for each participant and this must be available for inspection by the Department as required along with the necessary back up documentation. With this in mind, the Department provides funding for the employment of supervisors on a 39 hour week basis to provide adequate time to the sponsoring organisation to provide the necessary supports for the daily management of the scheme.

The Deputy will appreciate that robust controls and monitoring are required to ensure that public monies are being spent in an effective and efficient manner. In this regard there are at least two monitoring visits carried out by the Department to a scheme on an annual basis – financial monitoring and programme monitoring to ensure compliance with the CE operational procedures. The scheme itself has no paperwork to complete. The monitoring form is completed by officials from the Department.

As the deputy is aware, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) have taken the lead in addressing the entitlement of CE supervisors to occupational pensions. A Community Sector High Level Forum, chaired by DPER is currently examining this issue. Other Departments including my Department are represented on this group, as are the unions and Pobal and a number of meetings have been held.

While I am very conscious that the issue relates to Community Employment supervisors and assistant supervisors, such individuals comprise of just one small group within the wider Community and Voluntary sector any provision of State funding for such a scheme in respect of those employees could potentially give rise to claims for similar schemes on the part of those in the broader sector, thus crystallising the potential level of liability. Any solution to this issue will require careful consideration, in particular the implications for scarce Exchequer resources.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Data

216. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of carer's allowance applications in 2017; the number approved originally; the number refused and subsequently approved under review; the number approved under appeal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27102/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The following are the numbers of Carer's Allowance applications made in 2017 ('registered'), the number of claims awarded in the year ('awarded'), and the number of applications rejected in the year ('rejected'). Note that some of the awarded and rejected outcomes are in respect of claims registered prior to 2017, and that the same claim may appear in both the 'awarded' and 'rejected' columns in some instances.

Carer's Allowance applications, full year 2017

Registered	Awarded	Rejected
23,800	17,290	8,599

62.8% of the 3,416 carer's allowance appeals which were finalised in 2017 had a favourable outcome for the appellant, i.e. they were either allowed in full or in part, or resolved by way of a revised decision by a Deciding Officer/Designated Person. This is marginally higher than the overall favourable outcome rate of 60.1% for the total of 23,220 appeals which were finalised in 2017 in respect of all social welfare payments.

There are a number of reasons a decision which was refused at first instance might be successful on appeal and it is not necessarily the case that the first decision was wrong.

Where new evidence is provided with an appeal, the original decision may be revised by the Deciding Officer or Designated Person. This is particularly the case in appeals relating to illness and disability payments as appellants routinely supply additional medical evidence which they did not submit to the Department at initial claim or review stage.

This was the case in 36.4% of favourable carer's allowance appeal outcomes in 2017.

Where the decision is not revised in the Department in light of the appeal contentions, further evidence is often provided by the appellant as the appeal process proceeds. In addition, the Appeals Officer may gain insights when they meet the appellant in person at oral hearing which may also influence the outcome of the appeal.

Favourable Appeal Outcomes 2017

	Appeal Receipts	Revised Deciding Officers Decisions	Allowed by Appeals Officer	Partly Allowed by Appeals Officer	Total Favourable Decisions
Carers Allowance	3,200	780	1,204	161	2,145

Social Welfare Benefits Data

217. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protec-

tion the number of invalidity and disability payment applications in 2017; the number approved originally; the number refused and subsequently approved under review; the number approved under appeal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27120/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The following are the numbers of Carer's Allowance applications made in 2017 ('registered'), the number of claims awarded in the year ('awarded'), and the number of applications rejected in the year ('rejected'). Note that some of the awarded and rejected outcomes are in respect of claims registered prior to 2017, and that the same claim may appear in both the 'awarded' and 'rejected' columns in some instances.

Invalidity Pension and Disability Allowance applications, full year 2017

	Registered	Awarded	Rejected
Invalidity Pension	10,458	8,976	4,579
Disability Allowance	23,657	17,469	12,022

73.1% of the 1,348 Invalidity Pension appeals which were finalised in 2017 had a favourable outcome for the appellant, i.e. they were either allowed in full or in part, or resolved by way of a revised decision by a Deciding Officer/Designated Person. Meanwhile, 73.1% of the 4,934 Disability Allowance appeals which were finalised in 2017 had a favourable outcome for the appellant.

These rates are higher than the overall 60.1% favourable outcome rate for the 23,220 appeals which were finalised in 2017 in respect of all social welfare payments.

There are a number of reasons a decision which was refused at first instance might be successful on appeal and it is not necessarily the case that the first decision was wrong.

Where new evidence is provided with an appeal, the original decision may be revised by the Deciding Officer or Designated Person. This is particularly the case in appeals relating to illness and disability payments as appellants routinely supply additional medical evidence which they did not submit to the Department at initial claim or review stage.

This was the case in 65% of favourable invalidity pension appeal outcomes and 15.6% of favourable disability allowance appeal outcomes in 2017.

Where the decision is not revised in the Department in light of the appeal contentions, further evidence is often provided by the appellant as the appeal process proceeds. In addition, the Appeals Officer may gain insights when they meet the appellant in person at oral hearing which may also influence the outcome of the appeal.

Favourable Appeal Outcomes 2017

	Appeal Receipts	Revised Deciding Officers Decisions	Allowed by Appeals Officer	Partly Allowed by Appeals Officer	Total Favourable Decisions
Invalidity Pension	1,381	691	365	7	1,063
Disability Allowance	5,077	563	2,975	70	3,608

218. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the additional funding which will be allocated to Irish Water in 2018 to address curtailed upgrades of water infrastructure including the continuing discharge of raw sewage into the sea; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27034/18]

235. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the extent to which Irish Water has access to sufficient capital to ensure adequate investment in the infrastructure in respect of water and wastewater; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27084/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 218 and 235 together.

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. Irish Water's primary function is to provide clean safe drinking water to customers and to treat and return wastewater safely to the environment. In providing these critical services Irish Water plays a role in enabling social and economic growth, protecting the environment and the health and safety of the public.

The report of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Future Funding of Domestic Water Services published in April 2017 and approved by both Houses of the Oireachtas together with the Government approved recommendations of the Report of the Working Group on the Future Funding of Domestic Water Services, primarily involve, *inter alia*, all State funding to Irish Water in respect of domestic water services, as determined through the regulatory process, being channelled in future through my Department's Vote. The future funding of Irish Water in respect of domestic water services will therefore be from general taxation, in the form of a payment for domestic water services, based on the purchase of water covering the entirety of domestic water consumption, other than excessive use, and a contribution to replace the financing of the domestic component of capital investment previously funded by debt and a capital contribution from Central Funds.

Irish Water is being provided with a funding provision of €1.1 billion through my Department's Vote in 2018 to meet the cost of domestic water services, of which €500m relates to capital investment, the latter representing the major component of the overall planned capital investment of over €600m in cash terms by Irish Water in 2018.

The first ever Water Services Policy Statement, prepared in line with the Water Services Acts, which I launched on 21 May 2018, outlines a clear direction to strategic planning and decision making on water and wastewater services in Ireland. It identifies key policy objectives and priorities for the delivery of water and wastewater services in Ireland over the period to 2025. The Water Services Policy Statement sets out a series of high-level policy objectives across the three thematic areas of Quality, Conservation, and Future Proofing, which must be pursued when planning capital investment and framing current spending plans. It will provide the context within which necessary funding and investment plans by Irish Water will be framed and agreed.

On foot of this Water Services Policy Statement, Irish Water's forthcoming Strategic Funding Plan will set out the costs of providing domestic and non-domestic water services and the recovery of those costs. It will distinguish between operational and capital expenditure, and provide projections of income over the multi-annual period 2020-2024 inclusive, which will align with the next full regulatory period. Subject to my approval of the Strategic Funding Plan, it will feed into the allowed revenue determination for Irish Water by the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU), as the economic regulator of Irish Water, and ultimately feed into

future annual estimates and budgetary processes.

Irish Water's next Investment Plan for the five year period from 2020 to 2024 will set out the financial plan for capital investments to support its strategic objectives, as set out in the Water Services Strategic Plan and the forthcoming Strategic Funding Plan, to deliver improvements to water services throughout Ireland where they are needed most. Irish Water's Water Services Strategic Plan (WSSP) published in October 2015 already sets out a high level strategy over 25 years to ensure the provision of clean safe drinking water, effective management of wastewater, environmental protection and support for economic and social development.

Irish Water will also take account of developing subsidiary programmes within its investment plan to assist in implementing the National Planning Framework and the National Development Plan, including the forthcoming Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies as well as ongoing reviews of County Development Plans and Local Area Plans.

Irish Water continues to develop and implement a long-term investment perspective in order to strategically address the deficiencies in the public water and wastewater system. The utility is implementing the capital investment programme which prioritises investment decisions to ensure that it utilises available funding most effectively by making investments that deliver the best possible improvements to water and wastewater infrastructure and services, while maximising value for money.

A substantial proportion of investment by the State through Irish Water over the next ten years will be focused on programmes to improve compliance with relevant public health and environmental standards. This will involve implementation of the measures contained within the River Basin Management Plan for Ireland 2018-2021 and the achievement of the outcomes identified.

Irish Water has established a dedicated team to deal with representations and queries from public representatives. The team can be contacted via email to oireachtasmembers@water.ie or by telephone on a dedicated number, 1890 578 578.

Housing Policy

219. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the cost rental pilot project has gone out to tender; when construction is due to begin; the number of units due to be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26725/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I refer to the reply to Question No. 603 of 19 June 2018, which sets out the position in relation to this matter.

Questions Nos. 220 and 221 answered with Question No. 80.

Maritime Spatial Planning

222. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the position regarding the timeline for implementation and extent of marine protected areas. [23799/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government

(Deputy Damien English): I am committed to introducing enabling legislation to provide for the formal creation and management of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). It is intended to bring forward legislation for the designation and protection of MPAs once the legislative work on the prohibition of microbeads plastics has been completed.

I also intend to establish an expert advisory group whose terms of reference will include the development of a process for the identification, designation and recommendation of candidate marine areas which require protection. Work is ongoing to determine the appropriate composition of the group and relevant selection criteria and I anticipate that a broad range of relevant stakeholders will be represented. It is envisaged that the input of specialist experts from Government Departments, State agencies, the environmental NGO community and academia will be invited as well as that of commercial and recreational users of the marine space. Once established, this expert group will assist me in establishing the designation of various types of MPAs by Regulation, including their geographical delineation and the provision of the necessary special protection measures required for each MPA.

A significant number of protected areas have already been designated under the EU Birds and Habitats Directives. These include a number of special areas of conservation and special protected areas. The proposed legislation intends that new types of marine spatial protection measures will be added to the existing measures and, over time, provide for the designation of a coherent and representative network of marine protected areas.

I am not therefore in a position to advise on the exact timeline or total extent of MPAs to be designated at this point in time but confirm that once the immediate work in relation to the drafting and implementation of the microbeads legislation is complete, legislation on MPAs will be advanced.

Solar Energy Guidelines

223. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the regulations by which planning permissions for commercial solar energy installations are assessed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23916/18]

224. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his Department is formulating regulations regarding the construction of solar power projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23915/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 223 and 224 together.

There are no specific planning guidelines in place in respect of solar farms. Proposals for individual solar farm developments are subject to the statutory requirements of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) in the same manner as other proposed developments. Planning applications are made to the relevant local planning authority with a right of appeal to An Bord Pleanála.

Under the Act, each planning authority's development plan must set out an overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of the area concerned. Section 10 of the Act requires a development plan to include, inter alia, objectives for the provision or facilitation of the provision of infrastructure, including energy facilities, and many local authorities have developed renewable energy strategies for their areas in this context.

In making decisions on planning applications, planning authorities and the Board must con-

sider the proper planning and sustainable development of the area, having regard to the provisions of the local development plan, any submissions or observations received and relevant Ministerial or Government policies, including any relevant guidelines issued by my Department. Planning authorities must then make their own decisions based on the specific merits or otherwise of individual planning applications.

While I am satisfied that the planning code is sufficiently robust to facilitate the assessment of individual planning permission applications for solar farm developments, I have indicated that I will keep the matter under review, in consultation with my colleague, the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and the Environment, and his Department which leads on renewable energy policy.

In this regard, our two Departments are exploring the potential for enhancing national planning guidance on solar energy, taking account of solar energy projects being assessed by planning authorities and the scope for future development of the sector in the context of developing renewable energy policy. On foot of this engagement between our two Departments, where the need for specific planning guidance for solar farms is identified, my Department will develop such guidance as deemed appropriate.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

225. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the proposed affordable housing scheme; when details of and the opening of the scheme will be announced; if an affordable housing scheme will be operated in Galway city and county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26943/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I refer the Deputy to my reply to Questions Nos. 25 and 26 on today's Order Paper, which broadly sets out the position in relation to this matter.

In addition, before embarking on the development an affordable purchase or rental programme, it is important that local authorities carry out a fundamental economic and financial assessment of the housing purchase and rental markets in their respective functional areas, working with my Department and the Housing Agency to assess what affordability intervention, if any, is warranted.

I will shortly be issuing guidance to local authorities in this regard.

Student Accommodation

226. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the aids, incentives or grants available for the provision of low density student accommodation at private residences; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26944/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department does not provide direct financial aid, incentives or grants for the provision of student accommodation at private residences.

However, under Action 4.10 of Rebuilding Ireland which is also mirrored in Action 18 of the National Student Accommodation Strategy, which relates to the provision of student accommodation, my Department and the Department of Education and Skills provide funding to the Union of Students of Ireland (USI) to support ongoing activities and programmes aimed at

assisting students in finding accommodation and towards the administrative/research costs associated with identifying appropriate accommodation.

This funding also provides for the USI-led 'Homes for Study' campaign. This initiative essentially funds a website and activities to match students with accommodation in the form of rooms in private houses.

In addition, under the general 'rent-a-room' scheme, an exemption for up to €14,000 in rental income per annum for homeowners is available. Further information on the 'Homes for Study' initiative is available at the following link: homes.usi.ie/.

Question No. 227 answered with Question No. 75.

Severe Weather Events Response

228. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the emergency funding applied for by Waterford City and County Council to repair damage incurred during Storm Emma will be forthcoming. [26951/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The recoupment of unbudgeted expenditure by local authorities related to response and clean-up activities associated with severe weather and flooding has been established practice since the severe flooding that affected the country in 2009 and is seen as an important enabler of an effective and prompt local authority response. A total of €1.772m has been made available to Waterford City and County Council for this purpose since 2009.

My Department wrote to all local authorities on 29 March this year inviting claims for recoupment of the exceptional costs associated with the response to and clean-up following the severe cold weather and snow that affected the country from 23 February to 5 March this year.

Claims have now been received from the local authorities including Waterford City and County Council and are currently being examined between my Department and local authorities, a process which it is expected will be completed next month, after which recoupment to individual local authorities will be made.

Local Electoral Area Boundary Committee Report

229. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when an order under section 23 of the Local Government Act 2001 will be issued to establish new local electoral areas; his plans to make changes separate from the relevant Boundary Commission report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27002/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): 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 Committees were tasked with reporting to me within six months of their establishment and, last week, I received both reports within the required timeframe. These reports are now published on my Department's website at the following links:

Boundary Report 1

Boundary Report 2

Work will now commence within my Department on the preparation of the necessary orders to give effect to the Committees' recommendations in relation to local electoral areas. It is anticipated that these orders will be made in the Autumn of this year. The local electoral areas to be specified in these orders, and the number of members to be elected for each electoral area, will apply at the next local elections which are due to be held in late May 2019 in tandem with the elections for the 2019-2024 European Parliament.

Local Authority Housing Maintenance

230. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the legislation for improvements he is planning in relation to the estate management and housing maintenance functions of the local authorities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27038/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The responsibilities of local authorities in relation to estate management and housing maintenance are set out in the Housing Act 1966 and I have no plans at present for further legislation in this area.

Social and Affordable Housing

231. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on the fact that a person (details supplied) who has been on the housing list of a local authority and then moved to the housing list of a different local authority loses all the time built up on the waiting list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27061/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): In accordance with Regulation 5 of the Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011 (as amended), a household may apply for social housing support to one housing authority only, which may be the authority for the area in which the household normally resides or with which it has a local connection, or the authority that agrees, at its discretion, to assess the household for support.

In determining whether a household has a local connection with its area, a housing authority must have regard to whether a household member:

- lived in the area for a continuous five- year period at any time in the past,
- is employed in the area or within 15 km of the area,
- is in full-time education, or attending specialist medical care in the area, or
- has a relative (defined in the Regulations) living in the area for two years or longer.

A household meeting either the residence or local connection criteria may specify up to three areas of choice for receipt of support and, if qualified, will be entered on the housing waiting list.

As indicated above, it is not possible for a household to apply to more than one housing authority for social housing support at a time. Furthermore, it is not possible for a household on

the waiting list of one housing authority to transfer its application to another authority and to carry the time spent on the previous list.

As part of the broader Social Housing Reform agenda, my Department is examining ways of creating a more flexible and responsive system of housing support. The issue of allowing households scope to move between local authority housing lists will be looked at in this context.

Land Availability

232. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the degree to which he has sought or received from each local authority an indication of the availability of building lands for immediate housing purposes within each such administrative area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27081/18]

233. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the extent to which he has sought and received information relating to the land banks owned by various local authorities; the extent to which local authorities have utilised the land in their possession for housing purposes in view of the urgency of the situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27082/18]

234. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if local authorities have sought additional capital for the acquisition of building lands on which it may be proposed to build local authority houses as opposed to through the aegis of approved housing bodies; the degree to which previous owned local authority lands have been utilised exclusively for local authority house building purposes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27083/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 232 to 234, inclusive, together.

I refer to my reply to Question No. 51, Reference No. 21671, on today's Order Paper which broadly set out the position in relation to this matter.

In addition, as part of the development of their ambitious multi-annual housing programmes, local authorities are required to consider the availability of land for housing in their area. Having identified a need to acquire additional lands, local authorities may seek to borrow the required finance from the Housing Finance Agency. My Department then recoups the land costs and any associated loan interest charges to the local authority, as part of the normal social housing project approval process.

In accordance with Section 106 of the Local Government Act 2001, as amended, the decision to borrow is a reserved function of the elected members of the local authority concerned, who have direct responsibility in law for all reserved functions and are accountable for all expenditure by the local authority. As such, it is a matter for each local authority to determine its own spending priorities in the context of the annual budgetary process, having regard to both locally identified needs and available resources.

Section 106 of the Act also provides that local authorities must obtain the consent of the appropriate Minister to undertake borrowing. In this regard, sanction to borrow for housing land acquisition is submitted by the local authority to my Department, who provide an assessment of the financial viability of potential loans insofar as individual local authorities are concerned, and an assessment as to whether the borrowing can be accommodated within the context of the fiscal rules. My Department is currently reviewing that loan approval process.

Finally, as regards housing delivery more broadly, the Residential Land Availability Survey 2014, published in February 2015, determined the location and quantity of lands that may be regarded as being undeveloped and available for residential development purposes at 31 March 2014 in each local authority area. This survey measured the total amount of lands, whether owned privately or by the local authority, that have been identified for housing development in the various local authority development plans and that are the highest priority for development.

The area of such lands amounted to 17,434 hectares which, given a range of densities appropriate to whether the areas are in small villages or larger towns and cities and as determined by the relevant local authorities, could support the construction of over 414,000 dwellings. On that basis, I am satisfied that adequate lands are available to facilitate residential development in line with Rebuilding Ireland. The Residential Land Availability Survey 2014 is available on my Department's website at: <http://www.environ.ie/planning/residential-land-availability/residential-land-availability-survey>.

A further Residential Land Availability Survey will be undertaken in due course.

Question No. 235 answered with Question No. 218.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

236. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the building of sufficient rapid build homes will be authorised to deal with the emergency housing problem now emerging; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27086/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department is working closely with all local authorities in relation to increasing and accelerating the delivery of a range of social housing programmes and supports, including through the use of rapid build methodologies.

Local authorities have been advised that rapid build approaches should increasingly become the norm in terms of delivering social housing projects; ultimately, we will likely reach a point where there will be no differentiation between traditional and rapid build approaches.

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

To support delivery, the Office of Government Procurement (OGP) put in place a framework of Rapid Delivery contractors in 2017. This framework is available for all Local Authorities and Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) to use in the interest of accelerated delivery. In this regard, my Department has organised information seminars for Local Authorities, as well as visits to rapid delivery projects under construction. Local Authorities and AHBs have also been asked to consider, in particular, schemes which are suitable for early commencement, particularly in terms of their approved planning status.

Many of the issues around delivery that 'standard' social housing construction projects face, are also faced by rapid build projects, such as preparing sites, services/access to the site, community consultation, planning, etc. There are, however, savings in terms of design and construction and these advantages are growing as more use is made of the Office of Government Procurement framework contract and contractors gain more experience in implementing these

projects. Under this mechanism, acceleration is delivered both by the use of the Design and Build services of these contractors and reduced construction time periods due to considerable off site fabrication.

While the framework, or indeed off-site construction, may not be suitable for all developments or sites, my Department continues to encourage and support local authorities and AHBs to consider the rapid delivery mechanism in the interest of accelerated delivery.

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

<http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-publishes-social-housing-construction-status-report-q4-2017/>. The Q1 2018 report will be published shortly.

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

Local Authority Housing Eligibility

237. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the income limits appertaining to eligibility for local authority houses and loans will be revised upwards in view of the extent to which such applicants are excluded and forced into the private rental market which they cannot afford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27087/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011 prescribe maximum net income limits for each local authority, in different bands according to the area, with income being defined and assessed according to a standard Household Means Policy.

The income bands and the authority area assigned to each band were based on an assessment of the income needed to provide for a household's basic needs, plus a comparative analysis of the local rental cost of housing accommodation across the country. It is important to note that the limits introduced at that time also reflected a blanket increase of €5,000 introduced prior to the new system coming into operation, in order to broaden the base from which social housing tenants are drawn, both promoting sustainable communities and also providing a degree of future-proofing.

As part of the broader social housing reform agenda, a review of income eligibility for social housing supports has commenced. The Housing Agency is carrying out the detailed statistical work on behalf of my Department and I expect the results of this review to be available for publication in late Summer 2018.

Following a review of the two existing local authority home loan schemes, the House Purchase Loan and the Home Choice Loan, on 1 February 2018, a new loan offering, known as the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan was launched. The new loan enables creditworthy first-time buyers to access sustainable mortgage lending to purchase new or second-hand properties in a suitable price range. The low rate of fixed interest associated with the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan provides first-time buyers with access to mortgage finance that they may not otherwise be able to afford at a higher interest rate.

The income limits which are set out in the Housing (Rebuilding Ireland Home Loans) Regulations 2018 state that single applicants for the loan must not be earning greater than €50,000 gross per annum. The combined income of joint applicants must not be greater than €75,000 per annum. There are no set minimum income limits; however, applicants do need to have sufficient borrowing and repayment capacity and must be capable of repaying the mortgage in accordance with the statutory credit policy underpinning the loan. These income limits are unchanged from the previous local authority loan offerings.

Full details of the loan's eligibility criteria and other information is available from the dedicated Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan website: <http://rebuildingirelandhomeloan.ie/>.

Any person who meets the eligibility criteria may apply for a loan regardless of whether or not they are on the local authority housing list or qualified for social housing support.

Building Regulations

238. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if, in the context of providing a redress scheme for persons that have found themselves living in poorly built houses or houses not compliant with the standards applicable, it will be ensured that the construction industry, the insurance sector and planning authorities accept their share of the responsibility in view of the fact that fire and building regulations need to be observed and applied at all times; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27088/18]

239. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of instances in which failure to comply with fire and building regulations have been identified in housing schemes constructed during the boom period; his views on whether each of the participating bodies including the construction sector, the insurance sector and the local authorities have a precise role and responsibility which must be observed at all times; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27089/18]

240. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he is satisfied that adequate structural guarantees now exist in the building sector to protect the consumer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27090/18]

241. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the extent to which building control and fire regulations were ignored during the boom period; the means by which it is expected to address the issue with a view to protecting the consumer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27091/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 238 to 241, inclusive, together.

In response to the emergence of building defects in dwellings, my Department and representatives from the local government sector reviewed the existing building control regulatory framework, in collaboration and consultation with industry stakeholders. This has led to a multi-faceted Building Control Reform Agenda, which commenced implementation in 2014 with the introduction of the Building Control (Amendment) Regulations 2014.

Under these Regulations, the owner of a building must assign competent persons to design, build, inspect and certify building works he/she has commissioned. They in turn, must account for their contribution through the lodgement of compliance documentation, inspection plans and statutory certificates. The roles and responsibilities of owners, designers, builders, assigned certifiers, etc. during building works are set out in the Code of Practice for Inspecting and Cer-

tifying Buildings and Works, which is available at the following link: http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/2016-10-21_code_of_practice_for_inspecting_and_certifying_buildings_and_works_final_version.pdf. This has brought clarity and accountability, a focus on compliance with Building Regulations and a new order to bear on construction projects.

Enforcement of the Building Regulations is a matter for the 31 local building control authorities, who have extensive powers of inspection and enforcement under the Acts and who are independent in the use of their statutory powers.

The National Building Control Management Project (NBCMP) was set up to provide centralised oversight, direction and support for the development, standardisation and implementation of building control as an effective shared service in the 31 Building Control Authorities. Under this project, the Building Control Management System (BCMS) was developed and rolled out. A Framework for Building Control Authorities was prepared to standardise work practices. A compliance support facility has been established and a training programme is being developed. Also, and most fundamentally, steps are in place for the continued strengthening of the inspection regime in Building Control Authorities to carry out meaningful risk-based targeted inspections of building works.

The Government has also approved the General Scheme of the Building Control (Construction Industry Register) Bill to establish a mandatory statutory register for builders and specialist sub-contractors. The main objective of the Bill is to develop and promote a culture of competence, good practice and compliance with the Building Regulations within the Builder community of the construction sector. The establishment of a robust, mandatory, statutory register of builders and specialist sub-contractors provides consumers with assurance that they are dealing with competent and compliant operators.

These reforms have already brought, and, through their full implementation, will continue to bring, a new order and discipline to bear on construction projects, creating an enhanced culture of compliance with the Building Regulations.

The reduced risk of defective buildings has provided insurance underwriters with sufficient confidence to introduce new latent defect type products in Ireland, despite a general retrenchment and conservatism in the wider insurance industry. These new products are first party insurance policies which cover damage and breaches of building regulations claims, to varying degrees. This means that the purchaser does not have to make a claim through the builder but can submit a claim directly to the insurer. This would be of particular benefit to a homeowner in circumstances where the builder or developer has ceased trading.

My Department is planning to engage further with Departments and Agencies with responsibility for insurance and consumer protection and industry stakeholders in order to ensure that homeowners and buyers are aware of products and options that are available to them when purchasing a new home.

However, it is important to note that under the Building Control Acts 1990 to 2014, primary responsibility for compliance with the requirements of the Building Regulations rests with the owners, designers and builders of buildings. As such, in general, building defects are matters for resolution between the contracting parties involved, the homeowner, the builder, the developer and/or their respective insurers, structural guarantee or warranty scheme. It is incumbent on the parties responsible for poor workmanship and/or the supply of defective materials to face up to their responsibilities and take appropriate action to provide remedies for the affected homeowners.

My Department does not hold a central record of building failures that have emerged. However, the Government has supported homeowners through a number of expert reports and investigations into legacy problems such as the Report of the Pyrite Panel (June 2012) and the Report of the Expert Panel on Concrete Blocks (June 2017). I also published a Framework for Enhancing Fire Safety in Dwellings (August 2017), which is intended to be used as a guide by the owners and occupants of dwellings where fire safety deficiencies have been identified, or are a cause for concern.

Where apartment buildings that are defective from a fire safety perspective come to the attention of the local authority fire services, they work with management companies and other stakeholders to ensure that appropriate levels of fire safety are achieved to minimise the risk to life. Actions are taken on the basis of case by case fire safety assessments.

Following the Grenfell Tower tragedy, and in recognition of fears expressed for fire safety, the National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management in my Department was tasked with co-ordinating a high-level Task Force to lead a re-appraisal of fire safety in Ireland. The Task Force's report, which was published recently, is available at the following link:

Report of the Fire Safety Task Force

The report makes a number of recommendations in relation to fire safety in apartment buildings, including, including:

- the registration of fire stopping sub-contractors;
- the roles and responsibilities of Building Management Companies e.g. to review and maintain fire safety arrangements, to keep a Fire Safety Register, to advise residents on what to do in the event of a fire alarm (in particular the evacuation arrangements); and
- that local authority Fire Services should offer training to Building Management Companies on key life safety issues.

The National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management has been mandated to carry through the recommendations of the report which are within my Department's remit and to oversee and report on the implementation of the report's other recommendations.

Homeless Persons Data

242. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of homeless families in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27093/18]

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

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

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

While these reports identify the number of adults utilising State-funded emergency accommodation at the county level, details in relation to families and dependants is only available on a regional basis; consequently the specific data sought in the Question is not available in my Department and is a matter for the relevant housing authority, in this case Kildare County Council.

Local Authority Housing Provision

243. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the extent to which planning procedures can be expedited to facilitate the building of extra local authority houses with particular reference to the need to make a serious impact on the numbers on local authority waiting lists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27094/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016 amended section 179 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 relating to the arrangements for the approval by local authorities of their own development proposals, often referred to as the Part 8 process. This amendment required a supporting amendment to the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 which was provided for in the Planning and Development (Strategic Housing Development) Regulations 2017.

Under the new arrangements, which came into operation with effect from 3 July 2017, the maximum timeframe for the determination of local authority-own development proposals is now 20 weeks from the date of issue of the proposals for public consultation by the Chief Executive, whereas previously there was no maximum timeframe.

These reforms provide greater certainty for local authorities around the decision timelines associated with the various steps in the approval process of such own-development proposals, including proposals for social housing projects and infrastructure servicing both public and private development.

National Planning Framework

244. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the extent to which facilities are available to meet the housing needs of the indigenous rural population throughout rural Ireland by way of ensuring an adequate number of houses in keeping with good planning principles to facilitate in so far as is possible the indigenous needs of those living in rural areas thereby reducing the impact on housing lists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27095/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English) (Deputy Damien English): Project Ireland 2040, within which the National Planning Framework (NPF) sits, will ensure that we maintain the fabric of our rural communities, support the growth of rural towns while recognising the need for the countryside to continue to be a living and lived-in landscape, and invest to support job creation. The NPF is a national plan, with a high-level ambition of creating a single vision, a shared set of goals for every community across the country, and to deliver on these in a way that makes sense for our communities, rural and urban alike.

The Framework recognises the need for sustainable and co-ordinated development of our towns, villages and rural communities. To this end, Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies will also be developed, which will link strategic national planning and investment with regional-scale physical planning and the local economic and community development functions of local authorities.

In addition, the Action Plan for Rural Development, published on 23 January 2017, takes a whole-of-Government approach, led by my colleague, the Minister for Rural and Community Development, to the economic and social development of rural Ireland and acts as an overarching structure for the co-ordination and implementation of rural initiatives across Government Departments and other public bodies.

A high proportion of overall national house-building is taking place in rural areas, pointing to the degree to which indigenous communities in rural areas are being facilitated in meeting their housing needs locally, with a degree of overspill development from cities and towns as well.

Every statutory City and County Development Plan, and by extension every Local Area Plan, includes comprehensive policies for provision of housing needs at local level. These policies are informed by my Department's 2005 statutory Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Sustainable Rural Housing, which are designed to ensure that planning authorities strike a balance between managing the future of rural areas from a development perspective and at the same time enabling housing requirements of rural communities to be met.

The Guidelines set out how planning authorities should frame their development plan policies for the different types of rural areas which may exist within the development plan area. These types of areas range from rural areas close to cities and towns at risk of overspill development and more remote areas with low levels of development pressure and consistent patterns of population decline. The Guidelines also set out policy advice on issues such as access to appropriate wastewater treatment facilities, potential impacts of the development on groundwater, landscape, natural and cultural heritage and addressing road safety issues (e.g. frontage onto national roads).

Following engagement between the European Commission and my Department regarding the 2013 European Court of Justice ruling in the "Flemish Decree" case, a working group, comprising representatives from my Department and planning authorities, was established in May 2017 to review and, where necessary, recommend changes to the 2005 Guidelines, with a view to ensuring that rural housing policies and objectives contained in local authority development plans comply with the relevant provisions of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

This Working Group concluded its deliberations in September 2017 and taking account of the Group's analysis and recommended outcome, my Department has been engaging with the Commission on the matter, with a view to issuing a further circular letter to planning authorities as soon as possible, setting out revisions to the 2005 Guidelines that take account of the relevant ECJ judgment.

I am satisfied that a sufficiently flexible and robust policy framework is in place to ensure that rural communities can meet their housing needs and that the National Planning Framework reinforces this.