

## Written Answers.

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

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*Questions Nos. 1 to 13, inclusive, answered orally.*

*Questions Nos. 13 to 16, inclusive, resubmitted.*

### **Taoiseach's Meetings and Engagements**

17. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his visit to the UN and the United States of America; and the meetings he held and groups he met. [30644/18]

**The Taoiseach:** The Deputy's question relates to my visit to New York in July, to take part in a series of events marking the launch of Ireland's election campaign for a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council for the 2021-2022 term.

On Monday 2 July, I participated in a ceremony marking 60 years of Ireland's participation on UN peacekeeping operations, and paying tribute to the 88 members of the Defence Forces who have lost their lives while serving on peacekeeping missions.

I then attended the official launch of Ireland's UN Security Council campaign at UN Headquarters, together with Tánaiste, former President Mary Robinson, U2's Bono, and over 400 guests including the UN diplomatic corps. The preceding evening, as part of their support for Ireland's campaign, U2 hosted international diplomats based at the UN at their concert in Madison Square Garden, an event which I and the Tánaiste also attended.

I also met a group of UN African Permanent Representatives to discuss the Ireland-Africa relationship and Ireland's candidature for the UN Security Council.

I also took the opportunity to meet a cross-section of young Irish and Irish-Americans living in New York, and visited the New York Stock Exchange, where I met with representatives of Irish and American businesses, and rang the opening bell.

I made a return visit to the UN earlier this week, to represent Ireland at the Nelson Mandela Peace Summit, where leaders and representatives of more than 130 countries gathered to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the birth of Nelson Mandela, as part of the week's events around the United Nations General Assembly.

*Questions Nos. 18 to 67, inclusive, resubmitted.*

*Questions Nos. 68 to 78, inclusive, answered orally.*

## **Action Plan for Rural Development Implementation**

79. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of progress in meeting the objective set out in the Action Plan for Rural Development to support improvements to 600 towns and villages by 2019 under the town and village renewal scheme. [38572/18]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** The Government's three-year Action Plan for Rural Development was published in January 2017. The Plan includes a suite of measures to support our rural towns and villages, with a view to revitalising over 600 towns and villages over its lifetime.

The Town and Village Renewal Scheme is a key part of the Action Plan for Rural Development. Since the launch of the Action Plan, I have allocated €21.6 million to 281 projects throughout the country under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme. This follows on from €10 million which was allocated to 170 projects under the scheme in 2016, prior to the publication of the Action Plan. The Town and Village Renewal Scheme has therefore provided in excess of €31 million to over 450 projects since 2016.

I launched the 2018 Town and Village Renewal Scheme on 27 April last, which will see up to 200 further towns and villages benefit from an indicative allocation of €15 million over the next 15 to 18 months.

A further call for proposals in 2019 would see the target of supporting the revitalisation of 600 towns and villages over the period 2017 to 2019 being reached, or even exceeded.

In addition, the new €1 billion Rural Regeneration and Development Fund will provide an opportunity to deliver more integrated and ambitious projects which will further support the revitalisation of our rural towns and villages in the coming years. The first call for proposals under this Fund is now open and applications will be accepted up to 12 noon on 27th September.

### **Walks Scheme**

80. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the progress made towards reopening the rural walks scheme; when he plans to reopen the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38624/18]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** As the Deputy is aware, my Department administers the Walks Scheme which facilitates the development and maintenance of many of Ireland's walking trails. The scheme involves landholders as key participants in the provision of high quality walking trails, by contracting them to undertake maintenance work on sections of National Waymarked Ways and other priority walks that traverse their lands. Participant landholders receive modest payments for maintenance work undertaken, in line with agreed work plans.

The scheme currently covers 39 trails, with payments made to approximately 1,900 landholders to maintain those trails.

The Programme for a Partnership Government and the Action Plan for Rural Development both include a commitment to increase the number of trails covered by the Walks Scheme.

My officials are working towards this objective and will review the scheme's operation over the coming months to determine how best to expand the scheme and to maximise the impact of

the resources available to me.

By the end of this year, I hope to be in a position to announce areas where the scheme will initially be expanded.

*Question No. 81 answered with Question No. 74.*

### **Community Services Programme Expenditure**

82. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the amount of top-up required to be funded in 2018 by companies participating in the community services programme per full-time equivalent after receipt of the subvention for wages compared to 2010; the reason the grant or subvention for wages has not kept in line with the increases in the minimum wage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38603/18]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** The Community Services Programme (CSP) supports around 400 community organisations to provide local services through a social enterprise model. Funding is provided as a contribution to the cost of a manager and an agreed number of full-time equivalent positions. More than €46 million is available to support community organisations under the programme in 2018.

The CSP contribution to the cost of employees is not aligned to the national minimum wage. It is a fixed annual contribution of €19,033 per full-time equivalent and €32,000 per manager and is required to be co-funded by the organisation concerned from other sources, for example, from income received from the use of their facilities and services. In order to pay staff the current minimum wage, a top up of €2,000 per full-time equivalent is required from organisations. In 2010, as the minimum wage was lower than it is currently, no top-up was required.

My Department will be commencing a review of the CSP shortly. Decisions on the structure of funding supports for CSP funded organisations will be considered in the context of this review.

### **Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme**

83. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development his views on the commitments to disadvantaged communities under SICAP. [38348/18]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** My Department's Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme, or SICAP, is a key priority for Government and aims to address high and persistent levels of deprivation through targeted and innovative, locally led projects in communities. SICAP supports disadvantaged communities and individuals including unemployed people, people living in deprived areas, people with disabilities, single parent families, people on a low income, members of the Traveller and Roma community and other disadvantaged groups.

I announced the second SICAP programme, covering 2018 to 2022, earlier this year. It has a funding allocation nationally of €38 million in 2018 and will provide some €190 million over the five year period of the Programme to support the most disadvantaged individuals and communities in our society. This amount also includes an allocation under the European Social Fund (ESF).

SICAP's goals relate to supporting both groups and also individuals on a one to one basis.

It provides capacity at local level to respond to the particular needs in each area. It is managed locally by 33 Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) with support from Local Authorities and is administered on my Department's behalf by Pobal. In its mid-year review of 2018, Pobal has reported to my Department that the Programme is well on course to meet its targets, with over 27,000 individuals supported by mid year. In addition, there were over 5,000 interventions for Local Community Groups in the same period.

### **Leader Programmes Expenditure**

84. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the progress made to date with the roll-out of the Leader programme 2013-2020; the expenditure incurred to date on the programme by administrative costs and projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38602/18]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** LEADER is a multi-annual programme which has a total budget of €250 million over the period to 2020.

The level of project activity under the LEADER programme has increased significantly this year, and 1,300 projects have now been approved for funding of over €39.8 million. A further 324 project applications, requesting an additional €21.1 million, are at various stages in the approval process.

Project payments have also increased in recent months, as approved works are completed and claims are submitted. Over €6 million of project expenditure has been incurred in 2018, compared to just €600,000 in 2017.

Total expenditure on the LEADER programme since it commenced, effectively in 2016, has amounted to €27.79 million. This comprises:

€1.47 million in preparatory costs incurred by the Local Action Groups to develop Local Development Strategies,

€19.6 million in administration costs of the LAGs and the cost of their engagement with communities to generate projects, and

€6.72 million on project expenditure.

The progress now being made by the Local Action Groups in approving projects will result in a continued increase in project approvals and payments under the LEADER programme for the remainder of the year. This progress has been assisted by improvements made by my Department in the last year to the applications and approvals process, in consultation with the LAGs.

### **Housing Regeneration**

85. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of the pilot scheme to provide funding for the renovation of rural houses in towns and villages; if there will be adequate funding for same for in budget 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38585/18]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** The primary objective behind the pilot scheme is to encourage people to return to living in town centres as

part of the effort to revitalise rural towns and villages. A Steering Group, chaired by my Department, was established to examine the issue. A lot of consideration has been given by the Steering Group to the best approach to developing a model which will deliver on the stated objective.

As the Deputy will be aware, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to rejuvenating towns and villages in rural Ireland. The factors which attract people to live in particular settlements can be many and varied, including the availability of schools, shops, transport and other services. Apart from the need to identify suitable properties which may be available for residential purposes, it is important that the right infrastructure and services are in place to make the town attractive and safe for people and families to live in. This requires supports that renovation grants alone cannot deliver.

The Steering Group noted that some schemes such as the Home Renovation Incentive Scheme are already available to home owners for refurbishment and improvements, while other schemes which have specifically attempted to focus on the renovation of vacant properties have had a disappointing take-up.

It is clear that if we are to successfully encourage people to return to living in town centres, an integrated solution involving all aspects of town living and supporting infrastructure, needs to be considered.

The Steering Group has agreed that a pilot scheme, which takes a holistic approach to town centre living, be piloted in a small number of towns initially, with a view to a wider roll-out over time if the pilot is successful. This approach, which I have approved, will allow a number of Local Authorities to develop and test different models which they feel are appropriate to a small number of selected towns of different sizes and in different locations. The learnings from this approach will help to provide an indication as to what might work well for similar types of town on a wider scale.

### **Social Innovation Fund Ireland**

86. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if he will report on the work of the social innovation fund; if his Department partakes in the selection and awarding of funds to suitable local projects; if priority areas are outlined for the funds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38389/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Seán Kyne):** The Social Innovation Fund Ireland (SIFI) was established in 2013 following on from the recommendations of a 2012 report of the Forum on Philanthropy and Fundraising. Its mission is to provide growth capital to Ireland's best social innovations, investing in solutions to social problems and creating jobs. SIFI finds and backs innovative solutions to critical social issues in Ireland and is charged with establishing a philanthropic fund of significant size and impact to aid the development of social innovation.

In partnership with others, SIFI supports innovations that enable healthy, resilient communities, and tackle issues like educational disadvantage and exclusion. SIFI backs social innovators to sustain them, scale them and maximise their impact.

The Department has recently agreed a three-year contract with SIFI which will include a continued commitment to match philanthropic funding raised by SIFI with State funding. This funding model will allow SIFI to continue its work in providing growth capital and support to Ireland's best social innovations. Every euro raised in philanthropy by SIFI is matched by my Department from funding under the Dormant Accounts Fund.

Since 2016, SIFI has opened 15 public calls for applications, and supported 47 innovations to date which have an impact in every county in Ireland.

The selection process consists of a number of stages which are carried out by SIFI as an independent organization in line with its governance requirements. In the first instance, an internal review is undertaken to ensure all criteria have been met. This is followed by an external screen which usually involves expert reviewers and the donor is also given the option to participate in the external screening.

Further due diligence is performed by SIFI which can include technical checks, reference checks, verification of statements made, and site visits. A recommended short-list is then submitted to the two funding parties, the donor and my Department, who have the opportunity to provide observations, prior to the final decision. Other than reviewing the short-list, my Department does not participate in the selection process.

The Board of SIFI make the final decision regarding successful projects.

No priority areas have been set out for the funds by my Department. However, where possible, SIFI pays close attention to ensuring a geographical and subject balance in its selection processes.

### **Local Improvement Scheme Funding**

87. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if additional funds will be released for local improvement schemes for counties which have already met their targets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38588/18]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** The Local Improvement Scheme, or LIS, is a programme for improvement works on small private or non-public roads in predominantly rural areas. The scheme is funded by my Department and administered through the Local Authorities.

Following on from the successful re-launch of the scheme in 2017, I announced details of the 2018 Local Improvement Scheme on 27th February last. I allocated an initial sum of €10.8 million to Local Authorities across the country this year under the scheme.

The list of projects which each of the Councils has selected for improvement works under the scheme are available on my Department's website.

As part of the LIS scheme this year, I also requested each County Council to compile a secondary list of suitable LIS road projects which they could complete if additional funding becomes available through my Department later in the year.

I am assessing the level of expenditure on all of my Department's programmes on an on-going basis, and I will make decisions shortly on whether there is scope for any additional funding to be allocated to the Local Improvement Scheme this year.

Over 1,100 roads have benefitted from improvement works since I re-launched the LIS last year. This is having a hugely positive impact for residents and landowners along those roads in terms of access to their premises and properties.

### **Leader Programmes Data**

88. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of projects applied for and approved under the Leader programme to date in County Clare; the number of applications being processed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38321/18]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** LEADER is a multi-annual programme for the period 2014-2020 which has a total budget of €250 million over the programming period. The programme is administered by Local Action Groups (LAGs) which deliver funding in accordance with Local Development Strategies (LDS) that have been agreed for each LEADER sub-regional area.

To date, 89 projects with a combined grant amount of over €1.7 million have been approved in County Clare, with a further 12 applications seeking funding of over €400,000 currently at various stages in the approvals process.

I am confident that the progress now being made by the LAGs in approving projects, along with the administrative improvements which my Department introduced over the last year, will result in a continued increase in project approvals and payments under the LEADER programme in all LAG areas, including County Clare, over the coming months.

*Question No. 89 answered with Question No. 76.*

### **RAPID Programme**

90. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the areas of the country that can now avail of funding under the new RAPID programme; the reason this funding is not ring-fenced for the most highly deprived areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38604/18]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** I launched the new Community Enhancement Programme in May. The Programme builds on and replaces the Communities Facilities Scheme and the recast RAPID programme. Its development followed a review of those two schemes, and consultation with the 33 Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) across the country.

Under the Programme, funding is allocated to each Local Authority area taking account of the relative deprivation level, using the Pobal Hasse deprivation index. The Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) then administers the programme to ensure funding is allocated locally to the areas that need it most, in order to address disadvantage as identified in their Local Economic and Community Plan. This is a more effective, flexible and locally responsive approach to addressing disadvantage than ring-fencing geographical areas as under previous programmes.

I originally allocated €4.5 million to this programme in 2018, and, based on the overwhelmingly positive feedback from communities around the country have recently allocated an additional €8 million to the programme.

A report which provides information on the review completed by Department, and detail on the new programme, is available on my Department's website on the following link:

*<https://drctd.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/Review-of-Communities-Facilities-Scheme-and-RAPID.pdf>*

## **Departmental Agencies**

91. **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 Attorney General has an input; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38582/18]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** Pobal is a not for profit company limited by guarantee, which was established by Government in 1992 as Area Development Management (ADM) Ltd. Charitable status was granted to the company by the Revenue Commissioners on the 20th November 1996. In 2005 ADM was re-named Pobal. In accordance with Section 40 of the Charities Act, 2009, Pobal was entered onto the Register of Charitable Organisations automatically on 16 October 2014.

The basis for Pobal having charitable status is tied to the objects of the Company, which are specified in its Memorandum and Articles of Association. I am satisfied that Pobal is fully compliant with the relevant legislative requirements including those of the Charities Act, 2009.

Notwithstanding this, Pobal has commissioned an independent review of its charitable status. My Department has been advised that this work is now at a very advanced stage. The board of Pobal will receive a final report upon conclusion of the review and will communicate the outcome of the review to my Department through our existing corporate governance and oversight arrangements.

Neither my Department nor the Attorney General has an input into this independent review.

## **Rural Recreation Policy**

92. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the progress made since 2011 to date in 2018 with the development of rural recreation; the estimated number of jobs created in this sector in that time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38601/18]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** Responsibility for the development of the rural recreation sector in Ireland cuts across a number of Government Departments and Agencies.

Specific information regarding the numbers of jobs created in the sector since 2011 is not available in my Department. However, in 2014, 1.5 million overseas visitors engaged in outdoor activities in Ireland and this market was estimated to be worth over €900 million. These figures give an indication of the potential for the sector to grow and support job creation, especially in rural areas.

My Department supports a number of rural recreation initiatives, including the Walks Scheme and the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme, which are having a positive impact on employment in many parts of the country.

The Walks Scheme is currently operating on 39 trails and supports 1,905 landowners who ensure that the trails are maintained to a high standard. The scheme is managed and administered by 16 Local Development Companies around the country, employing 12 Rural Recreation Officers.

The Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme forms part of the Action Plan for Rural De-



velopment and, in particular, the Plan's focus on developing and promoting activity tourism. The scheme provides funding for the development of new outdoor recreational infrastructure and the maintenance, enhancement or promotion of existing infrastructure. Approximately €23 million has been allocated to almost 500 projects under the scheme since it was introduced in 2016 and further approvals will be announced shortly.

This funding will assist in the development of the rural recreation sector in Ireland, and assist the retention and creation of jobs in rural areas, both directly and indirectly, over the coming years.

### **CLÁR Programme**

93. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the position regarding CLÁR funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38625/18]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** The CLÁR programme provides funding for small scale infrastructural projects in disadvantaged rural areas that have experienced significant levels of depopulation. More than 1,200 projects have been approved for total funding of €25 million since I relaunched the programme in 2016.

The 2018 CLÁR programme provided funding under the following measures:

Measure 1: Support for Schools/Community Safety Measures

Measure 2: Play Areas/Multi-Use Games Areas

Measure 3: First Response Support Measure

In recent weeks, I approved 362 successful projects for funding under these measures, with a total allocation of €10.4 million across the three measures. The successful projects are listed on the CLÁR pages of my Department's website, [www.drcd.gov.ie](http://www.drcd.gov.ie).

I also announced a further measure to support mobility and cancer care transport in CLÁR areas which closed for applications at the end of August. I expect to make an announcement regarding the successful applicants under this measure shortly.

### **CLÁR Programme**

94. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development his plans to review the CLÁR areas based on the 2016 census returns; the timeline for the review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38622/18]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** CLÁR was originally launched in October 2001 to provide for targeted investment in disadvantaged rural areas. The areas originally selected for inclusion in the programme were those which suffered the greatest population decline from 1926 to 1996. The Cooley Peninsula was also included on the basis of the serious difficulties caused in that area by Foot and Mouth disease. The average population loss in the original CLÁR regions over the period 1926 to 1996 was 50%.

In 2006, an analysis of the 2002 Census data was carried out by the NIRSA Institute at Maynooth University and the programme was extended to include areas with an average population loss of 35% between 1926 and 2002.

The CLÁR programme was closed for new applications in 2010. However, I re-launched the programme in the second half of 2016, using as a base-line the areas identified in the work carried out by NIRSA. Over 1,200 projects have been approved for funding of €25 million under CLÁR since I re-launched the programme in 2016.

I intend carrying out a full review of qualifying CLÁR areas later this year on the basis of the 2016 Census data. The level of depopulation will continue to be a primary factor in the designation of any area as a CLÁR area. The review will involve a detailed examination of all areas of the country, as well as stakeholder consultation.

The findings of the review will inform future launches of the CLÁR programme into 2019 and beyond.

### **Telecommunications Services Data**

95. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if, as part of the mobile phone and broadband task force, all local authorities have identified coverage blackspots; and the steps being considered to address these blackspots. [38507/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Seán Kyne):** The Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce was established in July 2016 to examine broadband and mobile phone coverage deficits in Ireland and identify tangible actions to improve the quality of these services.

The Task Force Report was published in December 2016, encompassing 40 actions to alleviate barriers to mobile phone reception and broadband access. An Implementation Group was established in 2017 to oversee the delivery of the actions in the task force's report. Progress reports on the delivery of these actions are published on my Department's website on a quarterly basis.

With regard to the specific issue of mobile phone blackspots, my officials, in conjunction with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment, are actively engaged with Local Authorities and mobile phone operators to identify priority blackspots and take action to address this issue.

During 2017, officials of both Departments worked with a group of Local Authorities to identify the issues associated with mapping local blackspots. Building on this exercise, a call was issued to all Local Authorities in 2018 to map local blackspots and identify infrastructure that could potentially be used to improve telecommunications services.

To date, 17 Local Authorities have provided data on more than 200 blackspots, although it should be borne in mind that the number of blackspots is constantly changing as new telecommunications infrastructure is rolled out and upgraded. The blackspot information that the Department has received so far is providing data regarding poor coverage in specific rural areas and along national and regional roads. The Department is continuing to work with the telecommunications providers to ensure that new infrastructure is targeted at the areas most in need.

In addition, a Focus Group was established earlier this year by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment to provide guidance with respect to categories of location where high quality reliable mobile coverage should be made available as a priority. The report of the Focus Group was published in August 2018 and sets out a ranked list of categories of location where high quality mobile coverage should be available. It also recommends the level (in terms of quality and reliability) of coverage needed for these locations with respect to

mobile voice and data services.

### **Cross-Border Projects**

96. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if he or his Department have had recent discussions with the authorities in Northern Ireland on cross-Border projects which may be affected by Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38599/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Seán Kyne):** The Minister for Rural and Community Development is a member of the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC). However, his colleague, the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine has primary responsibility with respect to the North South Ministerial Council relating to Agriculture and Rural Development.

The North South Ministerial Council has been unable to meet since the Northern Ireland Executive collapsed in January 2017, and specifically because of the continuing absence of a First and deputy First Minister, who, acting jointly, are required to satisfy a number of statutory requirements in respect of NSMC Meetings.

While formal NSMC official-level Working Groups, whose primary purpose is to prepare for NSMC Ministerial meetings in the areas of cooperation, are also not taking place, officials from Departments in both jurisdictions have continued to work together in line with the previously agreed work programme of cooperation.

My officials have continued therefore to engage with their counterparts in relation to progressing projects under the co-operation measure under the current LEADER programme and within the North West Strategic Growth Partnership initiative being progressed by both Donegal Local Authority and Derry City Council.

My Department is also a Designated Accountable Department under the PEACE IV programme for Peace and Reconciliation. My colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, has overall responsibility for the PEACE Programme and any related BREXIT discussions.

The North South cooperation we enjoy today brings tangible benefits to the daily lives of people in the border region and across the island. It contributes to economic opportunity and development. It is also a very practical outworking of the peace process which allows for the normalisation of relationships between people across the island, to mutual benefit.

It is for these reasons that the Government has prioritised the protection of the Good Friday Agreement in all its part, and the gains of the peace process, along with the avoidance of a hard border, in the Brexit negotiations.

I earnestly hope that a new administration can be put in place in Northern Ireland soon and I look forward to engaging with my counterpart in Northern Ireland at an early date in the future on issues of common interest within my Department's remit.

### **Voluntary Sector Funding**

97. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the funding provided to an organisation (details supplied) in 2017; and the funding that will be

provided in 2018. [38506/18]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** The organisation referred to by the Deputy (Men's Sheds) is a member-based network with affiliated member bodies throughout the country. I am delighted to support the Men's Sheds; the funding provided by my Department is outlined below.

In 2017, I provided funding of €14,900, to the central Men's Sheds organisation, to purchase IT equipment. Also in 2017, my Department provided €131,720 to 81 member bodies under the recast RAPID programme and the Communities Facilities Scheme enabling them to upgrade their facilities and expand their activities.

The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) provided 13 grants to men's shed groups totalling €12,300 to date in 2018. SICAP also provides other supports to individual member bodies. In 2017, 142 groups were supported by actions that were undertaken under SICAP. In 2018 to date, the figure is 121.

In 2017, four projects were approved for €69,788 under the LEADER 2014-2020 Programme. By August 2018 a further six applications had been approved to the value of €263,554.

For 2018, I announced a new Men's Shed Fund under the Community Enhancement Programme. This provided €0.5 million for Men's Shed Groups to complete minor capital works or to purchase equipment.

### **Insurance Coverage**

98. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if his attention has been drawn to the threat to many rural festivals, féile and community type events in terms of the exorbitant insurance costs and threat of personal injury claims; the way in which he plans to address the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38587/18]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** Policy responsibility for the Financial Services and Insurance sectors lies with my colleague in the Department of Finance, Minister of State Michael D'Arcy, T.D.

In January this year, Minister D'Arcy published the Cost of Insurance Working Group's Report on the "Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance". This report is available on the Department of Finance's website.

I am aware that the cost of public liability insurance can be a real challenge for many festivals and other community events and activities. In that regard, I have made funding available to Mountain Rescue Ireland over the past number of years to help defray their insurance costs.

I am also aware that my colleague, the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, has made funding available to Agricultural shows, specifically to help defray the cost of their insurance.

I separately allocated €800,000 to almost 120 Agricultural shows throughout the country last year, in recognition of the difficulties experienced by such shows in recent years. I allocated a further €600,000 to the shows this year, to enable them to invest in and improve their shows for 2019.

99. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if budget 2019 will be rural-proofed in order to ensure that there will be no further cuts to services for rural communities; if recent cuts to services will be reversed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38586/18]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** The Deputy will be aware that the preparation of the Budget is primarily a matter for the Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform, who will bring his proposals for Budget 2019 to Government for decision in the coming weeks.

It would not be appropriate for me, at this stage, to comment on the issues raised by the Deputy in advance of the Budget being presented to Dáil Eireann on 9th October.

In a more general context, the Action Plan for Rural Development, which was published in January 2017, represents a significant development in providing a whole of Government approach to developing the opportunities, and addressing the challenges, facing rural Ireland today. The comprehensive range of measures contained in the Action Plan demonstrates the level of support for, and investment in, rural Ireland which is taking place right across Government.

Project Ireland 2040 builds on the Action Plan for Rural Development and includes a specific strategic objective of achieving strengthened rural economies and communities. To support this objective, the Government has established the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund, to be overseen by my Department, which will provide €1 billion for rural development over the next 10 years.

This Fund, along with the continued implementation of the Action Plan for Rural Development, will support the economic and social development of our rural communities in the coming years.

### **Library Services Funding**

100. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the capital investment in public libraries in 2017 and to date in 2018 in order to support the roll out of Our Public Libraries 2022 – Inspiring, Connecting and Empowering Communities. [38349/18]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** My Department provides funding to supplement investment by local authorities in their library services. Funding is provided, for example, as a contribution towards the cost of developing library buildings, technological capacity and resources, book-stock and other areas of activity that enhance local library services.

In 2017 my Department provided funding of almost €3.5 million to libraries across the country in Libraries Strategy Funding. This funding included tagging of book-stock, hot-desk facilities, purchase of book-stock and ICT equipment. In addition to this, over €3 million was provided under my Department's Libraries Capital Investment Programme giving a total capital investment of €6.5 million in 2017.

I recently approved funding for 2018 of almost €6 million for ICT capacity, digital services and facilities in public libraries. In addition, approximately €1 million is expected to be paid under the Libraries Capital Investment Programme this year giving a total capital investment of c.€7 million in 2018.

Responsibility for the delivery of public library services is generally a matter for each local authority in its capacity as a library authority under the Local Government Act 2001. Accordingly, the primary responsibility for funding the management and development of library services including the implementation of the new Strategy rests with the local authorities.

### **Charities Regulation**

101. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of his Department's engagement with the Charities Regulator with regard to his review of State agencies that also hold charitable status; if the Attorney General has had an input into this review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38583/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Seán Kyne):** The Charities Regulator is an independent authority which 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.

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 of 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 a review of charities which are statutory bodies. Neither my Department nor the Office of the Attorney General has had any involvement in this work.

The Charities Regulator's 2018 business plan also provided for the publication of a sectorial report, based on an analysis of data held on the Charities Register. This report, which was published in July, analysed issues such as the income and expenditure of the sector, overall economic and social impacts, legal structure and governance, and charitable donations. A copy of the report can be downloaded at

*<https://www.charitiesregulator.ie/media/1489/social-and-economic-impact-report-2018.pdf>*

### **CLÁR Programme**

102. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the areas in which he is expanding CLÁR funding in 2019, by category; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38626/18]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** The CLÁR programme provides funding for small scale infrastructural projects in disadvantaged rural areas that have experienced significant levels of depopulation. More than 1,200 projects have been approved for total funding of €25 million since I relaunched the programme in 2016.

The 2018 CLÁR programme provided funding under the following measures:

Measure 1: Support for Schools/Community Safety Measures

Measure 2: Play Areas/Multi-Use Games Areas

Measure 3: First Response Support Measure

In recent weeks, I approved 362 successful projects for funding under these measures, with a total allocation of €10.4 million across the three measures. The successful projects are listed on the CLÁR pages of my Department's website, *www.drcd.gov.ie*.

I also announced a further measure to support mobility and cancer care transport in CLÁR areas which closed for applications at the end of August. I expect to make an announcement regarding the successful applicants under this measure shortly.

Decisions regarding any categories or measures which might be supported under CLÁR in 2019 will be made early next year.

### **Action Plan for Rural Development**

103. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of the work of the Action Plan for Rural Development specifically relating to the revitalisation of towns and villages; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38589/18]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** The Government's Action Plan for Rural Development was published in January 2017. The Plan includes a range of measures to support the revitalisation of our rural towns and villages. Progress Reports on each of the measures in the Action Plan are published on my Department's website twice-yearly, with the most recent report published last May.

The Town and Village Renewal Scheme is a key part of the Action Plan for Rural Development. Since the launch of the Action Plan, I have allocated €21.6 million to 281 projects throughout the country under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme. This follows on from €10 million which was allocated to 170 projects under the scheme in 2016, prior to the publication of the Action Plan. The Town and Village Renewal Scheme has therefore provided in excess of €31 million to over 450 projects since 2016.

I launched the 2018 Town and Village Renewal Scheme on 27th April last, which will see up to 200 further towns and villages benefit from an indicative allocation of €15 million over the next 15 to 18 months.

The Government's commitment to supporting rural Ireland is underscored through the creation of the new €1 billion Rural Regeneration and Development Fund as part of Project Ireland 2040. This new Fund will provide an opportunity to deliver more integrated and ambitious projects which will further support the revitalisation of our rural towns and villages in the coming years. The first call for proposals under this Fund is now open and applications will be accepted up to 12 noon on 27th September.

### **Action Plan for Rural Development Implementation**

104. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the progress made by the Atlantic Economic Corridor Taskforce to date including appointment of the ten Atlantic Economic Corridor officers and the development of hubs in each local authority area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38596/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Seán Kyne):** The Programme for Partnership Government and the Action Plan for Rural Development both contain a commitment to progress the concept of an Atlantic Economic Corridor. The Atlantic Economic Corridor has been recognised in the National Planning Framework as a potential key enabler to the regional growth objectives of the NPF.

The Atlantic Economic Corridor Taskforce was established in March 2017 to progress the proposal. I chair the Taskforce, which includes senior representatives from the business sector, key Government Departments, other public bodies, and Third Level institutions.

The Taskforce has met six times since it was established, most recently in Galway in June 2018, with a seventh meeting scheduled for October 2018. A number of sub-groups of the Taskforce are progressing specific aspects of the overall proposal, such as examining infrastructure needs and enterprise property assets, and developing a communications strategy.

I launched the AEC website [www.atlanticeconomiccorridor.ie](http://www.atlanticeconomiccorridor.ie) in Galway in June 2018. The website offers information for people thinking of setting up a business in the region, or for those interested in relocating to the region.

Local Authorities are playing a key role in ensuring a cohesive approach is taken to the development of the AEC. To support this, my Department is providing funding of €30,000 to each of the Local Authorities along the Corridor to co-fund the appointment of a dedicated AEC Officer who will work to develop and promote the AEC initiative and support the work of the Taskforce and its sub-groups. Five of these Local Authorities (Leitrim, Limerick, Clare, Mayo & Roscommon) have already appointed AEC Officers. The remaining five Local Authorities (Sligo, Kerry, Donegal, Galway City and Galway County) have interim officers in place and are in the process of designating permanent AEC Officers.

The Dormant Accounts Action Plan 2018 contains a measure aimed at supporting employment along the AEC by providing funding to support innovation hubs and digital hubs in the functional areas of the 10 Local Authorities along the corridor. As with all Dormant Account measures, a voted allocation must be made available as part of the Estimates process for the measure to proceed. The Dormant Accounts Action Plan envisages that this measure will progress in 2019, subject to the necessary voted expenditure being made available.

### **Seniors Alert Scheme**

105. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the funding provided to Galway city and county under the seniors alert scheme; the number of applicants approved; the number of alert schemes installed in 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018; the funding allocated to Galway city and county for 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38598/18]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** The total allocation for the Seniors Alert Scheme (SAS) in 2016 was €2.3m of which €1.8m was spent. Following a review, I launched a new scheme which took effect on 1 November 2017. A media and information campaign was organised to support the launch.

I am pleased to say that since the launch of the new Seniors Alert Scheme, the demand has been unprecedented. During 2017, spend on the Scheme amounted to €2.7m, with over 12,600 applications approved and more than 10,000 installations completed. To the end of August 2018, almost 13,000 applications were approved, with in excess of 14,500 installations completed.



Since the Seniors Alert Scheme commenced in September 2015, 2,484 participants have been approved for the Scheme in County Galway, broken down as follows.

Year	Approved participants
2015	81
2016	538
2017	872
To end August 2018	993
Total	2,484

The lot-based tender system for suppliers combines a number of counties into each of the seven lots, and payments are made to the suppliers in each of these lots. Therefore it is not possible to say with full accuracy how much funding has been given to each county. The Senior Alert Scheme is demand led and funding is allocated to meet the demand under the Scheme and is not divided on a geographical basis.

My officials are carefully monitoring the scheme to ensure that current levels of demand can continue to be met from within the resources available to my Department. The funding allocation for 2019 is currently under consideration as part over of the overall 2019 Estimates process.

### **Action Plan for Rural Development Implementation**

106. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of the Atlantic economic corridor, including the recruitment of AEC officers in the relevant counties. [38323/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Seán Kyne):** The Programme for Partnership Government and the Action Plan for Rural Development both contain a commitment to progress the concept of an Atlantic Economic Corridor. The Atlantic Economic Corridor has also been recognised in the National Planning Framework as a potential key enabler to the regional growth objectives of the NPF.

The Atlantic Economic Corridor Taskforce was established in March 2017 to progress the proposal. I chair the Taskforce, which includes senior representatives from the business sector, key Government Departments, other public bodies, and Third Level institutions.

The Taskforce has met six times since it was established, most recently in Galway in June 2018, with a seventh meeting scheduled for October 2018. A number of sub-groups of the Taskforce are progressing specific aspects of the overall proposal, such as examining infrastructure needs and enterprise property assets, and developing a communications strategy.

I launched the AEC website [www.atlanticeconomiccorridor.ie](http://www.atlanticeconomiccorridor.ie) in Galway in June 2018. The website offers information for people thinking of setting up a business in the region, or for those interested in relocating to the region.

Local Authorities are playing a key role in ensuring a cohesive approach is taken to the development of the AEC. To support this, my Department is providing funding of €30,000 to each of the Local Authorities along the Corridor to co-fund the appointment of a dedicated AEC Officer who will work to develop and promote the AEC initiative and support the work of the Taskforce and its sub-groups. Five of these Local Authorities (Leitrim, Limerick, Clare, Mayo and Roscommon) have already appointed AEC Officers. The remaining five Local Authorities (Sligo, Kerry, Donegal, Galway City and Galway County) have interim officers in place and are

in the process of designating AEC Officers to fulfil the role on a permanent basis.

### Seniors Alert Scheme

107. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the financial allocations in 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018 for the seniors alert scheme; the take-up to date of the scheme in County Kildare since 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38571/18]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** The allocation for the Seniors Alert Scheme in 2016 was €2.3m of which €1.8m was spent. Following a review, I launched a new scheme which took effect on 1 November 2017. A media and information campaign was organised to support the launch.

I am pleased to say that since the launch of the new scheme, the demand has been unprecedented. During 2017, spend on the Scheme amounted to €2.7m, with over 12,600 applications approved and more than 10,000 installations completed. To the end of August 2018, almost 13,000 applications were approved, with in excess of 14,500 installations completed. Spend on this demand-led scheme to date in 2018 has been almost €5.4million.

Since the Seniors Alert Scheme commenced in September 2015, 1,102 participants have been approved for the Scheme in County Kildare, broken down as follows:

Year	Approved Participants
2015	69
2016	247
2017	383
To end August 2018	403
Total	1,102

The Senior Alert Scheme is demand led and funding is allocated to meet the demand under the Scheme and is not divided on a geographical basis.

My officials are carefully monitoring the scheme to ensure that current levels of demand can continue to be met from within the resources available to my Department. The funding allocation for 2019 is currently under consideration as part over of the overall 2019 Estimates process.

### Public Participation Networks

108. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if he will report on the engagement of public participation networks here; the way in which the opportunity to partake in public participation networks is advertised amongst communities and local authority areas; if changes to the running of the networks are planned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38388/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Seán Kyne):** My Department provides funding and support to 31 Public Participation Networks (PPNs) nationwide. This year, funding of up to €50,000 has been provided to each local authority to support the work of the PPNs, supplemented by a minimum of €30,000 per annum from each authority's own resources. In addition, my Department continues to support the ongoing development of the PPNs, through supporting the work of the National Advisory Group,

the provision of a data base, and the development of a User Guide.

The principal role of the National PPN Advisory Group is to monitor and evaluate PPNs regularly in line with best practice. Along with its monitoring role, the Advisory Group is also charged with advising and supporting the Department of Rural and Community Development in the further development of PPNs. The 2017 PPN Annual Report makes a number of recommendations which will be considered by the National Advisory Group as part of its ongoing work programme. These include a national publicity campaign to promote awareness and understanding of the PPNs, a review of the PPN Guidelines and structures and extra administrative resources to support the PPN development role.

PPNs have now been established in all local authority areas. Some are more firmly established than others, largely reflecting the timing of setting up arrangements, recruitment of resource workers and the formation of the various groupings required for PPNs to function.

In 2017, almost 13,000 organisations were members of 29 local PPNs surveyed. PPNs have developed communications activities to increase awareness of the organisation right across the community. This is rolled out to members and communities through various communication channels, including e-bulletins, social media, websites, promotional materials, local events and local radio.

PPN's are currently updating their membership database and are using this opportunity to identify and actively target community and voluntary groups that are not currently members of the PPN. There is a strong emphasis on engaging with the most marginalised members of communities that are not currently represented by any group in the PPN structures.

### **Town and Village Renewal Scheme**

109. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of the town and village renewal scheme; when applications from counties Carlow and Kilkenny can be submitted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38590/18]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** The 2018 Town and Village Renewal Scheme was launched on 27th April last. The scheme is funded by my Department and administered through the Local Authorities.

Under the scheme, Local Authorities were required to seek expressions of interest from communities for project proposals and were invited to select up to 12 proposals for submission to my Department for consideration. The closing date for submission of applications to the Department was 30th June 2018.

My Department received 290 applications in total under the scheme, including 12 applications from Carlow County Council and 7 applications from Kilkenny County Council.

My officials are currently assessing all applications received and it is anticipated that the successful projects will be announced shortly. Projects will be expected to commence by the end of the year and to be completed within a period of up to 18 months.

Over €31.6 million has been approved for more than 450 projects across the country under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme since it was introduced in the second half of 2016. It is anticipated that a further 200 projects will be supported under this year's scheme, with indicative funding of €15 million available.

The Town and Village Renewal Scheme is an important part of the Government's Action Plan for Rural Development. The Government's commitment to supporting rural Ireland is further underscored through the new €1 billion Rural Regeneration and Development Fund which was launched recently. This new Fund will provide an opportunity to deliver more integrated and ambitious projects which will further support the revitalisation of our rural towns and villages in the coming years.

### **Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas**

110. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the extent to which each of the 34 recommendations of the CEDRA report have been implemented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38594/18]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** The Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas (CEDRA) was established in November 2012 as an independent expert group to examine and report on the medium-term economic development of rural Ireland to 2025. The CEDRA report was published in April 2014. The priority recommendation made by CEDRA was the need for a co-ordinated approach to rural development across Government, led by a Cabinet Minister.

The 2016 Programme for a Partnership Government included a commitment to appoint a Government Minister and Department to provide greater political coordination and prioritisation of the work of other Departments in relevant areas that impact on rural Ireland. The assignment of these responsibilities to the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs in May 2016, and the subsequent establishment of the dedicated Department of Rural and Community Development in July 2017, has addressed this priority recommendation of CEDRA and has ensured representation at Cabinet for rural and community development issues.

The Government's Action Plan for Rural Development which was published in January 2017 builds on, and goes further than, the CEDRA report in that it seeks to address not just the economic development of rural areas, but also seeks to support the social and cultural development of rural communities across the country. Many of the recommendations in the CEDRA report which had not yet been implemented were integrated into the Action Plan.

My Department recently reviewed all of the recommendations in the CEDRA report and found that the recommendations have either been implemented, where feasible, or are being addressed through the Action Plan for Rural Development or other Government initiatives.

### **Cabinet Committee Meetings**

111. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach when Cabinet committee E on health last met. [38527/18]

**The Taoiseach:** Cabinet Committee E last met on 11 April 2018. Work continues on the issues/projects raised at that meeting. Most notably the Sláinte care report was published and launched.

### **Cabinet Committee Meetings**

112. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach when Cabinet committee D on infra-

structure last met. [38528/18]

**The Taoiseach:** Cabinet Committee D last met on 1 February and its next meeting is not yet scheduled.

As I have previously indicated to the House, the Committee works to ensure a coordinated approach to the delivery and ongoing development of policy across the areas of infrastructure investment and delivery, housing, and climate action.

Since the last meeting there is significant work underway across Government departments and agencies on each of these areas, in particular through regular discussion of these matters at meetings of Government.

Cabinet Committee D also provides a forum for strategic oversight of the implementation of Project Ireland 2040, the Government's overarching policy initiative to achieve balanced development and meet the infrastructure needs of our growing population.

Under the two pillars of Project Ireland 2040 - the National Planning Framework and the National Development Plan – four funds, totalling €4 billion in investment, have been launched in the areas of rural and urban regeneration and development, climate action, and disruptive technologies.

In addition, the Land Development Agency, another cornerstone initiative of Project Ireland 2040 was recently launched. It will work to ensure the optimal use and management of State land through strategic development and regeneration, with an immediate focus on delivering homes, including social and affordable homes.

Housing remains a central priority for the Government. While the indicators show that the numbers of new houses being built is up by more than a third compared to this time last year and is increasing month on month, we recognise that we are still facing a huge challenge in meeting demand. We will continue to focus on increasing housing supply, tackling homelessness and increasing the availability of affordable and social housing through the delivery of Rebuilding Ireland and the additional policy measures announced by Minister Murphy to tackle these issues.

Climate action objectives are also at the heart of Project Ireland 2040 and building on the National Mitigation Plan an investment of €22 billion in Exchequer and non-Exchequer funding will be made to ensure a step change in climate action policy.

### **Cabinet Committee Meetings**

113. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach when Cabinet committee B on social policy and public services last met. [38593/18]

**The Taoiseach:** Cabinet Committee B last met on 7 June.

The Committee, which covers the areas of Social Policy and Public Service Reform, ensures a co-ordinated approach to the delivery of commitments in the Programme for Partnership Government, and provides the opportunity to shape proposals on issues such as equality, disability and disadvantage which require input from multiple Departments.

Work continues as always on the agenda items to make further progress.

## **Departmental Reports**

114. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach the number of persons in his Department, both at official and other levels, who received the Scally report before it was leaked to the media on 11 September 2018 and before the victims had received a briefing on same; and his plans to investigate the leak. [37936/18]

**The Taoiseach:** The leaking of some information from the Scally Report before the women and families most affected could be briefed was wrong. The report concerned a very sensitive issue touching on the lives of women, some of whom are very ill, and of families, some of whom are grieving a devastating bereavement.

The leaking of this information was done without any regard to the interests of the families and the women concerned and frustrated the plans that had been put in place to have Dr. Scally brief the women and families and patients' representatives at the same time as the Cabinet meeting and ahead of the publication of the report.

The matter is being investigated by a senior official who did not receive a copy of the report in advance of its publication, and I do not wish to pre-empt the investigation by attempting at this stage to answer questions which will have to be considered as part of that investigation.

## **Commissions of Investigation**

115. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Taoiseach if the Commission of Investigation into Irish Bank Resolution Corporation is still due to report by year end 2018; the cost of the investigation to date; and the costs for legal fees to date. [38150/18]

**The Taoiseach:** In December 2017, following a request from the IBRC Commission of Investigation, I extended its deadline for reporting on the first module of its investigation, the Siteserv transaction, to 31 December 2018.

To the end of August 2018, the IBRC Commission spent a total of €4,268,887, of which €1,829,867 was spent on legal fees in relation to the Counsel engaged on behalf of the Commission. It should be noted that no third party legal costs have been paid to date.

## **Departmental Properties**

116. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Taoiseach the land his Department or agencies under its remit own in County Meath; the location of same; the use to which the land is put; the location of the land that is vacant, not in use or being used for agricultural purposes; the land his Department has made available to Meath County Council or other housing agencies for the purpose of house building; and the amount of this land that could be made available for housing. [38391/18]

**The Taoiseach:** My Department does not own any properties or land in County Meath or elsewhere. Properties occupied by my Department and the National Economic and Social Development Office - the only body under the aegis of my Department - are located in Dublin and are provided and managed by the Office of Public Works.

## **Departmental Expenditure**

117. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Taoiseach the expenditure savings that are earmarked for his Department for 2019 that are not accounted for in the mid-year expenditure report or are not included in the fiscal space calculations for 2019. [38493/18]

**The Taoiseach:** My Department is currently engaging with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform on its 2019 Estimate provision. Any expenditure savings will be identified as part of that process and announced by the Minister for Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform at Budget time.

### **European Council Meetings**

118. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he has spoken with the Prime Minister of Spain, Dr. Sánchez, while attending the informal European Council meeting in Salzburg or since. [38375/18]

**The Taoiseach:** I was honoured to be the first EU leader to meet with Pedro Sánchez following his appointment as Prime Minister of Spain, when I visited Madrid on 14 June. We discussed a range of issues across the EU agenda, including Brexit, migration and the EU budget, as well as foreign policy issues, and bilateral relations. The Prime Minister assured me of his strong support in relation to our unique concerns arising from Brexit, and agreed on the need to ensure that a legally operable version of the backstop is included in the Withdrawal Agreement. My visit to Madrid also included an event with the Spanish-Irish business network, where I had the opportunity to engage with our state agencies working in Spain, and representatives from the telecommunications, banking, tourism, and agrifood sectors.

More recently, I had the opportunity to engage informally with Prime Minister Sánchez at the Informal EU Summit in Salzburg on 19 and 20 September, where I was glad to hear that solidarity with Ireland among all 26 Member States and the EU Institutions remains absolutely solid.

I look forward to interacting with the Prime Minister and my other EU counterparts again at the European Council on 17 and 18 October.

Ongoing political engagement with our EU and international partners remains crucial, especially as negotiations on Brexit proceed, and I continue to take advantage of every opportunity to advance Ireland's interests with my fellow members of the European Council.

### **Departmental Communications**

119. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Taoiseach if he or Ministers, ministerial advisers or officials in his Department have ever used private email to communicate on departmental issues between one another or with other persons or organisations; if so, the reason; and if so, if he will publish these emails. [38565/18]

**The Taoiseach:** I and the staff working in my Department have been assigned Departmental email accounts which are used for official business. These accounts are only accessible through my Department's secure network and, in some circumstances, remotely using officially supplied and appropriately secured mobile devices such as laptop computers or mobile telephones.

My Department's ICT Policy stipulates that where personal email accounts are used for business purposes, due regard must be taken of the sensitivity and confidentiality of the information being transmitted.

The Policy further requires that, where personal email accounts are used for business purposes, a copy of any record created must be retained in an appropriate official electronic filing system and/or hard copy file which can be accessed should the need arise.

There may be occasional operational reasons to use a personal email account or from time to time, a third party may email me about official business using an address other than my Departmental address. This has occurred previously where the third party may have had a particular address to contact me prior to my appointment as Taoiseach.

In line with my Department's ICT policy, if such correspondence is received, I or my staff copy the reply to Government officials thereby creating a record of the correspondence which can be accessed at a later date. Indeed, such correspondence has been released under Freedom of Information.

### **Departmental Expenditure**

120. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the expenditure savings that are earmarked for his Department for 2019 that are not accounted for in the mid-year expenditure report or are not included in the fiscal space calculations for 2019. [38483/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** The Mid-Year Expenditure Report (MYER) set out the starting baseline in relation to the gross voted expenditure for 2019. As outlined in the MYER, the technical pre-Budget position for current expenditure is the current expenditure allocation for this year set out in REV. This pre-Budget position will be adjusted to reflect the allocation to the Department of a central provision in relation to the Public Service Stability Agreement.

The capital ceiling set out in the MYER is consistent with the ceiling for 2019 published in the National Development Plan.

The figures set out in the MYER do not include expenditure savings targets specifically earmarked for my Department. However, as usual as part of the Estimates process, my Department will be examining the allocations across its programme area, including taking into account expenditure trends in 2018, to identify how services can be delivered within the overall fiscal parameters for 2019.

### **Departmental Communications**

121. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if Ministers, ministerial advisers or officials in his Department have ever used private email to communicate on departmental issues between one another or with other persons or organisations; if so, the reason; if so, if he will publish these emails; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38563/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** I can confirm that neither myself, nor my special advisers, have used a private email account for official business.

An official email account is provided to all officials in my Department for use in all official email correspondence. In addition, employees provide a private email address to the National Shared Services Office to allow for direct communication with the individual in relation to their own individual HR and payroll matters. This is to facilitate communication in circumstances where an employee may be on leave or absent due to illness.



## Air Corps Equipment

122. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if there are plans to replace the CASA fixed-wing aircraft in the Air Corps; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38667/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** My priority as Minister with Responsibility for Defence is to ensure that the operational capability of the Defence Forces is maintained to the greatest extent possible so as to enable the Defence Forces to carry out their roles as assigned by Government.

The White Paper on Defence provides for the replacement of the two CASA 235 Maritime Patrol Aircraft with consideration of their replacement with larger more suitable aircraft, which would enhance maritime surveillance and provide a greater degree of utility for transport and cargo carrying tasks. A public tender competition for the replacement of the CASA Maritime Patrol Aircraft is underway in my Department at present, following the publication of a Request for Proposals on the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU) in May. The cost of the aircraft will only be known once the tender competition is concluded.

The Deputy may wish to note that the White Paper also provides for the replacement of the current Air Corps Cessna fleet with three larger aircraft which will be equipped for Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance (ISTAR). Following an open tender competition, a contract was placed with Pilatus Aircraft Ltd in December 2017 at a cost of some €32 million for the provision of three PC-12 fixed wing utility aircraft suitably equipped for ISTAR tasks which will replace the Cessna fleet. It is expected that the three aircraft will be delivered by 2020.

The National Development Plan provides for a Capital allocation of €541 million for Defence for the five year period 2018-2022. This allocation will allow the Defence Organisation to undertake a programme of sustained equipment replacement and infrastructural development across the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service, as set out in the White Paper. The replacement of the Air Corps Cessna aircraft and the CASA 235 Maritime Patrol Aircraft are among the projects included.

## EU Sanctions

123. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the proposed sanctions against Hungary in view of the recent developments and decisions that breach European values. [37934/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** On 12 September 2018, the European Parliament, under A7 of the Treaty on European Union, adopted a reasoned proposal to the Council, inviting the Council to determine whether there is a clear risk of a serious breach by Hungary of the values on which the European Union is founded. The President of the European Parliament formally communicated this proposal to the President of the Council of the European Union, the Austrian Chancellor, Mr. Sebastian Kurz, on 18 September. The Austrian Presidency will now determine how it intends to take this forward.

Fundamental values and the rule of law are a shared EU interest and call for a common approach. Our concerns about issues relating to the rule of law in Hungary are well known and were raised by the Taoiseach when he met with Prime Minister Orbán on 4 January last.

### **Brexit Issues**

124. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has met his Polish counterpart to discuss Brexit or other issues recently. [38606/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Maintaining regular contact with our fellow EU Member States, and the EU Commission, has been a vital aspect of ensuring that Ireland's priorities, in particular the continued protection of the Good Friday Agreement, are understood and reinforced as part of the Brexit negotiations. To this end, I, as well as other members of Government and senior officials, meet with Ministers and officials from the EU27 on a very regular basis, either bilaterally or on the margins of EU Council meetings.

Most recently, while attending the GAC (Article 50) in Brussels on 18 September, I spoke with Konrad Szymański, the Polish Minister for European Affairs. On 3 October, I shall be visiting Warsaw, where my meetings will include one with the Foreign Minister, Jacek Czaputowicz.

### **Brexit Issues**

125. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has spoken with his Spanish counterpart in relation to his request for legal guarantees regarding Gibraltar. [38375/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** In June I met with my Spanish counterpart, Josep Borrell, in the margins of the Foreign Affairs Council and expressed my appreciation for Spain's continued support for Ireland and for the inclusion of a legally binding backstop arrangement in the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland which is to form part of the EU-UK Withdrawal Agreement.

We also discussed the ongoing discussions between Spain and the UK with regard to Gibraltar. At the most recent GAC (Article 50) on 18 September, Spain provided an update to the EU27 on the status of these negotiations. I expressed Ireland's support for continued efforts to resolve the important issues regarding Gibraltar which arise in the context of the UK's exit from the EU.

### **UN Resolutions**

126. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if Ireland will support the upcoming United Nations General Assembly motion from Cuba which condemns the US blockade of Cuba and calls for it to be immediately lifted. [38274/18]

127. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade when he plans to bring the EU-Cuba Political Dialogue and Co-operation Agreement before Dáil Éireann for ratification (details supplied); and the status of his progress in this regard. [38275/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 126 and 127 together.

Ireland, along with our EU partners, has been a consistent supporter of the annual resolu-

tion put forward by Cuba at the United Nations General Assembly regarding the US economic blockade of Cuba. We have voted in support of this resolution on all of the 26 previous occasions that it has been put forward by Cuba.

Ireland's position on the United States' trade embargo of Cuba is long-standing and clear. We believe that the embargo serves no constructive purpose. Ireland, along with the other member states of the EU, is firmly of the view that the lifting of the embargo would facilitate an opening of the Cuban economy to the benefit of the Cuban people.

Ireland objects to unilaterally imposed measures that impede the economic and commercial relations of EU member states with Cuba and that are contrary to commonly accepted rules of international trade. Ireland believes that the economic embargo seriously hampers the economic development of Cuba and negatively affects its people.

Ireland looks forward to receiving the draft resolution from Cuba on 31 October this year, and will review and consider the resolution as on the previous 26 occasions.

As well as bilateral engagement with Cuba, Ireland also engages with Cuba by way of the EU-Cuba relationship. The EU-Cuba Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement marks an important point in this relationship. The Agreement is the EU's first bilateral agreement with Cuba, and will improve conditions for EU-Cuba trade and investment. The EU is Cuba's second most important trading partner, Cuba's biggest external investor and the source of one third of the 3.5 million tourists visiting the island each year.

I view the EU-Cuba Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement as an important step in further developing our relationship with Cuba. While most of the agreement has been provisionally applied since November 2017, its full application requires ratification by the EU once all member States have completed their own internal legal procedures. As of now, fourteen member states have notified that they have done so. On the bilateral front, Ireland and Cuba will meet for Political Consultations on 1 October in Dublin. We are in the process of completing our own internal legal procedures, and the EU-Cuba Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement will be brought before Dáil Éireann for ratification once it has been debated by the Select Committee of Foreign Affairs and Trade. I have requested officials in my Department that they ensure that the notification process is fully completed by the end of the year.

### **Departmental Expenditure**

128. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the expenditure savings that are earmarked for his Department for 2019 that are not accounted for in the mid-year expenditure report or are not included in the fiscal space calculations for 2019. [38487/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** As the Deputy will appreciate, my officials are currently in discussion with officials in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) regarding the Department's 2019 Estimates provisions for the Department's two Votes, Vote 27 – International Co-operation and Vote 28 – Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. These discussions will obviously take account of any savings that the Department can identify in the provision of existing services in 2019 and will be factored in to the decisions on the Department's 2019 Estimates provisions due to be announced on Budget Day, on 9 October 2018. I can assure the Deputy that it is the Department's ongoing policy to seek to identify any expenditure savings that can be made across the Department's two Votes, particularly in the context of any requests to DPER for funding for

new or additional expenditure measures.

### Human Rights Cases

129. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on recent protests in Nicaragua; the steps being taken at EU level to address this issue; the measures that have been taken at EU level to secure the release of those who have been arbitrarily detained, who includes amongst them a Belgian national; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38742/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I am aware of the recent protests in Nicaragua and of the case of the Belgian-Nicaraguan medical student who was detained, to which the Deputy refers. The right to freedom of expression and to peaceful demonstration are fundamental to a functioning democracy. I wholeheartedly condemn the use of violence and intimidation, and the arbitrary detention of citizens attempting to peacefully express their views. The recent events in Nicaragua are deeply concerning. The recent expulsion of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) following the publishing of its report detailing the worrying human rights abuses that have taken place in the country, was yet another troubling development.

I call on the Nicaraguan Government to seriously consider the findings of the OHCHR report and take urgent action to implement its recommendations. I would also urge it to allow the OHCHR officials to re-enter the country and continue their valuable work. Their presence is fundamental for the restoration of trust to all parties. Full co-operation and access should also be given to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

Ireland engages on this issue regularly at EU and UN level, and supports the clear EU position and strong statements on the situation. Ireland also supports EU action taken to support international and local initiatives to address the human rights situation, promote a culture of peace, and to provide support to victims of the crisis and their families, including by advocating for the release of those arbitrarily detained, among them the Belgian-Nicaraguan national referred to by the Deputy.

I believe that inclusive dialogue remains the only way of negotiating a peaceful and democratic resolution to this crisis, and of restoring the trust of the Nicaraguan people in the country's institutions. I encourage all relevant actors in Nicaragua to fully engage in the National Dialogue. Officials from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Dublin and in the Embassy of Ireland to Mexico, which is responsible for Ireland's relations with Nicaragua, will continue to monitor the situation in Nicaragua and engage with human rights defenders and civil society organisations working on the ground.

### Brexit Supports

130. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the Brexit information meetings being planned to inform the public over the coming months. [38532/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I have recently launched a national public information and outreach campaign aimed at *Getting Ireland Brexit Ready*. This campaign aims to provide information to citizens on the current state of play of the negotiations, the work going on across Government to prepare for Brexit, as well

as the comprehensive range of financial and other supports that are available for business and other key affected sectors. As part of this campaign, a series of whole-of-Government *Getting Ireland Brexit Ready* public outreach events are being planned for across the country. The first phase of these events will begin on 5 October in Páirc Uí Chaoimh in Cork. This will be followed by events in Galway on 12 October, Monaghan on 19 October and Dublin on 25 October. These events will showcase the extensive work of the Government's Departments and agencies, bringing together this experience and expertise in a 'one stop shop' for citizens and businesses in particular. Work to prepare Ireland for Brexit has been well underway across the Government and its agencies since before the UK even voted to leave the EU. These public outreach events provide an opportunity for interested individuals and businesses, including in the agri-food and tourism sectors, to access advice and information about Brexit preparedness and the range of support measures and resources the Government has put in place.

These events are free to attend, and interested members of the public can register via [www.dfa.ie/brexit](http://www.dfa.ie/brexit).

### **Brexit Negotiations**

131. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has met Mr. Michel Barnier recently. [38533/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I met with Michel Barnier on 18 September in Brussels and discussed progress in the negotiations between the EU and UK on the Withdrawal Agreement and the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland. Mr Barnier confirmed once again his view that without a backstop there can be no Withdrawal Agreement. He briefed me on his assessment that it is time to 'de-dramatise' the Protocol and focus on agreeing the workable solutions that it offers at its core. Ireland fully supports this approach and Mr Barnier's continuing efforts to agree with the UK the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland. At the GAC (Article 50), and subsequently at the informal European Council meeting in Salzburg on 20 September, our EU partners strongly reaffirmed their support for Ireland and the importance of agreeing a legally-binding backstop, as well as repeating their support for Michel Barnier in his efforts to conclude an agreement. As time is short, it is a matter of urgency that the UK engage constructively with Michel Barnier and his team with the objective of making progress on reaching an agreement on the backstop ahead of the European Council on 17-18 October.

### **Brexit Documents**

132. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his current views on the Chequers plan. [38534/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The UK Government White Paper of 12 July on the future relationship between the United Kingdom and the European Union remains the stated position of the UK Government on the framework which is to be agreed alongside the legal text of the Withdrawal Agreement. The EU's negotiating approach remains as set out in the European Council Guidelines of April 2017 and March 2018. The Government has been consistently clear that Ireland wants the closest possible relationship between the EU and the UK, including on trade, in order to minimise the impact on our trade and economy. At the same time, it is vital to our economic interests that the EU's Single Market and Customs Union are fully protected. The Government acknowledged

in June that the Chequers/White Paper proposals represented a useful contribution, but that much detailed analysis and discussion was required.

As reported by the EU Chief Negotiator, Michel Barnier, at the General Affairs Council (Article 50) on 18 September, in early discussions there has been a convergence of views in some areas, notably on future EU-UK cooperation on foreign policy and security, both internal and external. However, it is also clear that there are very substantial differences, in particular relating to the proposed future economic partnership. The President of the European Council, Donald Tusk, stated in Salzburg last week that the proposals on the future economic partnership will not work, not least because they risk undermining the Single Market.

It is now for the two sets of negotiators to take forward their work on the framework for the future relationship on the most intensive basis possible. At the same time, it remains essential, as underlined at Salzburg, that the Withdrawal Agreement, including the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland, is also concluded speedily.

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

133. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Finance if the disabled drivers and disabled passengers scheme criteria will be reviewed to include those who temporarily use a wheelchair but who demonstrate a degenerative or progressive illness that will result in permanent dependency for using a wheelchair; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38412/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers Scheme provides relief from VAT and VRT, an exemption from motor tax and a grant in respect of fuel expenditure, on the purchase of an adapted car for transport of a permanently and severely disabled person within the terms of the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Regulations 1994.

The scheme and qualifying criteria were designed specifically for those with severe physical disabilities and are, therefore, necessarily precise. To qualify for the scheme an applicant must be in possession of a primary medical certificate, which can be obtained from a Senior Medical Officer of the HSE, if an applicant meets one of the medical criteria set out in the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Regulations 1994.

It is important to note that an applicant who is unsuccessful in securing a primary medical certificate can appeal the decision of the Senior Medical Officer to the Disabled Drivers Medical Board of Appeal. An applicant can also re-apply for a primary medical certificate after six months if there is a deterioration in their condition.

From time to time representations are received on behalf of individuals who feel they would benefit from the scheme but do not qualify under the criteria. While I have sympathy for these cases, given the scale and scope of the scheme, I have no plans to expand the medical criteria beyond what is provided for in the Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Regulations 1994.

### **NAMA Social Housing Provision**

134. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Finance if all the properties leased for social housing by NAMA's national asset residential property service are deemed to be off-balance sheet; the additional number of social housing units it is hoped to provide by this approach

over the next three years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38882/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** National Asset Residential Property Services (NARPS) was established in 2012 as a special purpose vehicle in order to expedite the delivery, for social housing, of residential properties from the portfolio of assets controlled by NAMA debtors and receivers. NARPS purchases properties directly from NAMA debtors and receivers at market value and then onward leases these properties to local authorities and approved housing bodies on long term (20 year 9 months) leases, which include an option for the local authorities or approved housing bodies to purchase the units at market value during the latter part of the lease term. NARPS is a NAMA Group company and, as with other NAMA activities, its activities are considered to be off-balance sheet as far as Government accounting is concerned.

The NARPS portfolio is restricted to properties purchased from NAMA's debtors and receivers. Given that NAMA is now well advanced on its deleveraging programme, there is limited scope for the portfolio to expand further over the next three years. From its establishment to date, NARPS has delivered 1,372 properties for lease, or which are contracted for lease, to local authorities and approved housing bodies.

### Property Tax Exemptions

135. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Finance the reason a person (details supplied) did not remain entitled to a local property tax, LPT, exemption due to an unfinished estate; the reason they were not advised of these changes and liability; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38303/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised by Revenue that Local Property Tax (LPT) is operated on a self-assessment basis and it is the responsibility of the property owner to file and pay the tax due or ensure that their property is correctly entitled to any exemption before it is claimed.

The Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 (as amended) provides for exemptions for certain properties. Section 10(2) provides that a residential property is not liable to LPT where it is situated in an unfinished housing estate and is contained in a list prescribed by the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government. The list is included in the Schedule to the Finance (Local Property Tax) Regulations 2013 (S.I. No. 91 of 2013).

The qualifying conditions are set out in detail on the LPT portal at [www.revenue.ie](http://www.revenue.ie) and property owners have been consistently advised to check to ensure that their actual properties are included in the 'prescribed list' regardless of their location within an unfinished estate. If they have any doubt about their entitlement to an exemption, they are advised to contact the LPT Helpline.

Revenue conducts ongoing compliance programmes which include the review of LPT exemptions claimed. When the exemption claimed on the property of the person concerned was reviewed by Revenue, it was established that it was incorrectly claimed, as the property was not on the 'prescribed list' of exempt properties. A letter was sent by Revenue to the person advising her that she had incorrectly claimed the exemption and that the property was now liable to LPT for all years 2013 to 2018 inclusive (a total of €508). She was also invited to contact Revenue to discuss any aspect of the matter, if she needed.

I have been assured that if the payment of the arrears creates a difficulty for the person concerned, Revenue will be happy to discuss and agree a mutually acceptable phased payment

arrangement.

### **European Investment Bank**

136. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he or his officials have been involved in discussions regarding the possibility of injecting additional capital into the European Investment Bank as a result of the UK's planned departure from the EU; his views on the possibility of the UK remaining a member of the EIB after it leaves the EU; the consequences for Ireland if the UK is no longer a member of the bank; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38305/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** When the United Kingdom exits the EU on 29 March 2019, its departure from the EU will also mean that it will stop being a shareholder of the European Investment Bank (EIB). Article 308 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union states that: "The members of the European Investment Bank shall be the Member States". As a result, the UK will not remain a member of the EIB after it leaves the EU.

Once the UK stops being a shareholder of the EIB, the capital it has provided to the EIB will no longer be part of the Bank's subscribed capital base. In recent months, the shareholders of the EIB, including Ireland, have been actively discussing means by which the capital base of the EIB can be strengthened to compensate for the loss of the UK shareholding. This may include, redenomination of some reserves and potentially an adjustment in the shareholdings of the EU Member States.

Assuming a positive outcome and applying the provisions in the Withdrawal Agreement on the repayment of the UK's capital, the effect of UK withdrawal on EIB's operations and financial capacity should be mitigated. This would include any direct impact on EIB lending to Ireland. The future relationship between the UK and the EIB will be subject to the broader negotiations on the future relationship between the UK and the EU.

### **Pension Provisions**

137. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 61 of 2 December 2015, if progress has been made on allowing for bona fide transfers of pensions while safeguarding against avoidance schemes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38311/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The transfer of the deferred benefits of a member of an occupational pension scheme or a Personal Retirement Savings Account (PRSA) contributor's PRSA fund to an overseas pension arrangement is permitted, subject to the transfer complying with the Occupational Pension Schemes and Personal Retirement Savings Accounts (Overseas Transfer Payments) Regulations, 2003 and Revenue requirements. The Regulations are under the remit of the Minister for Social Protection and prescribe the conditions for transfers to arrangements established outside the State.

I am informed by the Revenue that many transfers of pension benefits overseas are made for legitimate reasons and are fully compliant with the transfer Regulations and Revenue requirements. The issue of seeking to recoup the tax relief provided to such individuals in building up their pension benefits here does not, therefore, arise.

Since 2012, all overseas pension transfer requests must be accompanied by a declaration



signed by the individual concerned to the effect that the transfer is for bona fide reasons and conforms to all of the relevant transfer obligations.

Since 2014 Revenue has been involved in an ongoing compliance program in relation to the transfer of pension funds off-shore with the objective of seeking to ensure the legitimacy of such transfers. Seeking to move pension funds or PRSAs overseas in an effort to circumvent the requirements of Irish tax legislation may fall foul of the conditions under which they were approved by Revenue and that this could result in the withdrawal of approval, the effect of which would be the claw back of the tax relief previously given.

My Department is engaged in an ongoing review of the area of pension transfers abroad in conjunction with Revenue, the Department of Social Protection and the Pensions Authority with a view to establish potential additional safeguards in this area.

As set out in A Roadmap for Pensions Reform 2018–2023 published last February, the Government is currently reviewing the Pensions system more generally.

### **Tax Collection**

138. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the anticipated changes in the volume of tax collected as a result of the modernisation of the PAYE system from 2019 on the basis of no other changes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38407/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Budget 2018 included provision for an additional €50 million in Income Tax receipts during 2018 arising from preparations for PAYE Modernisation, which is scheduled for implementation on 1 January 2019. I am advised by Revenue that, while it will be necessary to wait until after the year end to fully assess the outcome, preliminary analysis indicates this target will be met.

### **Film Industry Tax Reliefs**

139. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Finance his views on whether the current parameters for section 481 are rigid enough to prevent abuse in view of an allegation (details supplied); if an internal investigation into this case is being undertaken; the steps being taken to ensure that such a situation cannot occur; and when the findings of the report into the review of section 481 undertaken by the Revenue Commissioners will be published. [38430/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised by Revenue that they cannot comment on individual cases such as the allegation referred to in the Deputy's question. However, they have provided the following general information in relation to the administration and audit of claims for the film tax credit under Section 481, Taxes Consolidation Act 1997.

Under Section 481, in general terms a company which produces a film can claim a payable tax credit of 32% of the lower of:

- (a) the eligible expenditure incurred on producing a film,
- (b) 80% of the total cost of production of the film, or
- (c) €70 million per film.

The maximum credit a company can claim in respect of a film is therefore €22.4 million.

Eligible expenditure is the amount that the producer company spends in Ireland, wholly and exclusively on producing the film. Amounts spent on the film outside of Ireland do not qualify for the tax credit. However, where the credit is calculated based on 80% of the total cost of production, Revenue must have regard to the amounts incurred outside of the State as an increased global budget can lead to an increased credit.

The company that claims the credit must be an Irish producer company. The Irish work on the film must be carried out by a special purpose company which is wholly owned by that Irish producer company. Where the film is not a fully Irish production, for example where it is a multi-jurisdictional production or a co-production, the Irish producer company will often organise the Irish production on behalf of an international production company. In those cases, it is the international production company who has full knowledge of the global budget and of the make-up of the items in the Irish budget.

Recognising the potential risks presented, the administrative framework of the relief requires that a company's application for the credit must include:

(a) an auditor's report detailing the eligible expenditure, the global budget and details of related party transactions, and

(b) a solicitor's letter detailing that they have reviewed the legal agreements and that 68% of the funding has been lodged to the company's bank account (a requirement prior to Revenue releasing any amounts of the payable tax credit).

The payable credit is available to a film that has been approved by the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and which has been certified by Revenue. Section 481 provides that Revenue may refuse to certify a film if they have reason to believe that the budget, or any part of the budget, is inflated. They may also refuse to certify the film if they are not satisfied with the commercial rationale for the corporate structure used for financing, distribution and other similar activities. As with all tax reliefs, the greatest risk of inflation is found in related party transactions including through corporate or financing structures that facilitate circular flows of cash.

I am further advised by Revenue that the time taken to process applications for relief under Section 481 has increased in the last year, largely due to increased scrutiny on the expenses included within the "eligible spend" in 481 applications. As the relief was restructured in 2015 from an investor-based relief to a corporation tax credit, the first films which have been made under this new format relief were being completed in 2017, which is when Revenue were first able to review the actual spend on completed films and the amounts being included in the claims for relief, as signed off by the auditors. The largest adjustments arising from this review process are in respect of inflated related party expenditures, and discussions are ongoing between my Department, Revenue and the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht in relation to options to protect the Exchequer and give greater clarity to producers claiming the credit.

The review of the film relief currently under way in my Department is a cost benefit analysis, due under the Tax Expenditure Review Guidelines. The analysis is currently being finalised and is scheduled to be published on Budget day.

### **Property Tax Exemptions**

140. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the number of new and previously unused properties purchased from builders and developers between 1 January 2013 and to date in 2018, that are exempt from local property tax, LPT; the amount of LPT foregone

in respect of these dwellings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38460/18]

141. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the number of properties that were self-built before and after 1 May 2013 and to date that are exempt from local property tax; the amount of tax foregone on these dwellings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38461/18]

142. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the number of properties that were self-built between 1 January and 1 May 2013 that are exempt from local property tax until the end of 2019, that are used as sole or main residences; the amount of LPT foregone on these types of dwellings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38462/18]

143. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the number of properties purchased in 2013 that are classified as main residences that are exempt from local property tax until the end of 2019; the amount of LPT foregone on these properties from 2013 to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38463/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 140 to 143, inclusive, together.

The Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 (as amended) and Part 2 of the Act make provision for a number of LPT exemptions. The available exemptions include new and unused properties purchased from a builder or developer between 1 January 2013 and 31 October 2019 and properties purchased or built between 1 January 2013 and 31 December 2013. The exemptions apply to properties used as principal private residences.

I am advised by Revenue that the approximate number and value of claims to exemption under these categories, for years 2013 to 2018 inclusive, is as follows:

- New and unused purchases: 5,200 properties with total liability amounting to €10 million\*;
- Properties purchased or built as main residences during 2013: 11,700 properties with total liability amounting to €25 million.

\* Includes properties only where the liable person filed a return claiming the exemption. Where new and previously unused properties were purchased during the current valuation period (2013-2019) there is no obligation to file an LPT return as they are not liable to the tax until the next valuation period. Revenue does however capture data relating to new and previously unused properties on the LPT Register via Stamp Duty records and through various other information sources but they are not included here as they are considered not liable for 2013-2019.

As regards the number and value of self-built properties, Revenue does not collect such information as it is not relevant for LPT purposes.

The number of properties exempt from LPT up to Quarter 2 of 2018 by exemption category is available in the LPT statistics page on the Revenue website at <https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/local-property-tax/quarterly-reports-2018/local-property-tax-june-2018.aspx>

## **Motor Tax**

144. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Finance if a fuel tax to replace motor taxation will be considered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38472/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Motor tax is collected by the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and raises over 1 billion euro annually. I have no plans to replace motor taxation with a fuel tax.

The Exchequer receives substantial revenues from fuel excise duties and I recognise that the anticipated large scale adoption of electric vehicles in the future presents a fiscal challenge in this regard. My officials are examining how best, from a fiscal perspective, to manage the decarbonisation of the transport sector as well as the overall economy.

### **Departmental Expenditure**

145. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance the expenditure savings that are earmarked for his Department for 2019 that are not accounted for in the mid-year expenditure report or are not included in the fiscal space calculations for 2019. [38486/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Mid-Year Expenditure Report (MYER) set out the starting baseline in relation to the gross voted expenditure for 2019. As outlined in the MYER, the technical pre-Budget position for current expenditure is the current expenditure allocation for this year set out in REV. This pre-Budget position will be adjusted to reflect the allocation to the Department of a central provision in relation to the Public Service Stability Agreement.

The capital ceiling set out in the MYER is consistent with the ceiling for 2019 published in the National Development Plan.

The figures set out in the MYER do not include expenditure savings targets specifically earmarked for my Department. However, as usual as part of the Estimates process, my Department will be examining the allocations across its programme areas, including taking into account expenditure trends in 2018, to identify how services can be delivered within the overall fiscal parameters for 2019.

### **VAT Rate Application**

146. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if the 9% VAT rate for tourism services will be retained; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38496/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As the Deputy will be aware, it is a longstanding practice of the Minister for Finance not to comment, in advance of the Budget, on any tax matters that might be the subject of Budget decisions.

### **Fuel Rebate Scheme**

147. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Finance if the introduction of a diesel fuel user rebate scheme for licensed Irish hauliers has been considered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38537/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Diesel Rebate Scheme came into effect on 1 July 2013. This scheme is available to licensed Irish road hauliers. Full details of the scheme are available on the revenue website: <https://www.revenue.ie/en/companies-and-charities/excise-and-licences/mineral-oil-tax/diesel-rebate-scheme/index.aspx>.

## Exchequer Returns

148. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated €600 million yield in 2019 from the non-indexation of the taxation system by tax head; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38554/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I assume the figure the Deputy is referring to is the estimated Exchequer yield from non-indexation of the income tax head, prepared in advance of Budget 2018, which was of the order of €0.6 billion on a full year basis.

The expected yield from non-indexation in 2019 will be updated as part of the preparations for Budget 2019 as the various elements of budgetary arithmetic required to forecast this figure become finalised.

## Universal Social Charge

149. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated number of persons or income tax cases that in the event of no change to the USC bands or income tax bands in 2019 would move to a different USC band with a higher USC rate; the number that would cross the threshold to start paying income tax at the marginal rate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38555/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The table on page 3 of the Pre-Budget 2019 Revenue Ready Reckoner which is available on the Revenue website at: <https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/ready-reckoner/index.aspx> gives the estimated number of taxpayer units paying income tax and USC at the various rates in 2019. The number of taxpayer units moving between the various bands, between 2018 and 2019, are set out in the following table:

		Estimated number of taxpayer units 2018	Estimated number of taxpayer units 2019	Difference between number of taxpayer units in 2018 and 2019
Income Tax	Higher rate (40%)	531,700	595,900	64,200
	Standard rate (20%)	1,128,400	1,186,000	57,600
	Exempt	956,200	941,600	-14,600
USC	8% rate	224,100	243,300	19,200
	4.75% rate	1,114,500	1,183,300	68,800
	2% rate	507,900	521,500	13,600
	Exempt	769,800	775,500	5,700
Paying neither Income Tax or USC		769,800	775,500	5,700
Total Income Earners		2,616,300	2,723,500	107,200

This is only indicative of the number of people who would move as while some of the changes are due to taxpayers moving to a higher tax band, another factor is the growth in the

overall number of taxpayer units.

The 2018 estimates have been generated by reference to 2018 incomes as calculated on the basis of actual data for the year 2015. The 2019 estimates have been generated by reference to 2019 incomes as calculated on the basis of actual data for the year 2016, the latest year for which returns are available, adjusted as necessary for income, self-employment and employment trends in the interim. The estimates are provisional and may be revised.

### Corporation Tax

150. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the annual corporate tax take from the operators of stallion stud services for each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38718/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised by Revenue that the available information, set out in the following table, is the total Corporation Tax liability of companies where the main trade is indicated (on Revenue records) as breeding of horses. I would advise that 2016 is the most recent year for which information is available.

These amounts may not include Corporation Tax paid on the provision of stallion stud services by syndicates or other bodies as these are not separately identifiable on tax returns.

Year	Corporation Tax Liability €m
2012	0.2
2013	0.7
2014	0.6
2015	1.0
2016	1.2

### Mortgage Book Sales

151. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he will publish or make public his consultation with a bank (details supplied) in relation to the sale of a project under the relationship framework agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38748/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** In the first instance, I can confirm that consultation did take place in relation to Project Glas, as required under the Relationship Framework with PTSB.

In my response to the bank as part of the consultation, I acknowledged PTSB's assertion that extensive efforts had been made to reach sustainable restructures with these borrowers and that they had been facilitated in doing so during the sale process.

I also noted a number of matters including how critically important the transaction was to the viability and future success of PTSB and which was being pursued on foot of a regulatory requirement; the materially positive financial impact for the bank both in terms of reducing the NPL ratio and the accretion in capital; the bank had chosen to take out performing PDH split mortgages from the sale portfolio and excluded cases where mortgage to rent was an option; and the bank's intention to minimise customer disruption and ensure all borrowers that are transferring are informed of their rights in a timely and straight forward manner.

In my response I also highlighted that housing and homelessness is a priority issue for the

Government and it was therefore imperative that the bank was willing and able to promptly deal with all customers queries and concerns by having sufficient resources devoted to helplines and other customers communication channels. In addition, I asked the bank to facilitate a meeting between the successful purchaser of the portfolio and the Housing Agency as soon as possible post the closing of the sale.

### **Apple Escrow Account**

152. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the expected interest return per year on the moneys deposited by a company (details supplied) in the newly established escrow account; if the interest will be payable to the State or the company; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38749/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Notwithstanding that the Government profoundly disagrees with the Commission's analysis in the Apple State aid case, the full recovery of the alleged State aid from Apple has now been completed with approximately €14.3 billion deposited into the Escrow Fund. The funds will remain in the Escrow Fund pending a final determination in the European Courts over the validity of the Commission's Decision.

All income/expenses, including any gains or losses will accrue to the Escrow Fund. As investment deployment of the fund is currently underway it is premature to comment on possible returns. The arrangements in the Escrow Framework Deed include the agreement that all claims of ownership and access to these vast sums of money is suspended until the European Courts have concluded proceedings that the Government and Apple have brought.

### **Mortgage Repayments**

153. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Finance if a scheme will be introduced as part of budget 2019 to assist mortgage holders that find themselves in mortgage difficulty on a short-term basis, for example, if a person becomes temporarily unemployed; his views on whether a scheme similar to mortgage interest relief is essential in such cases; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38754/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Decisions on taxation matters including decisions (if any) in relation to mortgage interest relief are made in the context of the annual Budget process, and the Deputy will understand that I cannot give any indications of my plans for Budget 2019 at this time. In last year's Budget I announced that in fulfilment of a Programme for Government commitment, mortgage interest relief for owner-occupiers would be extended on a tapered basis to end-2020 for the remaining recipients of the relief. The process of phasing out mortgage interest relief for homeowners has been under way since 2009.

With regard to mortgage holders that find themselves in mortgage difficulty, there are various supports available to them. For example, the Abhaile service which was launched in October 2016 provides financial and legal advice and support to homeowners. This Government funded mortgage arrears resolution service gives indebted borrowers access to State-funded panels of qualified and regulated financial or legal professionals to give advice and assistance on how to resolve their mortgage arrears via a voucher system. The scheme has been very successful in helping those in long-term arrears and it is important to highlight that over 10,000 vouchers for consultations have issued since the scheme began in 2016. It aims to help mortgage holders in arrears to find the best solutions and keep them, wherever possible, in their own homes.

The Insolvency Service of Ireland continues to assist distressed borrowers by returning them to solvency. In over 90% of Personal Insolvency Arrangement (PIA) cases, debtors have been able to remain in their homes. The latest Insolvency Services Statistical Report for Q2 2018 shows that over 981 new applications were received in the quarter. This high level of new applications has been maintained in large part because of the Abhaile Scheme.

The Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears (CCMA) which is part of the Central Bank's Consumer Protection Framework provides protections to consumers whose loans are in mortgage arrears. It is a statutory Code first introduced by the Central Bank in February 2009, with the current CCMA becoming effective from 1 July 2013. The CCMA provides a strong consumer protection framework, aimed specifically at the process to be followed by relevant firms, to ensure borrowers in arrears or pre-arrears in respect of a mortgage loan secured on a primary residence are treated in a timely, transparent and fair manner. I have asked the Central Bank to carry out a review of the Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears (CCMA) to ensure that it remains effective and I expect to receive a report from the Central Bank next month.

The Mortgage to Rent (MTR) Scheme is a government initiative to help homeowners who are at risk of losing their homes due to mortgage arrears. To increase borrowers' awareness and understanding of MTR a new dedicated mortgage to rent website, [www.mortgagetorent.ie](http://www.mortgagetorent.ie), has been developed by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government together with the Housing Agency with input from the Abhaile Service and the Insolvency Service of Ireland.

### **VAT Rebates**

154. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Finance if a person (details supplied) can claim back VAT on security lighting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38761/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that in accordance with the EU VAT Directive farmers may register for VAT or be treated as flat-rate farmers for VAT purposes. Farmers who elect to register for VAT have an entitlement to reclaim VAT on costs incurred in relation to the farm business or they can remain unregistered and opt for the flat-rate scheme which is designed to reduce the administrative burden for farmers and to compensate them for the VAT borne on the purchases of goods and services relating to their activities.

The Value Added Tax (Refund of Tax) (No 25) Order, 1993 provides for a refund of VAT incurred by unregistered farmers in the "construction, extension, alteration or reconstruction of any building or structure which is designed for use solely or mainly in his or her farming business". The installation of security lighting would not of itself qualify for a refund of VAT under this Order but would qualify where it is a constituent element of qualifying construction work undertaken by an unregistered farmer. Each claim for a refund of VAT under this Order is evaluated on its merits.

I am further advised by Revenue that a farmer would be entitled to write off the cost of installing security lighting against his/her farming income as it would qualify for capital allowances. The cost may be written off over 8 years.

Where, however, a farmer does not have an entitlement to capital allowances e.g. s/he may be retired and no longer trading, relief may be available under the Home Renovation Initiative (HRI). This provides income tax relief in the amount of 13.5% of the cost of certain repairs, renovations and improvements, carried out on a person's main residence. The installation of security equipment such as security lighting comes within the terms of the Incentive. It should,



however, be noted that as relief under HRI is restricted to works carried out on a residence, the installation of security lighting to protect an out-building, or other non-residential part of a farm, would not qualify.

The relief is granted by way of a credit against income tax over the two years following the year in which the works are paid for. 50% of the relief is given in each year. The key features of the scheme are that:-

- The works must be carried out by a tax compliant contractor;
- The works must be carried out prior to 31 December 2018;
- Local Property Tax payments must be up to date in respect of the property;
- The cost of the works must be greater than €4,405 and not more than €30,000 (both figures exclusive of Value Added Tax). The cost of multiple works by different contractors may be aggregated in a claim.

Full details of the scheme are available on the Revenue website at: <https://www.revenue.ie/en/property/home-renovation-incentive/index.aspx>.

### **Private Rented Accommodation**

155. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Finance the steps he is taking to address insurance premium increases on landlords who rent out their units to housing assistance payment or rent assistance payment recipients rather than private tenancies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38881/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As Minister for Finance, I am responsible for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation. Neither I nor the Central Bank of Ireland has the power to direct insurance companies on the pricing or provision of insurance products. Indeed, the EU framework for insurance expressly prohibits Member States from adopting rules which require insurance companies to obtain prior approval of the pricing or terms and conditions of insurance products. Thus the provision of insurance cover and the price at which it is offered is a commercial matter for insurance companies, not dependent on any Government scheme and is based on an assessment of the risks they are willing to accept and adequate provisioning to meet those risks. These matters are considered by insurance companies on a case-by-case basis.

It is my understanding that insurers use a combination of rating factors in making their individual decisions on whether to offer cover and what terms to apply. Insurers do not all use the same combination of rating factors, prices vary across the market and consumers are free to choose and in fact are continually encouraged to shop around for the best price. It is also my understanding that Insurance companies consider their pricing structure in accordance with their own past claims experience.

Finally, I would highlight that the two schemes mentioned by the Deputy - the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme and the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) - both fall under the remit of the Minister of Housing, Planning and Local Government, while policy in respect of rent supplement payments is the responsibility of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

## Public Services Card

156. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to extend the number and category of bodies and associated timeframe that may be permitted to request the public services card; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38891/18]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Public Services Card (PSC), and its online counterpart MyGovID, are based on the Government wide SAFE standard for establishing an individual's identity. This standard, along with the PSC and MyGovID, combine to provide the Government with a consistent and robust method of protecting personal data while delivering public services in an efficient and effective manner.

"Specified bodies" as set out in the Social Welfare Consolidation Act, 2005, are permitted to request and use the PSC, and there are no plans in place to extend the number of bodies who can use this card.

During 2017 and over the course of this year, my Department and the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection have worked with a number of specified bodies to integrate the PSC and MyGovID, into their processes in order to improve access to and the security of public services. Currently, the PSC and MyGovID underpin access to social welfare entitlements, first time adult passport applications, citizenship applications, Revenue services, SUSI grants, driving licence and driver theory test applications.

During the rest of this year and 2019, access to more public services will be underpinned by the PSC and MyGovID. My Department along with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection is engaging with the relevant Departments to assist with the transition of services in line with the schedule set out in the eGovernment Strategy 2017-2020.

Further information, including a detailed list of services currently supported, and services planned to be supported by the PSC and MyGovID, is available at: <https://psc.gov.ie/services/>.

## Departmental Expenditure

157. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the expenditure savings that are earmarked for his Department for 2019 that are not accounted for in the mid-year expenditure report or are not included in the fiscal space calculations for 2019. [38491/18]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Mid-Year Expenditure Report (MYER) set out the starting baseline in relation to the gross voted expenditure for 2019. As outlined in the MYER, the technical pre-Budget position for current expenditure is the current expenditure allocation for this year set out in REV. This pre-Budget position will be adjusted to reflect the allocation to the Department of a central provision in relation to the Public Service Stability Agreement.

The capital ceiling set out in the MYER is consistent with the ceiling for 2019 published in the National Development Plan.

The figures set out in the MYER do not include expenditure savings targets specifically earmarked for my Department. However, as usual as part of the Estimates process, my Department will be examining the allocations across its programme areas, including taking into account expenditure trends in 2018, to identify how services can be delivered within the overall fiscal parameters for 2019.

## **Garda Station Refurbishment**

158. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of the refurbishment of a Garda station (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38669/18]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The property encroachment issues referred to in previous questions (June 2018) have been rectified. The Office of Public Works is reviewing all options to provide the best possible solution for An Garda Síochána's operational and policing needs in Ramelton while continuing to maintain the existing Garda Station premises.

## **Office of Public Works Projects**

159. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the financial contribution the Office of Public Works has made to a trust (details supplied) over each of the past five years and to date in 2018; the detail of the agreement between the OPW and the trust with regard to its offices; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38746/18]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Office of Public Works (OPW) makes no financial contribution to the Galway Civic Trust (Dúchas na Gaillimhe).

The Custom House in Galway encompasses an important archaeological site - the remains of the Hall of the 14th Century Red Earl's Castle - which is located in the foyer of the building.

The OPW made a significant investment in the restoration of the Hall of the Red Earl in recent years but did not have the resources to have it opened to the public. The OPW entered into an agreement with the Galway Civic Trust (Dúchas na Gaillimhe) to provide them with some accommodation on the ground floor of the Custom House, in return for facilitating public access to the Hall of the Red Earl.

## **Pension Provisions**

160. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of pension restoration for retired public sector workers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38830/18]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Public Service Pension Reduction (PSPR), was introduced on 1 January 2011 under the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (FEMPI) Act 2011.

The PSPR reduces the value of those public service pensions which have pre-PSPR values above specified thresholds. It does so in a progressively structured way which has a proportionately greater effect on higher value pensions.

A very significant part-unwinding of PSPR in three stages is taking place under the FEMPI Act 2015, with PSPR-affected pensioners getting pension increases via substantial restoration of the PSPR cuts on 1 January 2016, 1 January 2017 and 1 January 2018.

The cost of these FEMPI 2015 changes is estimated at about €90 million on a full-year basis from 2018.

The Public Service Pay and Pensions Act 2017, provides for further significant lessening of the impact of PSPR by way of threshold and rate changes to apply on 1 January 2019 and 1 January 2020.

The cost of these changes is estimated at €24 million in 2019 and €12 million in 2020. When fully in place from the beginning of 2020, these changes will mean that the vast majority of public service retirees, comprising everyone with occupational pension values up to at least €54,000, will be entirely free of PSPR. For those who retired since end-February 2012 that threshold will be even higher, at €60,000. Under section 27(3) of the Act, an order for the complete unwinding of PSPR, at an estimated additional cost of €12m, must be made by 31st December 2020.

### **Public Sector Staff Recruitment**

161. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform further to Parliamentary Question No. 67 of 19 September 2018, the reason successful candidates on the 2016 regional panels would not be given priority over new successful candidates who may be put on regional panels following the 2018 clerical officer campaign; the reason these regional panels would not be fully exhausted prior to new regional panels being put in place; if those who remain live on the 2016 regional panels must reapply under the 2018 clerical officer campaign; the reason these persons will not be automatically placed on the next panel until all candidates are placed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38834/18]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** All competitions in the civil service are time bound. In the case of open competitions this is usually between 18 months and 2 years. This affords an opportunity for those on the panel to be recruited from the current competition and also gives those not on the panel an opportunity to compete in subsequent competitions.

The number of positions available to any particular panel depends on the demand from departments/offices and that demand is subject to their pay and numbers allocation. While every effort is made to make sure that panels are not excessively large, placement on panels is no guarantee of appointment to a position and this is clearly set out in competition booklets.

As the Deputy will appreciate not everyone placed on a panels will be offered a position.

There is currently a new open clerical officer competition being run for the Civil Service by the Public Appointment Service. Clerical panels for 26 county locations will be created by PAS and vacancies will be filled as and when required by employing departments. Until such time as this panel is in place the 2016 CO competition will remain in place and vacancies arising filled from it.

### **School Transport Eligibility**

162. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a bus ticket will issue to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38277/18]

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

In the 2017/18 school year over 117,000 children, including over 12,000 children with spe-

cial educational needs, were transported in over 4,500 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually at a total cost of almost €190 million in 2017.

Bus Éireann has advised that the child in question commenced on a school transport service on Monday 24th September 2018.

### School Management

163. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the names of a board of management of a primary school are available to the public from the school or the patron; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38306/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The appointment of a Board of Management of a primary school is a matter for the relevant school patron in accordance with the provisions of the Education Act, 1998.

The procedures for the election, nomination and appointment of members of Boards of management of primary schools and the rules under which these Boards operate are set out in my Department's publication the "*Governance Manual for Primary Schools 2015-2019*".

In relation to the names of the individual members appointed, many schools use their website to make this publically available. Alternatively the names of the members of a Board of Management of a school should be made available upon request to the school in question.

### Schools Site Acquisitions

164. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress over the summer months to acquire a site for the new school building for a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38314/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** As the Deputy is aware, the building project for the school to which she refers is included on my Department's capital programme.

Agreement in principle for the acquisition of a suitable site for the school has been reached and this is currently being progressed.

In tandem with this the Schedule of Accommodation is currently being finalised and as soon as this is completed my Department will be in contact with the school authorities.

### School Meals Programme

165. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to ensure that the providers of school lunches ensure that the packaging for the food is as environmentally friendly as possible with the minimum use of plastics or the eradication of the use of plastics if possible. [38315/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Under the provisions of the Education Act 1998, the Board of Management is the body charged with the direct governance of a school. It is therefore a matter for each school to devise guidelines around the variants of

food that are available on the school premises, including where appropriate in the school canteen.

The School Meals Programme is operated by my colleague, the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and provides funding towards the provision of food to some 4,580 schools and organisations. All aspects of the operation of the school meals projects, including the choice of the school meals supplier, are the responsibility of the school board of management.

Schools at primary and post primary level can apply to be a part of the Green Schools Programme. This promotes long-term, whole-school action for the environment. Green-Schools is a student-led programme with involvement from the wider community. The programme is operated and co-ordinated by the Environmental Education Unit of An Taisce (FEE member for Ireland).

I understand that my colleague the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment is working with Local Authorities to roll out an education programme on the recycling of all waste, including plastics. This Recycling Ambassadors Programme will comprise of 650 workshops on how to recycle properly for community groups and workplaces and information on this programme can be found at [www.voiceireland.org/rap/](http://www.voiceireland.org/rap/).

The EU Commission also recently published its European Strategy for Plastics in January 2018. This strategy focuses on plastics production and use and sets a goal of ensuring all plastic packaging produced in the EU is recyclable by 2030. I also understand that my colleague the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment is working with the EU and other Member States to see how this country can play its part in meeting the ambition of this Strategy.

### Student Grant Scheme

166. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address an anomaly in the SUSI third-level grant process (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38327/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** To satisfy the terms and conditions of the student grant scheme in relation to progression, a student must be moving from year to year within a course, having successfully completed the previous year or be transferring from one course to another, where the award for the subsequent course is of a higher level than the previous course. If an applicant holds a qualification at any level and wishes to pursue another qualification at the same level, the second qualification is ineligible for funding as per the Student Grant Scheme.

The objective of this policy is to help as many students as possible to obtain one qualification at each level of study. This is necessary given the level of demand on the student grant budget from first time students and students who are progressing with their studies to a higher level.

It is not possible to examine the particular circumstances of the case, based on the information supplied by the Deputy. However, if the Deputy is in a position to provide information in relation to a specific case I will investigate the matter further with SUSI.

### DEIS Applications

167. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the procedure for a school to apply for DEIS status; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38331/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I wish to inform the Deputy that schools are not required to make an application for inclusion in the DEIS programme, as all schools both Primary and Post Primary are assessed using a new uniform identification model.

Following a review of the DEIS programme, my Department has introduced an objective, statistics based model for assessing which schools merit inclusion in the DEIS Programme, so that all stakeholders can have confidence that we are targeting extra resources at those schools with the highest levels of concentrated disadvantage.

The key data sources used in the DEIS identification process are the DES Primary Online Database (POD) and Post-Primary Online (PPOD) Databases, and CSO data from the National Census of Population as represented in the Pobal HP Index for Small Areas which is a method of measuring the relative affluence or disadvantage of a particular geographical area. Variables used in the compilation of the HP Index include those related to demographic growth, dependency ratios, education levels, single parent rate, overcrowding, social class, occupation and unemployment rates. This data is combined with pupil data supplied by schools, anonymised and aggregated to small area, to provide information on the relative level of concentrated disadvantage present in the pupil cohort of individual schools.

A detailed document explaining the methodology used in the Identification process is available on the Department's website at

*<https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools-/DEIS-Identification-Process.pdf>*

Further quality assurance work is currently being conducted on the model and it is not intended to extend the DEIS programme to any further schools until this work is complete.

### **Learner Protection Fund**

168. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the recognised schools that will be exempted from paying into the proposed learner protection fund with regard to the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) (Amendment) Bill 2018; the criteria a school must reach to gain recognition (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38335/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** 'Recognised' schools are those schools which are recognised by the Minister for Education and Skills in accordance with Section 10 of the Education Act 1998. This primarily relates to primary and post primary schools.

Recognised schools, as publicly funded schools, are currently exempt from Protection for Enrolled Learners (PEL) requirements under Section 65 of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012. While the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) (Amendment) Bill 2018 proposes to substantially amend Section 65 of the Act of 2012 to facilitate the introduction of the Learner Protection Fund, there will be no change to the exemption for recognised schools. This is reflected in the Bill as published.

### **Student Grant Scheme Applications**

169. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a higher education grant will be facilitated in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38339/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I wish to advise the Deputy that SUSI has advised that the student in question applied for a maintenance grant for the 2018/2019 academic year. He was assessed and determined to be over the threshold for the award of any grant assistance as his reckonable income exceeded the thresholds set out in the scheme.

The decision was issued by SUSI on 18th May 2018 and the applicant was advised at that time of his right to appeal SUSI's decision in accordance with the statutory timeline as set out in section 20 of the Student Support Act 2011. SUSI has further advised that no appeal was received within the statutory timeframe.

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

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

### **Pension Provisions**

170. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding a miscalculated pension; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38352/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** An official from my Department has been in regular contact with the person referred to by the Deputy and has outlined the current position to her in relation to the miscalculation of pension. A repayment plan is in place following agreement with the individual.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

171. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the new secondary school for the Castleknock and Carpenterstown area in Dublin 15; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38357/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** As the Deputy is aware, a project to deliver permanent accommodation for the new post primary school to serve Castleknock and Carpenterstown is included on my Department's capital programme.

Officials in my Department continue to liaise with officials in Fingal County Council in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding in relation to the identification and acquisition of a suitable location for the school in question and have identified a preferred site option within the relevant school planning areas. Negotiations with the landowner in respect of this



proposed acquisition are currently ongoing.

In the interim the school will be accommodated from September 2018 at the former Institute of Horology property, Mill Road, Blanchardstown, Dublin 15 on a temporary basis.

Due to commercial sensitivities relating to site acquisitions generally, the Deputy will appreciate that I am not in a position to provide further details in relation to the permanent site for the school at this time but I can confirm that the school patron is being kept apprised of developments in respect of the site acquisition process.

### **Schools Refurbishment**

172. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when replacement buildings were first sought for the prefab classrooms being used in a school (details supplied) in Dublin 22; if his attention has been drawn to the poor condition of these prefabs; the stage the current proposals for this school have reached; the timeframe to complete same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38379/18]

173. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when replacement buildings were first sought for the prefab classrooms being used in a school (details supplied) in Dublin 22; if his attention has been drawn to the poor condition of these prefabs; the stage proposals for this school have reached; the timeframe for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38380/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to answer Questions Nos. 172 and 173 together.

The major building project referred to by the Deputy relates to both the Junior School and Senior School in question.

A brief was prepared by the Planning and Building Unit of my Department to extend and refurbish both schools as a single building project and a Design Team was appointed in January 2014.

The major building project for the schools is currently at an advanced stage of architectural planning, Stage 2(b), Detailed Design which includes the application for statutory approvals and the preparation of tender documents.

All Statutory Applications including Planning Permission, Fire Safety Certification and Disability Access Certification have been secured.

The Design Team is currently working on completion of the Stage 2(b) submission, which includes the latest Departmental Technical Guidance Document TGD 033, Compliance with Part L of the Building Regulations, (NZEB).

Upon receipt and review of the Stage 2(b) Submission, my Department will revert to the Board of Management of the schools with regard to the further progression of the project at that time.

This major building project is included on the Department's 6 year Construction Programme 2016-21.

### **Schools Mental Health Strategies**

174. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the current and planned investment in mental health counselling at primary level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38397/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Within my Department's Action Plan for Education in 2016/19 mental health and well-being promotion is afforded a high priority and is one of the key goals. My Department is strongly supportive of the promotion of positive mental health awareness in both primary and post-primary schools. The Department adopts a holistic and integrated approach to supporting schools in promoting positive mental health and to supporting those with a broad range of problems including behavioural, emotional and social.

To support this holistic approach my Department has published a *Well-being Policy and Framework for Practice* (2018-2023) for all schools which will inform how schools can promote student well-being. It is the Department's aim that by 2023 all schools and centres for education will have embedded a dynamic Well-being Promotion Process which promotes a whole school preventative approach to the promotion of well-being with interventions at both universal and targeted levels. This approach is the most beneficial evidence informed approach for schools in the promotion of mental health and the support for students with mental health difficulties. The Well-being Policy includes an Implementation Plan with seven high level actions to support the realisation of the policy. Actions 2, 3 and 4 below focus on the need for the training of teachers which will include work with schools to ensure those students with most needs, including mental health needs, receive the highest level of support. It is intended to:

- Plan and provide for the national roll-out of a professional development process to facilitate all schools and centres for education to engage with and embed a Well-being Promotion Process which builds professional capacity and collaborative cultures in schools from 2018-2023.

- Provide for an aligned, comprehensive and easily accessible programme of support for all schools and centres for education to address school-identified Well-being Promotion Needs.

- Consider how the system is meeting current and future teachers' learning needs relating to well-being promotion.

Support for implementation of the national *Well-Being in Primary Schools Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention* (2013) is also encompassed within the *Well-being Policy and Framework for Practice* implementation.

Responsibility for provision of mental health services and counselling for young people lies with the Department of Health and the Health Service Executive. Schools are advised to identify supports and services that are available in their community, build relationships and agree referral pathways for students needing referral. The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) provides psychological support and engages in collaborative work helping school staff in how to access appropriate mental health services. Psychologists support schools in connecting with Primary Care Psychology Services and Child and Adolescent Mental Health services in relation to individual children and young people with mental health needs. Psychologists support and encourage the establishment of referral and communication protocols between education and health services at local level and work with others to develop community based mental health promotion strategies.

NEPS also provides guidelines and resource materials for schools to enable them to deal with certain traumatic events which can adversely affect students and school staff. The guidelines *responding to Critical Incidents: Guidelines and Resource Materials for Schools* (2016)

refer to preventive approaches that schools can adopt in creating a safe and supportive environment. It also outlines how schools can plan for crises. The publication provides support to schools at a potentially overwhelming time with practical step-by-step guidance for teachers and principals on how to respond when a tragedy occurs. The guidelines focus on alerting schools to planning processes, structures and actions which will better allow them to cope with a traumatic incidents such as suicide or suspected suicide, murder, accidental death including road traffic accidents and drowning, and death through illness of members of the school community. In relation to suicide, advice is also given on prevention and positive mental health stratagems and approaches. NEPS psychologists will also, at the specific invitation of school authorities, attend at the schools immediately following such incidents to offer direct advice and assistance to school staff and students.

A Well-being Steering Committee is overseeing the implementation of the *Well-being Policy Statement and Framework for Practice* within my Department. It examines issues in relation to the co-ordination and aligning of the range of supports provided to schools in regard to well-being and mental health promotion. This involves coordinating the liaison with other Departments and Government agencies.

The Policy includes a Well-being Implementation Plan and significant resources have been committed from a number of sections of the Department. NEPS capacity to enhance educational psychological service to schools has been increased through the appointment of an additional 10 educational psychologists in the last academic year and a further 10 psychologists in 2018/19. The focus of part of this additional support, in the context of primary schools, is on extending the delivery of training in the Incredible Years Teacher Classroom Management Programme (IYTCM) and the Friends programmes to teachers in DEIS schools. IYTCM aims to reduce behavioural difficulties and strengthen social and emotional competence in primary school-age children. The Friends Programme, when delivered by trained teachers, reduces anxiety and promotes coping, resilience and school-connectedness in young people thus promoting mental health.

The Department also works with the Department of Health to promote participation by primary and post-primary schools in the Health Promoting Schools initiative, which is supported by the Health Service Executive. This European-wide programme aims to strengthen schools' capacity to be a healthy setting for learning and working by focusing on whole-school level conditions that affect health and well-being of children and young people.

Finding new ways of tackling policy issues that are not the sole responsibility of any one Government Department or agency has been prioritised by Government. My Department has been involved with the Taskforce on Youth Mental Health as part of the programme for Government. One of the challenges of providing a coordinated, streamlined approach to mental health promotion is the fact that there are so many statutory and voluntary agencies/services/NGOs involved. The Task Force was established to produce a series of action-focused recommendations to improve youth mental health. The main areas of focus comprised: emotional literacy and reduction of stigma; awareness of services and supports; accessibility to services and supports across different settings; alignment of services and supports across different providers; and building capacity in local communities. The report has been published and a memorandum has been agreed the Government.

The work of implementing the Taskforce recommendations will be linked with the Youth Mental Health Pathfinder Project. Youth mental health and suicide prevention is one of three Pathfinder Projects under Action 5 of the Civil Service Renewal Plan (2014) and agreed by the Civil Service Management Board. This Youth Mental Health Pathfinder Project is an initiative to innovate and improve whole-of-Government working on cross-cutting policy issues and im-

prove the delivery of shared whole-of-Government projects. The aim is to strengthen management and accountability of cross-cutting projects that involve multiple Departments, Offices and Agencies and ensure that policies that are not the priority or responsibility of a single body are effectively managed, supported and resourced.

### Schools Building Projects Data

175. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of each new school build and school extension in progress across south County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38399/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** In line with the ongoing review of school planning areas generally, the Department is reviewing provision at post-primary level across the school planning areas in South Kildare and this review is due to be completed in October. It will include an assessment of the extent to which projected needs in the area will be met from the additional capacity being provided by the projects already approved and how any specific additional needs will best be catered for, recognising the importance of maintaining a balance between existing and any additional school provision.

Information in relation to the current status of all school building projects in County Kildare is available on my Departments website and this information is regularly updated. For the Deputy's convenience an extract of that information detailing all of the projects underway or planned for County Kildare is attached.

Major Projects	-	-	-	-
202	Kildare	13902O	Hewetson NS	Project Brief Stage
203	Kildare	15040T	Mercy Convent, Naas	On Site
204	Kildare	15769C & 16707I	Scoil Eimhinn Naofa & St Peter's NS, Monasterevin	Stage 2b (Detailed Design)
205	Kildare	16706G	St Joseph's BNS, Kilcock	Stage 2b (Detailed Design)
206	Kildare	17254C	St. Corban's NS, Naas	Project Brief Stage
207	Kildare	17341U	Maynooth BNS	Stage 2b (Detailed Design)
208	Kildare	17872F	St Conleth's/ St Mary's, Newbridge	Stage 2b (Detailed Design)
209	Kildare	17873H	St Conleth's Infant school	Stage 2b (Detailed Design)
210	Kildare	18288B	Scoil Mhichil Naofa, Athy	Stage 2b (Detailed Design)
211	Kildare	18988G	St Raphael's Special School	Site Acquisition Process

Major Projects	-	-	-	-
212	Kildare	19277B	St Anne's Special Sch, Ballymany Cross, Curragh	Stage 2a (Developed Sketch Scheme)
213	Kildare	19455W	St. Mark's Special, Newbridge	Project Brief Stage
214	Kildare	19796C	St Patrick's BNS, Clane	Stage 2b (Detailed Design)
215	Kildare	20257C	Scoil Naomh Padraig, Celbridge	Site Acquisition Process
216	Kildare	20292E	Maynooth ETNS	On Site
217	Kildare	61681V	Patrician Post Primary, Newbridge	Project Brief Stage
218	Kildare	61690W	Cross & Passion Secondary School, Kilcullen	Project Brief Stage
219	Kildare	61702D	St Pauls' Secondary School, Monasterevin	Stage 2b (Detailed Design)
220	Kildare	61730I	St. Mary's Girls Post Primary, Naas	Project Brief Stage
221	Kildare	70650L	Athy Community College	Project Brief Stage
222	Kildare	70680U	St. Conleth's Vocational School, Newbridge	On Site
223	Kildare	70700A	Maynooth PP, Moyglare Rd, Maynooth	On Site
224	Kildare	70720G	St Farnan's Post Primary, Prosperous	Project Brief Stage
225	Kildare	76193Q	Maynooth Community College	On Site
226	Kildare	76194S	Naas Community College	Stage 2b (Detailed Design)
227	Kildare	91614B	Celbridge Community School	Site Acquisition Process

Questions - Written Answers

Additional Accommodation	-	-	-	-	-
Kildare	13902O	Hewetson NS, Millicent, Clane	1 x 80m2 m/s classroom & 1 x wc for assisted users	DESIGN STAGE	2015
Kildare	16845U	Rathcoffey NS	2 classroom 183m2 and conversion of existing to multi-purpose room	DESIGN STAGE	2015
Kildare	17787O	SN Colmcill Naofa, Moone, Athy	1 x 80m2 mainstream classroom with assisted users toilet & 1 x 15m2 SET room	DESIGN STAGE	2017
Kildare	18096P	Coill Dubh NS, Naas	2 x 80m2 classrooms	ONSITE	2014
Kildare	18096P	Coill Dubh NS, Naas	2 x 80m2 classrooms & refurb to create 2 ASD Classrooms	ONSITE	2018
Kildare	18644U	Straffan National School, Straffan	4 x 80m2 mainstream classrooms & wc for assister users & stairs	ONSITE	2015
Kildare	18650P	Newtown NS, Enfield	4 x 80m2 Mainstream Classrooms with en-suite toilets, 2 x 15m2 SET Rooms & Assister Users WC	DESIGN STAGE	2018
Kildare	19452Q	Scoil Mhuire Senior School, Ballymany, Newbridge	2 x 80m2 & 4 x 16m2 Resource room & 1 x 16m2 WC for assisted users	ONSITE	2014
Kildare	19550Q	Scoil Mhuire JNS, Ballymany	2 Classroom SNU @ 470m2	ONSITE	2014
Kildare	19675N	Scoil Bhride, Kilcullen	1x80m2 mainstream, en-suite toilets and WC for assisted users.	DESIGN STAGE	2018

Additional Accommodation	-	-	-	-	-
Kildare	61661P	Salesian College, Celbridge	2 Classroom Base SNU	DESIGN STAGE	2015
Kildare	61691B	Scoil Dara, Kilcock	5 x 58.5m2 Mainstream Classrooms, 5 Standard WC's & 1 x 10.5m2 Assisted Users WC, 2 Science Labs & Prep Area (217m2)& 1 x 119m2 Arts & Crafts Room (Prefab Replacement) 4 x 58.5m2 Mainstream Classrooms & 4 Standard WC's	DESIGN STAGE	2018
Kildare	61730I	St. Mary's College, Naas	1x100m2 Science Lab and 1x58m2 Technical Graphics(DCG) Room	DESIGN STAGE	2017
Kildare	68077S	Ardscoil na Trionide, Athy	5 x general classrooms and ASD unit 552m2	ON SITE	2014

### Direct Provision System

176. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if persons in direct provision are classified as international students for fees in the context of completing the leaving certificate and progressing to third-level education here (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38411/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):** Access to PLC provision for eligible international protection applicants is subject to the payment of the full economic fee. This is broadly in line with arrangements in the higher education sector. Arrangements in relation to payment of the full economic fee for international protection applicants have not changed since 2001. PLC colleges are responsible for collecting the fee.

More broadly, the Government decision to opt in to the EU (recast) Receptions Conditions Directive (2013/22/EU) has given international protection applicants, who have been waiting 9 months or more for a first instance recommendation, access to all aspects of further education and training. While this modifies some of the earlier arrangements regarding access, it does

not change the situation regarding the payment of the full economic fee for PLC programmes.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

177. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the development of a primary school building for a school (details supplied) in County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38413/18]

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

Officials in my Department are working closely with officials from Wexford County Council under the Memorandum of Understanding in relation to the acquisition of a suitable permanent location for Wexford Educate Together NS.

A potential site option has been identified and discussions are ongoing with the landowner with a view to acquiring this site.

Due to commercial sensitivities relating to site acquisitions generally I am not in a position to provide further details at this time but I can assure the Deputy that the school patron will be informed of the proposed location for the school as soon as it is possible to do so.

### **School Transport**

178. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the allocation of a second school bus route will be ensured for students attending schools (details supplied) in order to accommodate the 31 eligible students who are without transport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38419/18]

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

In the 2017/18 school year over 117,000 children, including over 12,000 children with special educational needs, were transported in over 4,500 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually at a total cost of almost €190 million in 2017.

Children who are eligible for school transport and who have completed the application process on time have been accommodated on school transport services for the current school year where such services are in operation.

A number of children who are eligible for school transport from the area referred to by the Deputy were late in submitting their payment details and the service is now operating to capacity.

The terms of the School Transport Schemes are applied equitably on a national basis.

### **School Management**



179. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if one release day per week will be allocated to all teaching principals to help alleviate their workload; if his attention has been drawn to the difficulties for principal teachers in terms of the extra demands and workloads put on them over the past decade; if national clusters of panels will be created that will cover such release time to ensure consistency of curriculum delivery; his plans to address the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38470/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Building on measures in previous budgets to enhance school leadership, Budget 2018 made €0.4 million available to fund almost 4600 additional release days for teaching principals in primary schools. This additional funding has provided an increase in the number of release days available to teaching principals in the 2018/19 school year to 17, 23 or 29 days depending on the size of the school.

I recently announced an extension to the arrangements for schools with teaching principals to cluster their release days into full-time posts, with one teacher covering the release days of all the schools in the cluster. Up to 50 principal release cluster posts will be put in place for the current school year. This measure will assist teaching principals to more effectively plan their release days for the benefit of the school.

Budget 2017 allowed for the commencement of restoration of middle management posts as part of an agreed distributed leadership model and meant lifting the rigidity of the longstanding moratorium on these posts at primary and post-primary levels. This recognises the key role school leadership has in promoting a school environment which is welcoming, inclusive and accountable.

€2.75m was allocated in Budget 2017 to restore middle management positions i.e. the equivalent of approximately 1,300 middle management posts (Assistant Principal I and Assistant Principal II) at both Primary and Post-Primary. (2,600 in total). In addition, 400 Deputy Principal positions were created at post-primary level.

While the Principal is ultimately responsible to the Board of Management for the management and leadership of the school, the Deputy Principal occupies a position of vital importance within the senior leadership team in each school. The Deputy Principal co-operates with the Principal in the fulfilment of the Principal's role and acts or deputises as the Principal in the Principal's absence.

In relation to the duties assigned to Assistant Principal posts, the Principal following consultation with staff, agree the schedule of duties as best meet the needs of the school. These duties are designed to reduce the workload of the Principal.

Enabling teaching principals to have one release days per week would cost approximately €12 million per annum. Any additional increase in the number of release days will be considered as part of the next annual budgetary process alongside the many other demands from the education sector.

### **Departmental Expenditure**

180. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the expenditure savings earmarked for his Department for 2019 that are not accounted for in the mid-year expenditure report or are not included in the fiscal space calculations for 2019. [38484/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Mid-Year Expenditure Report (MYER) set out the starting baseline in relation to the gross voted expenditure for 2019.

As outlined in the MYER, the technical pre-Budget position for current expenditure is the current expenditure allocation for this year set out in REV 2018 plus an additional allocation for certain demographic pressures and the Department's share of unallocated carryover costs relating to 2018 measures. This pre-Budget position will be adjusted to reflect the allocation to the Department of a central provision in relation to the Public Service Stability Agreement.

The capital ceiling set out in the MYER is consistent with the ceiling for 2019 published in the National Development Plan.

The figures set out in the MYER do not include expenditure savings targets specifically earmarked for my Department. However, as usual as part of the Estimates process, my Department will be examining the allocations across its programme areas, including taking into account expenditure trends in 2018, to identify how services can be delivered within the overall fiscal parameters for 2019.

### **Teachers' Remuneration**

181. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps he is taking to address the situation of pay inequality for new teachers; if this matter will be addressed in budget 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38545/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The public service agreements have allowed a programme of pay restoration for public servants to start. I negotiated, together with my colleague the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, a 15-22% pay increase for new teachers.

As a result of these changes, from 1 October 2018 the starting salary of a teacher will be €36,318, and from 1 October 2020 onwards will be €37,692.

Section 11 of the Public Service Pay and Pensions Act 2017 provides that "the Minister [for Public Expenditure and Reform] shall, within three months of the passing of this Act, prepare and lay before the Oireachtas a report on the cost of and a plan in dealing with pay equalisation for new entrants to the public service."

The report laid before the Oireachtas on foot of this provision by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform assesses the cost of a further change which would provide a two scale point adjustment to new entrants recruited since 2011. The total cost of such an adjustment across the public sector is of the order of €200 million, of which Education accounts for €83 million. The report also acknowledges that, during the financial crisis, there were policy changes which affected remuneration in different occupations across the public sector (including education). Addressing any issues arising from changes which are not specifically detailed in the report would give rise to additional costs over and above the foregoing figures.

The matter of new entrant pay is a cross sectorial issue, not just an issue for the education sector alone. The Government supports the gradual, negotiated repeal of the FEMPI legislation, having due regard to the priority to improve public services and in recognition of the essential role played by public servants.

On Monday 24th September, I welcomed, together with the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, the outcome of discussions between public service employers and the public services committee of ICTU in respect of new entrant pay.

This agreement will benefit 16,000 teachers and nearly 5,000 SNAs within the education

sector. The deal provides for a series of incremental jumps for new entrants at points 4 and 8 of their scale.

For example, a teachers hired in September 2011 would see their salary increase from €45,200 in September 2018 to €53,062 in September 2020 under the PSSA agreement and the recent outcome of the new entrant pay talks.

### **Departmental Communications**

182. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if Ministers, ministerial advisers or officials in his Department have ever used private email to communicate on departmental issues between one another or with other persons or organisations; if so, the reason; if so, if he will publish these emails; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38550/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I would like to refer the Deputy to a parliamentary question I responded to on the 13th December 2016 tabled by Mr. John Brady, T.D. (PQ ref: 39582/16). Since late 2016 I have only used dedicated Department email addresses to communicate official Department business.

I have consulted with the Ministers of State and the special Advisers at my Department and they have confirmed that they have only used Department email addresses when conducting their official functions.

My Department does have an Information and Communications ICT Usage Policy which highlights for staff the need for email security. All staff members have to sign up to the policy and all new staff are provided with a copy of the policy as part of their induction material and are expected to comply with this policy.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

183. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the new building project at a school (details supplied). [38570/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** As the Deputy is aware, a building project for the school to which he refers is included in my Department's 6 Year Construction Programme.

The project brief is being finalised with a view to progressing the project into architectural planning.

### **School Accommodation Provision**

184. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 174 of 8 March 2018, the status of the removal of prefab units; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38575/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I can confirm to the Deputy that the project to remove the prefab accommodation is being progressed by Dublin Dun Laoghaire ETB, who agreed to manage this project for my Department.

Some additional works were recently identified as part of the project. In that context a

member of my Department's technical staff carried out a site visit, to assist the ETB in advancing the project.

### **Schools Property**

185. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department has an interest in a freehold lease of a former school building (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38581/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The property referred to by the Deputy is not in my ownership. In common with other buildings of its kind, there is a charging lease in place on the property, in this case dated 1891 for 999 years to protect the state's investment in the property.

In circumstances where a property has ceased to be used as a school, and a request is received from the property owner to release the State's interest secured under a charging lease, such requests are considered in the context of the specific circumstances which pertain to the individual property.

I can confirm that my Department has not received a request from the property owners to release my interest in this property. Queries in relation to the property should be directed to the property owner in the first instance.

### **Student Grant Scheme Eligibility**

186. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an anomaly in the SUSI system whereby students can work during the Easter mid-term and not during the October mid-term will be rectified (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38685/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The assessment of means under the student grant scheme is based on gross income from all sources, with certain social welfare and health service executive payments being exempt.

In the assessment of means, a deduction can be made for holiday earnings made by the applicant from employment outside of term time but within the reference period. I increased the value of this income disregard from €3,809 to €4,500 in the 2016 scheme.

The periods normally considered as holidays are the 2 weeks at Easter, the 12 weeks of summer (June, July and August) and the 2 weeks at Christmas. If the holiday periods for a particular course/college were not consistent with these dates, SUSI may ask for a letter from the college confirming the term dates; so that the student's income can be considered as holiday earnings.

The onus is on the grant applicant to provide the necessary documentary evidence to SUSI in order to have the relevant holiday earnings deducted from the reckonable income.

Further details can be obtained at the following link:

*[http://susi.custhelp.com/app/answers/detail/a\\_id/349/~/\\_what-are-considered-holiday-earnings%3F](http://susi.custhelp.com/app/answers/detail/a_id/349/~/_what-are-considered-holiday-earnings%3F)*

### **School Transport Provision**

187. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a school transport service will be provided for a person (details supplied). [38699/18]

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

In the 2017/18 school year over 117,000 children, including over 12,000 children with special educational needs, were transported in over 4,500 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually at a total cost of almost €190 million in 2017.

Bus Éireann has advised that the family in question did not submit their payment details for the 2018/19 school year on time and the service is now operating to capacity.

The terms of the School Transport Schemes are applied equitably on a national basis.

### **School Transport Provision**

188. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a school transport service will be provided for a person (details supplied). [38700/18]

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

In the 2017/18 school year over 117,000 children, including over 12,000 children with special educational needs, were transported in over 4,500 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually at a total cost of almost €190 million in 2017.

Bus Éireann has advised that they have no record of an application for school transport from the child referenced in the details supplied. The family is advised to liaise with their local Bus Éireann office should they wish to make enquiries.

### **School Accommodation Provision**

189. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of planned development works and the replacement of prefab units at a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38716/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The school to which the Deputy refers to was approved a devolved grant under my Department's Additional Accommodation Scheme 2015. The development approved consists of the demolition of 2 prefabricated classroom buildings and the erection of a two-storey detached building. The new building will include 8 resource rooms, a library, a kitchen, a breakfast room, an entrance lobby/reception, staircases and a lift. The development also consists of the formation of a new vehicular entrance and the rationalisation of onsite parking & associated drainage/site works.

The project has been devolved for delivery to the school authority. My Department under-

stands that the school authority has secured planning permission for the project. The next steps are to proceed to tender and construction. It is a matter for the school to progress the project accordingly.

### **Special Educational Needs Staff**

190. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a SNA will be provided for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38723/18]

**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 Department Circular 0030/2014, which is available on the Department's website at [www.education.ie](http://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 support for individual pupils, the NCSE take account of the pupils' needs and consider the resources available to the school to identify whether additional support 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.

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.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

191. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a building project for a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38727/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Deputy will be aware that a major building project for the school to which he refers, is included in my Department's Capital Programme.

It is acknowledged that this project will involve complex and careful master-planning of the site. A full technical site visit has taken place and the project brief for the school is currently being formulated. In that regard, my Department is currently liaising with the school's patron, Waterford and Wexford Education and Training Board.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

192. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a new school building project for a school (details supplied) in County Clare; when the project will move to construction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38728/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** A project for the school referred to by the Deputy is included in my Department's Capital Programme.

My Department is awaiting information from the school in respect of their new school site. Once this information is provided the project can be progressed.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

193. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills that status of a new school building project for a school (details supplied) which is due to start in 2019; if the school is being prioritised due to the continued deterioration of the prefabs which make up the school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38731/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The major building project referred to by the Deputy is currently at Stage 1 of the Architectural Planning Process. Stage 1 is the Preliminary Design Stage where the Design Team, in conjunction with the school authority, analyse all the constraints of the site, develop a preferred design option and ensure that the preferred option is the best option for the delivery of the brief. The school's design team will shortly be presenting its design proposals to the Department for approval.

On satisfactory completion of Stage 1 the project will be progressed through the remaining stages of architectural planning which includes detailed design, the planning application and other statutory approvals and the preparation of tender documents. When planning permission and the other statutory approvals have been secured my Department will be able to provide the school with a more definitive timeframe for the tender and construction stages of the project.

This project is included in the 6 year construction programme 2016-2021 and is scheduled therein to go to construction in the 2019 - 2021 period.

### **School Transport Provision**

194. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an extra bus will be provided at a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38741/18]

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

In the 2017/18 school year over 117,000 children, including over 12,000 children with special educational needs, were transported in over 4,500 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually at a total cost of almost €190 million in 2017.

Bus Éireann is responsible for the routing and timetabling of school transport services. Buses may operate double trips in the morning and afternoon to facilitate primary and post primary schools which have different starting and finishing times. This ensures that school transport vehicles are fully utilised in the most efficient and cost effective manner.

Bus Éireann is continuing to liaise with the school authorities of the school in question in regard to the specific issues referred to by the Deputy.

### **School Management**

195. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the estimated cost to provide one administration day a week to teaching principals across the primary school network. [38762/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Building on measures in previous budgets to enhance school leadership, Budget 2018 made €0.4 million available to fund almost 4600 additional release days for teaching principals in primary schools. This additional funding has provided an increase in the number of release days available to teaching principals in the 2018/19 school year to 17, 23 or 29 days depending on the size of the school.

I recently announced an extension to the arrangements for schools with teaching principals to cluster their release days into full-time posts, with one teacher covering the release days of all the schools in the cluster. Up to 50 principal release cluster posts will be put in place for the current school year. This measure will assist teaching principals to more effectively plan their release days for the benefit of the school.

Enabling teaching principals to have one release day per week would cost approximately €12 million per annum. Any additional increase in the number of release days will be considered as part of the next annual budgetary process alongside the many other demands from the education sector.

### **School Management**

196. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the estimated cost of lifting the moratorium on filling school management positions at primary school level, that is, assistant principal 1 and assistant principal 2 positions. [38763/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Budget 2017 allowed for the commencement of restoration of middle management posts as part of an agreed distributed



leadership model and meant lifting the rigidity of the longstanding moratorium on these posts at primary and post-primary levels. This recognises the key role school leadership has in promoting a school environment which is welcoming, inclusive and accountable.

€2.75m was allocated in Budget 2017 to restore middle management positions i.e. the equivalent of approximately 1,300 middle management posts (Assistant Principal I and Assistant Principal II) at both Primary and Post-Primary (2,600 in total).

The lifting of the moratorium is an initial phase in the restoration of middle management posts and any future improvements to the number of posts allocated will be dependent on budgetary demands.

The estimated cost of lifting the moratorium on posts of responsibility and restoring them to pre-moratorium levels at primary level would be in the order of €19m.

### School Transport

197. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of eligible and concessionary customers, respectively, transported in each financial year since 2010 and to date in 2018, by sub-division in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38767/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):** School transport is a significant operation managed by Bus Éireann on behalf of the Department. In the 2017/18 school year over 117,000 children, including over 12,000 children with special educational needs, were transported in over 4,500 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually at a total cost of almost €190 million in 2017.

The purpose of the School Transport Scheme is, having regard to available resources, to support the transport to and from school of children who reside remote from their nearest school.

In general, children are eligible for school transport if they meet the distance criteria and are attending their nearest school. A minimum of 10 eligible children residing in a distinct locality, as determined by Bus Éireann, is required before consideration may be given to the establishment or retention of school transport services, within reasonable cost limits.

The information sought by the Deputy is set out below:

#### Total Number of Children on School Transport 2011 to end 2017/18 School Year

School Year	Total Number	Mainstream	Special Educational Needs
2011	113,000	105,000	8,000
2012	112,000	104,000	8,000
2013	114,000	105,000	9,000
2014	113,000	103,000	10,000
2015	114,000	104,000	10,000
2016	116,000	104,000	12,000
2017	116,500	104,000	12,500
End 17/18	117,455	104,700	12,750

#### Details of Mainstream Eligible v Concessionary Children 2011 to end 2017/18 School

**Year**

School Year	Eligible Children		Concessionary Tickets (% is a % of Total Tickets)	Total Tickets
2011	99,878	4,854	4.6%	104,732
2012	95,197	8,949	8.6%	104,146
2013	92,454	12,370	11.8%	104,824
2014	84,098	18,688	18.2%	102,786
2015	81,862	22,208	21.3%	104,070
2016	78,912	25,242	24.2%	104,154
2017	77,500	26,775	25.6%	104,275
End 17/18	77,474	27,230	26%	104,704

The remainder of the information as requested by the Deputy is not readily available in the format requested and my officials are requesting this information from Bus Éireann.

**School Patronage**

198. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will report on the proposed reconfiguration process in school patronage; if school patronage surveys have been undertaken; if so, if he will report on the results; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38773/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** As the Deputy will be aware, I developed the new schools reconfiguration for diversity process, which is aimed at providing more multi-denominational and non-denominational schools across the country, in line with the choices of families and school communities and the Programme for Government commitment for 400 such schools by 2030.

There are two Phases to the new process – the Identification Phase and the Implementation Phase.

The Identification Phase is currently underway in 16 areas nationwide. Each of the 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs) have selected an initial pilot area within their district, which they consider, based on census data and local knowledge, there exists a demand for more diversity in educational provision. Surveys of parents of pre-school children have been carried out in these areas by the relevant City/County Childcare Committee on behalf of the ETBs. ETBs, having analysed the survey results, draw up comprehensive reports on the position in relation to each of the 16 pilot areas. This forms the basis of discussions with the most prevalent patron/landowner in the area (the Catholic Bishop in most cases) concerning the transfer of patronage of an existing school(s) to meet that demand. The response by the landowner/patron to any identified demand for greater diversity is included in the report prepared by the ETB, for submission to my Department, who will subsequently publish the reports. The publication of reports is expected to occur shortly.

Following the publication of the first round of reports, the Schools Reconfiguration process will move into the Implementation Phase. This Phase involves consultation with local school communities on accommodating demand for diversity by transferring patronage of an existing school to a new multi-/non-denominational patron. Draft protocols for the Implementation

Phase are at an advanced stage of development and consultation with Catholic Church representatives is ongoing.

A second round of town selections and surveys of pre-school parents will be organised by ETBs when the outcomes of the initial round of pilot surveys have been assessed and any necessary adjustments made in the process.

I believe that this new Schools Reconfiguration process, which involves the transfer of live schools, has the potential to significantly increase patronage diversity in our school system.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

199. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the funding for a new school building for a school (details supplied) in Dublin 22; the stage this project is at; and the timeline for the releasing of the funding for same. [38776/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** As the Deputy is aware, a building project for the school to which he refers is included in my Department's 6 Year Construction Programme.

In this regard, a schedule of accommodation, for the purposes of the school's project brief was furnished to the school authorities. In the context of progressing the project to the next stage, a technical site visit is necessary and the details are currently being confirmed with the school patron.

### **Youthreach Programme**

200. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding Youthreach services in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38825/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):** I understand that the current service agreement for the delivery of the Youthreach Programme between Kerry ETB and the Kerry Diocesan Youth Services (KDYS) is due to expire on 31 December 2018. Kerry ETB plans to move to the direct delivery of the programme from 1 January 2019. I understand that Kerry ETB is currently engaging with KDYS to prepare for the transfer of staff. Kerry ETB has also kept my Department informed of developments and has been in contact with the union representing some of the staff. The ETB aims to ensure the smoothest transition possible for both staff and students and it is important that KDYS continue to support the process through the provision of relevant information to the ETB.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

201. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the progression of a school building project for a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38885/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I wish to inform the Deputy that my Department is presently finalising the acquisition of 0.43 acres of land adjacent to the school in question's playing field. Additionally, I can also confirm that agreement has been

reached in principle between officials from South Dublin County Council and my Department on the acquisition of an additional portion of land totalling 0.96 acres which also adjoins the playing field.

These acquisitions will serve to enhance the facilities currently available to the school while also supporting any potential options for the future development of the school going forward.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

202. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress made to date on a project (details supplied); if a site has been identified for this project; if the new school will be built and open by 2020; if not, if he is planning interim arrangements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38886/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** As the Deputy is aware, I recently announced the opening of 42 new schools over the next four years. This announcement followed nationwide demographic exercises carried out by my Department into the current and future need for primary and post-primary school places across the country, and included provision for the school to which he refers.

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

In line with the policy on the use of State assets (Department of Public Expenditure and Reform Circulars 11/15 and 17/16), my Department is, in the first instance, seeking to maximise the use of sites already in my ownership and of available properties in the ownership of other State bodies, where these are considered suitable.

In addition, as part of my Department's ongoing engagement with Local Authorities in respect of statutory planning processes and under the Memorandum of Understanding on school site acquisitions, my Department is considering other potentially suitable site options, including appropriately zoned sites, to serve the relevant areas.

Taking into account all of the above, decisions will then be made as part of the site acquisition process in relation to appropriate sites for all the schools announced, including the school in question, and their locations will be confirmed as soon as possible.

The current focus for the Department is to prioritise the 17 schools opening in 2019 so that patrons can be appointed and accommodation solutions put in place as soon as possible. The announcement in April 2018 provides a better lead in period for planning and delivering accommodation solutions for the schools that are due to be established from September 2020 onwards.

The Department's Design and Build Programme will be the main delivery mechanism for providing permanent accommodation for the 42 new schools.

### **Visa Applications**

203. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason holiday visas for persons (details supplied) were refused when evidence of substantial cash reserves, pension, property and business interests were given; if the file will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38340/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the visa applications referred to were refused by the Visa Office in New Delhi on 17 May 2018. Appeals were subsequently made and refused on 16 August 2018. The decisions were communicated to the applicants along with the refusal reasons.

The original refusals were on a number of grounds including financial grounds. The applicants addressed the financial grounds in the subsequent appeals. However, the visa appeals officer was not satisfied that they demonstrated strong economic, social or family reasons to return to their home country following their proposed stay.

Only one appeal is permitted per application. It remains open to the applicants to make a fresh application. If such applications are made, the applicants should bear in mind the refusal reasons communicated to them and be in a position to address the matters in the new applications.

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

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

### **Commencement of Legislation**

204. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when he plans to commence Part 9 of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38364/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** Part 9 of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 provides for a number of amendments to the Civil Registration Act 2004, all of which have yet to be commenced.

Sections 92, 93, 95 and 99 of the 2015 Act provide for the registration and re-registration of the birth of a donor-conceived child. These sections cannot be commenced until Parts 2 and 3 of the 2015 Act are brought into operation by the Minister for Health, who has indicated that he intends to commence these Parts in the autumn of 2018.

The commencement of other sections of Part 9 of the 2015 Act are dependent on provisions of the Civil Registration (Amendment) Act 2014 being commenced by the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection. Officials from my Department, the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, and the Department of Health are working to coordinate the scheduling of the commencement of these sections.

### **Referendum Campaigns**

205. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the timetable for the holding of referendums agreed on 26 September 2017 relating to blasphemy, woman's life within the home and divorce; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38634/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Thirty-seventh Amendment of the Constitution (Repeal of offence of publication or utterance of blasphemous matter) Bill 2018 was passed by both Houses of the Oireachtas on 20 September 2018. On 21 September 2018 the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government made a Referendum (Polling Day) Order appointing 26 October 2018 as the day upon which the referendum on the proposal contained in the Bill should take place.

It was the Government's intention that a referendum would also be held on that date to delete Article 41.2 of the Constitution which deals with a woman's life within the home. However, the decision of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice and Equality to undertake pre-legislative consideration of the General Scheme of the Bill to amend the Constitution on two dates this month has meant that this cannot happen. When the Committee's report on this matter becomes available, I will consider what further steps might be taken.

Under the timetable approved by Government on 26 September 2017, it is proposed to hold a referendum on divorce in June 2019. In that regard, the Government has decided to support the Thirty-fifth Amendment of the Constitution (Divorce) Bill 2016, a Private Member's Bill introduced by Deputy (now Minister) Josepha Madigan. The Bill completed Committee Stage in the Dáil on 12 July 2017. I am currently considering the issues raised by Deputies at the Committee Stage debate on the Bill and I will bring proposals to Government in that regard in due course.

### **Garda Deployment**

206. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí in the drugs units in Ballymun and Finglas in each of the years 2008 to 2017 and to date in 2018. [38282/18]

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

As the Deputy will be aware all Gardaí have a responsibility in the prevention and detection of criminal activity whether it be in the area of drug offences crime or otherwise. I can assure the Deputy that An Garda Síochána continues to pro-actively and resolutely tackle all forms of drug crime in this jurisdiction.

An Garda Síochána's National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau, which was established in 2015, continues to lead out the policing strategy for tackling drugs by demand reduction and supply reduction strategies. In this regard the Bureau continues its policy of working with Garda Divisional Drug Units nationwide in tackling supply reduction at local level.

This work is further supported by other national units, including the Criminal Assets Bureau, in targeting persons involved in the illicit sale and supply of drugs. This approach allows for the co-ordinated use of Garda resources in tackling all forms of organised crime, including illicit drug activity nationwide. Multi-disciplinary approaches are also utilised to ensure that those involved in illicit activity are effectively targeted including through the use of the proceeds of crime legislation, money laundering legislation and the powers of the Criminal Assets Bureau. I am informed that this approach adopts good practice in implementing a co-ordinated

use of Garda resources and in utilising available criminal law to its fullest extent in tackling all forms of organised crime, including drug trafficking.

We have also seen unprecedented international cooperation between An Garda Síochána and policing services in other jurisdictions leading to important arrests and drug seizures.

Underpinning all these measures is this Government's commitment to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country in order to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and deter crime. I am informed by the Commissioner that since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, almost 2,200 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide.

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

Information in relation to Drugs Unit Personnel at the Divisional level, from 2008 onwards, as provided by the Garda Commissioner, is set out in the table following.

#### Drugs Unit Personnel By Division 2008-2018

Table

DIVISION	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
D.M.R. EAST	10	9	13	15	13	13	10	10	9	11
D.M.R. NORTH	25	31	34	32	31	27	16	25	21	19
D.M.R. NORTH CENTRAL	15	16	15	18	20	13	20	20	30	14
D.M.R. SOUTH	28	26	30	31	30	23	17	16	17	14
D.M.R. SOUTH CENTRAL	22	18	19	16	13	11	19	19	13	9
D.M.R. WEST	32	35	36	35	28	26	24	26	20	17
D.M.R. NSS				2	6					
CARLOW/ KILDARE	8									
KILDARE		5	6	7	2	2	6	7	8	9
LAOIS/OFFALY	10	10	13	6	3	0	3	0	0	5
MEATH	3	10	10	7	6	4	4	5	8	5
LONGFORD/ WESTMEATH	12									
WESTMEATH		7	9	9	7	7	6	5	6	6
WICKLOW	11	11	11	11	3	4	4	4	11	0
CAVAN/ MONAGHAN	11	10	11	8	5	0	0	0	0	5
DONEGAL	8	10	8	12	10	10	8	7	4	4
LOUTH	8	6	7	6	7	6	6	6	6	5
SLIGO/ LEITRIM	8	8	2	7	8	6	8	7	7	14
WATERFORD/ KILKENNY	15									

Questions - Written Answers

DIVISION	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
KILKENNY/ CARLOW		8	11	8	7	7	5	7	4	5
TIPPERARY	14	10	10	9	8	7	7	8	9	12
WATERFORD		12	12	10	10	9	5	5	5	6
WEXFORD	13	12	12	11	6	4	1	6	6	5
CORK CITY	26	25	27	24	26	29	28	15	20	17
CORK NORTH	8	8	9	7	9	9	5	5	5	5
CORK WEST	6	5	6	7	5	4	3	4	3	5
KERRY	11	11	10	10	6	8	10	9	7	9
LIMERICK	14	19	22	20	12	11	12	14	12	11
CLARE	6	6	9	9	7	6	7	5	5	5
GALWAY	8	13	12	12	11	12	8	12	9	9
MAYO	6	6	7	5	5	5	5	5	5	6
ROSCOM- MON/ GAL- WAY EAST	3									
ROSCOM- MON/ LONG- FORD		8	7	7	6	7	6	6	6	4
TOTAL	341	355	378	361	310	270	253	258	256	236

Table(cont)

DIVISION	Jan-18	Feb-18	Mar-18	Apr-18	May-18	Jun-18	Jul-18	Aug-18	Sep-18	Oct-18	Nov-18	Dec-18
D.M.R. EAST	11	11	11	11	11	11	9	9				
D.M.R. NORTH	19	19	19	19	19	19	19	19				
D.M.R. NORTH CENTRAL	14	14	14	14	14	19	19	19				
D.M.R. SOUTH	16	14	16	16	16	16	16	16				
D.M.R. SOUTH CENTRAL	9	9	9	9	9	12	12	12				
D.M.R. WEST	16	17	17	17	16	16	16	16				
D.M.R. NSS												
CARLOW/ KILDARE												
KILDARE	9	11	11	11	11	11	11	11				
LAOIS/OFFALY	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5				
MEATH	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	6				
LONGFORD/ WESTMEATH												
WESTMEATH	6	6	6	6	6	7	7	7				
WICKLOW	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0				
CAVAN/ MONAGHAN	5	5	5	6	6	6	4	4				
DONEGAL	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4				
LOUTH	5	5	5	4	4	4	4	4				
SLIGO/ LEITRIM	14	14	14	4	4	4	4	4				
WATERFORD/ KILKENNY												
KILKENNY/ CARLOW	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5				
TIPPERARY	12	12	11	11	11	11	11	9				
WATERFORD	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6				
WEXFORD	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5				
CORK CITY	17	16	16	15	15	18	18	18				



DIVISION	Jan-18	Feb-18	Mar-18	Apr-18	May-18	Jun-18	Jul-18	Aug-18	Sep-18	Oct-18	Nov-18	Dec-18
CORK NORTH	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5				
CORK WEST	5	3	3	6	6	6	6	6				
KERRY	9	9	9	10	10	10	10	10				
LIMERICK	8	7	7	8	8	8	8	8				
CLARE	5	5	5	4	4	4	4	4				
GALWAY	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9				
MAYO	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6				
ROSCOMMON/ GALWAY EAST												
ROSCOMMON/ LONGFORD	4	4	4	3	3	3	3	3				
TOTAL	234	231	232	224	223	235	231	230				

For more general information on Garda Facts and Figures please see the link below

[http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/An\\_Garda\\_Siochana\\_facts\\_and\\_figures](http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/An_Garda_Siochana_facts_and_figures)

### Garda Operations

207. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on Garda actions surrounding the removal of occupiers from a location (details supplied); if the wearing of balaclavas by members of An Garda Síochána is lawful or appropriate in such circumstances; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38313/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Deputy will appreciate that the manner in which any Garda operation is conducted is solely a matter for the Garda Commissioner and his management team and I, as Minister, have no role in this regard. Similarly, the deployment of all Garda resources, including personnel, is a matter for An Garda Síochána.

With regard to the incident in question, I am advised by the Garda authorities that a removal was conducted on behalf of the property's owner, and was the subject of a High Court order directing people who had been occupying the premises to vacate it. The removal of individuals from the property was not conducted by An Garda Síochána, but by a private firm acting for the owner of the premises on foot of this High Court Order.

I am further advised that the role of the Gardaí who were in attendance at the scene that evening was to facilitate the High Court order being carried out safely, to ensure public order and to facilitate peaceful protest. I understand that Community Gardaí were deployed initially and were later supported by a Garda Public Order Unit.

I note Commissioner Harris's recent statement in relation to the protest and he has requested a report from the Assistant Commissioner, Dublin Metropolitan Region (DMR), to see what lessons can be learned from the event. I also note that the Policing Authority will be pursuing this matter with An Garda Síochána too.

The right to protest is a fundamental one in any democracy, and one which must be protected and facilitated. However, it is also a right that must be exercised peacefully and with respect for the rights of others. In this context, we must not lose sight of the fact that the members of An Garda Síochána were enforcing the law in what were very difficult circumstances.

I am aware that there has been some disquiet about members of the Public Order Unit wearing hoods. The Commissioner has said they should have been worn in conjunction with

helmets and you will be familiar with public order police around the world wearing helmets in the course of their policing duties.

It is a sad fact and a worrying development that Gardaí, and particularly those who undertake public order policing, are frequently personally targeted and subjected to vile abuse and threats, particularly online. At the protest itself, the Gardaí were subject to sustained abuse, including in one incident, racist abuse, and I condemn that behaviour. Where behaviour crosses the line into criminality, it may be investigated but it would be preferable if the crime did not occur at all. I would appeal to people to recognise that Gardaí simply doing their jobs should not be subjected to threats, intimidation or abuse.

### **Visa Applications**

208. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if and when a join spouse visa will be considered in the case of a person (details supplied); when documentation such as proof of Irish citizenship, original and translated marriage certificate and copies of state marriage certificate are likely to be returned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38350/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the visa application referred to was refused by the Visa Office in Dublin on 6 February 2017. An appeal was subsequently made and refused on 26 July 2017. This decision was communicated to the applicant.

No further applications have been made. If one is made, the applicant should bear in mind the original refusal reasons communicated to her and be in a position to address them.

Original documents, such as a marriage certificate, are returned to applicants as a matter of course. INIS have reviewed the visa application file and have identified an original translation of the marriage certificate which has now been returned. All other certificates on file are photocopies.

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

### **Residency Permits**

209. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when a person (details supplied) will receive a GNIB card. [38360/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service of this Department that their records indicate that the IRP card for the person was printed on 12/07/2018 and would have been posted to the address on record in the week beginning 16/7/2018.

I am further advised that there is no record of this correspondence being returned by An Post as undelivered.

I would recommend the person to contact the Registration Office at burghquayregoffice@justice.ie to confirm non receipt of the IRP card and to request the issue of a replacement card, if appropriate.

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.

### **Direct Provision Data**

210. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons in 2018 who have been refused accommodation in the Reception and Integration Agency's accommodation portfolio due to the lack of bed space; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38394/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):** The Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) has been working actively to find solutions to the increased demand for its accommodation over the past months.

To meet the steady increase in demand, RIA has added a net 646 beds to its portfolio over the last twelve months, including by opening of new centres in Lisdoonvarna and Moate. However, in recent weeks demand has spiked and the number of people arriving in Ireland applying for international protection has increased even further.

Due to this spike, full capacity was reached and RIA had to prioritise accommodation for families and other vulnerable persons who presented and were unable to offer immediate accommodation services to some people. The numbers who did not initially receive an offer of accommodation are relatively small and RIA has been working to meet their needs and indeed many have since been offered accommodation. Further efforts to provide accommodation to international protection applicants will involve the opening of new accommodation centres.

It is an extremely rare event for a person not to be offered accommodation in Ireland on arrival.

To address current and future needs, advertisements have been placed in the national media seeking additional accommodation that must be fully compliant with the recommendations of the McMahon report. Quite separate to this, it is also engaged in an open competitive process to establish a framework of accommodation centres from which we can draw down accommodation as and when needed over the coming years.

At the present time (September 2018), the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) has contracted approximately 5,800 beds, almost all of which are fully occupied. It is currently accommodating some 600 persons in accommodation who have been granted a permission to remain in Ireland (and therefore are technically ineligible for free accommodation in Accommodation Centres). Some of these have recently received a decision while others have received decisions several months and indeed a couple of years ago.

The Reception and Integration Agency has provided funding to NGOs to provide house-finding and support services to these residents to obtain permanent homes in the community. RIA also works with the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government on this issue.

## **Commission on the Future of Policing Expenditure**

211. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the cost of the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38404/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy will be aware, the report of the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland was published on Tuesday last, 18 September. The report addresses all aspects of policing in Ireland and provides a comprehensive blueprint for the transformation of An Garda Síochána. I will be consulting with the Commissioner and the Departments and Agencies concerned with the Report over the coming period and will be bringing a High Level Implementation Plan to Government in December for approval.

A budget of €1.5 million was approved for the Commission on its establishment and expenditure to the end of August 2018 was approximately €1.4 million. The final costs will of course be published in my Department's Appropriation Account for 2018.

## **Commissions of Investigation**

212. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the MacLochlainn commission of investigation report will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38415/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The MacLochlainn Commission of Investigation was established in August 2014 under the Commissions of Investigation Act 2004 to investigate and report on certain matters relative to the fatal shooting of Mr Ronan MacLochlainn by members of An Garda Síochána in the course of an attempted armed robbery of a Securicor van in Co. Wicklow in May 1998.

The final report of the MacLochlainn Commission was presented to my Department by the Sole Member, Mary Rose Gearty SC, on 28 June 2018.

In keeping with my obligations under section 38 of the Commissions of Investigation Act 2004, I am examining the report and consulting as required, in particular with the Office of the Attorney General and Director of Public Prosecutions, to ensure that publication would not prejudice any criminal proceedings.

I expect to be in a position to complete this process in the near future, with a view to arranging for publication of the report as soon as possible, in accordance with the provisions of the Act.

## **Probate Data**

213. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on the waiting time for probate to be considered once submitted to the Dublin Probate Office's principal probate registry; if the office is fully staffed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38431/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Probate Office is an office of the High Court and management of the courts is the responsibility of the Courts Ser-

vice, which is independent in exercising its functions under the Courts Service Act 1998.

However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has informed me that the current processing times for applications to the Principal Probate Registry in Dublin are as follows:

- 5 weeks – applications from solicitors
- 12 weeks – personal applications

The Courts Service has advised that the Principal Probate Registry is fully staffed and that waiting times have reduced and are in line with the normal waiting times for work of this nature.

The Deputy may wish to be aware that the Report of the Probate Services Review Group was approved by the Courts Service Board on 23 April 2018 and makes a number of recommendations in relation to

- Improvements to existing business processes (some of which are already underway);
- Communication with the District Probate Registries;
- Re-allocation of functions and
- ICT efficiencies including the development of online filing functionality, through an e-probate system and electronic data exchange with the Revenue Commissioners.

Work has now commenced on planning for the implementation of these recommendations, including amendments to the Rules of the Superior Courts and changes in work practices and processes.

### **Peace Commissioners Appointments**

214. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the appointment of a person (details supplied) as a peace commissioner; the length of time this appointment process will take; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38446/18]

215. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the nomination of a person (details supplied) as a peace commissioner; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38449/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 214 and 215 together.

The applications for appointment to the Office of Peace Commissioner referred to in the questions are currently being considered in line with standard procedures. When this consideration is complete, I will make a decision and the person concerned will then be informed. Appointments are made at the discretion of the Minister for Justice and Equality with regard to the needs of particular areas. In general terms, an applicant, who may otherwise be suitable, may not be appointed if no such need arises.

### **Citizenship Applications**

216. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of

a citizenship application by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38468/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy has not been refused. It is currently being processed with a view to establishing whether the applicant meets the statutory conditions for the granting of naturalisation, such as good character and lawful residence. A letter issued to the person concerned on 3 September 2018 requesting certain information specifically related to identity and the use of differing forenames on various documents and forms of identification. However, while a reply has been received, the documentation requested in this letter is still outstanding.

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

### **Visa Data**

217. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the recent changes introduced by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service by which re-entry visas can now only be made via postal applications have caused great concern to many non-EU nationals; the reason the GNIB card will not suffice for the non-EU re-entry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38469/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service of this Department that non-nationals from visa required countries require a re-entry visa if they wish to leave and return to Ireland during the period of their registration. Up to 3 September 2018 customers had the option of submitting their application for a re-entry visa by post, or in person. In person applications were made by appointment, with appointments being made available 3 weeks in advance.

I am further advised that the change was introduced in order to improve efficiency and enhance the service to customers. As a face to face meeting is not required to issue a re-entry visa, applications are now dealt with by post and these applications are usually processed within 3 to 4 weeks. Customers with urgent travel needs can continue to make an emergency appointment for a re-entry visa and their application will be dealt with within 24 hours with additional appointments are being made available in this regard.

The requirements for registration of immigration permissions and visa and re-entry visa requirements are kept under regular review.

### **Departmental Expenditure**

218. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the expenditure savings that are earmarked for his Department for 2019 that are not accounted for in the mid-year expenditure report or are not included in the fiscal space calculations for 2019. [38490/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Mid-Year Expenditure Report (MYER) set out the starting baseline in relation to the gross voted expenditure for 2019. The technical pre-Budget position for 2019 in respect of current expenditure is the current expenditure allocation for this year set out in the Revised Estimates for 2018 (REV 2018). The figures set out in the MYER do not include expenditure savings targets specifically earmarked for my Department.

The capital provision set out in the MYER is consistent with the allocation for 2019 published in the National Development Plan.

The expenditure requirements for 2019 are being evaluated in the context of the estimates process currently underway and will be published in due course.

### **Garda Stations**

219. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the details of the 111 Garda stations not connected to the Garda network; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38546/18]

220. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 222 of 12 July 2018, the detail of each Garda station that does not have access to the Internet; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38547/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 219 and 220 together.

There has been unprecedented investment in An Garda Síochána in recent years, in support of the Government’s commitment to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and deter crime.

€1.65 billion has been allocated to the Garda Vote for 2018. This is an increase of approximately 2% over the allocation for 2017.

Further, the Deputy will be aware that the Programme for a Partnership Government recognises that Gardaí must have the modern technology and resources necessary to detect and investigate crime and to prevent loss and harm to citizens and their property on a 24/7 basis.

In support of this, €342 million, including €217 million in additional funding under the Capital Plan 2016-2021, is being invested in Garda ICT infrastructure between 2016 and 2021 to enable An Garda Síochána to deploy the latest cutting-edge technologies in delivering professional policing and security services for the community. This investment will allow delivery of a broad range of projects associated with the Garda Modernisation and Renewal Programme.

The Deputy will be aware that the Garda Commissioner is responsible for managing and controlling generally the administration and business of An Garda Síochána as well as for decisions in relation to the allocation and management of Garda equipment and resources, including in relation to ICT. As Minister, I have no direct role in these matters.

There are 565 operational Garda stations in the State. I am informed by the Garda authorities that broadband networks and services are used to connect stations to the Garda network for official purposes. All connections to Garda stations are managed in Telecommunications Division to ensure the speed of the network connection meets the requirements of the particular location.

I am further informed by the Garda authorities that a project to enhance network access to rural Garda stations is being progressed under the Modernisation and Renewal Programme.

I understand that 111 stations are currently not connected to the Garda network. I have been advised by the Garda authorities that for operational reasons a list of the 111 stations concerned cannot be provided.

However I can update the Deputy that of this total, I am informed that arrangements for connection of 34 stations are nearing completion. Options are being explored to provide members attached to the remaining stations not yet networked with local access to Garda ICT services. This includes an assessment of the availability or otherwise of local broadband services and/or the provision of mobile technology.

Finally, it is important to note that any member attached to a currently unconnected Garda station can access PULSE at their local district station. Members attached to non-networked locations can also contact the Garda Information Services Centre (GISC) or an associated networked station if required.

### **Central Statistics Office**

221. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on the crime statistics and information being provided by An Garda Síochána to the Central Statistics Office; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38560/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** It is vitally important for a number of reasons, but particularly for the management of criminal justice policy and Garda operations, that we have regular publication of CSO crime statistics to allow for a targeted response to crime. As the Deputy will be aware, the Central Statistics Office (CSO) formally recommenced the publication of Crime Statistics on 28 March 2018 with a designation of ‘Under Reservation’.

While it is clear that there is a body of work to be done to ensure that the CSO can stand over the figures they release as a true and accurate reflection of the level of criminality in our society, I am confident that the work being done by An Garda Síochána, in conjunction with the CSO and the Policing Authority, will soon return the recorded crime statistics to the higher ‘Official’ standard expected of our crime statistics.

I understand that this matter will also be addressed at the next public meeting of the Policing Authority and An Garda Síochána on Thursday, 27 September 2018 and I look forward to hearing the outcome of those discussions.

### **Departmental Communications**

222. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if Ministers, ministerial advisers or officials in his Department have ever used private email to communicate on departmental issues between one another or with other persons or organisations; if so, the reason; if so, if he will publish these emails; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38564/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** My Department has a clear policy in which staff are directed not to use third-party or web-based email accounts to send or receive Departmental information, not least because the method is much less secure than Departmental systems.



Thus it is not the practice amongst officials within my Department, nor is it my practice nor that of my advisors, to use personal email accounts for Departmental business.

However, the issue of personal email accounts for work-related business may on rare occasions arise out of necessity, for example where ICT systems are inaccessible.

### Written Answers Nos. 223-237

#### Garda Operations

223. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will report on Garda Operation Redline; the number of persons arrested and charged to date; the number of successful convictions obtained to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38664/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am advised by the Garda authorities that Operation Redline was put in place in 2012 and concluded in 2013. Operation Redline led to 27 arrests which resulted in 32 charges or summonses and 10 convictions.

#### Closed-Circuit Television Systems

224. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda stations that operate CCTV in the custody area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38764/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for decisions in relation to the provision and allocation of Garda equipment and resources, including the installation of CCTV in custody areas in Garda stations. I, as Minister, have no direct role in that matter.

I have asked the Garda Commissioner for the specific information requested and when it is received I will write directly to the Deputy.

#### Departmental Funding

225. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the amount of funding provided to a charity (details supplied) in each of the years 2008 to 2018 in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38774/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** Details of the funding amount provided by my Department to the organisation being referred to by the Deputy for each year for the period 2008-2018 are provided in the following table.

#### Department funding provided to Rape Crisis Network Ireland 2008- 2018

Year	Total
2008	€83,500
2009	€154,060

2010	€127,192
2011	€130,241
2012	€91,830
2013	€83,737
2014	€86,500
2015	€71,648
2016	€85,000
2017	€85,000
2018* (as at September 20 2018)	€59,033

### Departmental Funding

226. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the amount of funding provided to each rape crisis centre in each of the years 2008 to 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38775/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** Details of the funding amount provided by my Department to rape crisis centres each year for the past ten years; and the services and supports provided from this funding by each centre, are provided in the enclosed tables. Staged payments were made during the course of a year for the particular service in some instances. Grants for awareness raising activities ceased to be paid to individual non-governmental organisations from 2016 onwards, arising from a call from them for a national campaign to be held, which commenced in 2016.

As the Deputy will be aware, Tusla is the main funder of domestic and sexual violence services and is providing €23.8m for these services in 2018.

#### Funding

Organisation Name -2018 (end June)	Details of Payment	Balance
DUBLIN RAPE CRISIS CENTRE LTD	GRANT FUNDING-BODYRIGHT PROG	€ 11,000.00
DUBLIN RAPE CRISIS CENTRE LTD	FUNDING SERVICES VICTIMS CRIME	€ 20,000.00
DUBLIN RAPE CRISIS CENTRE LTD Total		€ 31,000.00
RAPE CRISIS NETWORK IRELAND	GRANT PAYMENT - LEGAL COORDINATOR	€ 30,000.00
RAPE CRISIS NETWORK IRELAND	Funding for Services to Victims of Crime	€ 29,033.51
RAPE CRISIS NETWORK IRELAND Total		€ 59,033.51
SEXUAL VIOLENCE CENTRE CORK	Funding for Services to Victims of Crime	€ 20,800.00
SEXUAL VIOLENCE CENTRE CORK Total		€ 20,800.00
Grand Total		€ 110,833.51

## Closed-Circuit Television Systems

227. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if consideration will be given to the issues raised by a local authority (details supplied) in relation to CCTV schemes; the measures he plans to implement to improve the criteria pertaining to this scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38782/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Deputy will be aware that CCTV systems installed for the purposes of crime prevention and as aids to policing in areas to which the general public routinely have access, such as town centres, fall into two distinct but complementary categories, namely Garda CCTV systems and community-based CCTV systems.

Community CCTV is governed by section 38 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005 and the Garda Síochána (CCTV) Order 2006 (SI No 289 of 2006). This legal framework requires that any proposed community CCTV scheme must:

- be approved by the local Joint Policing Committee,
- have the authorisation of the Garda Commissioner, and
- have the prior support of the relevant local authority, which must also act as data controller.

This is the legal basis for all community CCTV schemes, regardless of whether or not grant funding is sought from my Department to assist in their establishment.

In accordance with this legal framework, I understand that the large majority of local authorities have previously undertaken to act as data controllers in the context of specific community CCTV schemes. Further, it is important to note that many community CCTV schemes are up and running successfully nationwide.

I am also pleased to see that the numbers of new applications to the grant aid scheme administered by my Department are increasing - there have to date been 27 applications to the scheme, including 13 applications received this month. 6 applications have been approved. 18 applications are currently being considered. The remaining 3 applications have been returned to the applicants concerned to enable them to supply the information necessary to qualify for grant aid.

In establishing the grant-aid scheme, the Department consulted broadly including with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner, An Garda Síochána and the Office of the Attorney General. There was also consultation regarding the scheme with stakeholders including County and City Management Association (CCMA), Local Government Management Agency (LGMA), Irish Rural Link as well as interested community groups.

Nonetheless and in response to the queries or concerns expressed by some local authorities, my officials continue to engage on the matter in particular through the LGMA and the CCMA, to address any concerns and clarify any queries arising.

The Data Protection Commissioner's Office has confirmed as recently as May of this year that it does not have any concerns on the legislative basis for CCTV. However it is currently conducting an audit of the practice, operation and governance of CCTV. We expect findings from this process to be of great assistance to local authorities as they carry out their function of Data Controller.

I am keen to ensure that all interested groups, in both rural and urban areas, have the opportunity to take advantage of the availability of this grant aid scheme administered by my Department. Under the scheme, which is intended to run for 3 years with funding of some €1 million being made available each year, eligible community groups can apply for grant-aid of up to 60% of the total capital cost of a proposed CCTV system, up to a maximum total of €40,000.

Full details of the grant aid package are available to download from my Department's website - [www.justice.ie](http://www.justice.ie) and support and guidance is available to help interested groups to apply for this funding through a dedicated email address [communitycctv@justice.ie](mailto:communitycctv@justice.ie).

### **Insurance Industry**

228. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress being made to implement a recommendation by an organisation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38887/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Cost of Insurance Working Group proposed exploring the possibility that a specific unit, funded by the insurance industry, be established within the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau (GNECB) to tackle insurance fraud.

I understand that the GNECB has engaged with Insurance Ireland in relation to this matter and submitted a mechanism for establishing an insurance fraud unit to Insurance Ireland in the first half of 2017. Following receipt of the reply from Insurance Ireland in July 2018, I met with the GNECB and the Assistant Commissioner, Special Crime Operations, on 30 August to discuss this recommendation further.

I understand that, at this stage, the Garda Commissioner has yet to form a view on the recommendation, and no proposal or recommendation has yet been submitted to me as Minister.

### **Closed-Circuit Television Systems**

229. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of applications made for community-based CCTV systems; the number that have been funded, installed and now operational; the locations of all such CCTV systems; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38888/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Deputy will be aware that the Programme for a Partnership Government commits to supporting investment in CCTV systems. In pursuance of this commitment, a grant-aid scheme was launched by my Department in 2017 to assist groups in the establishment of community-based CCTV systems in their local areas. It is intended that the scheme will run for 3 years with funding of some €1 million being made available each year.

Under the scheme, eligible community groups can apply for grant-aid of up to 60% of the total capital cost of a proposed CCTV system, up to a maximum grant of €40,000.

Systems funded under this scheme supplement the existing network of CCTV systems, both Community and Garda, in operation in the State.

The Department receives a regular flow of enquiries regarding the scheme from a broad spectrum of the public. There have been 27 applications to the scheme to date, including 13

applications received this month. 6 applications have been approved to date. 18 applications are currently being assessed. The remaining 3 applications have been returned to the applicants concerned, to enable them to supply the information necessary to qualify for grant aid.

Details of the counties in which successful applications have been based and the funding approved are included in the following table:

County	Number of applications	Approved Funding
Wicklow	1	€40,000.00
Wexford	3	€77,914.51
Sligo	1	€8,835.00
Leitrim	1	€40,000.00
Total	6	€166,749.51

I am keen to ensure that all interested groups, in both rural and urban areas, have the opportunity to take advantage of the availability of this grant aid scheme. For any community groups wishing to avail of the scheme, full details are available to download from my Department's website - [www.justice.ie](http://www.justice.ie).

In addition, support and guidance is available from my officials to help interested groups to apply for this funding through a dedicated email address [communitycctv@justice.ie](mailto:communitycctv@justice.ie).

### Work Permits Eligibility

230. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the plans in place in order to allow stamp 3 skilled workers' spouses and partners to access employment here whilst living here with their partners; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38471/18]

235. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to change the rules with regard to allowing the spouses, partners and dependants of highly skilled non-EEA professionals residing here on visas in view of near full employment and as skill shortages begin to develop in the economy; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38455/18]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 230 and 235 together.

Immediate family members, that is dependants, partners and spouses of Critical Skills Employment Permit holders already have very broad access to the Irish labour market. The Dependant/Partner/Spouse Employment Permit is uniquely available to the families of Critical Skills Employment Permit holders, as part of the Government's policy to promote Ireland's attractiveness as a location for highly skilled workers. The application process is free of charge.

The following conditions ensure dependants, civil partners, and spouses eligible under this scheme will have greater ease of access to employment in the State:

- They can apply for a permit in respect of all occupations, including certain carers in the home, and excluding all other occupations in a domestic setting.

- They can apply for a permit with a remuneration of less than €30,000 p.a. (but not less than the National Minimum Wage).

- Their prospective employer is not required to undertake a Labour Market Needs Test.

The situation in relation to the immigration Stamp for immediate family members of non-EEA nationals is a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Justice and Equality. My officials are in consultation with officials in the Department of Justice and Equality on options to offer greater clarity to prospective employers on the position in relation to the dependants, partners and spouses of Critical Skills Employment Permit holders.

### **Personal Injuries Commission**

231. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if all the recommendations in the most recent report from the Personal Injuries Commission will be implemented; the timetable for the completion of all the recommendations; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38750/18]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I was pleased to submit the Second and Final Report of the Personal Injuries Commission (PIC) to Government on the 18 September 2018. The publication of this Report now concludes the challenging work programme of the Personal Injuries Commission since its establishment in January 2017.

The Report makes ten recommendations and the implementation of which will be a matter for each of the bodies responsible. While the recommendations are not time-bound due to the nature of them, it is expected that they will be acted upon by the bodies responsible as soon as possible.

In this regard, I am writing to relevant Government colleagues, the Minister for Justice and Equality and the Minister for Health, and other organisations including the Garda Commissioner, Insurance Ireland, The Law Society, The Council of the Bar of Ireland and the Law Reform Commission seeking co-operation in advancing the implementation of the recommendations relevant to them.

As the Personal Injuries Commission was established following a recommendation in the Cost of Insurance Working Group Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance published in January 2017, it is intended that progress on implementation will be monitored through the Cost of Insurance Working Group Quarterly Progress Reports published by my colleague Minister of State Michael D'Arcy.

### **IDA Ireland Site Visits**

232. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of IDA visits that have taken place to the new advance factory on the Breaffy Road, Castlebar, County Mayo; and the month in which those visits took place. [38382/18]

233. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the steps which have been taken to secure a tenant for the new advance factory on the Breaffy Road, Castlebar, County Mayo. [38383/18]

234. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of IDA visits that have taken place in County Mayo to date in 2018; the month each visit occurred; and the locations shown to prospective investors. [38384/18]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 232 to 234, inclusive, together.

County Mayo has hosted four IDA site visits to date in 2018. Site visits are collated by the IDA on a county-by-county basis only and are released every quarter. Information on the number of site visits per month to specific locations is therefore unavailable.

With regards to the Castlebar facility, this building is now completed and is being actively marketed to IDA clients through its network of offices in Ireland and overseas. The Agency does not, on account of client confidentiality and commercial sensitivity, release details of specific site visit itineraries of potential investors.

IDA Ireland continues to highlight the benefits of expanding or locating in all counties of Ireland to its client base. It is important to remember, however, that the final decision as to where to invest always rests with the company concerned. It is also the case that site visit activity does not necessarily reflect investment potential, as at least 70% of all new foreign direct investment (FDI) comes from existing client companies of the Agency.

The overall outlook for FDI in County Mayo remains positive. There are 16 IDA client companies employing 4,462 in total in the County. Mayo has experienced a 26% increase in FDI employment from 2012 to 2017 with job numbers increasing from 3,537 in 2012 to 4,462 at the end of last year. IDA Ireland continues to engage with its existing client base to support them in growing their business and footprint further in County Mayo.

*Question No. 235 answered with Question No. 230.*

### **Departmental Expenditure**

236. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the expenditure savings that are earmarked for her Department for 2019 that are not accounted for in the mid-year expenditure report or are not included in the fiscal space calculations for 2019. [38479/18]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Mid Year Expenditure Report 2018 published by the Department of Public Expenditure Reform in July this year sets out the public expenditure position as at the end of June. Whilst the Report noted that total gross voted expenditure was slightly behind profile for the first 6 months of the year, it stated that it was too early to estimate what the end year expenditure position might be and indeed whether Supplementary Estimates or the surrender of funds to the exchequer may arise at year end.

As regards the Budgetary Strategy for Expenditure in 2019, the Expenditure Report in restating the pre-budget Departmental expenditure ceilings for 2018-2020 as set out in the Summer Economic Statement, reaffirmed that a headline deficit of 0.1% of GDP in 2019 would leave a budgetary package of €3.4 billion available for 2019. Of this total, €2.6 billion of expenditure is already pre-committed, thus leaving €0.8 billion for further allocation as and between taxation and expenditure measures in Budget 2019. The allocation of this €0.8 billion will be determined through the Budget 2019 process following which my Department's 2019 capital and current expenditure ceilings will be finalised for the coming year.

### **Departmental Communications**

237. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if Ministers, ministerial advisers or officials in her Department have ever used private email to communicate on departmental issues between one another or with other persons or organisations; if so, the reason; if so, if she will publish these emails; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38561/18]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** As set out in my Department's internal ICT Usage Policy, staff are provided with email accounts for official use. It is the practice that communication of Departmental issues be conducted through Departmental email accounts and not through private email.

While no survey into the use of private email addresses has been conducted, I am not aware of any issues arising in this regard. Furthermore, the ICT Usage Policy sets out that access to Internet based email services are generally refused, partly due to the risk they pose in respect of mishandling communication of Departmental issues.

### **Construction Contracts**

238. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to review the Construction Contracts Act 2013 for the purpose of enhancing payment protections for subcontractors; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38701/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen):** The Construction Contracts Act, 2013 came into force for certain construction contracts entered into after the 25th July 2016. The Act applies to both written and oral construction contracts, although some do not fall within its remit, for example, if the value of a contract is not more than €10,000. The purpose of the legislation is to provide new legal rights and obligations on the parties to a construction contract. The Act imposes minimum contractual provisions in relation to payments, particularly the timing of payments and the parties to a relevant construction contract cannot opt out of the provisions of the legislation. The Act also prohibits the practice of 'pay when paid', except in the circumstance of a third party to a contract becoming insolvent.

The Act provides specific deadlines for a subcontractor to submit payment claim notices. On receipt of same, payment must be made to a subcontractor within 30 days. If a subcontractor is not paid the amount due under the contract in full and within 30 days, s/he has the right to suspend work until full payment is made. In addition, a subcontractor also has the right to refer such a payment dispute to adjudication.

The Act therefore provides important statutory protections for subcontractors in the construction industry. For it to achieve its intended purpose, it is important that subcontractors exercise their rights under the legislation to ensure they receive full payment for work carried out under a construction contract.

My Department will continue both to monitor the effectiveness of the legislation and to consult with key construction sector stakeholders as to its ongoing impact.

### **Construction Contracts**

239. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of applications for the appointment of an adjudicator received by the Construc-



tion Contracts Adjudication Service in 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018; the number of these adjudicators appointed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38702/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen):** The Construction Contracts Act, 2013 came into force for certain construction contracts entered into after the 25th July 2016. The Act provides for, inter alia, access to statutory adjudication as a means to resolve payment disputes that arise under applicable construction contracts. Either party to a construction contract may refer a payment dispute for adjudication. If the parties cannot agree on whom to appoint as Adjudicator, a party may apply to the Chairperson of the Ministerial appointed Panel of Adjudicators to select an Adjudicator from the Panel to the payment dispute. These applications under section 6(4) of the Construction Contract Act, 2013 are processed by the Construction Contracts Adjudication Service of my Department and the number of applications received together with the number of Adjudicators appointed, are set out in the following table.

Applications	2016	2017	2018 to date
Number of applications for appointment of Adjudicator	1	1	13
Number of Adjudicators appointed	0	1	11

### Construction Contracts

240. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation when the second annual report of the implementation of the Construction Contracts Act 2013 will be published; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38730/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen):** I have received the second annual report on the implementation of the Construction Contracts Act, 2013 from the Chairperson of the Construction Contracts Adjudication Panel and it will be published shortly by my Department.

### Nursing Homes Support Scheme

241. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health his plans to introduce a scheme to incentivise homeowners residing in nursing homes and availing of the fair deal scheme to rent out vacant family homes in order to get the them back into the housing market to address shortfalls in the rental market; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38293/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** Under NHSS rental income is considered income for the purpose of the financial assessment, and is assessed at 80% less any allowable deductions. Allowable deductions include income tax and, therefore, any income tax arising from rental income should be deducted; other deductions include some health expenses, levies required by law to be paid, and interest on some loans in respect of a person's principal private residence.

Action 17 of the Strategy for the Rental Sector commits the Department of Housing, Planning, and Local Government (DHPLG) to examine the treatment, under the Nursing Homes Support Scheme's financial assessment, of income from the rental of a person's principal private residence where they move into long term residential care. My officials are working with

DHPLG officials and examining a number of possible options. I am not in a position, however, to provide detail on these as discussions are ongoing and any potential proposals have not been finalised.

### **Psychological Services**

242. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if all psychologists and social workers working in an organisation (details supplied) have specialist training in forensic interviewing techniques and child sexual abuse; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38680/18]

**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.

### **Health Services**

243. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if an audit of the quality and reliability of the findings of an organisation (details supplied) has ever been carried out; if so, when; and the person or body that carried out the audit. [38683/18]

**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.

### **Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services**

244. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive an appointment for CAMHS in CHO1; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38270/18]

**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.

### **HSE Staff Recruitment**

245. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health the status of the appointment of a consultant (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38271/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

### **Mental Health Services Provision**

246. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health the facilities available in Ballymun for persons who are struggling with mental health (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38281/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** As this is a service

matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

247. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38284/18]

**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.

### **Healthcare Infrastructure Provision**

248. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health the current and future investment plans for St. Joseph's Hospital, Ardee and other relevant details; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38285/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of healthcare infrastructure projects, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly in relation to this matter.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

249. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38286/18]

**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.

### **Hospice Services Provision**

250. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the estimated average cost per patient per year of caring for a patient in a section 39 hospice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38288/18]

**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.

### **HSE Funding**

251. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the section 39 organisations and the amount contributed to them per year by the HSE since 2008 to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38289/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to you directly on this matter.

### **Health Services Staff Remuneration**

252. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full-year cost of restoring pay to section 39 workers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38290/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The HSE has advised that the estimated cost of pay restoration for Section 39 health sector employees from 2019 is €67.881m. This is a projected cost based on an assessment of information provided by a pilot group of section 39 organisations.

## **Written Answers Nos. 253-267**

### **General Practitioner Contracts**

253. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health the status of the negotiations of the general practitioner contract; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38292/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Government is committed to engaging with the representatives of general practitioners on the development of a package of measures and reforms to modernise the 1989 GMS Contract.

Our goal is to develop a contractual framework that has a population health focus, providing in particular for health promotion, disease prevention and for the structured care of chronic

conditions. This will enable general practitioners to better meet the needs of patients and will also promote general practice as a viable and rewarding career for both existing doctors and future medical graduates.

Agreement on the delivery of service improvements and contractual reform has the potential to facilitate a substantial increase in the resourcing of general practice on a multi-annual basis.

The Department and the HSE met with the Irish Medical Organisation GP Committee in early May with the State side setting out the mandate agreed by Government under which the consultations were being conducted and the package of measures to be agreed. The Department subsequently wrote to the IMO, at the Organisation's request, setting out these proposals formally. The IMO responded to the Department by letter on 20 July. The Department and HSE expect to re-engage with GP representatives shortly.

### **Public Procurement Regulations**

254. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if a company is owned by a person (details supplied). [38294/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this is an operational issue, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to you directly as soon as possible.

### **Public Procurement Regulations**

255. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) has contracted out privately owned companies in which they have an interest to deliver occupational health services to public bodies such as Cork University Hospital or other hospitals in the South/South West hospital group and UCC; and, if so, if this person has declared a conflict of interest to the group and the HSE nationally. [38295/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this is an operational issue, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to you directly as soon as possible.

### **Public Procurement Regulations**

256. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the procurement process for contracting employee assistance support in the South/South West hospital group. [38296/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this is an operational issue, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to you directly as soon as possible.

### **Hospital Groups**

257. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the reason the UHL group has a mortgage on its property portfolio in view of the fact that the HSE is not permitted to hold mortgages; and the person who authorised this mortgage and signed off on same. [38297/18]

258. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the person or body that applied for and authorised a bridging loan of behalf of UHL hospital group going back to 2014. [38298/18]

265. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the reason the taking out of a mortgage and a bridging loan by UHL has not been reported to the director general by the head of estates for the HSE and head of maintenance; and the reason a formal investigation into the way in which and the reason this happened has not been carried out. [38312/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 257, 258 and 265 together.

Under the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform's Code of Practice for Governance of State Bodies, the Chairperson of the Board of all public bodies, including the HSE, should seek the approval of the relevant Minister and the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform in advance of any material acquisition or disposal of land, buildings or other material assets proposed by a State body. This also includes long-term leases or purchase of right to use (rather than own) an asset. The information requested by you in relation to the UHL Group and the HSE is not available in my Department. As governance of Hospital Groups falls under the HSE's remit, I have asked the HSE to reply directly to you on this matter.

### **Public Procurement Regulations**

259. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if the CEO of UHL or their family members are renting or leasing property to the HSE; and if so, if the CEO has declared this as a conflict of interest. [38299/18]

260. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if the CEO of UHL is a shareholder or holds directorship of a company that owns private property and rents, leases property, space or services to the HSE or its agents. [38300/18]

261. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the university from which the CEO of UHL received the entitlement and award to use the title professor. [38301/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 259 to 261, inclusive, together.

I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly on this matter.

### **Services for People with Disabilities**

262. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the reason the services provided for a person (details supplied) have been terminated without advanced notice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38307/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Non-Consultant Hospital Doctors**

263. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the cost of the HSE contribution for approved clinical courses and examinations under the clinical course and examination refund scheme for non-consultant hospital doctors, NCHDs, in 2017. [38308/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly on this matter.

### **Non-Consultant Hospital Doctors**

264. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the cost of the HSE contribution for approved clinical courses and examinations under the clinical course and examination refund scheme for non-consultant hospital doctors, NCHDs, in 2016. [38309/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly on this matter.

*Question No. 265 answered with Question No. 257.*

### **Hospital Waiting Lists**

266. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Clare will have cataract surgery on both eyes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38326/18]

**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 Waiting Lists**

267. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons awaiting an initial urology consultation by county; the waiting times for same by county; if he will engage with the National Treatment Purchase Fund, NTPF, to address waiting times; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38329/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The data requested by the Deputy are pro-

vided in the excel spreadsheets in the following link.

Improving waiting times for hospital procedures is a key commitment in the Programme for Government and in 2018 €50 million was allocated to the NTPF to provide treatment for patients.

The Inpatient/Day Case Action Plan 2018 which was published in April outlines the combined impact of HSE and NTPF activity in 2018 to reduce the number of patients waiting for treatment. NTPF authorisations are made in respect of the longest waiting patients first.

Key to the delivery of the Action Plan is the ongoing collaboration between the NTPF and the HSE and individual hospitals to identify solutions for long waiting patients. The NTPF will provide funding to the solutions proposed if appropriate. To date this year, the NTPF has approved eight Urology submissions which has resulted in the treatment of over 1,400 patients.

Overall, the Inpatient/Daycase waiting list for Urology has reduced by over 1,100 patients since August 2017 with improvements across the 6-24 month timebands.

Nationally, the Outpatient Waiting List remains a significant challenge to be addressed in 2018. The Outpatient Waiting List for Urology has seen an increase of over 1,700 patients since August 2017.

My Department, in consultation with the HSE and the NTPF, is in the process of finalising an Outpatient Action Plan for the remainder of 2018 which I hope to publish soon. The Plan will include the trialling of a number of NTPF funded interventions, including weekend and out of hours clinics.

[<a href="/debates%20authoring/webattachments.nsf/0/D2E1BA9DDEC5C12D80258314003A9F5E/\$File/Urology.xlsx?openelement">Table</a>]

### Cancer Services Provision

268. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be seen by an oncologist in St. Vincent's University Hospital. [38330/18]

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

### Hospital Consultant Contracts

269. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Health if an issue (details supplied) will be investigated at Sligo University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38337/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Report of the Public Sector Pay Commission published on 4 September recognised that the implementation of the settlement of the 2008 Consultant Contract claim, while necessary of itself, would serve to highlight the differential in pay between the pre-existing cadre of consultants and new entrants. It stated that the aggregate level of vacancies for consultant posts at the end of 2017 and evidence of recruitment campaigns with very low levels of applications, suggest a general difficulty recruiting



consultants and that the two-tier pay system was among a number of factors raised with it as affecting recruitment. It also stated that the policy responses it expected for new entrants across the public services generally would be unlikely to address the degree of pay differential which applied to new entrant consultants. The Commission proposed that the Parties to the Public Service Stability Agreement jointly consider what further measures could be taken, over time, to address this difficulty.

New entrant consultants' are encompassed by the process announced yesterday for new entrants across the public service under Section 4 of the Public Service Stability Agreement and will benefit accordingly. However there will continue to be a pay differential between pre-existing and new entrant consultants. The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform has noted the Commission's views that the Parties to the Public Service Stability Agreement jointly consider what further measures could be taken, over time, to address the pay differential between pre-existing consultants and new entrant consultants. The challenge will be doing so in a manner that respects pay policy and our budgetary constraints.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

270. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive an appointment for a MRI scan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38338/18]

**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**

271. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38342/18]

**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.

### **Vaccination Programme Data**

272. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if his Department or the HSE have obtained all the research behind the Gardasil HPV vaccines research trial data; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38353/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Minister for Health has no role in examining the raw data from research trials in relation to medicinal products.

### **Medical Card Reviews**

273. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if a medical card review form will issue in the post to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38368/18]

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

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

274. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health the steps being taken to arrange a hip replacement at UHW for a person (details supplied); his views on whether there is an onus on him to insist that the HSE rectify the situation without further delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38371/18]

**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.

## Medicinal Products Reimbursement

275. **Deputy Kate O’Connell** asked the Minister for Health the length of time persons are waiting on average for drugs to be approved for public funding (details supplied); and the processes and procedures being undertaken to expedite access for persons with MS to new and effective treatments in a timely fashion. [38381/18]

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

Under the 2013 Act, if a company wishes to have a medicine reimbursed through the community drugs schemes, it must submit an application to the HSE to have the medicine added to the Reimbursement List.

As outlined in the 2016 Framework Agreement on the Supply and Pricing of Medicines, and in line with the 2013 Act, the HSE will decide, within 180 days of receiving the application (or a longer period if further information is sought from the company), to add the medicine to the reimbursement list, agree to reimburse it as a hospital medicine or refuse to reimburse it.

HSE decisions on which medicines are reimbursed by the taxpayer are made on objective, scientific and economic grounds, on the advice of the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE). The NCPE conducts health technology assessments for the HSE, and makes recommendations on reimbursement to assist HSE decisions. The NCPE uses a decision framework to systematically assess whether a drug is cost-effective as a health intervention.

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

I am keen to explore ways in which new medicines might be more easily available for public patients in Ireland, but innovative approaches must be compatible with the statutory provisions in place and must also recognise fundamental pricing and funding issues, in the context of finite Exchequer resources.

## Psychological Services

276. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the progress being made to recruit a permanent psychologist to a vacant post as part of the school age disability psychology service in County Donegal; the staff cover in place owing to this vacancy to assist staff deliver the service; when the post will be filled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38385/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for

people with disabilities.

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Primary Care Centres Provision**

277. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health when a primary health centre will be provided at locations (details supplied) in County Cork. [38386/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As the HSE has responsibility for the provision, along with the maintenance and operation of Primary Care Centres and other Primary Care facilities, the Executive has been asked to reply directly to the Deputy.

### **Home Care Packages Provision**

278. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health the number of home care packages provided in counties Sligo, Leitrim, Donegal and Roscommon in each of the years 2015 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38392/18]

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

### **Mental Health Services Staff**

279. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff working on the mental health team in counties Kildare and Wicklow; the per capita spend on mental health in County Kildare in each of the years 2012 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38398/18]

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

### **Hospital Services**

280. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the status of plans for the development of a new endoscopy unit at Naas Hospital. [38400/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of healthcare infrastructure projects, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly in relation to this matter.

### **HSE Properties**

281. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the status of refurbishment of the HSE property in Drogheda Street, Monasterevin, County Kildare; and if he will make a

statement on the matter. [38401/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the management of the health-care property estate, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to you in relation to this matter.

### **General Practitioner Services**

282. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health if a person over 70 years of age is entitled to a general practitioner visit card once they reach the age of 70 regardless of income; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38402/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the terms of the Health (General Practitioners Service) Act 2015, all persons aged 70 or older qualify for a GP Visit Card, regardless of income.

### **HSE Staff Remuneration**

283. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health if the pension of a person (details supplied) will be investigated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38403/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

### **Home Care Packages Provision**

284. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health the status of a home care package application by a person (details supplied); if it has been sanctioned; the reason it is not being implemented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38409/18]

**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.

### **Services for People with Disabilities**

285. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health when improved services will be allocated under the HSE disability services to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38410/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be

referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Primary Care Centres**

286. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the position on a new primary care centre for a location (details supplied) in County Wexford; the facilities to be included in the development; the location in which the centre will be situated; the stage at which development is; when it will open; if mental health facilities and supports will be incorporated into its development; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38414/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As the HSE has responsibility for the provision, along with the maintenance and operation of Primary Care Centres and other Primary Care facilities, the Executive has been asked to reply directly to the Deputy.

### **Hospital Equipment**

287. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the CT cardiac angiogram scan machine in Tallaght hospital is broken and patients are being referred to private hospitals to have scans done; the length of time this machine has been broken; when it will be fixed; the number of patients that have been referred to private hospitals; the amount it has cost to date; and if the machine will be fixed as soon as possible. [38416/18]

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

### **Hospital Equipment**

288. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that dialysis activity at Tallaght hospital has increased to more than 30,000 dialysis treatments per year but that it currently only has a designed capacity for 9,000 treatments per year (details supplied); and if a new dialysis unit at the hospital will be established. [38417/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of healthcare infrastructure projects, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly in relation to this matter.

### **Hospitals Building Programme**

289. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 5 of 28 September 2017 (details supplied), if a copy of the options appraisal will be provided; if the report is not available, the reason; the persons conducting the appraisal; the date on which the report will be available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38424/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

## **Mental Health Services Report**

290. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Health when the Jigsaw review will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38428/18]

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

### **Mental Health Services**

291. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Health the status of the closure of a children's inpatient mental health unit (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38437/18]

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

### **Mental Health Services Provision**

292. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Health when a children's mental health unit (details supplied) will be reopened; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38438/18]

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

### **Hospital Staff Recruitment**

293. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health if the current vacant clinical psychologist position in Cherry Orchard Hospital will be filled as a matter of urgency (details supplied). [38439/18]

**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.

### **Abortion Legislation**

294. **Deputy Seán Barrett** asked the Minister for Health if provision will be made for pharmacists who have conscientious objections to the general scheme of the health (regulation of termination of pregnancy) Bill 2018; if they are included in the definition "medical practitioners"; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38444/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Conscientious objection is covered by Head 15 of the updated General Scheme of the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Bill which was approved by Government on 10 July 2018 and is available on the Department of Health website.

It states that where he/she has a conscientious objection, a medical practitioner, nurse or midwife shall not be obliged to carry out, or to participate in carrying out, a termination of pregnancy.

Pharmacists are obliged to comply in full with the statutory Code of Conduct for Pharmacists, published by the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland. Principle 1 of the Code of Conduct states that “a pharmacist should ensure that in instances where they are unable to provide prescribed medicines or pharmacy services to a patient, they must take reasonable action to ensure these medicines/services are provided and the patients care is not jeopardised”.

### **Mental Health Services Funding**

295. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Health if funding will be provided to an organisation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38456/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

As the Deputy’s question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Hospital Appointments Delays**

296. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for a person (details supplied) will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38457/18]

**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 Delays**

297. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for a person



(details supplied) in County Cork will be expedited. [38459/18]

**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.

## Written Answers Nos. 298-312

### Medical Card Applications

298. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the progress to date in the determination of an application for a medical card in the case of a person (details supplied); if all documentation has been received and processed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38467/18]

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

### Medical Products Supply

299. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the savings that will accrue to his Department in 2019 arising from the agreement with an association (details supplied); and the way in which this is accounted for in the fiscal space calculations for 2019. [38477/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The 2016 Framework Agreement on the Supply and Pricing of Medicines (available at <http://www.ipha.ie/alist/ipha-hse-agreement.aspx>), between the State and the Irish Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association (IPHA), is expected to deliver approximately €600 million in savings from IPHA companies over the four year lifetime of the Agreement and €150 million in savings from non-IPHA companies.

The 2016 Agreement represents clear additional value to the State over previous agreements. For example, the reference basket of countries, used to set drug prices in Ireland, has been expanded from 9 to 14 countries, including lower cost countries. Also, the Agreement now provides for an annual price realignment, so that Irish medicine prices can be reduced in line with price reductions across the reference countries. This will ensure the State achieves better value for money on medicines as prices in other basket countries are adjusted downwards over time. In addition, the Agreement provides for a 30% reduction in the price of biologic medicines when a biosimilar medicine enters the market.

A key focus of this agreement is to achieve lower prices in the face of both demographic pressures on expenditure and the continued development of new medicines, many of which pose affordability challenges to the Irish health service and internationally.

The estimated saving for 2019 from the Agreement is €203 m.

### **Departmental Expenditure**

300. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the expenditure savings that are earmarked for his Department for 2019 that are not accounted for in the mid-year expenditure report or are not included in the fiscal space calculations for 2019. [38488/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The level of funding available for my Department is being considered as part of the national Estimates and budgetary process for 2019 which is currently underway. Pending completion of this process it is not appropriate for me to comment further at this stage.

### **Services for People with Disabilities**

301. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Health if the case of a person (details supplied) with very complex special needs and who requires specialised residential care will be examined; if funding will be granted to allow them to reside in a home; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38502/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

### **HSE Properties**

302. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE has made progress on securing a building (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38510/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be

referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Services for People with Disabilities**

303. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Health his plans for a new school building (details supplied) in County Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38513/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Pharmacy Regulations**

304. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that pharmacy assistants are being regulated out of their jobs and existence by a society (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38514/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Pharmacy Act 2007 established the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (PSI) and the functions of the Society are set out in the Act. The functions of the PSI are carried out on its behalf by the Council of the Society.

Section 30 of the Act provides for an exception to the general provision in the Act which requires the sale and supply of medicines at a pharmacy to be conducted under the personal supervision of a registered pharmacist, and specifies that no offence is committed where a registered pharmaceutical assistant "acts on behalf of a registered pharmacist during the temporary absence of the registered pharmacist".

Section 30 also permits the Council to make rules as to:

1. What may or may not be done by a registered pharmaceutical assistant when acting on behalf of a registered pharmacist; and
2. What constitutes the temporary absence of a registered pharmacist.

On June 21, the Council of the Society approved for issuance for public consultation the proposed draft Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (Temporary Absence of Pharmacist from Pharmacy) Rules 2018. This public consultation commenced on 17 July and ran until 14 August and afforded any interested party the opportunity to make representations on the matter directly to the PSI.

Following completion of the public consultation phase, the Council of the PSI considered the proposed draft Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (Temporary Absence of Pharmacist from Pharmacy) Rules 2018 at its meeting on the 20th September 2018 where Council approved the draft rules without amendment.

My role in relation to this process is limited to the consideration of any such Rules once submitted for my approval. I must consider any Rules presented to me from a fair and impartial perspective, without prejudice or prejudgement. I await the receipt of the Rules for my consideration from the PSI and until that time, I am unfortunately not in a position to comment any further on the matter raised.

### **Cannabis for Medicinal Use**

305. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Health if CBD oil will be made available to persons with multiple sclerosis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38516/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As the deputy will be aware, cannabis is strictly controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Acts 1977 to 2016, and the Regulations and Orders made thereunder.

For the purposes of clarity, the two most common active components found in cannabis oil are tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) and cannabidiol (CBD).

Whilst THC is the principal psychoactive constituent of cannabis, under the Misuse of Drugs legislation products containing THC are strictly controlled and possession is unlawful except under licence. However, although CBD is derived from cannabis, since it is not psychoactive it is not controlled under the Misuse of Drugs legislation, and does not require a Ministerial Licence.

Persons interested in the use of cannabis for medical purposes are strongly advised to consult the Department of Health website which contains details information on cannabis for medical use, including information on the different types of cannabis products and the specified medical conditions for which they may be used to treat, as well as clinical guidance on the use of medical cannabis products. This information can be found at the following website address:

<https://health.gov.ie/blog/publications/cannabis-for-medical-use/>.

It is important to note that the decision to prescribe or not prescribe any treatment, including cannabis treatment, for an individual patient is strictly a decision for the treating clinician, in consultation with their patient. As Minister for Health I have no role in this clinical decision-making process.

If patients or clinicians require any further details or clarification they are invited to contact the my Department directly.

### **Transport Support Scheme**

306. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Health when the new transport support scheme will be put in place following the discontinuation of the mobility allowance for new applicants in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38517/18]

**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.

My colleague, the Minister for Health and I brought a Memorandum to Government on proposals for a new Transport Support Payment Scheme towards the end of the last Dáil ses-

sion. Following consideration of the matter, it was decided to withdraw the Memorandum from the Cabinet Agenda at the time. A new Transport Support Payment Scheme remains a priority and we intend to revert to Government with revised proposals to reflect the discussions at that Cabinet meeting and further discussions between ourselves, 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 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.

### **Hospitals Building Programme**

307. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the status of the planned new acute psychiatric unit at Sligo University Hospital; when the project will proceed to construction; if a completion date for the project has been determined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38523/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The HSE is responsible for the delivery of health infrastructure developments. I understand the HSE Directorate approved the tender contract last week. Therefore I expect construction work to commence shortly.

### **Services for People with Disabilities**

308. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Health the HSE supports offered to spinal injury patients who are seeking to move from a care setting into a home in the community in order to live independently; his views on whether discussions with the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government might advance this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38541/18]

**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.

### **Services for People with Disabilities**

309. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE's views on whether the level of care provided to a person (details supplied) to date has been appropriate for a person who has suffered life-changing disabilities; if his attention has been drawn to the problems faced by the person; if clarification will be sought from the occupational services team in Sligo about when the person's wheelchair provision situation will be resolved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38542/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Autism Support Services**

310. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the level of funding being provided to an autism support organisation (details supplied); his plans to increase funding for this group; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38543/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Treatment Abroad Scheme**

311. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the reason only six paediatric scoliosis patients have been sent abroad for treatment under the treatment abroad scheme in view of the backlog of cases; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38548/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** In May 2017 the HSE published the Scoliosis Waiting List Update and Service Development Plan, to address waiting times for Scoliosis.

Under this Plan the Children's Hospital Group used a combination of insourcing of surgical procedures within the Children's Hospital Group (CHG) and the broader public hospital sector, as well as outsourcing initiatives, including private providers nationally and abroad.

As part of the outsourcing initiative, two hospitals in the UK and two in Europe were engaged to undertake spinal fusion surgery. In 2017, 28 surgeries were completed in these hospitals.

The Children's Hospital Group has advised that as part of the outsourcing initiative this year families were offered the opportunity to have their children's surgery abroad but did not avail of the offer as they did not want to travel abroad.

They further advise that one child did have their surgery abroad in 2018, this was scheduled to have taken place in late 2017 but it was deferred until 2018.

More broadly, the Children's Hospital Group has advised that as capacity has increased in its hospitals during 2018 there has not been the demand to send patients abroad for surgery.

Furthermore, the Deputy may wish to be aware that the HSE operates the Cross-Border Directive (CBD) in Ireland. Under the terms of the Directive, patients of an EU/EEA Member State who meet the necessary criteria may opt to avail of healthcare provided under the legislation of their Member State of affiliation in another EU/EEA Member State and be reimbursed the lesser of the cost of receiving the treatment abroad, or the cost in their own Member State. The HSE advise that Scoliosis surgery is not accessible via the Treatment Abroad Scheme (TAS).

In 2017 waiting times for scoliosis related surgery reduced for the first time in a number of years. This has continued in 2018 with the investment in paediatric orthopaedics this year, to include scoliosis services, which has already improved access for surgery and out-patient review to address the lengthy waiting times experienced by children and young people with scoliosis.

The impact of investment is now starting to deliver results with a consistent reduction in waiting times being recorded. The Children's Hospital Group advise that already this year 319 spinal surgeries have been carried out and they are on course to meet the year of end target of 446 surgeries while at the same time dealing with the 291 children who have been added to the waiting list for scoliosis surgery this year.

## **Obesity Strategy**

312. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the progress made on the national roll-out of the no-fry zone in County Wicklow, which prevents the sale of fatty or fast food near schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38549/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne):** The initiative that the Deputy has raised is relevant to the national Obesity Policy and Action Plan being implemented under the aegis of the Department of Health.

A Healthy Weight for Ireland', the Obesity Policy and Action Plan (OPAP), was launched in September 2016 under the auspices of the Healthy Ireland agenda.

The OPAP covers a ten year period up to 2025 and aims to reverse obesity trends, prevent health complications and reduce the overall burden for individuals, families, the health system,

and the wider society and economy. It must be emphasised that every sector of our society has a role in reducing the burden of obesity and the OPAP clearly acknowledges this.

The policy prescribed ‘Ten Steps Forward’ that would be taken to prevent overweight and obesity. Under the Plan, a new Obesity Policy Implementation Oversight Group (OPIOG) was established in October 2017 under the Chair of the Department of Health. It is comprised of representatives from a range of Government Departments and Agencies - including the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government.

Step 2 of the OPAP is *Regulate for a healthier environment*. One of the Actions under this Step is to “Develop guidelines and support material for those working in developing the built environment for urban development and planning in relation to reducing the obesogenic environment”. The OPAP recognised that changing the obesogenic environment is a critical factor underpinning the success of maintaining the population at a healthy weight. The prevention approach aims to gradually change Ireland’s food environment to one that facilitates consumption of healthier food and drinks and fosters active lifestyles. The OPAP acknowledged that food and retail outlets are more widely available now than ever before and that this becomes important as children have discretionary income and may not follow the healthy eating guidelines. It therefore declared that it is important that the health input into the local area planning process is consistent and evidence based.

This area is being progressed through engagement with other Government Departments to support the work of stakeholders involved in planning and developing the built environment.

In line with Actions 31 and 59 of the National Physical Activity Plan, which commit to developing guidelines and support materials for those working in developing the built environment in order to promote the importance of physical activity (31), and to develop a programme of on-going stakeholder communication and engagement to ensure delivery of the Plan (59), it is intended to hold a Stakeholder Forum in November this year. The planned Forum will focus on the theme of the Built Environment.

Planning for the Forum is at an advanced stage, and a number of individuals - including key representation from the initiative referred to by the Deputy - have been approached with regard to giving presentations at the Forum. A wide range of stakeholders will be invited to the Forum, comprising key representatives from health, sport, planning, environment, local government and others. Full details of the Forum will be available once finalised.

Finally, the question of legislation around planning matters for the issue raised by the Deputy is ultimately a matter for my colleague the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, and I understand that he has addressed the position on this in his reply to Parliamentary Question 34831/17. For convenience a link to this question is here <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2017-07-13/1332/?highlight%5B0%5D=34831>.

### Departmental Communications

313. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health if Ministers, ministerial advisers or officials in his Department have ever used private email to communicate on departmental issues between one another or with other persons or organisations; if so, the reason; if so, if he will publish these emails; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38551/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** All Ministers at my Department conduct official business through official Department of Health secure email accounts. The Department’s ICT Acceptable Usage Policy states that users may not transmit sensitive or classified



information using third party email services. The Ministers of State do not use personal email accounts for work purposes. As previously stated, I have on rare occasions used my gmail account when my Department's server was down. Access to webmail services is not permitted from the Department's network.

While a review is underway, there is currently no policy preventing members of Government using personal accounts.

### **Hospital Staff Data**

314. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Health the average ratio of patients to nurses in the emergency department at University Hospital Kerry; and the recommended ratio. [38556/18]

**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.

### **Emergency Services**

315. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Health the number of extra nursing resources provided to University Hospital Kerry in 2018 to deal with overcrowding in the emergency department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38557/18]

**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.

### **Emergency Departments Staff**

316. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Health if a pharmacy technician and desk clerk can be provided to reduce the burden on those that are employed in the emergency department of University Hospital Kerry in view of the difficulty nationally recruiting nurses. [38558/18]

**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.

### **Emergency Departments Services**

317. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Health his plans to prepare for the busy winter months at the emergency department at University Hospital Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38559/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Tackling overcrowding in EDs is a key commitment of this Government. An extra €30 million was made available to respond to winter pressures in 2017, with a further €40 million being provided in 2018.

I understand that preparations and planning for winter 2018-19 have already begun at hospital and local level. My Department is working with the HSE to ensure that these local and regional plans are consolidated and supported through policies and plans at national level to

ensure the most effective response to the winter challenges to unscheduled care provision.

Against this background, I am currently in the process of meeting with the chairs of the hospital groups and the chief officers of the community healthcare organisations to receive a briefing on their plans to respond to expected peak demand during the coming winter months.

### **Emergency Aeromedical Service**

318. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the status of the provision of a helipad for a hospital (details supplied) in County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38569/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of healthcare infrastructure projects, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly in relation to this matter.

### **Psychological Services Waiting Lists**

319. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting to see a child psychologist in County Limerick; the number of child psychologists employed in County Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38579/18]

320. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health the steps taken to alleviate the waiting lists for children's psychology services in County Limerick; if additional services to help deal with the backlog will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38580/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 319 and 320 together.

As these questions relate to service matters, I have arranged for the questions to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply.

### **Respite Care Services**

321. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the status of the provision of 12 dedicated respite houses nationally announced on 12 December 2017; the specific locations of each; the number of persons that can be accommodated in each; the estimated number of respite nights that each house will provide in a full calendar year; the capital and acquisition costs of each; the estimated annual running costs of each; the number of whole-time equivalent staff to be employed in each; if each house is operational; and if not, when each will commence providing services in tabular form. [38610/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** Residential respite services has come under increased pressure in the past couple of years. At the same time families need access to regular planned respite, whereas the lack of respite increases demand on scarce high-cost residential services.

The additional €10 million funding provided for 2018 has made a significant improvement in respite services for people with a disability and their families. 12 additional respite houses

are opening across the country. 8 are now open, and the rest are being made ready to open before the end of the year. Funding of €8 million has been allocated to open these houses, providing additional respite for families that need it.

Some €2 million of the additional funding was also allocated to provide alternative respite services. These are practical and important solutions, extended day services, summer camps and Saturday clubs and they are making a difference to families right across the country.

As the Deputy's question refers to a service matter, I have asked the HSE to reply to her directly with regard to the specific detail she has requested.

### **Disability Services Data**

322. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the number of children awaiting a first assessment from the HSE under the Disability Act 2005 at the end of August 2018 or latest date available by each local health office area in tabular form. [38611/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Speech and Language Therapy Waiting Lists**

323. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on the speech and language therapy assessment waiting list; and the number waiting less than four to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively by each local health area in tabular form. [38612/18]

324. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on the speech and language therapy initial treatment waiting list; and the number waiting less than four, four to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively by each local health area in tabular form. [38613/18]

325. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on the speech and language therapy further treatment waiting list; and the number waiting less than four, four to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively by each local health area in tabular form. [38614/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 323 to 325, inclusive, together.

As these questions relate to service matters, I have arranged for the questions to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply.

## **Occupational Therapy Waiting Lists**

326. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on the occupational therapy first time assessment waiting list; the number waiting less than four, four to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively; and the number waiting aged 0 to four, five to 17, 18 to 64 and over 65 years of age, respectively by each category, by local health area in tabular form. [38615/18]

327. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on the occupational therapy treatment waiting list; the number waiting less than four, four to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively; and the number waiting aged 0 to four, five to 17, 18 to 64 and over 65 years of age, respectively by each category, by each local health office area in tabular form. [38616/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 326 and 327 together.

As these questions relate to service matters, I have arranged for the questions to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply.

## **Hospital Facilities**

328. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year current and capital costs that would be needed to provide an additional catheterisation laboratory at Beaumont Hospital, Dublin 9; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38666/18]

**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.

## **Departmental Meetings**

329. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the dates and times of and attendees at meetings his Department had with organisations (details supplied) in 2017 and to date in 2018. [38670/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** A number of units within the Department engage with each of these organisations regularly on a various issues. The full information requested by the Deputy is not immediately available. I have surveyed the Department and the collated replies will be prepared into a full response to the Deputy as soon as possible.

## **Disabilities Assessments**

330. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the wait times for an assessment of need by CHO area in tabular form. [38672/18]

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

### **Disabilities Assessments**

331. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the waiting times for an early intervention service by CHO area in tabular form. [38673/18]

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

### **Hospital Transfers**

332. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health the procedure for requesting a medical helicopter transfer from one HSE hospital to another; the persons authorised to make such request; if the requested hospital is obliged to accept the patient; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38689/18]

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

### **Hospital Transfers**

333. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons authorised to travel with a patient who is being transferred from one HSE hospital to another; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38690/18]

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

### **Hospital Transfers**

334. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health the precise role of the paramedic in the hand-over process to the medical team in a receiving hospital in the case of the helicopter transfer of a patient from one HSE hospital to another; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38691/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this is a service issue, I have asked the

HSE to reply to you directly.

### **Patient Files**

335. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health if a patient's files travel with him or her in the case of the helicopter transfer of a patient from one HSE hospital to another; the person responsible for handing such files to the medical team in the receiving hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38692/18]

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

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

336. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive an appointment for a cataract procedure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38703/18]

**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.

### **Disability Support Services**

337. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health the status of funding for transport for students to and from a centre (details supplied) in County Tipperary; the funding that was available for each of the years from 2014 to 2017; the funding available for 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38710/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be

referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Medical Card Applications**

338. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health the status of a medical card application by a person (details supplied); and when a decision will issue on his or her case. [38714/18]

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

### **Home Care Packages**

339. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health the status of a home care package application by a person (details supplied); if it has been sanctioned; if so, when it will be actioned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38717/18]

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

### **Hospital Waiting Lists**

340. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Health when a bed will become available in St. Patrick's University Hospital for a person (details supplied). [38724/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** I understand that this person is seeking admission to a private mental health facility. This would, therefore, seem to be a matter for the person in question or their health professional to take this up directly with the facility concerned. However, I will also ask to HSE to correspond with you directly in relation to the reference in the details to any possible involvement by local HSE mental health services.

### **Medical Aids and Appliances Provision**

341. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Health his plans to fund medical garments (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38726/18]

**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.

### **Autism Support Services**

342. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if the provision of autism assistance dogs for persons that may require them will be supported (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38729/18]

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

### **Disability Services Provision**

343. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Health the status of the implementation of the neuro-rehab strategy plan; the progress in providing cognitive occupational therapists, adult speech and language therapists and psychological services in primary care centres in Bray and other centres in Wicklow, Arklow and Blessington, County Wicklow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38732/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The Programme for a Partnership Government includes a commitment to publish a plan for advancing neuro-rehabilitation services in the community.

A National Steering Group, chaired by the HSE Head of Operations and Service Improvement Disability Services with representation from the Department of Health, Primary Care, Social Care, the National Clinical Programme for Rehabilitation Medicine, and the Neurological Alliance of Ireland, recently completed an implementation framework in respect of the recommendations from the National Policy and Strategy for the provision of Neuro-Rehabilitation Services in Ireland 2011-2015. This framework will guide the reconfiguration and development of neuro-rehabilitation structures and services at national and local level.

This framework was recently submitted by the HSE to the Department of Health and is currently being reviewed.

In relation to the progress in providing the various services identified by the Deputy, I have asked the Health Service Executive (HSE) to respond directly.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

344. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for a person (details supplied) will be scheduled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38734/18]

**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.

### **Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Data**

345. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of children awaiting an inpatient CAMHS bed in each CAMHS inpatient unit in total and by unit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38745/18]

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

### **Hospital Facilities**

346. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 494 of 18 September 2018, the way in which, if this response was factual, a decision could be made by the HSE to provide Waterford University Hospital with a second fixed cardio catheterisation laboratory service outside of the National Review of Specialist Cardiac Services identified in the reply; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38753/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The National Clinical Programme for Acute Coronary Syndrome (ACS) published its Model of Care in 2012. As part of the model of care, University Hospital Waterford was designated as one of Ireland's six primary PCI centres with formal arrangements with the national ambulance service. Given University Hospital Waterford's status as a primary PCI centre, I believe there is merit in the proposal for a modular cardio-catheterisation laboratory at University Hospital Waterford.

### **Disability Support Services Provision**

347. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) referred to an early intervention team may have to wait 26 months for an intake assessment for that team; his views on whether the fact that the person may have to wait a time equivalent to the time they have been alive is appropriate in the context of the principle of early intervention; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38758/18]

**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 an individual case, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

### **HSE Funding**

348. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of hospices and palliative care units that receive funding from the HSE as section 39 entities; the number of beds in each hospice and palliative care unit; the number of whole-time equivalent staff employed in each; and the funding provided by the HSE in 2016, 2017 and 2018, in tabular form [38789/18]

**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.

### **Nursing Homes Support Scheme**

349. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year cost of amending the fees charged under the nursing homes support scheme, NHSS, to enable nursing home residents with an assessed weekly income of €300 or less to retain a minimum of €60 weekly. [38790/18]

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

### **Hospital Facilities**

350. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year current and capital cost of providing a mobile catheterisation laboratory for Waterford University Hospital. [38791/18]

**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 Beds Data**

351. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year running costs of opening all medical assessment units on a seven day basis. [38792/18]

368. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year cost of providing an additional 100 critical care beds. [38809/18]

369. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the estimated cost of providing an additional 150 inpatient rehabilitation beds. [38810/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 351, 368 and 369 together.

There is no one capital or revenue cost for providing additional beds. The cost is dependent on the nature of the additional bed, the clinical speciality and where the additional beds will be provided (an existing hospital, an extension to an existing hospital or the development of a new hospital).

As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of health services, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to you.

### **Hospital Consultant Recruitment**

352. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year cost of recruiting an extra 500 hospital consultants; and the average estimate for support staff required per consultant. [38793/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly on this matter.

### **Nursing Staff Recruitment**

353. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year cost of recruiting an additional 4,000 nursing staff. [38794/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly on this matter.

### **Drugs Payment Scheme Expenditure**

354. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year cost of abolishing prescription charges. [38795/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The HSE have statutory responsibility for the administration of community drug schemes. As such, I have referred the matter for direct reply to the Deputy.

### **General Practitioner Contracts**

355. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year cost of increasing the general practitioner rural practice allowance to €25,000. [38796/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Regulations were signed on 5 May 2016 which provide for the introduction of the new Rural Practice Support Framework (RPSF), which includes improved qualifying criteria for rural support and an increase in the financial allowance from €16,216.07 to €20,000 per annum.

Under this Framework, if two practice units are providing general practitioner services in the same qualifying area, both practices may qualify for a modified allowance of €10,000. GPs holding a permanent GMS contract who received the Rural Practice Allowance of €16,216.07 immediately prior to the introduction of the new Regulations who do not meet the new qualifying criteria continue to receive the payment on a personal basis, provided they retain their contractual commitment to the remote rural area.

As at 1 July 2018, there are 257 practice units in receipt of rural supports under the RPSF. 179 practices receive the full financial allowance of €20,000 and 22 practices receive the modified allowance of €10,000.

The estimated full year cost of increasing the existing allowance to €25,000, and the corresponding modified allowance to half of this amount, based on the current number of GPs qualifying for allowances under the RPSF, is approximately €950,000. Any increase in the

financial allowance under the new RPSF would only apply to those practices that qualify under the new criteria, therefore these costings have excluded the 56 GPs who currently receive the old financial allowance of €16,216.07.

### **National Maternity Strategy Expenditure**

356. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year cost of implementing the national maternity strategy. [38797/18]

370. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the status of the national maternity strategy; and the estimated additional extra funding that will be required for its implementation. [38811/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 356 and 370 together.

Implementation of Ireland's first National Maternity Strategy - Creating a Better Future Together 2016-2026 - is being led by the National Women and Infants Health Programme. To this end, the Programme has developed a detailed Implementation Plan which I was pleased to launch in October 2017. The Plan is presented under the Strategy's four strategic priorities and details how each of the 77 actions will be implemented.

The Programme has estimated that full implementation will cost in the region of an additional €80 million revenue funding over the lifetime of the Strategy. Work to identify the precise capital funding requirement is ongoing. The Strategy will be implemented on a phased basis over the coming years and therefore the funding requirement will vary from year to year. In that context, the Implementation Plan will inform the annual Estimates process each year.

I can confirm that additional funding of €4.15 million is being provided to the Programme this year to progress implementation of the Strategy. The Programme's priorities for 2018 include: improving quality and safety, establishing community midwifery teams and increasing access to anomaly scans. An online resource for maternity care will also be developed.

### **Home Help Service Expenditure**

357. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year cost of providing an additional 2.2 million home help hours. [38798/18]

358. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year cost of providing an additional 5,000 homecare packages. [38799/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly) (Deputy Jim Daly):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 357 and 358 together.

As these are service matters I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Mental Health Services Data**

359. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year cost of completing the recruitment required for the full implementation of A Vision for Change.

[38800/18]

**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.

### **Drugs Payment Scheme Data**

360. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year cost of reducing the drug payment threshold to €100. [38801/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The HSE have statutory responsibility for the administration of community drug schemes. As such, I have referred the matter for direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Speech and Language Therapy Data**

361. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year cost of recruiting an additional 200 speech and language therapists. [38802/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly on this matter.

### **Occupational Therapy Staff**

362. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year cost of recruiting an additional 200 occupational therapists. [38803/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly on this matter.

### **Physiotherapy Provision**

363. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year cost of recruiting an additional 200 physiotherapists. [38804/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly on this matter.

### **Dental Services Data**

364. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year cost of recruiting an additional 50 dental surgeons. [38805/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly on this matter.

### **Ambulance Service Data**

365. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the estimated capital cost of providing an additional emergency ambulance; and the estimated full year costs of additional personnel required for its staffing. [38806/18]

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

### **Disability Services Data**

366. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year cost of providing an additional one and a half million personal assistant hours for persons with disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38807/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The full year cost of providing an additional one and a half million Personal Assistant hours is €37.5 million.

### **Home Care Packages Data**

367. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year cost of providing an additional 200 intensive homecare packages for persons with dementia; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38808/18]

**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.

*Questions Nos. 368 and 369 answered with Question No. 351.*

*Question No. 370 answered with Question No. 356.*

### **Neuro-Rehabilitation Services Data**

371. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff in community neuro-rehabilitation teams in each community healthcare organisation, CHO, in tabular form; the specific medical or healthcare posts in each team in each community healthcare organisation; and the estimated full year cost of providing a full neuro-rehabilitation team in each CHO. [38812/18]

**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.

## Hospital Charges

372. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the €10 charge on medical card holders for X-rays in public hospitals; the rules regarding charging medical card holders that require X-rays as outpatients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38813/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The only outpatient charge that applies in public hospitals is the €100 Emergency Department charge, for which medical cardholders are exempt. Therefore it should be noted that there is no legal basis for levying a any charge for planned public outpatient services, this applies to all persons who access these services in the public hospital system.

If the Deputy wishes to contact the Department with full details of this issue, I will request the HSE to investigate and revert back to the Deputy.

## Hospital Appointments Status

373. **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. [38821/18]

**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

374. **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. [38822/18]

**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 sched-

uled 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**

375. **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. [38823/18]

**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 Waiting Lists**

376. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a cataract operation in CUH for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38824/18]

**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.



## Psychological Assessments Waiting Times

377. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health the steps being taken to address the delays in having assessment of needs for children with autism carried out, access to the school age team psychology services and access to the early intervention psychology services in order to address waiting lists and times as quickly as possible. [38828/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

## Hospital Waiting Lists

378. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38829/18]

**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.

## National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics

379. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the number of health technology assessments carried out by the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics since 2016 in view of the fact that page 6 of the NCPE's HTA submission applicant template indicated that the medicine has an orphan designation from the EMA; the number of these medicines that have since been added to the reimbursement list; the combined cost of these reimbursed medicines per annum; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38835/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The requested information is held by the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics. It has been referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy.

380. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the criteria which will be used over the next two years to determine the level of funding required by each local and regional drug task force during the development of a performance measurement system to improve accountability across all sections of local and regional drug task forces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38892/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne):** Measuring the overall effectiveness of the response to the drug problem is an important objective of public policy. Resources should be direct towards interventions and strategies which are most likely to lead to a reduction in problem substance use and an improvement in public health, safety and well-being.

The national drugs strategy, *Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery*, commits to operationalising a performance measurement system by 2020. The system is primarily concerned with the net effects of the drugs strategy at the population level, in particular the effects on the health, well-being and quality of life of people living in drug and alcohol task force (DATF) areas.

The performance measurement system incorporates a resource allocation model to enable DATF funding to be allocated on a more equitable and rational basis, which takes account of underlying need in local areas and targets those communities which face a higher risk of substance misuse. The criteria to be used to determine the allocation of resources to task forces will be developed in consultation with key stakeholders, including DATFs.

I am committed to supporting the valuable work of the drug and alcohol task forces. For that reason, I recently allocated an additional €290,000 for task forces. In addition, task forces are being consulted on the allocation of €710,000 for priority projects and services to address drug and alcohol misuse in community healthcare organisation areas.

### **Hospitals Car Park Charges**

381. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health if the review of hospital parking charges has been completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38893/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Early this year I requested the HSE to undertake a review of car parking charges in public hospitals. I understand that this report is currently being finalised by the HSE and will be submitted for my consideration shortly. My Department will then liaise with the HSE on the next steps to be undertaken.

### **Hospital Waiting Lists Action Plans**

382. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health when the HSE and NTPF will finalise and publish an outpatient action plan for 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38894/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I wish to assure the Deputy that my Department, in consultation with the HSE and National Treatment Purchase Fund, is in the process of finalising an Outpatient Action Plan for the remainder of 2018 and I hope to publish it shortly.

The Plan will support the HSE's compliance with their National Service Plan targets, reduce

the growth in the number of patients waiting for outpatient services.

In addition, in June this year I approved the establishment of a Central Waiting List Validation function with the NTPF. The new Office will deliver a standardisation of approach of validation across all waiting lists and all hospitals in line with the best patient-centred practices. The validation of waiting lists will better inform the true demand for hospital services and enable improved efficiency and patient scheduling.

Furthermore, the NTPF has recently commenced trialing a number of outpatient interventions, including weekend and out of hours clinics. The NTPF has invited proposals from hospital groups and to date this has resulted in the approval of 12,600 outpatient appointments.

I acknowledge that, nationally, the Outpatient waiting list is a challenge to be addressed in 2018. Waiting times can often be unacceptably long and I am conscious of the burden that this places on patients and their families.

### **Agriculture Schemes**

383. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to reintroduce the agri-environment options scheme and natura scheme in the near future. [38317/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** There are no plans to reintroduce the Agri-Environment Options and Natura Schemes (AEOS) at present. The subsequent agri-environment scheme the Green Low-Carbon Agri-Environment Scheme (GLAS) opened in three tranches commencing in 2015. It was open to AEOS participants to apply to join GLAS, such applicants were required to exit their existing AEOS contract before a GLAS contract could commence. GLAS is now fully subscribed with the target of 50,000 participants met well ahead of target. There are no plans to re-open this scheme to new applications.

Agri-environment policy is included in the CAP reform negotiations currently under way and any future schemes will be dependent on the outcome of these negotiations.

### **Haulage Industry**

384. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps which have been taken to assist an association (details supplied) following receipt of correspondence by his Department in July 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38450/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The Director of the Irish Grain and Feed Association (IGFA) wrote to my Department on behalf of the membership on 17th July seeking the immediate introduction of a derogation for the haulage sector to facilitate increased levels of demands for their services arising from increased levels of demand for the transportation of fodder and feed for animals.

Road Safety is the responsibility of the Department of Transport, Tourism and my Department conveyed this request to the appropriate Department at that time.

### **Departmental Expenditure**

385. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the expenditure savings that are earmarked for his Department for 2019 that are not accounted for in the mid-year expenditure report or are not included in the fiscal space calculations for 2019. [38478/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The Mid-Year Expenditure Report (MYER) set out the starting baseline in relation to the gross voted expenditure for 2019. As outlined in the MYER, the technical pre-Budget position for current expenditure is the current expenditure allocation for this year set out in the Revised Estimates (REV). This pre-Budget position will be adjusted to reflect the allocation to the Department of a central provision in relation to the Public Service Stability Agreement.

The capital ceiling set out in the MYER is consistent with the ceiling for 2019 published in the National Development Plan.

The figures set out in the MYER do not include expenditure savings targets specifically earmarked for my Department. However, as usual as part of the Estimates process my Department will be examining the allocations across its programme areas, including taking into account expenditure trends in 2018, to identify how services can be delivered within the overall fiscal parameters for 2019.

### **Agriculture Schemes**

386. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a suckler cow scheme will be introduced in order to help to increase the incomes of suckler farmers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38497/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Examination of appropriate measures to support all agrifood sectors, including the suckler sector, is under way in my Department in preparation for the next iteration of the CAP. The measures adopted will be informed by stakeholder consultation on the needs of the sector to develop in an economically and environmentally sustainable way, as well as the available budget and structure of the new CAP when it is finalised.

Currently, the Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP) is the main support specifically targeted for the suckler sector, which provides Irish beef farmers with some €300 million in funding over the current Rural Development Programme (RDP) period. This scheme is an agri-environmental measure to improve the environmental sustainability of the national suckler herd by increasing genetic merit within the herd.

My Department has rolled out a range of schemes as part of the €4 billion Rural Development Programme (RDP), 2014 - 2020. In addition to the BDGP, other supports which are available for suckler and sheep farmers under Pillar II of the CAP include GLAS, ANCs and Knowledge Transfer Groups. Suckler farmers also benefit from the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) and Greening payments under CAP Pillar I.

I am strongly of the view that the current range of supports available to suckler farmers, together with ensuring market access to as many markets as possible, both for live animals and beef exports, are appropriate supports for the continued development of the sector. National Farm Survey data suggests that suckler farmers receive support equivalent to approximately €500 per suckler cow on average.

I will continue to argue for as strong a CAP budget as possible, post-2020. In particular, I

am committed to ensuring that suckler farmers continue to receive strong support in the next CAP. My view is that such payments should support and encourage suckler farmers to make the best decisions possible to improve the profitability, and the economic and environmental efficiency, of their farming system.

### **Herd Number Applications**

387. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of an application for a herd number by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38498/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Staff in my Regional Veterinary Office have been in direct contact with the applicant regarding his herd number application and I expect the matter to be resolved in the shortest possible time.

### **Organic Farming**

388. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the measures which can be put in place to ensure organic farming remains competitive and worthwhile in circumstances in which current prices for organically reared cattle are similar to those for non-organic cattle; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38499/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** A new Organic Sector Strategy Group was established in March this year by my Department which is tasked with developing a strategy for the development of the Organic Sector for the period up to 2025. The new Strategic plan will feed into the new Rural Development Plan and Foodwise 2025. This strategy will incorporate sectorial and cross sectoral recommendations, market developments, training and education, public awareness and wider EU policy.

Recognising that it is critical that stakeholders have their views considered, before the finalisation of this strategy, a public consultation process was initiated by my Department which afforded an opportunity for all interested parties to contribute to the development of the new strategic plan for the development of the Organic Sector.

Bord Bia research shows that the Irish Organic Market grew by 10.5% in 2017. This is a very positive reflection on organic farming in Ireland and it mirrors a growing trend across Europe and globally. This trend suggests that there is further potential in the sector but in order to grow sustainably it must be market driven. We need to focus on how we can further grow the market and explore all opportunities such as growing exports. In this way we can ensure that the sector remains competitive and that organic producers receive a worthwhile premium for their product.

### **Harbour Fees**

389. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if harbour charges being levied on small fishing boats at a pier (details supplied) in County Kerry will be reviewed; if officials from his Department will meet the fishermen to discuss the charges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38500/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** My Depart-

ment owns, manages and maintains the six State-owned Fishery Harbour Centres, located at Castletownbere, Dingle, Dunmore East, Howth, Killybegs and Ros An Mhíl. The Fishery Harbour Centres (Rates and Charges) Order 2012 (214 of 2012), which came into effect on the 1st July 2012, sets out the fee schedule for the use of the facilities at each of the six Fishery Harbour Centres. Different rates apply according to the type and nature of the vessel, the different use made of the facilities by the vessel, the size of the vessel and the quantity, value and species of fish landed (where applicable).

The Department is currently undertaking a review of the 2012 order and expects to engage in a Public Consultation on the matter, as required by legislation, as part of the review process.

### **GLAS Payments**

390. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on whether it is acceptable that a GLAS 2017 payment for a person (details supplied) is delayed as a result of a Department approved commonage manager failing to submit a commonage management plan on time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38511/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The person named was approved into GLAS 1 with a contract commencement date of 1 October 2015 and has received full payments for scheme years 2015 and 2016. The 85% 2017 advance, including GLAS+ has also been paid.

The Commonage Management Plan is outstanding for this application. The completion and submission of these Plans is a matter between the GLAS participant and their Commonage Advisor. I have made enquiries and I have been advised that an Advisor has been allocated to complete this Plan. The applicant may wish to contact his Commonage Advisor directly.

### **Aquaculture Licence Applications Data**

391. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number and location of all new, renewal and review aquaculture and foreshore licence applications awaiting a decision for County Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38519/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The information requested by the Deputy is not readily available and will require a detailed examination of my Department's records.

A full response to the Deputy will issue within two weeks.

### **Aquaculture Licence Applications**

392. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the granting of an aquaculture licence to an organisation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38520/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The aquaculture licence application referred to by the Deputy is currently under consideration by my Department under the provisions of the 1997 Fisheries (Amendment) Act, the 1933 Foreshore

Act and applicable EU legislation.

The licensing process also involves consultation with a wide range of scientific and technical advisors as well as various statutory consultees. The legislation also provides for a period of public consultation.

It is not possible at this stage to say when this process will be complete. As the licence application is under active consideration as part of a statutory process it would not be appropriate to comment further on the matter at this time.

Every effort is being made to expedite the conclusion of this matter as soon as possible.

### **Departmental Communications**

393. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if Ministers, ministerial advisers or officials in his Department have ever used private email to communicate on departmental issues between one another or with other persons or organisations; if so, the reason; if so, if he will publish these emails; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38552/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The Deputy may wish to note that my official business is carried out through secure official email accounts.

I would also refer the Deputy to my reply to PQ No. 39577/16 where I confirmed that in the past I had occasionally used my personal Gmail account for non-sensitive official correspondence.

All employees of my Department are bound by its Information Security Acceptable Use Policy which states that the official email accounts assigned to each member of staff are to be used for all work related correspondence.

### **Agriculture Scheme Penalties**

394. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if interest will be waived on an instalment repayment plan in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38573/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The Super levy Instalment scheme was introduced in 2015. This scheme was offered by the EU Commission to Member States to implement on a voluntary basis to allow producers who had incurred super levy debt to spread the cost over three years (2015–2017) interest free.

At the end of the milk quota regime in April 2015 Ireland exceeded its quota by 4.4%, resulting in a super levy bill of €71 million for 6,400 Irish farmers. Each Member State was obliged to settle the liability in full in 2015 with the EU Commission and could then re-coup the money from its farmers as per the scheme. My Department chose to implement the scheme on the basis that it would minimise the burden on the sector during a period of planned expansion here as well as helping with the immediate cash flow difficulties for farmers faced with such a bill.

My Department introduced the scheme of phased recoupment from farmers who had the option of joining the scheme and spreading their repayment over three years. This repayment

schedule took the form of a 33% lump sum in 2015 and the balance to be spread over five equal instalments in 2016 and 2017 over the peak production period of May to September. Ireland was one of the few Member States with a super levy bill to introduce the scheme.

This scheme was financed from Exchequer funds and so my Department is responsible for ensuring that the funds advanced to the Commission on behalf of farmers are recouped on behalf of the taxpayer.

The person in question incurred a superlevy fine because they supplied almost double their assigned quota in the 2014/15 quota year. They are subject to the same conditions regarding interest which apply to all participants of the scheme and they are strongly encouraged to engage with the relevant officials in my Department to resolve the issue.

### **Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Payments**

395. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of farm payments for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38694/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** A 2018 Areas of Natural Constraints/Basic Payment Application was received in respect of the person named on 22 February 2018. In the course of the standard processing of this application an over-claim was identified on a parcel of land. A letter and map detailing the over-claim was recently issued and the person named has subsequently replied to appeal the Departments findings. The reply is currently being examined.

The ANC payment on the originally determined eligible land issued last week to the nominated bank account of the person named. Following examination of the appeal submitted, a supplementary payment will issue if the appeal is upheld.

### **Aquaculture Licence Applications**

396. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of an application for an oyster licence by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38697/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** My Department considers all applications for aquaculture licences in accordance with the provisions of the 1997 Fisheries (Amendment) Act, the 1933 Foreshore Act and applicable EU legislation. The licensing process involves consultation with a wide range of scientific and technical advisers as well as various Statutory Consultees. The legislation also provides for a period of public consultation.

In addition, the legislation governing aquaculture licensing provides for an appeals mechanism. Appeals against licence decisions are a matter for the Aquaculture Licences Appeals Board (ALAB) which is an independent statutory body. Full details of the appeals process can be obtained at: <http://www.alab.ie/appealsprocess/>.

In accordance with the applicable legislation, the Statutory and Public Consultation phase in respect of these applications has now concluded. Every effort is being made to expedite a decision on these applications having regard to the complexities involved. As the applications referred to by the Deputy are under active consideration as part of a statutory process it would



not be appropriate to comment further on the matter at this time.

## Waste Management

397. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to compel county councils which are responsible for waste to compel waste collectors to secure green bins (details supplied) through the provision of locking mechanisms; his plans to encourage local authorities to introduce by-laws to encourage householders to fit locking mechanisms in order to ensure that during inclement windy weather these bins, if toppled, do not end up causing widespread littering; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38473/18]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** Each local authority has discretion to draw up its own bye-laws on waste presentation in accordance with: the Local Government Act, 2001 (legislation which is under the remit of my colleague the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government); Section 35 of the Waste Management Act, 1996 and Section 21 of the Litter Pollution Act, 1997 (if necessary). The power to adopt such bye-laws is a reserved function.

While the power to make a bye-law and its actual content remain matters exclusively for each individual local authority, it is Government policy that a regionalised approach to both waste management planning and regulatory enforcement is adopted. Accordingly, the three Regional Waste Management Offices were established in 2013, with formation of the Waste Enforcement Regional Lead Authorities (WERLAs) following in 2015.

One of the priority tasks contained in the three Regional Waste Management Plans 2015-2021 was to commence a project to attain a more unified approach to the content and making of waste presentation bye-laws.

*A Template for a Bye-law on Waste Presentation* has been prepared by the three Regional Waste Management Offices and circulated to local authorities with a view to standardising such bye-laws across the State. The template does not contain a provision concerning the fitting of a locking mechanism to kerbside bins, however, it does contain a specific provision in relation to the maintenance and management of waste containers so as not to be a source of nuisance or litter, as well as provisions on the storage and presentation of waste containers.

An example of such draft bye-laws which were the subject of a public consultation (closed on 17 September, 2018) is available at: <https://consultation.dublincity.ie/environment/draft-dublin-city-council-bye-laws-waste-managemen/>.

## Waste Disposal Charges

398. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 422, 425 and 430 of 5 December 2017, the status of the issue since these questions were tabled, especially with regard to the proposed €75 annual support; his views on whether this will be sufficient to support the households; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38536/18]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** My Department is continuing the work of developing a mechanism to provide a €75 support for persons with lifelong or long-term medical incontinence to help meet the aver-

age annual cost of disposing of medical incontinence products. This process has unfortunately taken longer than envisaged, due to data protection issues that have arisen since the introduction of GDPR. However, I can assure the Deputy that I am committed to introducing the annual support as soon as practically possible in conjunction with relevant agencies and stakeholders.

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.

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 twelve months of data to date. While fluctuations in prices and service offerings have been observed, the overall trend is relative price stability.

### **Action Plan for Rural Development Implementation**

399. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the work under the Action Plan for Rural Development, specifically relating to the roll-out of broadband; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38636/18]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** I refer to the reply to Question No 618 of 18 September 2018, which details the position in relation to the National Broadband Plan.

By way of update, my Department is now evaluating the Final Tender submission received from the bidding consortium on 18 September 2018. This is a significant milestone as the National Broadband Plan procurement process enters its final stage.

### **Broadband Service Provision**

400. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the date for the roll-out of high-speed broadband for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38332/18]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** The premises referred to by the Deputy is in the AMBER area on the High Speed Broadband Map which is available on my Department's website at [www.broadband.gov.ie](http://www.broadband.gov.ie), and is therefore included in the State Intervention Area under the National Broadband Plan (NBP).

My Department is in a formal procurement process to select a company who will roll out a new high speed broadband network in the State intervention area, and is now evaluating the Final Tender submission received from the bidding consortium on 18 September 2018. This is a significant milestone as the NBP procurement process enters its final stage.

For those premises currently awaiting access to high speed broadband, practical initiatives will continue to be addressed through the work of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce

to address obstacles and improve connectivity in respect of existing and future mobile phone and broadband services.

Under this Taskforce, engagement between telecommunications operators and local authorities through the Broadband Officers is continuing to strengthen. These Broadband Officers are acting as single points of contact in local authorities for their communities. The appointment of these officers is already reaping rewards in terms of ensuring a much greater degree of consistency in engagements with operators and clearing obstacles to developing infrastructure. The Department of Rural and Community Development maintain a list of Broadband Officers, a link to which is available on my Department's website at

*<https://www.dccae.gov.ie/en-ie/communications/topics/Broadband/national-broadband-plan/Pages/NBP-Information-Leaflets.aspx>*.

### **Bioenergy Strategy Publication**

401. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment further to Parliamentary Question No. 1146 of 21 March 2017, the reason the timescale for public consultation in quarter 2 of 2017 was not met in regard to the strategic environmental assessment of the national bioenergy plan, which was drafted in 2014 and has remained in draft form since; the reason the timescale for public consultation in early 2018 which he set out in Parliamentary Question No. 215 of 13 December 2017 was not met; the reason the timescale for public consultation in summer 2018 which he set out in Parliamentary Question No. 1048 of 12 June 2018 was not met; and when the strategic environmental assessment of the draft national bioenergy plan will be put to public consultation. [38345/18]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** The Draft Bioenergy Plan established the policy context for the development of Ireland's bioenergy sector and set out actions to be undertaken to further the demand for and supply of bioenergy in Ireland. Significant progress has been made in the implementation of these actions including:

- the approval by Government of the Support Scheme for Renewable Heat, the opening for applications of the first phase of the scheme (providing installation grants for heat pumps) earlier this month, and the planned opening of the second phase of the scheme (providing multi-annual support to biomass and anaerobic digestion heating systems) by the end of 2018 subject to State aid approval;

- continued support for bioenergy use in the electricity sector including the approval by Government of the high level design of the new Renewable Electricity Support Scheme in July of this year;

- successive increases in the obligation rate to 8% (January 2017), 10% (January 2019) and 11% (planned for January 2020) under the Biofuels Obligation Scheme which increases the use of biofuels and stimulates demand for competitively priced domestic production;

- increases in February of this year in supports under the Forestry for Fibre Scheme for those landowners planting forestry to supply the energy sector;

- the establishment of Bord na Móna Bioenergy in September 2017; and

- the development and publication of research such as the Assessment of Cost and Benefits of Biogas and Biomethane in Ireland published by the SEAI in July 2017.

In addition to progressing the actions set out in the Draft Bioenergy Plan, work has proceeded in updating the plan itself and its associated Strategic Environmental Assessment and Natura Impact Statement. This update has taken longer than originally anticipated in order to reflect policy developments – including the National Mitigation Plan, the National Development Plan, and the EU’s Clean Energy Package.

As part of the EU’s Clean Energy Package, the recently agreed Regulation on the Governance of the Energy Union and Climate Action stipulates that all Member States must develop a draft National Energy and Climate Plan and submit it to the European Commission by the end of 2018.

The scope of the National Energy and Climate Plan covers the full energy system and requires a high level of detail on all sectors, fuels, policies, and support measures. It will, therefore, encompass the policies and measures that would be set out in any revision of the Draft Bioenergy Plan. My Department is currently considering how best to integrate both planning and consultation processes.

### **Broadband Service Provision**

402. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if the issues being faced by a business (detail supplied) due to the lack of broadband will be reviewed; the status of the roll-out of e-fibre in this area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38362/18]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** The premises referred to by the Deputy is in the AMBER area on the High Speed Broadband Map which is available on my Department’s website at [www.broadband.gov.ie](http://www.broadband.gov.ie) and is therefore included in the State Intervention Area under the National Broadband Plan (NBP).

My Department is in a formal procurement process to select a company who will roll out a new high speed broadband network in the State intervention area, and is now evaluating the Final Tender submission received from the bidding consortium on 18 September 2018. This is a significant milestone as the NBP procurement process enters its final stage.

Although it seems that there is coverage within a short range of the address referenced, the coverage in question is provided by a commercial operator in the market and the referenced address has not been included on that company’s deployment plan. Decisions made by private telecommunication operators relating to the roll out and siting of their infrastructure to provide high-speed broadband services throughout Ireland are matter for each telecommunication operator. I have no statutory role or function to intervene in the commercial decisions of private operators.

For those premises currently awaiting access to high speed broadband, practical initiatives will continue to be addressed through the work of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce to address obstacles and improve connectivity in respect of existing and future mobile phone and broadband services.

Under this Taskforce, engagement between telecommunications operators and local authorities through the Broadband Officers is continuing to strengthen. These Broadband Officers are acting as single points of contact in local authorities for their communities. The appointment of these officers is already reaping rewards in terms of ensuring a much greater degree of consistency in engagements with operators and clearing obstacles to developing infrastructure. The Department of Rural and Community Development maintain a list of Broadband Officers,

a link to which is available on my Department's website at

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### **Ministerial Correspondence**

403. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when a reply will issue to correspondence (details supplied); if he will meet the group involved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38426/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne):** A detailed response to the correspondence referred to was issued to the Deputy on 10 August last.

### **Energy Efficiency**

404. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his Department has achieved an annual rate of energy efficient renovation for Government buildings of 3% as required by EU Directive 2012/27/EU on energy efficiency; his plans to extend this to schools, libraries and community facilities, municipal or other public buildings; if the national energy efficiency targets have been set for local or central Government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38441/18]

405. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if the cost of achieving an annual rate of energy efficient renovation for Government buildings of 6%, as guided by the principles of EU Directive 2012/27/EU on energy efficiency, has been identified; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38442/18]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 404 and 405 together.

The EU Energy Efficiency Directive sets out measures Member States must take for the EU to meet its target of improving energy efficiency by 20% by 2020. Article 5 of the Directive provides for the exemplary role of public bodies buildings and includes achieving an annual rate of energy efficient renovation for Government buildings of 3%. The directive allows for this to be achieved either through renovation or by "alternative measures". Ireland has chosen the alternative approach which entails a mix of energy management and efficiency upgrade measures.

Ireland has however set a more ambitious energy efficiency objective for our public sector. When Government set our national 20% target the public sector (which includes schools and local authorities) was given a more ambitious target of 33% which goes beyond the 3% renovation requirement in the EU directive. Progress has been good with a 20% improvement in energy efficiency achieved across the public sector by end 2016. The cumulative savings from 2009 to 2016 amount to 2.6 million tonnes of CO2 emissions reduction and €737m in energy spend avoided.

In the case of my own Department we achieved approximately 20% energy efficiency improvement by end 2016 with a 31% efficiency improvement over the same period for our group. I am confident this performance will be further enhanced when the next performance report issues late this year. Details of efficiencies achieved by all public bodies are available online

in the Annual Report on Public Sector Energy Efficiency Performance available on the SEAI website.

To further drive the effort required to achieve the 33% target, I published the first Government approved Public Sector Energy Efficiency Strategy in 2017. The Strategy introduces new governance structures and enhanced support measures, and provided clarity on the retention of financial savings achieved by public sector bodies from the energy efficiency measures they implement.

Since we launched the Strategy all government departments have appointed a designated Energy Performance Officer (EPO) to drive the Strategy and provide the necessary strategic leadership to the bodies within their groups. My Department, along with the SEAI, and the OPW have been engaging pro-actively with Departments and their EPO's through workshops and individual advisory sessions. The main focus is to support EPO's to work with the bodies in their sector to identify and develop energy efficiency projects and avail of the advice and supports available.

Since 2017, I have provided €14m in funding to the SEAI to engage and work with the OPW and the Department of Education & Skills on two pilot projects. These are delivering energy retrofit upgrades, and crucially, informing and developing replicable and scalable models for energy retrofit investment that can be more widely deployed. In parallel the SEAI is working with the higher education and healthcare sectors to develop significant projects and continues, along with my Department, to support the City & County Management Association in developing the National Public Lighting Upgrade Programme, which has the potential to more than halve local authority electricity use.

### National Broadband Plan Implementation

406. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if the Cumminstown area is included in the broadband roll-out proposed for the Ballynacargy area of County Westmeath. [38451/18]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** According to my Departments High Speed Broadband Map, available at [www.broadband.gov.ie](http://www.broadband.gov.ie), there are 19 premises in the townland of Cumminstown in the Ballynacarrigy area, Co Westmeath.

Of these premises 2 are in the AMBER area of the map, and 17 are in the LIGHT BLUE area.

The AMBER areas represent the target areas for the proposed State led Intervention under the NBP and are the subject of an ongoing procurement process. My Department received the Final Tender submission from the bidding consortium on 18 September 2018. This is a significant milestone as the NBP procurement process enters its final stage.

LIGHT BLUE areas of the map represent eir's commercial rural deployment plans to rollout high speed broadband to 300,000 premises as part of a Commitment Agreement signed with me in April 2017. Individuals can check which category their premises falls into by going to my Department's website [www.broadband.gov.ie](http://www.broadband.gov.ie) and entering their eircode into the High Speed Broadband Map. Further information on eir's planned rural deployment is available at <http://fibrerollout.ie/eircode-lookup/>. A copy of the Commitment Agreement underpinning eir's rural deployment plan is also available on my Department's website [www.dccae.gov.ie](http://www.dccae.gov.ie).

For those premises currently awaiting access to high speed broadband, practical initiatives will continue to be addressed through the work of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce to address obstacles and improve connectivity in respect of existing and future mobile phone and broadband services.

Under this Taskforce, engagement between telecommunications operators and local authorities through the Broadband Officers is continuing to strengthen. These Broadband Officers are acting as single points of contact in local authorities for their communities. The appointment of these officers is already reaping rewards in terms of ensuring a much greater degree of consistency in engagements with operators and clearing obstacles to developing infrastructure. The Department of Rural and Community Development maintain a list of Broadband Officers, a link to which is available on my Department's website at

*<https://www.dccae.gov.ie/en-ie/communications/topics/Broadband/national-broadband-plan/Pages/NBP-Information-Leaflets.aspx>*

### **Departmental Expenditure**

407. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the expenditure savings earmarked for his Department for 2019 that are not accounted for in the mid-year expenditure report or are not included in the fiscal space calculations for 2019. [38481/18]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** The Mid-Year Expenditure Report (MYER) sets out the starting baseline in relation to the gross voted expenditure for 2019. As outlined in the MYER, the technical pre-Budget position for 2019 current expenditure is the current expenditure allocation for this year, as set out in the Revised Estimates Volume (REV). This pre-Budget position will be adjusted to reflect the allocation to the Department of a central provision in relation to the Public Service Stability Agreement.

The capital ceiling set out in the MYER is consistent with the ceiling for 2019 which was published in the National Development Plan.

The figures set out in the MYER do not include expenditure savings targets specifically earmarked for my Department. However, as part of the Estimates process, my Department will be examining the allocations across its programme areas, including taking into account expenditure trends in 2018, to identify how services can be delivered within the overall fiscal parameters for 2019.

### **National Broadband Plan Implementation**

408. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when homes in County Mayo can expect to have broadband; the roll-out, plan and timeline of the national broadband plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38539/18]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** In April 2017 I published an updated High Speed Broadband Map which is available on my Department's website at *[www.broadband.gov.ie](http://www.broadband.gov.ie)*. This map shows the areas targeted by commercial operators to provide high speed broadband services and the areas that will be

included in the State Intervention Area under the National Broadband Plan (NBP).

There are approximately 83,200 premises in Co Mayo. Approximately 36,700 fall within the AMBER area and will be served under the State led Intervention. Some 35,300 premises are in a BLUE area and are or will be served by commercial providers. Just over 11,200 premises are in the Light BLUE area and remain to be covered under eir's 300,000 planned rural deployment.

Information on categories of specific premises can be accessed at [www.broadband.gov.ie](http://www.broadband.gov.ie) by entering the relevant eircode into the High Speed Broadband Map. A copy of the Commitment Agreement underpinning eir's rural deployment plan is also available on my Department's website [www.dccae.gov.ie](http://www.dccae.gov.ie). I can confirm that data for Q2 2018 submitted by eir to my Department indicates that the company has passed some 175,000 premises nationwide as part of its ongoing deployment, including more than 5,000 premises in Co Mayo.

My Department is in a formal procurement process to select a company who will roll out a new high speed broadband network in the State intervention area, and is now evaluating the Final Tender submission received from the bidding consortium on 18 September 2018. This is a significant milestone as the NBP procurement process enters its final stage.

For those premises currently awaiting access to high speed broadband, practical initiatives will continue to be addressed through the work of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce to address obstacles and improve connectivity in respect of existing and future mobile phone and broadband services.

Under this Taskforce, engagement between telecommunications operators and local authorities through the Broadband Officers is continuing to strengthen. These Broadband Officers are acting as single points of contact in local authorities for their communities. The appointment of these officers is already reaping rewards in terms of ensuring a much greater degree of consistency in engagements with operators and clearing obstacles to developing infrastructure. The Department of Rural and Community Development maintain a list of Broadband Officers, a link to which is available on my Department's website at

<https://www.dccae.gov.ie/en-ie/communications/topics/Broadband/national-broadband-plan/Pages/NBP-Information-Leaflets.aspx>.

### **National Broadband Plan Expenditure**

409. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the overall cost of the national broadband plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38540/18]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** My Department is in a formal procurement process to select a company who will roll out a new high speed broadband network in the State intervention area, and is now evaluating the Final Tender submission received from the bidding consortium on 18 September 2018. This is a significant milestone as the NBP procurement process enters its final stage.

The level of subsidy required to bring high speed broadband services to citizens and businesses in the NBP State intervention area will be determined through the procurement process. I cannot comment any further on the procurement process at this stage.



## National Broadband Plan Implementation

410. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when the roll-out of the national broadband plan will be completed; the time-line within which households and businesses, specifically in north County Kildare, can expect to receive a broadband upgrade, in view of the existing quality of service and the fact that current connection speeds are not fit for purpose; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38631/18]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** In April 2017 I published an updated High Speed Broadband Map which is available on my Department's website at *www.broadband.gov.ie*. This map shows the areas targeted by commercial operators to provide high speed broadband services and the areas that will be included in the State Intervention Area under the National Broadband Plan.

There are approximately 91,000 premises in Kildare. Approximately 13,500 fall within the AMBER area and will be served under the State led Intervention. Some 76,500 premises are in a BLUE area and are or will be served by commercial providers. Just over 1,000 premises are in the Light BLUE area and remain to be covered under eir's 300,000 planned rural deployment.

I can confirm that data for Q2 2018 submitted by eir to my Department indicates that the company has passed some 175,000 premises nationwide as part of its ongoing deployment including over 8,000 premises in Co. Kildare.

My Department is in a formal procurement process to select a company who will roll out a new high speed broadband network in the State intervention area, and is now evaluating the Final Tender submission received from the bidding consortium on 18 September 2018. This is a significant milestone as the NBP procurement process enters its final stage.

For those premises currently awaiting access to high speed broadband, practical initiatives will continue to be addressed through the work of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce to address obstacles and improve connectivity in respect of existing and future mobile phone and broadband services.

Under this Taskforce, engagement between telecommunications operators and local authorities through the Broadband Officers is continuing to strengthen. These Broadband Officers are acting as single points of contact in local authorities for their communities. The appointment of these officers is already reaping rewards in terms of ensuring a much greater degree of consistency in engagements with operators and clearing obstacles to developing infrastructure. The Department of Rural and Community Development maintain a list of Broadband Officers, a link to which is available on my Department's website at

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## North-South Interconnector

411. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when the independent report on the North-South interconnector will be published (details supplied). [38698/18]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** In 2017 I commissioned two studies designed to address the main points of the

motions passed in Dáil and Seanad Éireann as well as key concerns expressed by those opposed to the development of the North South Interconnector as an overhead line.

The first is an independent study to examine the technical feasibility and cost of undergrounding the interconnector. Three international experts in the field of electricity infrastructure development carried out a comprehensive analysis of international developments in undergrounding technologies since the publication of the International Expert Commission report in 2012. This was a key request of the representatives of the communities concerned about the proposed overhead line development.

The North South Interconnector is critical to ensuring a safe, secure supply of electricity throughout the island of Ireland. It also supports the core objectives of European and national energy policy – namely sustainability, security of supply and competitiveness.

The second study is focused on the levels of compensation provided to land and property owners in proximity to high-voltage transmission lines in a European context. This study was undertaken to consider a separate concern raised by public representatives at meetings with me - the impact of transmission lines on land and property values and the level of compensation paid in lieu of such impacts. Levels of compensation provided to land and property owners are considered to be a reflection of the impact of transmission lines on land and property values, so this study, undertaken by KHSK Economic Consultants, analysed the compensation regimes in other European and selected international countries.

Both studies are now completed and have been submitted to me.

In order to have the most up-to-date assessment of implications of Brexit on the energy sector before bringing the reports to Government, I sought views of the energy regulator and electricity and gas transmission system operators on the implications for the electricity market in Ireland in the event of a hard “Brexit”, including for the SEM, for timelines for the delivery of programmes such as DS3 and the NSIC and for continued secure cross-border electricity trading across interconnectors. The outcome of this analysis was submitted to my Department recently and is being considered.

It has always been my intention to bring the relevant reports to Government for consideration prior to their publication and I expect to do this shortly.

## **Brexit Issues**

412. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the specific details of the request from the European Commission on the commissioning of a study into the implications of a hard Brexit for the single electricity market; when the Commission made this request; when the study was commissioned; the terms of reference of the study; the person or body that undertook the work; the Department or agencies that were consulted on same; when it is planned to publish this study; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38783/18]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** My Department, like all Government Departments, has been undertaking Brexit preparedness planning since the UK Government called the Brexit referendum. My Department has published on its website analysis of Brexit issues and hosted public and industry meetings and events. In line with efforts across Government to further intensify preparedness, I sought the views of the energy regulator, CRU, and the electricity and gas transmission system operators, EirGrid and Gas Networks Ireland respectively, on the implications of various Brexit

scenarios for the electricity and gas markets in Ireland. These reports have been received and are currently under consideration. The reports identify market challenges absent an agreement between the EU and the UK on energy trading post Brexit, as trade with UK will become a market that straddles a EU Member State and a Third Country. From the outset we have identified continued secure energy trade with the UK as a priority and the detailed material now received will input to our engagement with the EU as it progresses negotiation. This material also addresses an issue raised by EU officials in June this year when further details on how a range of Brexit scenarios would impact Irish energy policy were sought by the Commission. This included how a 'hard Brexit' may impact the Single Electricity Market. Our Brexit contingency and preparedness planning is well advanced.

Last week Minister Coveney, on behalf of the Government, announced details of the 'Getting Ireland Brexit Ready' public information campaign. This campaign includes whole-of-Government public outreach events and will provide information on the latest preparedness and support measures being taken by Government.

### **National Broadband Plan Implementation**

413. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment further to Parliamentary Question No. 78 of 18 September 2018, if there are references in the agreement to the fact that premises can be assessed on a case by case basis; and the way in which property owners can put forward a case for inclusion when supply runs close to their properties. [38826/18]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** The Commitment Agreement I signed with eir commits the company to deploy a high speed broadband network to the 300k premises identified in that agreement. Any decision by the company to provide a service to premises not covered by the commitment agreement would be a matter for the company and not a matter in which I have any role.

### **Road Safety**

414. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if speed calming measures will be implemented at a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38272/18]

**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. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the planning, design and operation of individual roads is a matter for the relevant road authority in relation to local and regional roads, or for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) in conjunction with the local authorities concerned, in relation to national roads.

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

### **Road Traffic Legislation**

415. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when he plans to introduce primary legislation to amend an error in the Road Traffic Act 2016

whereby drivers that fail a roadside impairment test conducted by An Garda Síochána cannot be required to provide a blood or urine sample due to an error in the legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38370/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** First of all, I would like to clarify what is evidently a misunderstanding of the situation. While there is an error in the legislation, it is not that suggested in the question.

Drivers who fail an impairment test will be arrested under section 4 or section 5 of the Road Traffic Act 2010. These sections deal respectively with intoxication offences related to driving and being in charge of a mechanically propelled vehicle.

The actual error in the legislation relates to the substitution of section 11 of the 2010 Act - the section which is the basis for impairment testing - in the Road Traffic Act 2016. Section 11 empowers Gardaí to conduct impairment tests and makes it an offence if a person, without reasonable excuse, fails to comply with a requirement to undergo an impairment test. The section empowers Gardaí to arrest without warrant a person guilty of failing to comply with such a request.

The difficulty arises because the 2016 revision of section 11 changed the internal numbering of subsections. The power of arrest for someone who failed to comply with a request to conduct an impairment test was originally in section 11(5) and is now in section 11(6). References elsewhere in the legislation to procedure following arrest under section 11(5) should now refer to procedure following arrest under section 11(6).

References in sections 13A and 13B to section 11(5) were corrected to refer to section 11(6) by section 2(a) and (b) of the Road Traffic (Amendment) Act 2018, which will be commenced on 26 October. These will allow Gardaí to conduct preliminary oral fluid tests for drugs and evidential blood tests for drugs where people have been arrested under section 11(6).

Subsequently, it has been noted that similar changes will be required to references in section 12 - obligation to provide blood, breath or urine specimens following arrest - and section 16 - power to detain people after arrest where they might pose a danger to themselves or others. These will be corrected in the forthcoming Road Traffic (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill.

In the meantime, it is important to note that a person convicted under section 11 for failure to comply with a request to undergo an impairment test is liable to a fine up to a maximum of €5,000 and/or up to six months in prison. They will also be subject to a consequential disqualification of at least 1 year. It is not therefore the case that people in this position can evade the consequences of their actions.

### **Greenways Provision**

416. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the development of the Sligo to Enniskillen greenway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38393/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I launched the Strategy for the Future Development of National and Regional Greenways last July and there is currently an open funding call for Greenways projects which closes on 30th November 2018. Applications must be made by the appropriate Local Authority or State Agency.

€53m in funding has been allocated under the NDP for Greenways for 2019 to 2021. Fol-

lowing an assessment of the applications received, I plan to award funding to the successful projects. The Strategy, the application form and other relevant documents can be found on the Department's website at the following link: <http://www.dttas.ie/tourism/english/greenways>.

The current status regarding planning and land ownership is a matter for the local authorities concerned.

### **Departmental Expenditure**

417. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the expenditure savings earmarked for his Department for 2019 that are not accounted for in the mid-year expenditure report or are not included in the fiscal space calculations for 2019. [38494/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The Mid-Year Expenditure Report (MYER) set out the starting baseline in relation to the gross voted expenditure for 2019. As outlined in the MYER, the technical pre-Budget position for current expenditure is the current expenditure allocation for this year set out in REV. This pre-Budget position will be adjusted to reflect the allocation to the Department of a central provision in relation to the Public Service Stability Agreement.

The capital ceiling set out in the MYER is consistent with the ceiling for 2019 published in the National Development Plan.

The figures set out in the MYER do not include expenditure savings targets specifically earmarked for my Department. However, as usual as part of the Estimates process my Department will be examining the allocations across its programme areas, including taking into account expenditure trends in 2018, to identify how services can be delivered within the overall fiscal parameters for 2019.

### **Cycling Facilities Funding**

418. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the consideration he has given to the pre-budget submission by a group (details supplied) in relation to allocating 10% of the transport budget to cycling in order to radically transform the present situation and positively assist in reaching climate change emission targets and to tackle obesity; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38515/18]

421. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the request by a group (details supplied) that 10% of the budget for transportation be allocated for cycling and cyclists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38544/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 418 and 421 together.

I would like to advise the Deputy that I am acutely aware of the importance of investing in a safe cycling infrastructure not just to ensure the safety of cyclists, but also to help alleviate congestion, lower emissions and improve the overall health of those who chose to cycle.

Improvements to our cycling infrastructure will be made possible by the increased funding I have secured over the period 2018 to 2021 such as:

- €110 million to be allocated through the National Transport Authority, NTA, and local

authorities to develop cycling and walking infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area, Galway, Limerick, Cork and Waterford;

- €135 million secured for the Sustainable Urban Transport projects to be developed by the NTA in conjunction with relevant local authorities which will provide both direct and indirect improvements to cycling and walking infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area, Galway, Limerick, Cork and Waterford;

- €750 million which will be provided to support the roll-out of BusConnects by the NTA, initially in Dublin, which will provide over 200 km of, where possible, segregated cycle lanes in the city

- €53 million allocated to support greenways projects across the country in line with the new greenways strategy.

In addition to this capital investment, my Department also provides funding to the NTA for the delivery of behavioural change programmes in workplaces and campuses designed to encourage more people to take up cycling, while my Department has also worked with Cycling Ireland on the development of a new a new national cycle training standard - “Cycle Right” – which was rolled out in January 2017 to approximately 15,000 primary school students, the RSA in relation to the promotion of safe roads for all users and local authorities for initiatives such as the annual Bike Week and European Mobility Week.

I believe these measures, and the funding I have secured to underpin them, will positively assist with the better development and provision of cycling and walking infrastructure across the State.

### **Road Network**

419. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the specific funding available to upgrade the Portsalon to Fanad Head road in County Donegal; if a request has been received by his Department from the relevant authorities for funding and or supports to be made available in order to carry out improvement works on the section; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38518/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads in County Donegal is the statutory responsibility of Donegal County Council, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from local authorities’ own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter for the local authority. My Department has no grant application on hand in relation to the upgrade of the Portsalon to Fanad Head road.

Given the cutbacks in State funding for regional and local roads since the financial crisis, it has been necessary to curtail the grant programme for major new regional and local road schemes and for major realignment schemes in order to protect the funding available for the maintenance of the existing network. The bulk of the funding allocated under the capital plan is, therefore, earmarked for the maintenance and renewal of the road network with some limited investment in the new projects.

### **Rail Services Provision**

420. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the overcrowding problem on the DART service from Dublin's north-side heading southbound during morning peak hours (details supplied); if extra capacity will be provided on these routes at this time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38535/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The issue raised is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) in conjunction with Iarnród Éireann and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

*Question No. 421 answered with Question No. 418.*

### **Sports Capital Programme Applications**

422. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if unsuccessful applications under the sports capital programme 2017 must resubmit a full application for 2018; if unsuccessful applications will be rolled over and considered in the next round of funding; and the body which makes the application in a case in which a sports body and a school wish to submit a joint application. [38568/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin):** All valid local applications under the 2017 round of the sports capital programme, SCP, were allocated a grant. In the case of invalid applications, all those deemed invalid due to the submission of incorrect documentation have been advised they can now submit corrected documentation in order to be considered for funding under the 2018 round of the programme and a full new application is not required. In addition, a small number of applicants have been informed that their 2017 application can now be considered without amendment due to changes to the terms and conditions of the 2018 round being such as to accommodate the original application. Finally, some applications under the 2017 round cannot be made valid by the submission of revised documentation. Typically these are applications that had no sporting content and will require a new application.

All invalid applications under the 2017 round have been contacted in relation to their options. In all cases the applicant is free to make an entirely new application if preferred.

In the case of schools and sports clubs or groups making joint applications, it is a requirement that the landowner makes the application for capital works. Either party can apply for sports equipment. All joint applications must be accompanied by a signed licence agreement between the parties.

All organisations wishing to apply for 2018 SCP funding are advised to consult the Department's guide to making an application and view the YouTube guide to the application form. Links to these resources are available on my Department's website at [www.dttas.ie](http://www.dttas.ie).

### **Public Service Obligation Levy**

423. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated amount it would cost in a full year if the PSO levy to CIÉ increased by 12.5%; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38668/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Since 2010, Public Service Obligation, PSO, subvention is no longer paid by my Department to transport opera-

tors. The award and subvention of PSO contracts now falls under the independent statutory remit of the National Transport Authority, NTA, which has direct responsibility for this area along with the routes covered. I have therefore forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

### **Roads Maintenance**

424. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to upgrade the R392 from Mullingar to Ballymahon; if traffic surveys along this route can be carried out in order to gauge the increase in traffic levels in particular a large increase in HGVs using this route; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38711/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of local authorities, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from a local authority's own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of works, including traffic surveys, is also a matter for the local authority.

My Department is providing grant assistance to Longford County Council under the specific grant programme for certain improvement works on the R392 at present.

### **Departmental Funding**

425. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the funding his Department received directly from the Exchequer to substitute for funding previously obtained from the local government fund receipts relating to motor tax; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38788/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** In 2017 my Department received €1,810 million in total funding according to the Revised Estimates Volume as published. €1,442 million came from the Exchequer and €367.95 million came from appropriations-in-aid. Within the appropriations-in-aid €345.5 million was received from the local government fund.

Since my Department took over motor tax policy, the receipts from motor tax payments are paid directly to the Exchequer. They are no longer paid to the local government fund. My Department no longer receives an appropriation-in-aid from the local government fund.

In 2018 my Department received €2,029.8 million in total funding according to the latest Revised Estimates Volume as published. €2,005.3 million came from the Exchequer. €24.5 million came from appropriations-in-aid. However, under the new arrangements, these appropriations-in-aid came from sources other than the local government fund.

As the Deputy can see, the total funding in my Department's Vote was increased significantly between 2017 and 2018. Funding in 2018 is therefore not directly comparable with that in 2017 which included a contribution from the local government fund. However, it is clear that my Department did not lose funding as result of the change in the treatment of the local government fund.



## Adoption Authority of Ireland

426. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will address a matter (details supplied) regarding a priority list; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38302/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The agency the Deputy has referred to is accredited to undertake its work by the Adoption Authority of Ireland. I have asked the authority to respond directly to the Deputy on this issue.

### Foster Care

427. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if Tusla carry out assessments on potential short-term foster carers solely for weekend respite or emergency placements for foster children; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38343/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I can confirm that Tusla undertakes assessments on all potential general foster care applicants regardless of whether they are short term, emergency carers or long term foster carers. The assessment process provides a framework to enable assessing social workers make recommendations in relation to their suitability to foster. The requirement for assessment and approval is set out in legislation for foster care.

The Child Care Act 1991, part IV, section 36 (1) legislates for the accommodation and maintenance of children in care. It states:

The Child Care (Placement of Children in Foster Care) Regulations 1995 stipulate that all children who require foster care are placed with persons chosen from a panel of persons who are willing to act as foster parents. They set out conditions to be met to be placed on such a panel which include: A written assessment of their suitability, having been considered by a foster care committee who are satisfied that they are suitable persons to act as foster parents.

These regulations further charge TUSLA with responsibility for matching children with foster carers chosen for their capacity to meet children's assessed needs. These needs are identified as encompassing the children's emotional, psychological, medical, educational, physical care, identity, ethnicity, religious, safety and security needs.

The National Standards for Foster Care (2003) 14(a) require that foster care applicants participate in a comprehensive assessment of their ability to carry out the fostering task and are formally approved prior to any child or young person being placed with them.

Standard 23 of The National Standards for Foster Care (2003) stipulates that foster care committees recommend whether or not to place applicants' names on their panel of approved foster carers.

This task is underlined in the HSE National Policy, Procedures and Best Practice Guidance for HSE Foster Care Committees, 2012 which sets out the criteria for acceptance of foster care applicants.

The only exception to the assessment process relates to the emergency placement of children in care with relatives. In these circumstances children can be placed with relatives without an assessment having taken place. This is governed by the Child Care (Placement of Children with Relatives) Regulations 1995, article 6 (1):

An assessment process will commence with the potential relative foster carers following the placement of the child in these emergency circumstances.

I hope this information clarifies the current position in relation to the assessment of foster carers.

### **Child Protection**

428. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to the fact that there are sporting organisations operating here under the governance and child protection arrangements and guidelines from another jurisdiction; if her attention has been further drawn to the fact that these organisations are not adhering to the Children First guidelines; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38432/18]

429. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the steps that have been taken to ensure that the Children First guidelines are followed by organisations in which children are members that are governed by rules and guidelines from another jurisdiction; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38433/18]

430. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to the conditions that can or should be applied to sporting organisations hosting competitions or other such activities in which children are involved to ensure that the Children First guidelines are followed; if there are conditions attached to licensing such activity; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38434/18]

431. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the person or organisation that has responsibility for ensuring that the Children First guidelines are observed in sporting organisations in cases in which the governing body, the competition and other rules are set in another jurisdiction; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38435/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 428 to 431, inclusive, together.

The Children First Act 2015, which was fully commenced in December 2017, provides for a number of key child protection measures, including raising awareness of child abuse and neglect, providing for reporting and management of child protection concerns and improving child protection arrangements in organisations providing services to children.

The Act places a number of statutory obligations on organisations providing relevant services to children. These obligations include: a requirement to keep children safe from harm while they are availing of the service; a requirement to carry out a risk assessment, and, a requirement to prepare a child safeguarding statement which sets out the policies and procedures which are in place to mitigate these risks.

The Act operates side-by-side with the non-statutory obligations provided for in Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children. The guidance sets out definitions of abuse, and signs for its recognition. It explains how reports about reasonable concerns of child abuse or neglect should be made by the general public and professionals to Tusla. It sets out what organisations need to do to keep children safe. It also describes the obligations under the Children First Act 2015 and who they attach to. These guidelines have been in place since 1999 and were fully revised and published in October 2017 to include reference to the provisions of the Act.

The statutory obligations in the Children First Act apply to both public and private sector organisations providing relevant services to children operating in this jurisdiction, regardless of where an organisation's governing body is located. The relevant services to children that attract an obligation to produce a child safeguarding statement are set out in schedule 1 of the Act.

Sections 12 and 13 of the Act make provision for the Child and Family Agency to establish and maintain a register of non-compliance for providers of relevant services who fail to provide a copy of the Child Safeguarding Statement to Tusla when requested to do so. A new Child Safeguarding Compliance Unit has recently been established within Tusla. As this is a new statutory obligation for many organisations, Tusla is focusing on encouraging and supporting providers of relevant services to meet their statutory obligations and it will endeavour only to place relevant service providers on the register where a supportive approach has proved unsuccessful.

In addition, section 27 requires each Government Department to prepare and publish a sectorial implementation plan that outlines the programme of measures to be taken to ensure that the Department, and any body that provides a relevant service and receives funding from that Department, comply with the provisions of the Act.

The key principle of Children First is that child protection issues are the responsibility of all and that child safety and welfare concerns must be dealt with as and where they arise. In this regard the specific issues raised by the Deputy relating to sporting organisations come within the remit of the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport.

### **Departmental Expenditure**

432. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the expenditure savings that are earmarked for her Department for 2019 that are not accounted for in the mid-year expenditure report or are not included in the fiscal space calculations for 2019. [38480/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The figures set out in the Mid-Year Expenditure Report in respect of my Department do not include expenditure savings targets. My Department is currently examining expenditure requirements across all programme areas, including expenditure trends in 2018, to identify how services can be delivered within the overall fiscal parameters for 2019.

As the Deputy will be aware, this forms part of the normal budget/estimates process and it would be inappropriate for me to comment further at this point.

### **Early Childhood Care and Education Funding**

433. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will direct that ECCE payments will have specific payment dates with no delays; the reason for delays to these payments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38662/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The preliminary Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) payment was sent out to service providers on the 24 August. Please see the following link below for the full ECCE payment schedule for the programme year 18/19.

[<https://debates%20authoring/webattachments.nsf/0/F21C61B4AD60421C8025831400>]

### **Public Liability Insurance**

434. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the position regarding public liability insurance for foster carers; the progress made on this issue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38671/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** As the Deputy is aware, foster carers are no longer covered by a commercial public liability insurance policy. Attempts by Tusla to secure continuing commercial cover have proved unsuccessful. However, I am pleased to confirm that pending a permanent solution, all foster carers have an indemnity on an individual basis where required. This is on an ex-gratia basis as a temporary measure to address immediate individual cases while the overall indemnification issues are being resolved.

As I have stated previously, I fully support extending the State Indemnity Scheme under the State Claims Agency to foster parents. Unfortunately, this has taken longer than expected due to technical issues associated with the approvals and statutory process involved, but I can assure the Deputy that work is continuing to address these matters. My Department has been in discussion with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform on the matter, and my intention is to include foster carers under the General Indemnity Scheme operated by the State Claims Agency as soon as possible. In this regard, work is ongoing with the Office of Parliamentary Counsel to draft the necessary Order for Government.

My Department has written to the Irish Foster Carers Association (IFCA) outlining the position and, through the Association, foster carers have been informed as to the current position. IFCA have been kept up to date on a continuous basis. In addition, I understand that Tusla has also made publicly available the information provided to IFCA so as to communicate the position to those foster carers who are not members of that association.

### **Child Abuse**

435. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if an oversight body monitors the work of an organisation (details supplied) which specialises in reports of child sexual abuse. [38677/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I will refer the Deputy's question to my colleague, the Minister for Health, for direct reply.

### **HIQA Inspections**

436. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if an organisation (details supplied) is regulated and inspected by HIQA. [38678/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I will refer the Deputy's question to my colleague, the Minister for Health, for direct reply.

### **Child Abuse**

437. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if an organisation (details supplied) operates independently of or in tandem with Tusla. [38679/18]

439. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the reason second opinions in regard to findings in relation to allegations of child sexual abuse by an organisation (details supplied) are not facilitated by Tusla. [38682/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 437 and 439 together.

I can inform the Deputy that St Clare's Unit operates independently of Tusla.

I am informed by Tusla that if social workers are seeking a second opinion in relation to findings of an assessment completed by an organisation such as St Clare's, it is generally Tusla practice to seek a second opinion from a similar organisation, such as St Louise's Unit. This is done to ensure the second opinion is independent and the assessment process follows the same format.

### Child Abuse

438. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the basis on which An Garda Síochána and Tusla assert that they are bound by the findings of reports on allegations of child sexual abuse from an organisation (details supplied); and if this is the case. [38681/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** When a report of child sexual abuse is received into Tusla, the duty social worker screens the report to obtain more information and ascertain if it reaches threshold. Once the report is screened, a strategy meeting is held with the Social Work Department, An Garda Síochána and where relevant, the identified service which offers credibility and therapeutic services in the catchment area, such as St Claire's Unit. At this meeting a decision is reached regarding which service would be most suitable for the child. The available options are: 1) A Joint Specialist Interview, with Gardaí taking the lead role. 2) A referral to a Specialist Unit such as St Claire's Unit. 3) The Social Work Department completing the assessment. When an assessment is completed by a Specialist Unit, Tusla receives a comprehensive report outlining the specific details, including an analysis of the findings. The assessment reports are forwarded to the Principal Social Worker, Team Leader and referring social worker who then review the findings. Tusla generally accept the findings of the specialised unit unless there are specific circumstances raising concern. The outcome of a completed assessment is either 'Founded' or 'Unfounded.' Tusla relies on this outcome to determine what further intervention is required.

Separately, An Garda Síochána have statutory responsibilities for the safety and welfare of children and the investigation of criminal complaints. As Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, I am not in a position to comment on the views of An Garda Síochána in relation to these matters. However, I will reiterate that Tusla and specialist services are civil authorities that make findings, drawn from all available information, on the balance of probability. This may differ from the burden of proof for criminal prosecution required for investigations by An Garda Síochána.

Tusla has a primary responsibility to promote the safety and well-being of children. Everyone must be alert to the possibility that children with whom they are in contact may be suffering from abuse or neglect. This responsibility is particularly relevant for professionals such as teachers, child care workers, health professionals and those working with adults with serious

parenting difficulties. It is also an important responsibility for staff and people involved in sports clubs, community activities, youth clubs, religious/faith sector and other organisations catering for children. Tusla should always be informed when a person has reasonable grounds for concern.

*Question No. 439 answered with Question No. 437.*

### **Child Abuse Reports**

440. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 1132 of 12 June 2018, when a response from Tusla is likely to be forthcoming. [38738/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** Following the Deputy's original question, my Department forwarded the request to Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, for attention and direct reply.

My officials have followed up with Tusla in relation to the Deputy's question, and have asked Tusla to respond to the Deputy with the requested information, as soon as possible.

### **Child Abuse Reports**

441. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of the serious incident report being prepared by a person (details supplied) into alleged child sex abuse in County Limerick; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38740/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The Deputy is referring to an independent review I commissioned, in agreement with the Minister for Justice and Equality, to examine and report on the management of a complex and serious case of alleged child abuse and neglect involving sixteen children in four families.

While there is no evidence of any serious mishandling of the case by either Tusla or An Garda Síochána, I considered that it would be good practice to arrange for a short, focused independent 'Serious Incident' review of the actions taken in the case.

The primary purpose of the review is to ensure that any learning which may arise in relation to information exchange is captured and informs future work.

The Special Rapporteur on Child Protection, and chair of the Review Panel, Dr Geoffrey Shannon, has assisted with drafting the terms of reference for the review. These Terms of Reference have now been agreed with the Department of Justice and Equality, and will shortly be jointly submitted by myself and Minister Flanagan for the consideration of the Attorney General.

It is not possible to give a timeframe for the delivery of the report at this stage, given the complex and unusual nature of this case, and the importance of ensuring that this non-statutory review does not risk prejudicing the on-going investigation and criminal prosecution.

### **Child Abuse**

442. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to Par-

liamentary Question No. 242 of 27 June 2018, when a response from Tusla is likely to be forthcoming. [38743/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I have referred the Deputy's question to Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, for direct reply.

### **Child Abuse**

443. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if correspondence from a person (details supplied) and the attachments thereto which related to the outcome of the deliberations of Tusla's section 3 committee and included documents outlining policy, implementation and a training plan in regard to the management of child sexual abuse allegations were furnished by Tusla to HIQA as part of the latter's recent investigation into the management of allegations of child sexual abuse against adults of concern by Tusla. [38744/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I have referred the Deputy's question to Tusla for direct reply.

### **Child and Family Agency Staff**

444. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if complaints, grievances or disclosures have been submitted to her Department or the board of Tusla in relation to the performance of a person (details supplied); and if so, the details of same. [38752/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I have not received any complaints or grievances in respect of the person referred to by the Deputy. It would not be appropriate to comment on disclosures under the Protected Disclosures Act 2014 relating to any individual. I have referred the Deputy's question to the Board of Tusla for direct reply.

### **Child Abuse**

445. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of cases deemed to be founded and unfounded, respectively in each year since 2014 with regard to the assessment made by Tusla following the report of a case of child abuse in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38755/18]

446. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of cases deemed to be founded and unfounded, respectively in each year since 2014 with regard to the assessment made by Tusla on foot of a retrospective report of child sexual violence in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38756/18]

447. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the methodology used in assessments with regard to the decision by Tusla to deem reports of child abuse to be founded or unfounded as referred to on its website (details supplied); the policy basis for the choosing of those terms specifically; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38757/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 445 to 447, inclusive, together.

I can inform the Deputy that Tusla currently do not collate data on the number of assess-

ments deemed to be ‘founded’ and ‘unfounded.’

Current Tusla policy “Policy and Procedures for responding to allegations of child abuse and neglect”(September 2014), outlines the policy basis for the use of ‘founded’ and ‘unfounded.’ Best practice in a number of other jurisdictions utilises the terms ‘founded’ or ‘unfounded’ as a means of concluding a position on child protection enquiries. It has been decided to use the terms ‘founded’ and ‘unfounded’ to keep in line with international best practice.

In Children First, 2011, Section 5.5, ‘Unfounded Concerns’, provides guidance on actions to be taken where, after an assessment or appeals process, concerns or suspicions of child abuse are considered as ‘unfounded.’

A ‘founded’ assessment is an authentication that a judgement has been made that evidence exists which confirms that child abuse occurred. An ‘unfounded’ assessment is one where the evidence does not support a finding of abuse. It does not mean the abuse did not occur, rather that there is a lack of evidence to support a ‘founded’ outcome. For example, there may be no convincing disclosure, no clear evidence, no witnesses, and/or no admission on the part of the Person Subject to Allegations of Abuse (PSAA). The ‘balance of probabilities’ is interpreted as the degree to which something is more likely to have occurred than not.

The key principles informing decision-making when an assessment is being made include the following:

- a. The welfare of the child is the paramount consideration
- b. The requirements of Children First must be met
- c. Tusla must determine and assess any current or future risk to a child
- d. If a child is deemed to be at immediate serious risk the child’s interest takes priority over the suspected person’s right to be informed of allegations against him/her.
- e. If Tusla concludes there is an immediate serious risk to a child, this must be communicated to an appropriate relevant third party to enable Tusla to take whatever protective action is necessary
- f. Maintaining children in their own home is in their best interests. If the child is living with an alleged abuser, the safety of the child is paramount
- g. Social work professionals make a determination on a balance of probabilities
- h. Natural justice and fair procedures must be applied in relation to persons suspected of abuse, including their right to be informed about allegations against them and to respond
- i. A Tusla assessment should take representations made by a person suspected of abuse into account
- j. Any action or protection plan should be signed off by all relevant parties, including the person suspected of abuse, where possible.
- k. A person suspected of abuse has a right to have their data protection rights protected, to obtain legal advice, to see all relevant documentation, to submit relevant documentation, to make oral or written submissions and have these considered, to identify any third parties with relevant information for Tusla consideration for interview, and to request an independent review of the assessment undertaken by the social worker.



## Departmental Expenditure

448. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the expenditure savings that are earmarked for his Department for 2019 that are not accounted for in the mid-year expenditure report or are not included in the fiscal space calculations for 2019. [38492/18]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** The Mid-Year Expenditure Report (MYER) set out the starting baseline in relation to the gross voted expenditure for 2019. As outlined in the MYER, the technical pre-Budget position for current expenditure is the current expenditure allocation for this year set out in REV. This pre-Budget position will be adjusted to reflect the allocation to the Department of a central provision in relation to the Public Service Stability Agreement.

The capital ceiling set out in the MYER is consistent with the ceiling for 2019 published in the National Development Plan.

The figures set out in the MYER do not include expenditure savings targets specifically earmarked for my Department. However, as usual as part of the Estimates process the my Department will be examining the allocations across its programme areas, including taking into account expenditure trends in 2018, to identify how services can be delivered within the overall fiscal parameters for 2019.

## Local Improvement Scheme Funding

449. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if additional funding will be provided for the local improvement scheme to local authorities, particularly in counties Cavan, Monaghan and Meath, in order to clear the backlog of applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38387/18]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** The Local Improvement Scheme (LIS) is a programme for improvement works on small private or non-public roads in predominantly rural areas. The scheme is funded by my Department and administered through the Local Authorities.

Following on from the successful re-launch of the scheme in 2017, I announced details of the 2018 Local Improvement Scheme on 27th February last. I allocated an initial sum of €10.8 million to Local Authorities across the country this year under the scheme, including €295,000 for Cavan, €250,000 for Monaghan, and €359,000 for Meath.

The list of projects which each of the Councils has selected for improvement works under the scheme are available on my Department's website at: <http://drcd.gov.ie/about/rural/local-improvement-scheme/>.

As part of the LIS scheme this year, I also requested all County Councils to compile a secondary list of suitable LIS road projects which they could complete if additional funding becomes available through my Department later in the year.

I am assessing the level of expenditure on all of my Department's programmes on an on-going basis, and I will make decisions shortly on whether there is scope for any additional funding to be allocated to the Local Improvement Scheme this year.

Over 1,100 roads have benefitted from improvement works since I re-launched the LIS last

year. This is having a hugely positive impact for residents and landowners along those roads in terms of access to their premises and properties.

### Leader Programmes Data

450. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the expenditure by LAG to date on projects under the Leader programme 2013-2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38633/18]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** LEADER is a multi-annual programme for the period 2014-2020 and has a total budget of €250 million over that period. The programme is administered by Local Action Groups (LAGs) which deliver funding in accordance with Local Development Strategies that have been agreed for each LAG area.

More than 1,300 projects with a value of more than €39 million have now been approved under the programme. A further 325 projects with a value of €20.8 million are at an earlier stage in the approvals process.

Table 1 details the project expenditure incurred to date in each LAG area.

Project payments have increased significantly in recent months as approved works are completed and claims for payment are submitted by the project promoters. Over €6 million of project expenditure has been incurred in 2018 compared with just €600,000 in 2017.

The progress now being made by the Local Action Groups in approving projects will result in a continued increase in project approvals and payments under the LEADER programme for the remainder of the year. This progress has been assisted by improvements made by my Department in the last year to the applications and approvals process, in consultation with the LAGs.

**Table 1: LEADER 2014-2020 Expenditure as of 17 September 2018**

Sub-Regional Area (LAG)	Total Project spend to date
Carlow	494,755.79
Cavan	216,588.79
Clare	236,728.83
Cork North	206,245.72
Cork South	20,000.00
Cork West	20,933.30
Donegal	1,089,300.20
Galway: Forum Connemara	5,041.79
Galway: Galway Rural Development	0.00
Kerry	447,287.07
Kildare	0.00
Kilkenny	300,982.30
Laois	69,883.78
Leitrim	103,485.23
Limerick	0.00
Longford	7,691.66

Sub-Regional Area (LAG)	Total Project spend to date
Louth	90,644.77
Mayo	358,091.06
Meath	34,199.35
Monaghan	241,671.11
Offaly	539,120.35
Roscommon	57,761.88
Rural Dublin	71,130.81
Sligo	501,580.63
Tipperary	312,812.37
Waterford	899,438.80
Westmeath	118,797.16
Wexford	260,367.46
Wicklow	19,856.08
Total	€6,724,396.29

### Town and Village Renewal Scheme

451. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of the work of the Action Plan for Rural Development specifically relating to the revitalisation of towns and villages; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38636/18]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** The Action Plan for Rural Development includes a suite of measures for delivery across a range of Government Departments and agencies to support the revitalisation of rural towns and villages.

The Town and Village Renewal Scheme, which is administered by my Department, is a key component of the Government's Action Plan. Over €31.6 million has been approved for more than 450 projects across the country since the scheme was introduced in the second half of 2016.

The 2018 Town and Village Renewal Scheme was launched on 27th April. Local Authorities were required to seek expressions of interest from communities for proposals under the scheme and select up to 12 proposals for submission to my Department for consideration.

The closing date for submission of applications to my Department was 30th June 2018. Applications are currently being assessed and successful projects will be announced shortly.

It is anticipated that a further 200 projects will be supported under this year's scheme, with indicative funding of €15 million available. Projects will be expected to commence before the end of the year and will run for up to 18 months.

The Government's commitment to supporting rural Ireland is further underscored through the new €1 billion Rural Regeneration and Development Fund which was launched recently. This new Fund will provide an opportunity to deliver more integrated and ambitious projects which will further support the revitalisation of our rural towns and villages in the coming years.

### Local Improvement Scheme

452. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the

status of the local improvement scheme to local authorities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38637/18]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** The Local Improvement Scheme, or LIS, is a programme for improvement works on small private or non-public roads in predominantly rural areas. The scheme is funded by my Department and administered through the Local Authorities.

Following on from the successful re-launch of the scheme in 2017, I announced details of the 2018 Local Improvement Scheme on 27th February last. I allocated an initial sum of €10.8 million to Local Authorities across the country this year under the scheme.

The list of projects which each of the Councils has selected for improvement works under the scheme are available on my Department's website at: <http://drzd.gov.ie/about/rural/local-improvement-scheme/>.

As part of the LIS scheme this year, I also requested all County Councils to compile a secondary list of suitable LIS road projects which they could complete if additional funding becomes available through my Department later in the year.

I am assessing the level of expenditure on all of my Department's programmes on an on-going basis, and I will make decisions shortly on whether there is scope for any additional funding to be allocated to the Local Improvement Scheme this year.

Over 1,100 roads have benefitted from improvement works since I re-launched the LIS last year. This is having a hugely positive impact for residents and landowners along those roads in terms of access to their premises and properties.

### **Community Services Programme Funding**

453. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the funding options available to a group (details supplied) to help with day-to-day costs of office and administration; and his plans to fund the group following a recent meeting which he held with its representatives. [38735/18]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** The Community Services Programme (CSP) supports some 400 community organisations to provide local services through a social enterprise model, with funding provided as a contribution to the cost of a manager and an agreed number of full-time equivalent positions.

To be eligible for support, an organisation must be a social enterprise capable of generating income from its activities. CSP funding is a fixed annual contribution and does not meet the full salary cost of supported posts or fund other day-to-day operating costs. Accordingly, the CSP contribution must be co-funded by the organisation concerned from other sources, for example, from income received from the public use of their facilities and services.

The organisation in question may submit an expression of interest to my Department under the programme and funding will be considered, subject to the organisation meeting all CSP eligibility criteria and in light of available budgets during the year.

### **Departmental Consultations**

454. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the degree to which he hopes to engage with various rural community groups with a view to identifying their perspectives on the issues with which his Department may be able to assist; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38871/18]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** My Department is in ongoing contact with local and community groups to identify the most appropriate actions in regard to all issues relevant to the work of the Department.

Groups can also input into the policy-making process through the local structures established by my Department such as Public Participation Networks and Local Community Development Committees.

In addition, all interested parties are invited to provide submissions to public consultations that are opened by my Department and we encourage groups from all sectors to take the opportunity to input where appropriate. For example, public consultations have been held in relation to my Department's first Statement of Strategy and also the new library strategy, "Our Public Libraries 2022 - inspiring, connecting and empowering communities", both of which were published earlier this year. More recently I have sought submissions in relation to my Department's first Official Languages Scheme.

### **Action Plan for Rural Development Implementation**

455. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the degree to which he expects to improve the quality of life for persons and communities throughout rural Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38872/18]

459. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development his plans to further support enterprise and enhance employment across rural Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38876/18]

461. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the extent to which he continues to address the stigmatisation of rural or urban communities (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38879/18]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 455, 459 and 461 together.

As Minister with responsibility for Rural and Community Development I note the substantial progress made to improve the quality of life for persons and communities throughout Ireland, both rural and urban.

My primary focus is to support the creation of vibrant, inclusive and sustainable communities across this country. This can be achieved through the implementation of programmes and initiatives that facilitate and encourage economic development through the creation of jobs and the infrastructure required to support those jobs, and to support our communities to become and remain desirable places to live, work and raise families.

The Action Plan for Rural Development, the Framework Policy for Local and Community Development in Ireland, and Project Ireland 2040 are the key policy initiatives that set out the ways in which Government aims to address disadvantage and how we can support both rural and urban communities across Ireland.

In particular, the Action Plan for Rural Development, which complements the Regional Action Plans for Jobs and other Government plans and strategies, includes a range of measures which will support enterprise growth and job creation in rural areas. These measures will be delivered across a range of Government Departments, State agencies and other organisations over the period to 2020.

Improving the quality of life of those who live and work in rural communities is another key objective of the Action Plan, which is the most comprehensive Government plan ever produced to support economic and social development in rural areas.

In relation to employment, Labour market data published by the Central Statistics Office, for Quarter 4 2017, shows that employment increased in almost all regions of the country year-on-year. Two-thirds of the 19,332 new jobs created by Enterprise Ireland companies in 2017 were outside of Dublin, while all regions saw increases in IDA employment in 2017, with over 50% of the 19,851 new jobs created last year located outside of Dublin.

My own Department also contributes to supporting job creation and the enhancement of the quality of life in local communities through a range of programmes, including:

- €31.6 million has been invested in over 450 projects under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme.

- €23 million has been allocated to almost 500 projects under the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure scheme.

- More than 1,200 projects have been approved for total funding of €25 million under the CLÁR programme.

- 1,100 private roads in rural areas have benefitted from investment of €28.2 million under the Local Improvement Scheme since last September; and

- More than 1,300 projects with a value of over €39 million have now been approved under the current LEADER programme. LEADER is a multi-annual programme which has a budget of €250 million over the period to 2020 and has a job creation target of 3,100 over the lifetime of the programme.

- €190 million will be provided by the new Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme over the period 2018-2022. SICAP aims to reduce disadvantage and poverty in local communities across the country.

- My Department is also working closely with local authorities to support the roll-out of the National Broadband Plan and rural telecommunications infrastructure. We are assisting local authorities to develop local digital strategies, which will be essential if the full economic and social benefits of high-speed broadband connectivity are to be realised equally across all communities over the coming years.

My Department will continue to implement these and other programmes but is also in a position to provide additional investment of €1 billion over the next 10 years through the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund, which is being delivered as part of the Government's Project Ireland 2040 commitment to strengthen rural economies and communities.

### **Departmental Programmes**

456. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Devel-

opment the extent to which he has received applications in 2018 for assistance from various groups throughout the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38873/18]

458. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the extent to which he expects to be in a position to offer grant aid to rural communities involved in various projects to enhance rural life; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38875/18]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 456 and 458 together.

My Department funds a range of programmes and schemes that provide financial assistance to eligible groups throughout the country. These schemes provide much needed funding, support and assistance to communities at local level.

These include the LEADER and CLÁR programmes; the recently launched Community Enhancement Programme, to which I announced the allocation of a further €8million in funding last week; the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP); the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme; the Town and Village Renewal Scheme; and the Community Services Programme.

All schemes delivered by my Department are open to applications from eligible parties during the relevant application timeframes set for each scheme/programme.

Full details of how to register or apply for financial assistance under these schemes can be obtained online [[www.drcd.gov.ie](http://www.drcd.gov.ie)], together with more detailed information on all various funding programmes and schemes administered through my Department.

### **Action Plan for Rural Development**

457. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the action he has taken to address issues of rural isolation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38874/18]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** The response to the issue of rural isolation is delivered across a number of Government Departments and organisations. The Government's Action Plan for Rural Development includes a range of measures which will contribute significantly to addressing isolation and social inclusion in rural areas. Specific examples of actions in the Plan which will help those who feel isolated or vulnerable in rural areas include:

- Significant investment in the Seniors Alert Scheme, which facilitates valuable community-based support for vulnerable older people living alone. During 2017, spend on the Scheme amounted to €2.7 million, with over 12,600 applications approved and more than 10,000 installations completed. To the end of August 2018, almost 13,000 applications were approved, with in excess of 14,500 installations completed. Spend on this demand-led scheme to date in 2018 has been almost €5.4 million.

- Investment of €46 million in Garda fleet to ensure that Gardaí are mobile, visible and responsive to prevent and tackle crime.

- Support for 450 Men's Sheds across rural Ireland which provide a safe space where men can gather and participate in their communities, develop social networks and potentially gain

new skills and access information. In July I provided funding of €500,000 to support the work of Men's Sheds throughout Ireland.

- Maintaining the network of senior helplines in operation throughout the country, which offer a listening service for older people to help address issues such as loneliness and isolation in rural areas.

- Continued support and prioritisation of community crime prevention through schemes such as Neighbourhood Watch and Text Alert.

- Funding allocation of €14.9 million for Local Link rural transport services in 2018. Local Link facilitated 1.9 million passenger journeys last year, providing a vital service for rural communities.

The issue of isolation, whether in urban or rural areas, is one which should concern us all and I am committed to continuing my Department's response to this issue through programmes such as Seniors Alert and progressing the measures contained in the Action Plan for Rural Development in collaboration with my Government colleagues.

*Question No. 458 answered with Question No. 456.*

*Question No. 459 answered with Question No. 455.*

### **Voluntary Sector Funding**

460. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the main headings under which his Department expects to be in a position to offer financial assistance to voluntary groups throughout County Kildare and the country at large; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38877/18]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** My Department operates a number of funding programmes and schemes that are open to applications from relevant parties, including groups in the voluntary sector, who satisfy the relevant criteria during the application timeframes set for each scheme/programme.

Volunteering supporting infrastructure has been set up nationwide in the form of Volunteer Centres, Volunteering Information Services and Volunteer Ireland, and the Department hopes to further develop this infrastructure.

In 2018, €3.5 million was allocated by my Department to support the work of volunteering organisations. The Department also approved a request from Volunteer Ireland for €115,000 to update the I-VOL database, which will be provided on a recoupment basis. This upgrade will facilitate public online access to volunteering information and opportunities.

My Department also has lead responsibility for developing the relationship between the State and community and voluntary sector. The Scheme to Support National Organisations (SSNO) provides multi-annual funding towards core costs of national organisations in the sector, with a focus on organisations that provide supports to those who are disadvantaged. The current three-year scheme runs to 30 June 2019, and all funding has been fully allocated for 2018.

The Community Services Programme (CSP), which has an allocation for 2018 of €46million, supports community-based organisations to provide local social, economic and environmental services through a social enterprise model for services which are not being met through



public or private funding.

The Community Enhancement Programme (CEP) was launched by my Department in May 2018. It provides small capital grants to community groups across the country. The original allocation announced in May 2018 was €4.5m and last week, I was able to announce a further allocation of €8million to the CEP for 2018. An additional €0.5m was allocated and ring-fenced for Men's Sheds in June of this year.

The programme allows communities across the country to apply for funding to enhance the facilities in their areas. Hundreds of groups are benefitting across the country in 2018 and money is being spent on what is important to people locally in their area. Co. Kildare has been allocated a total of €442,585 under the CEP in 2018.

Voluntary groups in rural areas may also be able to access funding under the CLÁR Programme, which has allocated approximately €23million to almost 500 small scale infrastructural projects since 2016, in the areas of school and community safety, recreational play areas and first response support. Last month I also opened up the programme to supports for mobility and cancer care transport.

Funding may also be available under my Department's LEADER Programme to support groups in the voluntary sector. Applications for funding can be made directly to the relevant Local Action Groups.

The Seniors Alert Scheme provides personal monitored alarms to enable older people, of limited means, to continue to live securely in their homes with confidence, independence and peace of mind. The Scheme is administered on behalf of my Department by Pobal, with applicants applying via community organisations operating in their local area. Since Pobal took over the administration of the Scheme in September 2015, 15 community organisations have been approved to operate the Scheme in Co. Kildare.

Further information on all funding programmes and schemes is available on my Department's website [www.drccd.gov.ie](http://www.drccd.gov.ie).

*Question No. 461 answered with Question No. 455.*

### **Broadband Service Provision**

462. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the progress to date in respect of the two regional broadband action groups with particular reference to the provision of an efficient broadband network across rural Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38880/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Seán Kyne):** My Department has combined the original two Regional Broadband Action Groups into a single country-wide Regional Action Group to remove barriers to the installation of telecoms infrastructure and accelerate the roll-out of the National Broadband Plan once a contract is signed with the successful tenderer. The Group currently meets on a monthly basis and has successfully facilitated the sharing of ideas and local knowledge, and established valuable networking opportunities between the Local Authorities and service providers.

A key deliverable of the Regional Action Group is the development of local digital strategies in each Local Authority area. Indecon was appointed to assist Local Authorities in this process, with Digital Readiness Assessments prepared for each Local Authority. It is anticipated

that the local digital strategies will be completed over the coming months.

My Department has also been engaged with broadband officers and telecommunications providers to assess the viability of sharing underground infrastructure. My officials are also working with broadband officers to develop pilot projects which will seek to test the viability and scalability of digital initiatives before they are rolled out in other rural locations.

### Social Welfare Benefits

463. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding dental benefit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38318/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Budget 2017 announced a number of changes to treatment benefit, which encompasses the dental, optical and medical appliance schemes. This included extending the scheme from March 2017 to self-employed PRSI contributors and their dependent spouses for the first time and reinstating treatments from October 2017 that had not been available since 2009.

Among the treatments re-introduced from October 2017 was the dispensing of spectacles and contact lenses under the optical benefit scheme and the re-introduction of cleanings under the dental benefit scheme.

Under the dental scheme, qualified PRSI contributors and their dependent spouses can, in addition to a free annual oral examination, avail of either an annual scale and polish treatment or a more extensive periodontal treatment. The Department pays 42 euro towards either of these treatments, with the customer paying the balance between the departments contribution and the normal private fee charged directly to the dentist. For the scale and polish treatment this customer contribution is capped at a maximum of 15 euro.

I hope this clarifies matters for the Deputy.

### Social Insurance Yield

464. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated revenue which would be raised by introducing an employer PRSI rate of 15.75% on the portion of salaries above €100,000. [38408/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The information requested by the Deputy is contained in the following table.

	Increased Revenue (full year)	Employments affected
New employers' rate of pay related social insurance of 15.75% on the portion of salary paid in excess of €1,923 per week	€376.04m	242,959

These estimates are based on PRSI Class A contributors. They use the latest available data and reflect macro-economic indicators for 2019. It should be noted that these estimates do not take into account any possible changes in employer behaviour arising from changing rates of

contribution.

### **Mortgage Interest Supplement Scheme**

465. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the measures in place to assist mortgage holders who find themselves in short-term difficulty; if there is a similar scheme of mortgage interest relief that mortgage holders can avail of for a period of time; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38751/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The original purpose of the mortgage interest supplement scheme (MIS) was to provide short-term support to eligible people who were unable to meet their mortgage interest repayments in respect of a house which is their sole place of residence due to temporary unemployment or loss of earnings. The scheme was closed to new entrants from 1 January 2014.

It had been intended to close the scheme from 31 December 2017. However, due to the exceptional difficulties and pressures experienced in the housing sector, arrangements have been put in place to continue support to existing MIS beneficiaries by providing alternative financial support under the supplementary welfare allowance scheme. All cases are subject to ongoing review to ensure there is a requirement to continue this financial support together with ongoing engagement with their lenders to explore sustainable solutions.

As the Deputy may be aware that the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS), under the aegis of the Citizens Information Board, provides assistance to people, in particular those on low incomes or living on social welfare payments, who are over-indebted and need help and advice with debt problems. As part of its free services, MABS provides help and advice to those in mortgage arrears.

The role of MABS was expanded in 2015 with the establishment of a Dedicated Mortgage Arrears MABS service (DMA MABS) across the MABS network, to help people specifically with home mortgage arrears. There are 32 specialist DMA advisors working across 27 locations countrywide, assisting borrowers to assess the options available to them and, where required, negotiating with lenders on their behalf. To date, the DMA service has helped approximately 5,746 such borrowers.

Additionally, MABS provides a national network of court mentors who attend each listed repossession Court hearing countrywide. The mentors provide support to distressed borrowers who are facing the loss of their home and signpost them to the appropriate services. To date, over 1,400 borrowers have been referred onward to MABS advisors through the court mentor service.

In 2016, a further initiative was announced by Government, known as Abhaile. This scheme further extends the free services already available to borrowers through the DMA MABS service and the court mentor service. This voucher based scheme, for which MABS is the gateway, provides access for people, who are insolvent and in home mortgage arrears, to access independent expert financial and/or legal advice and assistance, free of charge. To date, approximately 13,748 vouchers for services have been issued, in respect of c. 7,345 principle private residences.

The most appropriate way in which customers experiencing mortgage difficulties can be supported is through ongoing engagement with their lender to explore sustainable solutions

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Invalidity Pension Reviews**

466. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the progress to date in the review of eligibility for an invalidity pension based on medical evidence submitted in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38279/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The gentleman referred to has been awarded invalidity pension with effect from the 31 May 2018. Payment will issue to his nominated bank account on the 27 September 2018.

Any arrears due from 31 May 2018 to 26 September 2018 (less any overlapping social welfare payment) will issue in due course. The gentleman in question was notified of this decision on the 24 September 2018.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Illness Benefit Payments**

467. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when payments will issue to a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38333/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The Illness Benefit (IB) claim from the person concerned has been processed and they are in receipt of their full entitlements under the Scheme. The IB cheque referred to for the period 27th August to 3rd September 2018 has, according to our records, been cashed and the signature matches those on previous cheques received by the customer.

However, it appears that the cheque for the period 14th August to 20th August 2018 has not been cashed. We will contact the customer directly to verify if this cheque was received by them and, if not, we will take appropriate remedial action.

I hope this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

### **Rent Supplement Scheme Payments**

468. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the level of rent support being received in the case of a person (details supplied); if the highest level based on circumstances is being paid; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38334/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The person concerned is in receipt of a rent supplement from this Department on the basis of an assessable rent of €1250.00 per month and income from One Parent Family payments and income from part time earnings.

A review has been completed this week and the person concerned has been advised of the outcome. The person concerned is in receipt of the highest level of rental support based on their circumstances.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Rent Supplement Scheme Payments**

469. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the level of rent support being received in the case of a person (details supplied); if the highest level based on circumstances is being paid; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38336/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The person concerned is in receipt of a rent supplement from this Department on the basis of an assessable rent of €1250.00 per month and income from One Parent Family payments and income from part time earnings.

A review has been completed this week and the person concerned has been advised of the outcome. The person concerned is in receipt of the highest level of rental support based on their circumstances.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Carer's Benefit Applications**

470. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application for carer's benefit by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38341/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Carer's benefit (CARB) is a payment made to insured people who leave the workforce to care for a person(s) in need of full-time care and attention.

I confirm that my department received an application for CARB from the person concerned on the 16 May 2018.

Additional information was requested from the person concerned on 20 September 2018. Once the information is received the application will be processed without delay and she will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Jobseeker's Allowance Payments**

471. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if all jobseeker's allowance entitlements since July 2018 to date have been paid in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38344/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The person concerned has been paid Jobseeker's Allowance payments from 03rd July 2018 to 14th August 2018.

The claim was closed 14 August 2018 as the claimant had returned to work.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Social Welfare Schemes**

472. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if public sector pension deductions are included as a statutory deduction in social work welfare assessments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38354/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Social welfare legislation provides for a number of deductions in the assessment of earnings for means-testing purposes. In this regard, for weekly social assistance schemes and for the Working Family Payment, earnings are assessed less “any allowable contribution referred to in Regulations 41 and 42 of the Income Tax (Employments)(Consolidated) Regulations 2001”. Pension related deductions come within the remit of Regulation 41, and as such are considered as a statutory deduction in the assessment of earnings for social welfare means-testing purposes.

### **State Pensions**

473. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to review and increase the time limit for claiming backdated State pensions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38361/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** From April 2012 the period for which a claim for State Pension can be backdated is six months as provided for under the Social Welfare Act 2011.

Developments in the administration of contributory pensions in recent years have facilitated customers in making pension application in a timely manner. Generally customers are more likely now than before to have an attachment to the workforce thus ensuring more awareness of their entitlements arising from their PRSI contributions. This, together with my Department’s focus on providing information to the public, ensures that people are more aware than ever of social welfare schemes and entitlements and are more likely to apply on time.

Late claims for the State pension (contributory) may only be backdated for a maximum period of 6 months. Backdating of a late claim beyond 6 months will be considered in circumstances where the failure to claim arose as the result of either incorrect information having been supplied by my Department, or the claimant’s serious incapacity by illness or infirmity. However, my advice to everyone who approaches the age of 66, and who may potentially have an entitlement to a State pension, is to make a claim to my Department, and generally people will do so.

It is open to anyone to request a copy of their contribution record in order to assess their pension entitlement and request assistance in a number of ways, if needed. Questions about eligibility and conditions can be made by phone, or locally at a customer’s local Intreo Centre, social welfare office or Citizens Information Centre. Queries can also be made using the online enquiry form available on the Department’s website [www.welfare.ie](http://www.welfare.ie) or may be sent in writing to Social Welfare Services, College Road, Sligo.

In addition my Department provides a general information telephone service, where people can get information on the wide range of schemes and services operated by the Department.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

## Legislative Programme

474. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when she expects to publish legislation based on the recommendations of the report of the Gender Recognition Act 2015 review; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38363/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Officials from my Department are currently considering the recommendations of the report, and how they can best be progressed, in conjunction with the Office of the Attorney General and relevant Government Departments.

I intend to come back to Government later in the year seeking approval to legislate, based on the outcome of the discussions with other Departments and the Attorney General; and to lay my own report on the review before the Houses of the Oireachtas.

## Social Welfare Schemes

475. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of the review of the artist's social welfare scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38365/18]

502. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of applications received for the artist's social welfare pilot scheme; the number of persons in receipt of welfare payments in respect of the scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38715/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 475 and 502 together.

A pilot initiative to assist self-employed visual artists and writers who apply to my Department for jobseeker's allowance was launched in June 2017. Under this initiative self-employed professional artists and writers who are in receipt of a jobseeker's allowance are not subject to the activation process for 12 months. Applicants for the pilot scheme must satisfy all of the other qualifying conditions of the scheme.

My Department's records show that a total of 76 people have registered for the scheme since it commenced in June 2017. There are currently 54 artists and writers who are availing of the pilot arrangements.

It is planned that a review of this scheme will commence shortly.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy at this time.

## Illness Benefit Data

476. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 1252 of 7 September 2018, if consultations took place with general practitioners and their representatives before her Department changed the forms for illness benefit. [38366/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The introduction of the new forms was discussed and agreed with the Irish Medical Organisation.

Prior to the introduction of the new forms, my Department wrote to all GPs on 16th July advising them that the forms would issue to them.

The introduction of these and other initiatives are the subject of ongoing discussions with the IMO. A framework and timetable has been agreed with the IMO, during which intensive discussions are planned with the aim of resolving issues relating to the resourcing of these initiatives. Changes to existing procedures will not be introduced until these discussions are concluded and advance notice, including details of any changes to payment arrangements, will be provided to individual GPs.

The Department has had a long and positive partnership with GPs over many years and is committed to working hard to resolve any outstanding issues which are causing concern amongst our GP partners.

### **JobPath Programme**

477. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of jobseekers who have been referred to JobPath for the second time after completing the scheme in full; the length of time after the scheme is completed that JobPath can re-invite former participants to participate again; if jobseekers must participate the second time; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38367/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** All persons in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance must be capable of, available for and actively seeking full time employment. The Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005, as amended, specifies that participation in activation meetings is mandatory and that applies to all activation services provided by the Department including those provided by the contracted providers JobPath; Local Employment Services and Jobs Clubs.

JobPath is designed to support people who are long term unemployed to obtain and sustain employment in the open labour market. The JobPath companies have no role in selection of jobseekers for referral to the service. My Department selects clients for the JobPath service by means of a random selection process and protocols for selection currently preclude the selection of anyone who has already completed 52 weeks with the JobPath service within the previous four months.

Since July 2015, just over 11,000 jobseekers have commenced a second engagement period with the service, having availed of the service for one year previously. For those jobseekers returning to the JobPath service for additional assistance in their search for employment, their Personal Progression Plan will be developed to build on their previous engagement including tackling their own barrier/s to employment.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Community Employment Schemes Data**

478. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of eligible workers for community employment schemes who have been signed up to Turas Nua; the percentage of eligible workers for community employment schemes this represents; the efforts being made to address the crisis of recruiting persons for community employment schemes throughout the country; and if she will make a statement on the matter.



[38369/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** As the Deputy will be aware JobPath is an employment activation service that supports people who are long-term unemployed and those most distant from the labour market to secure and sustain full-time paid employment. My Department has contracted two companies, Turas Nua and Seetec JobPath, to provide the service.

All persons engaged with JobPath may also be eligible for a placement on CE. From 1st June 2018, I broadened access by allowing persons to take up a placement on CE while also attending their JobPath provider.

This facilitates the combination of the strengths of the two programmes - by enabling those people with the JobPath service to avail of a CE placement and in turn benefit from the job-seeking support of their JobPath personal advisor while also availing of a quality training and development opportunity provided by a CE scheme.

The Deputy will appreciate that the welcome reduction in the unemployment rate is a factor in recruitment to all programmes. The Government is very mindful of the large number of work programme places involved in service delivery and other valuable services around the country. In this regard if any scheme is experiencing particular recruitment difficulties, they should contact their local Department Intreo Centre for assistance.

### **Brexit Issues**

479. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she has received guarantees from the UK Government that the portability and payment of British pensions to older persons resident here will not be affected by the withdrawal of the UK from the European Union; the guarantees and measures which will be put in place to safeguard the financial security of Irish residents in receipt of UK pensions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38440/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** It is important to note that social security arrangements between the UK and the EU27 have not changed. The future operation of arrangements will, of course, be determined as part of the complex process of negotiating the UK's exit from the EU.

My key area of concern is the impact of Brexit on the current reciprocal arrangements for social insurance schemes, social assistance schemes and child benefit between Ireland and the UK, including Northern Ireland. The importance of maintaining the Common Travel Area was acknowledged in Prime Minister May's letter of 29 March 2017 triggering Article 50 of the TEU, the Joint EU/UK Progress report agreed at the European Council on 15 December 2017 and in the protocol to the draft Withdrawal Agreement published by the Commission on 28 February 2018. It has also been acknowledged in the technical paper issued by the UK Government on 13 September.

I met with the UK Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the Right Honourable Esther McVey, on Monday 23 April 2018. I emphasised my objective of ensuring that the reciprocity of social welfare rights and entitlements, which currently exist for Irish and UK citizens moving within Ireland and between Ireland and Britain under the Common Travel Area, are safeguarded and maintained. I am happy that we have a broad agreement to preserve the status quo in that regard.

I have a dedicated team in my Department which is conducting a deep analysis of scenarios on a scheme by scheme basis and contingency planning is ongoing for all outcomes, including a no-deal or worst-case outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Disability Allowance Applications**

480. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if an application for disability allowance by a person (details supplied) will be expedited. [38452/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The person concerned has been awarded disability allowance with effect from 18 July 2018. The first payment will be made by her chosen payment method on 3 October 2018.

Arrears of payment due will issue once any necessary adjustment is calculated and applied in respect of any other social welfare payments received since 18 July.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Community Employment Schemes Review**

481. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a review has been carried on the pilot scheme which allowed those aged 62 years of age and over to remain on a community employment scheme until their retirement age; if this pilot scheme will now be extended to remove the restrictions on the numbers both nationally and within each scheme; her views on whether this scheme has been effective in relieving the crisis of recruitment within community employment schemes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38453/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Community Employment (CE) is a programme providing part-time temporary work in local communities, including opportunities for training and development, as a stepping-stone back to employment. The CE programme provides funding for participants aged up to 66 years of age who meet the current eligibility criteria.

A pilot initiative known as the Service Support Stream (SSS) was implemented in January 2016. This enabled 7% of participants aged 62 years and over to extend their participation beyond the standard maximum participation limits and to remain on CE up to State pension age, provided the participant continued to meet the eligibility conditions and the number of places on the scheme was not exceeded. The total number of places allocated nationally to the SSS for the 12 month period of 2016 was 1,600 places, which represented 7% of the total number of active CE places. To date, all places have not been utilised.

A commitment given by Government to review the SSS is now completed. Overall the scheme for over 62's has been positively received by Sponsors, Community Groups who benefit from the service of CE and the participants who have availed of the pilot scheme. My Department has examined the recommendations, which includes re-visiting the number of places available to the SSS. I have recently permitted persons on reaching age 62 to apply for one of these places rather than completing a waiting period, in some cases up to 12 months following

the break in their previous CE participation. This should assist in filling some of the places available on the SSS.

The Deputies will appreciate that the welcome reduction in the unemployment rate is a factor in recruitment to all programmes. The Government is very mindful of the large number of work programme places involved in service delivery and other valuable services around the country. In this regard if any scheme is experiencing particular recruitment difficulties, they should contact their local Department Intreo Centre for assistance.

### **Community Employment Schemes Administration**

482. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to amalgamate Tús and community employment programmes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38454/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** As the Deputy may be aware, there is provision for almost €840m to be spent on working age employment supports provided by my Department in 2018. It is recognised by Government that work schemes such as Tús and Community Employment are positive initiatives that enable the long-term unemployed to make a contribution to their communities whilst up-skilling themselves for prospective future employment. Various community services and activities are directly and indirectly supported by participants through these programmes and initiatives.

Tús was introduced and numbers on other schemes expanded as a direct response to the growth in the level of unemployment during the financial crisis. As the economy continues to recover and the overall level of unemployment continues to fall, the Department recognises the need to adapt these work schemes to the changing circumstances, opportunities and needs of jobseekers and others.

The Department will continue to review these schemes and continue to work with stakeholders in planning the longer term needs of jobseekers and other customers. It remains committed to ensuring that the social inclusion and community benefits that accrue from these schemes continue to be recognised and supported. I do not have any plans to amalgamate the two schemes as suggested by the Deputy.

### **Community Employment Schemes Supervisors**

483. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of community employment supervisors' pay and pensions; if she has engaged with the Minister for Finance regarding the provision of same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38458/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** As the Deputy will be aware, CE scheme supervisors are employees of private companies in the community and voluntary sector that receive public funding. They are not employees of my Department or public servants, and as such were not subject to pay reductions under the provisions of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (FEMPI) which only applied to public servants.

The issue of CE Supervisor pensions is currently being examined by a Community Sector High Level Forum, chaired by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform who are

taking the lead on this matter. A number of Departments, including my own Department, are represented on this group, as are the unions and Pobal.

A detailed scoping exercise was carried out with input from the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES) on the potential costs of providing Exchequer support for the establishment of such a pension scheme for employees across the Community and Voluntary sector in Ireland. The exercise clearly illustrated that this matter presents very significant issues for the Exchequer, with a potential cost to the State of €188 million per annum in respect of funding to enable an employer pension contribution in State funded Community and Voluntary organisations, excluding any provision for immediate ex gratia lump sum payment of pension as sought, which could, depending on the size of the sector, entail a further Exchequer cost of up to €318 million.

I am very conscious that while 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.

### **Carer's Allowance Payments**

484. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the value of the carer's allowance payable will be increased; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38465/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Department provides a range of income supports to assist carers. These include Carer's Allowance, Carer's Benefit, Domiciliary Care Allowance and the Carer's Support Grant. The 2018 Revised Estimates provide an allocation of over €1.18 billion for these schemes (€789.1 million for Carer's Allowance, €35.9 million for Carer's Benefit, €153.1 million for Domiciliary Care Allowance and €207.7 million for the Carer's Support Grant), representing an increase of over €138 million from the 2017 allocation for these schemes.

It should be noted that Carer's Allowance recipients automatically qualify for the Carer's Support Grant, an annual payment of €1,700, which is not means-tested or taxed. Carer's Allowance recipients also qualify for Free Travel and, if they are living with the person they are caring for, the Household Benefits package.

The appropriate rates of income supports, including supports for carers, will be considered by Government in the context of the Budget, in light of available resources and other priorities. In this regard, each €1 increase in the weekly rate of Carer's Allowance (including proportionate increases for qualified adults) is estimated to cost €3.3 million in 2019. This cost is subject to change in the context of emerging trends and associated revision of the estimated numbers of recipients for 2019.

### **Fuel Allowance Applications**

485. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social

Protection if an application for fuel allowance will be reviewed in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38466/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Fuel allowance is a means-tested payment to assist householders on long-term social welfare payments towards the cost of their heating needs.

The main eligibility conditions that apply to the fuel allowance scheme are that a person must be in receipt of a qualifying payment, must satisfy a means test and must either be living alone or with other qualifying persons. The fuel allowance means test is linked to the maximum rate of the state pension (contributory). The applicant and their spouse can have a combined weekly household income of €100.00 above the maximum rates for state pension (contributory) and Increase for qualified adult and still be eligible for a fuel allowance.

The person concerned is in receipt of an occupational pension in addition to their State pension entitlements. This brings their household means over the permissible weekly means for fuel allowance qualification purposes.

For every means limit set, there will be applicants who exceed the permissible income limit, marginally or otherwise, and fail to qualify. The application for fuel allowance was disallowed. The person concerned was notified in writing of this decision on 11 April 2018.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Departmental Expenditure**

486. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the expenditure savings that are earmarked for her Department for 2019 that are not accounted for in the mid-year expenditure report or are not included in the fiscal space calculations for 2019. [38485/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Mid-Year Expenditure Report (MYER) sets out the starting baseline in relation to the gross voted expenditure for 2019. As outlined in the MYER, the technical pre-Budget position for current expenditure is the current expenditure allocation for this year set out in REV 2018 plus an additional allocation for certain demographic pressures and the Department's share of unallocated carryover costs relating to 2018 measures. This pre-Budget position will be adjusted to reflect the allocation to the Department of a central provision in relation to the Public Service Stability Agreement.

The capital ceiling set out in the MYER is consistent with the ceiling for 2019 published in the National Development Plan.

The figures set out in the MYER do not include expenditure savings targets specifically earmarked for my Department. However, as usual as part of the Estimates process, my Department will be examining the allocations across its programme areas, including taking into account expenditure trends in 2018, to identify how services can be delivered within the overall fiscal parameters for 2019.

### **Carer's Allowance Applications**

487. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social

Protection the status of an application for carer's allowance by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38495/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a person who has such a disability that they require that level of care.

An application for CA was received from the person concerned on 9 July 2018.

One of the qualifying conditions for receipt of CA is that the applicant must be providing full-time care and attention. Based on the evidence submitted in support of this application, a deciding officer has disallowed the application on the grounds that this condition was satisfied.

The person concerned was notified on 20 September 2018 of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Working Family Payment Payments**

488. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when payments will issue to a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38504/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Working Family Payment (WFP) is a weekly tax-free payment which provides additional income support to employees on low earnings with children.

To qualify for WFP a person must be engaged in full time remunerative employment as an employee for a minimum of 38 hours per fortnight (or 19 hours per week). It is also possible to combine hours worked with a spouse, civil partner or cohabitant to satisfy this condition.

An application for WFP was received from the person concerned on 12th September 2018.

The applicant has been awarded WFP with effect from 05th July 2018 to 29th August 2018. The award period is effective to 29th August 2018 only as the applicant is no longer engaged in full-time remunerative employment. The person concerned is currently in receipt of maximum rate Jobseeker's Benefit (JB) with effect from 30th August 2018. (WFP is not payable with JB)

The total WFP payment owing will issue shortly to the applicant's nominated bank account as arrears.

The person concerned was notified on 21st September 2018 of this decision and of their right of review and appeal.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Jobseeker's Allowance Applications**

489. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when an application for jobseeker's allowance might be expedited in respect of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38609/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):**

The person concerned made an application for a Jobseeker's Allowance payment in December 2017. The application was disallowed by the Deciding Officer as it was deemed that the person concerned had means in excess. The person concerned appealed the decision to the Social Welfare Appeals Office, and a decision is awaited.

The person concerned has no pending application for a Jobseeker's Allowance Payment at this time.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Jobs Initiative**

490. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of hours per week that workers on the job initiative scheme are required to work; if this includes time for tea breaks in the morning and afternoon; the length of lunch break provided for; if time for lunch breaks is included in the working hours; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38632/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Job Initiative (JI) Programme is one of a range of activation supports and programmes provided by my Department, catering for long-term unemployed jobseekers and those most distant from the labour market.

The JI programme is sponsored by local community groups/statutory organisations (Managing Agents) wishing to benefit the local community. My Department provides financial support in the form of allowances and funding to assist with the programme, including wages, materials/overheads grants and training grants.

The Managing Agent is entitled to claim funding towards the cost of wages. In general employees work 39 hours per week, excluding breaks. Funding is not provided to cover the cost of breaks.

As the employer, the Managing Agent is responsible for all matters concerning the management and welfare of participants. It is their responsibility to be familiar with all relevant employment legislation and to ensure that statutory entitlements with regards to breaks are met.

### **Carer's Allowance Payments**

491. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if all arrears will issue to a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38635/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I confirm that my department received an application for carer's allowance (CA) from the person concerned on 2 May 2018.

Carer's allowance was awarded to the person concerned on 10 September 2018 with effect from 3 May 2018. The first payment will issue to her nominated bank account on 4 October 2018.

The person concerned is currently in receipt of another social welfare payment. Arrears of

CA will be due for the period from 3 May 2018 to 3 October 2018 and will be calculated once the other social welfare payment has been stopped.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications**

492. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38674/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** An application for domiciliary care allowance was received from the person concerned on the 15th February 2018. The application was not allowed as the child was not considered to satisfy the qualifying conditions for the allowance. A letter issued on the 23rd April 2018 setting out the decision of the deciding officer to refuse the allowance.

An appeal of this decision was requested on the 28th May 2018. As part of the appeals process the application was reviewed by a deciding officer who determined that a revised decision was not warranted. The person concerned was notified of this decision on the 22nd August 2018. On 30th August 2018 additional medical information was received which was forwarded to the Department's Medical Assessor. The application will again be re-viewed by a deciding officer and a revised decision will be made if warranted. If the decision is not revised, the case will be referred for consideration by the Social Welfare Appeals Office. The person concerned will be notified of the outcome of the deciding officer's review as soon as it is completed.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Invalidity Pension Applications**

493. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38675/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The lady referred to has been awarded invalidity pension with effect from the 2nd August 2018. Payment will issue to her nominated account on the 11 October 2018. Any arrears due from 2nd August 2018 to 11th October 2018 (less any overlapping social welfare payment) will issue in due course. The lady in question was notified of this decision on the 21st September 2018.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Disability Allowance Applications**

494. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38676/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection**



**(Deputy Finian McGrath):** The person concerned has been awarded disability allowance (DA) with effect from 26 September 2018 as they are currently in receipt of another social welfare payment at a higher rate than their DA entitlement. The first payment will be made by their chosen payment method on 26 September 2018 .

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Pensions Reform**

495. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she is satisfied that the public consultation process with regard to pension reform has been conducted in line with the Open Government Partnership National Action Plan 2016-2018 and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform's consultation principles and guidelines. [38704/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** My officials are well aware of the Open Government Partnership National Action Plan 2016-2018 and the consultation principles and guidelines set out in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform's document in September 2016. I am satisfied that the public consultation processes with regards to pensions reform are being conducted with due regard to the guidelines and principles.

My Department fully complied with the consultation principles set out below:

The first of principle is that consultation with the public must be genuine, meaningful, timely, balanced and with the ultimate objective of leading to better outcomes and greater understanding by all involved of the benefits and consequences of proceeding with particular policy or legislation proposals. Consultation should aim to achieve real engagement and 'real listening' rather than being a pro-forma exercise for bureaucratic purposes. A genuine consultation process ensures that the real-world impact of policy options is considered.

The second principle is that consultation should be targeted at and easily accessible to those with a clear interest in the policy in question. There is no 'one size fits all' approach to consultation. The size, type and scope of the consultative process depends on the proposed policy, the type and scale of the potential impacts of the proposal or decision being taken, the number of people or groups affected by them, and where relevant particular requirements of the child and young people and those who may be marginalised or vulnerable.

The third principle is that Government departments and agencies should make systematic efforts to ensure that interested and affected parties have the opportunity to take part in open consultations at all stages of the policy process on significant policy, services and legislative matters: development, implementation, evaluation, and review.

For example in relation to the reform of the State Pension (Contributory), the policy to introduce the Total Contributions Approach (TCA) to pensions calculation was adopted by Government in the National Pensions Framework in 2010, as was the decision to base the entitlements of all new pensioners on this approach from around 2020. The Roadmap for Pensions Reform 2018-2023 confirmed the Government's position that the State pension will be reformed and will remain as the fundamental basis of the pension system in Ireland.

The Government intends to introduce the TCA to establishing level of entitlement for all new state pension contributory claims from 2020 onwards and I launched the public consultation on this proposal in May. My Department invited sectorial interest groups representing pen-

sioners, workers, employers, young people, the unemployed and more. Members of the media were also invited and the launch was featured extensively throughout the broadcast and written media in the days that followed. The consultation was hosted on the Department's website and open to everyone to submit responses and submissions. The consultation sought input on a range of relevant factors which included the amount of contributions needed for a full rate contributory state pension, the amount of credited contribution a person could avail of, and whether there would be a "phase-in period" for the changes.

The online consultation lasted for over 3 months and we received over 270 responses. The consultation closed on Monday, the 3rd of September. An analysis of the views submitted is now being undertaken and feedback will be published on the Department's website. Following this a review of the consultation process will be carried out which will consider whether the objectives of the consultation have been met, including whether the methods used were appropriate to the objectives and the cost-effectiveness of the consultation process. It will also identify any lessons learned to inform future consultation processes.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Pensions Reform**

496. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will re-run the public consultation process with regard to pension reform in view of the perceived serious inadequacies of the current consultation process. [38705/18]

497. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to the fact that the online briefing document Total Contributions Approach Consultation 2018 contains significant and serious errors which give a distorted impression of the changes brought about by the TCA 2012 system (details supplied). [38706/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 496 and 497 together.

A policy to introduce the Total Contributions Approach (TCA) to the State Pension contributory (SPC) calculation was adopted by Government in the National Pensions Framework in 2010, as was the decision to base the entitlements of all new pensioners on this approach from 2020.

The Roadmap for Pensions Reform 2018-2023 confirmed the Government's position to reform the State pension in line with the Total Contributions Approach.

A public consultation on the introduction of the Total Contributions Approach to be designed for the periods from 2020 was launched on May 28th. This is distinct from the TCA2012 model announced in January this year which will be available for those affected by the 2012 rate-band changes.

My Department invited interest groups representing pensioners, workers, employers, young people, the unemployed and several other areas to the launch event at which we provided a range of informative presentations and hosted a series of workshops on the various aspects of the proposed reform. Members of the media were also invited and the launch was featured extensively throughout the broadcast and written media in the days that followed. The online consultation lasted for over 3 months and we received nearly 300 responses from individuals and organisations.

The consultation questionnaire was accompanied by a document setting out the context of the consultation. In Appendix 1 of this document there is a table setting out the illustrative entitlements under different state contributory pension approaches - the yearly average approach, the National Pensions Framework approach and the TCA2012 approach. It did not include a model for TCA2020 as that model has not yet been decided.

The Deputy is correct in stating that two of the figures given under the TCA2012 approach in the hypothetical cases are incorrect. I am advised that this inaccuracy was a result of an error in a formula that was used to calculate the outcomes. I apologise for this. I understand that this matter came to light very shortly before the public consultation closed, when a member of the public who had spotted it called an official in my Department.

I do not believe that this has resulted in those who answered the consultation being misled about the provision for credits in the TCA2012 model. In the main body of the document, the chapter "Models of TCA" highlights the primary policy levers within a TCA framework, and the second one listed said "The amount of ordinary credited contributions that could be used (10 years in NPF and TCA2012)". People reading the document would therefore be aware that this limit would apply, and how it would impact upon entitlements. The table in the appendix was added for illustrative purposes only. It was also made clear that the TCA2012 model was not being proposed for TCA2020, and it warned that amounts in the table may depend upon a number of factors. I do not propose to delay either the introduction of the TCA2012 model, or the progress towards TCA2020, on the grounds set out by the Deputy. Both of these reforms will be introduced via legislation, and the policy choices about the balance between paid contributions, credited contributions and periods caring in the home in calculating entitlements will, I believe be broadly debated by members of the Oireachtas. An amended copy of the table, with outcomes under the final TCA2020 model will be made available in due course, and I can assure the Deputy that there will be no error in that version.

Regarding the contributory pension outcomes under TCA2012, it is true that a person who has spent most of their working age life in receipt of Jobseekers payments, and only 15 years paying into the Social Insurance Fund (as in these hypothetical examples cited by the Deputy), would have a significantly lower contributory pension entitlement than someone who had paid into the Social Insurance Fund for 40 or more years. In most countries, that is how contributory pensions work. However, in most cases, a person in Ireland who received jobseekers payments for most of their adult lives would be entitled, upon reaching State pension age, to a State pension (non-contributory), at 95% the maximum rate of a contributory pension. Consequently the amounts cited by the Deputy as being lost by these pensioners would not arise, except in a very small minority of cases, where a person paid very little into the Social Insurance system, was unemployed for most of his/her life, had no homecaring periods, and yet retired with very significant additional means which made them better off than most pensioners. I think most people would agree that this is very uncommon, and there is not a strong case for such pensioners to be cross-subsidised by others, most of whom have less means, and who have contributed more into the Social Insurance Fund over the years.

The TCA2020 consultation process is now complete, and officials in my Department are analysing the inputs made by those who participated. A summary of these will be published on my Department's website in due course when this work is complete. I am told that a number of submissions stressed the importance of credited contributions, among other matters (notably the total number of contributions required, and the possibility of transitional measures for those who reach pension age soon after 2020), and I will consider the points made in the context of finalising the design for Government's consideration.

Following this, a review of the consultation process itself will be carried out which will con-

sider whether the objectives of the consultation have been met, including whether the methods used were appropriate to the objectives and the cost-effectiveness of the consultation process. It will also identify any lessons learned to inform future consultation processes.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Pensions Reform**

498. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to the fact that up to 20 years of homecare credits can be used under the 40 year TCA 2012 while there is a limit of ten years for other credits such as unemployment and illness in contrast to the National Pensions Framework, which envisaged a standard approach applying to the various categories of persons that receive credited contributions; her views on this provision; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38707/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The National Pensions Framework (2010) proposed that a “Total Contribution Approach” (TCA) should replace the yearly average approach, for new pensioners from 2020. The aim of this approach is to make the rate of contributory pension more closely match contributions made by a person.

The TCA will ensure that the totality of a person’s social insurance contributions - as opposed to the timing of them - determines their final pension outcome. In particular it will benefit people whose work history includes an extended period of time outside the paid workplace, while raising families or in a full-time caring role.

This approach will make it easier for many post-2012 pensioners affected by the 2012 rate band changes who are currently assessed under the yearly average model, to qualify for a higher rate of the State Pension (contributory). A person who reached pension age after 1st September 2012 and has a 40 year record of paid and credited social insurance contributions, subject to a maximum of 20 years of the new HomeCaring periods, will qualify for a maximum contributory pension where they satisfy the other qualifying conditions for the scheme. Up to 10 years of other credits, for example, awarded when on Jobseekers or Illness Benefit, may also be used, subject to the total of such credits and HomeCaring periods not exceeding 20 years.

So, for example, a person might receive a maximum pension based on 20 years paid PRSI contributions, 5 years jobseeker credits, and 15 years HomeCaring Credits (before or after 1994), over a 50 year period and qualify for a maximum rate pension, despite additional gaps of up to 10 years. Those with fewer contributions will have a pro-rata entitlement. For example, someone with 18 years PRSI contributions and 18 years homecaring may qualify for a 90% contributory pension.

As the Deputy has pointed out, the National Pensions Framework proposals would have treated homemaking credits and ordinary credits with a standard approach. However, while it is true they would be counted in the same manner, the conditions of their awarding significantly differed. Under the Framework, homemaking credits would only have had effect from 1994, with both types of credits being limited to 10 years, and outcomes for women under this model would have been significantly worse than those for men. It was decided, therefore, that there should be a rebalancing of the proposed TCA formula, with up to 20 years homemaking periods being recognised under TCA2012, for periods both before and after 1994.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Illness Benefit Appeals**

499. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if eligibility will be reviewed in the case of a person (details supplied); if the case will be reviewed with a view to issuing a payment in the early future; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38708/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Illness Benefit claim from the person concerned has been processed and the original notification issued to inform the customer that he did not qualify for payment under the scheme. Unfortunately, the incorrect disallowance reason was entered onto the notification letter and the Department sincerely apologises for any upset this may have caused.

An updated letter has issued to the person concerned to inform the customer that he does not qualify for payment under the scheme as a result of insufficient PRSI contributions.

Should the person concerned be in need of financial assistance, he should contact his local Community Welfare Service at his local Intreo Centre. Should he have any further information to support his Illness Benefit claim, my Department will be happy to consider that so that a further review can be carried out.

I hope this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

### **Disability Allowance Applications**

500. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application for disability allowance by a person (details supplied); and when a decision on the case will issue. [38712/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** I confirm that my department received an application for disability allowance from this gentleman on 20 August 2018. On completion of the necessary investigations on all aspects of the claim a decision will be made and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

The processing time for individual disability allowance claims may vary in accordance with their relative complexity in terms of the three main qualifying criteria, the person's circumstances and the information they provide in support of their claim.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Carer's Allowance Applications**

501. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application for carer's allowance by a person (details supplied); and when a decision on the case will issue. [38713/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a child or an adult who has such a disability that as a result they require that level of care.

An application for CA was received from the person concerned on 20 August 2018. The application is currently being processed and once completed, the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

*Question No. 502 answered with Question No. 475.*

### **Carer's Allowance Applications**

503. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38719/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a child or an adult who has such a disability that as a result they require that level of care.

An application for CA was received from the person concerned on 24 January 2018.

It is a condition for receipt of a CA that the person being cared for must have such a disability that as a result they require full-time care and attention.

This is defined as requiring from another person, continual supervision and frequent assistance throughout the day in connection with normal bodily functions or continual supervision in order to avoid danger to him or herself and likely to require that level of care for at least twelve months.

The evidence submitted in support of this application was examined and the deciding officer decided that this evidence did not indicate that the requirement for full-time care was satisfied.

The person concerned was notified on 20 July 2018 of this decision, the reason for it and of his right of review and appeal.

Following the submission of further evidence, CA was awarded to the person concerned on 20 September 2018 and the first payment will issue to his nominated bank account on 27 September 2018.

Arrears of allowance due from to 25 January 2018 to 26 September 2018 have also issued. The person concerned was notified of these details on 20 September 2018.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Carer's Allowance Applications**

504. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38720/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a child or an

adult who has such a disability that as a result they require that level of care.

I confirm that my department received an application for CA from the person concerned on the 9 July 2018.

The application is currently being processed and once completed, the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Carer's Allowance Review**

505. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38721/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a child or an adult who has such a disability that as a result they require that level of care.

A recent review has taken place of the means of the person concerned. The outcome of this review is that the person concerned is entitled to an increase in their CA.

First payment of their increased allowance issued on 13 September 2018.

Arrears of allowance due from 22 March 2018 issued by cheque to the person concerned on 7 September 2018.

The person concerned was notified on 7 September 2018 of this decision the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Carer's Allowance Applications**

506. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38722/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a child or an adult who has such a disability that as a result they require that level of care.

I confirm that my department received an application for CA from the person concerned on the 20 July 2018.

Additional information was requested from the person concerned on 20 September 2018. Once the information is received the application will be processed without delay and she will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Illness Benefit Applications**

507. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when an application will be processed for a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38725/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Illness Benefit claim for the person concerned has been processed and he is in receipt of his full entitlement under the Illness Benefit Scheme. All arrears owing have now been paid.

I hope this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

### **Early Retirement Scheme**

508. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a person (details supplied) can be considered for an early retirement scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38759/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** HR Division of my Department has informed me that the process for dealing with applications for Ill Health Retirement from the Civil Service is as set out in DPER Circular 22/07.

The Chief Medical Officer for the Civil Service provides advice as to whether in his opinion a civil servant is incapable on medical grounds of regular and effective service due to a current on going medical condition that is likely to be permanent.

The final decision on whether or not a civil servant is granted ill health retirement lies with the relevant appropriate authority having received the advice of the Chief Medical Officer.

### **Sign Language and Deaf Services**

509. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will report on the extension of the hours of a service (details supplied) to evenings and weekends; the number of additional hours provided for both evenings and weekends to date in 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38868/18]

510. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the additional resources provided in 2018 for a charity (details supplied); and the increase in the number of trained sign language and deaf interpreters resulting from such additional resources. [38869/18]

511. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will report on the provision of a quality assurance and registration scheme for sign language and deaf interpreters. [38870/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 509 to 511, inclusive, together.

The Sign Language Interpreting Service (SLIS), which is funded and supported by the Citizens Information Board, (CIB) is the national service for the development, promotion and delivery of sign language interpreting services to the Deaf community in Ireland.



CIB has allocated a budget of €676,000 to SLIS for 2018. This includes over €300,000 in additional funds to expand its activities in order to deliver on the commitments set out in the National Disability Inclusion Strategy 2017 – 2021.

To date, four additional permanent part-time interpreters and a part time Administrator have been recruited to work, which has allowed for the extension of service hours. Its hours of operation were extended to evenings and weekends on a phased basis from 1 March, 2018 to 1 September, 2018. As of beginning September, the opening hours of the IRIS service have been extended by 18 hours per week. The additional hours are as follows

9.00 to 9.30 (Mon to Friday)

13.00 to 14.00 (Mon to Friday)

17.00 to 18.30 (Mon to Friday)

10.00 to 13.00 (Saturday)

A further extension of hours is planned for 2019.

SLIS is currently recruiting a Quality Development Officer to develop a quality assurance and registration scheme for interpreters. It is expected that this post will be in place by November. The Quality Development Officer will work with SLIS' key stakeholders to research, develop and deliver a national registration scheme for sign language interpreters. S/he will also develop continuous professional development and training to support the provision of a high quality sign language interpreting service.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Pension Provisions**

512. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her estimate as to the cost of an auto enrolment scheme in each of the years 2022 to 2028 to cover both administration costs and the cost of the State of paying €1 for each €3 paid into a pension scheme by a member; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38890/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Pensions reform is a Government priority and the plans to achieve this are set out in the Roadmap for Pensions Reform 2018-2023, which was published last February. Among the key commitments contained in this plan is to develop, by 2022, a new 'Automatic Enrolment' (AE) supplementary retirement savings system for employees without pensions coverage.

AE will see a transition from the current and purely voluntary supplementary pension system to one which will, subject to certain parameters, automatically enrol employees into a quality assured retirement savings system. This reform, where the saver will maintain the freedom of choice to opt-out, will encourage long term saving and asset accumulation amongst those who may otherwise suffer a reduction in living standards at retirement. It will increase the wellbeing, financial security and independence of future retirees.

Last month, the Government published a 'Strawman' proposal for an AE supplementary retirement savings system and commenced a public consultation process on the design and operational structure of the AE system. The 'Strawman' proposal is a high level draft proposal designed to prompt and generate discussion and improve ideas. It should not, in any way, be construed as Government's confirmation of what form AE will ultimately take.

The goal of publishing the 'Strawman' is to help interested parties conceptualise plausible approaches to AE and to facilitate a focused policy debate around key design issues, such as administrative arrangements and organisational approach, target membership, minimum contribution rates and State financial incentives.

The feedback received during the consultation process will be used to inform future Government decisions and assist in determining a preferred operational structure and design parameters for AE. To this end, as the 'Roadmap for Pensions Reform' makes clear, further detailed evidence building is required to identify the potential costs attached to any options considered. Accordingly, it is not possible at this juncture to estimate such costs. These costs should become more apparent once this work is complete and preferred options are being fully advanced.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Library Services Staff**

513. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the reason for the delay in the filling of job vacancies (details supplied) for a service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38276/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Under section 159 of the Local Government Act 2001, each Chief Executive is responsible for the staffing and organisational arrangements necessary for carrying out the functions of the local authorities for which he or she is responsible.

My Department has approved Kerry County Council's Library Service Workforce Plan.

The delegated sanction conveyed by my Department to the County Council covers posts that become vacant within the agreed workforce plan numbers, including mobile library drivers.

### **Housing Estates**

514. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when he plans to invite proposals for the next round of the national taking in charge scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38278/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** 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 €10 million in funding, developments subject to valid taking-in-charge applications were eligible for inclusion in the associated call for funding proposals. Ultimately, €7.5 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, including through coordination with capital works by Irish Water.

In addition, the National Development Plan includes provision of €31 million for the period 2018-2021 for DPI, demonstrating the Government's commitment to transition from the pilot phase under NTICI to a programme phase.

My Department intends to write to local authorities to advise them of the future funding arrangements for DPI-type housing estates that are not taken in charge, following publication of the review report on the 2016 NTICI.

### **Land Development Agency**

515. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the way in which housing waiting lists are to be met in the context of the Land Development Agency operating a 10% ceiling on public owned building land to be used for social housing purposes; his views on whether the waiting list figures indicate a housing boom would be required to meet the demand; if local authorities will be required to acquire building land via the land development agency for the purpose of meeting social housing needs; if acquisitions and rezoning will take place independently of the Land Development Agency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38319/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** The new Land Development Agency, which was established earlier this month, 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, including the provision of social and affordable housing.

To support the work of the LDA, the Government has agreed that in addition to the statutory requirement that 10% of lands being developed for housing purposes be reserved for social housing under Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), there will also be a new requirement requiring that 30% of public lands are reserved for affordable housing purposes, thereby ensuring more housing supply at affordable prices and rents that will progressively ease the demands being placed on our social housing delivery process. Additional social housing supply that becomes available through the activities of the LDA will be subject to the existing social housing allocation systems currently operated by local authorities.

It should be noted that Part V is just one of a range of mechanisms through which a significantly increased level of social housing is being delivered. Overall, over the course of 2016/17, Rebuilding Ireland has supported the delivery of over 12,700 built, bought or long-term leased social housing homes, in addition to a further 32,000 flexible housing solutions delivered under the Housing Assistance Payment and Rental Accommodation Schemes. In total, almost 45,000 individuals and families have had their housing needs met over a 2-year period.

The scale of this delivery has been such that housing waiting lists are falling markedly. Details on the number of households qualified for social housing support in each local authority are provided in the statutory Summary of Social Housing Assessments (SSHA), which has been carried out on an annual basis since 2016. Although the full SSHA 2018 report has not yet been published, the number of qualified households recorded on local authority lists shows a drop from 85,799 in 2017 to 71,858 in 2018, a reduction of over 16% in one year alone.

As regards land acquisition and planning and zoning functions in general, legislation being brought forward later this Autumn for publication in early 2019 will set out the general statutory framework within which the LDA will be expected to operate, including interactions with local

authorities and the planning process. However, I have no plans to require that local authorities that may need to acquire building land for social housing purposes would be obliged to do so solely via the LDA. Nonetheless, there will clearly be opportunities for both local authorities and the LDA to work together in implementing Government policy in relation to the planning, housing and sustainable urban development policies contained in Project Ireland 2040 and the National Planning Framework in particular.

Finally, the zoning of land for development purposes is a reserved function of the elected members, which is distinct from the general land and property acquisition functions of local authorities and commercial state bodies, including the Land Development Agency.

### **Housing Loans**

516. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the reason the initial practice of enabling members of the public to transfer approval under the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme between local authorities was altered to now require applicants to make repeat applications in each local authority area in which they are considering buying a dwelling. [38346/18]

517. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to enable persons that have been approved for a Rebuilding Ireland home loan from one local authority to draw it down from another authority (details supplied). [38347/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 516 and 517 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. This has always been part of the application process for the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan since its launch and there has been no change in this regard.

Applications for the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan cannot be transferred between local authorities as the final decision on whether to approve a loan application is made by the credit committee in each area. This decision is taken in accordance with the regulations, having regard to the recommendations made by the Housing Agency.

### **Seaweed Harvesting Licences**

518. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if traditional seaweed harvesters must now register by 2019 in order to retain their seaweed licence; and if so, his plans to roll-out an information campaign to raise awareness of this new requirement. [38351/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English):** I took the opportunity in June, at this year's "Our Ocean Wealth" summit, to clarify the position in relation to the legal interaction between applications to my Department for licences to harvest wild seaweed and existing seaweed harvesting rights.

The position is that my Department cannot licence seaweed harvesting in an area where there is an existing right to harvest seaweed. I also clarified that existing seaweed rights holders can continue to exercise their right to harvest seaweed and do not require consent under the 1933 Foreshore Act.

Accordingly, harvesters may continue to harvest seaweed as they have done for many years. They must, however, as has also been the case for many years, respect relevant national and European legislative environmental requirements when harvesting wild seaweed.

### **Local Authority Housing Rents**

519. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if public sector pension deductions are classified as a statutory declaration in the calculation of rent for local authority dwellings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38355/18]

520. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the method of calculation of the differential rent for local authorities and voluntary housing bodies is absolutely identical; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38356/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 519 and 520 together.

Current local authority rent differential schemes generally set out that assessable income is net of statutory deductions such as income tax, PRSI, universal social charge, pension deductions, etc, which is in line with the Household Means Policy, which local authorities must use in assessing an applicant's eligibility for social housing in the first instance.

In respect of tenants in Approved Housing Body (AHB) homes that are funded under the Capital Advanced Leasing Facility (CALF)/Payment and Availability (P&A) arrangements, the differential rent scheme of the relevant local authority is applied by the AHB. In homes funded under the Capital Loan and Subsidy Scheme tenants pay a rent to be determined by the AHB, subject to a minimum set out by my Department. In AHB homes funded under the Capital Assistance Scheme, tenants pay an economic or reasonable rent (such tenants may sometimes avail of Rent Supplement from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection).

Section 31 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 enables the Minister to introduce a national differential rents framework which will harmonise local authority rents, including income disregards. Considerable work has been carried out by my Department in developing a draft framework, and this work is now being examined further in the light of the broader commitment given in the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, to review the disparate systems of differential rent for social housing in place across local authorities. The overall objective is to ensure that housing supports are fair and sustainable, prioritise those on lowest incomes and avoid creating social welfare traps that may prevent people from either returning to work or to the private housing market. It is expected that the review will be completed shortly. It is intended that the meaning of assessable income, and income disregards, will be standardised across the country in the proposed national framework.

### **Local Authority Housing Provision**

521. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the sanctions in place for local authorities not meeting their new build or vacant property turnaround targets in Rebuilding Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38358/18]

522. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the target turnaround of local authority properties from void to occupancy; the

sanctions in place when these targets are not met; the incentives on offer to ensure targets are met; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38359/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 521 and 522 together.

The setting and publishing of social housing targets for 2018 and 2018-2021 reflects a drive towards increased transparency and accountability. Rebuilding Ireland is modelled on blended delivery across the main programmes of build, acquisition and leasing.

While it is recognised that the pace of delivery, particularly under build activity, may vary from local authority to local authority, the range of delivery options available, combined with the relevant support structures, provide the necessary resources for local authorities. All stakeholders are expected to be fully mobilised towards meeting the targets for 2018, and subsequent years.

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

Over the period 2016 to 2021, the national target is for the delivery of an additional 50,000 social housing units through Build, Acquisition and Leasing Schemes.

The ambition is for 33,500 of these units to be delivered through build programmes including Part V and Voids; for 6,500 to be delivered through Acquisition programmes including the Housing Agency Acquisition Programme; and for the remaining 10,000 units to be delivered under a range of leasing initiatives.

The Voids Programme, introduced in 2014 by my Department, provides additional support to local authorities in preparing vacant units for re-letting. The maximum funding provided for each unit under this programme is €30,000. In addition, the Derelicts Programme provides funding to remediate more seriously derelict social houses. There is also another smaller 2 into 1 programme, which focuses on converting vacant old bedsit type accommodation into one bedroom units. Together, under these three programmes, exchequer funding is provided to support local authorities in remediating vacant units. The exchequer funding provided by the Department is additional to the support that local authorities provide themselves towards such work.

The Rebuilding Ireland target for Department funded Voids across the period 2016-2021 is 3,459. By end 2017 some 4,065 voids had been delivered under the programme, in addition to local authority self funded voids and re-lets, demonstrating significant activity across all local authority areas.

Management of stock at local level, re-letting programmes and timeframes are all operational matters for each local authority to co-ordinate and execute. In creating more visibility around targets and delivery against targets, it is my expectation that performance in the delivery of social housing homes at local authority level can be tracked and overseen effectively, particularly by the elected members.

## **Fire Safety**

523. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Gov-

ernment the status of actions taken further to the publication of a report into fire damage at an estate (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38396/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** In July 2015, a review was undertaken by an independent fire expert to develop a framework for general application, in the interest of supporting owners and residents living in developments where concerns regarding non-compliance with fire safety requirements arise. This review included a case study at the estate referred to by the Deputy.

This review was completed and the ‘Framework for Enhancing Fire Safety in dwellings where concerns arise’, was published on 25 August 2017. Based on the legal advice received it was not possible to publish the Case Study.

The Framework contains the following:

- an explanation of the statutory provisions in respect of fire safety, namely the Building Control Acts 1990 to 2014 and the Fire Services Acts 1981 & 2003, and the respective responsibilities of owners, designers, builders, occupants, local authorities;
- a range of actions that may reduce risk and improve the level of fire safety where deficiencies arise in dwelling houses, apartments and/or the common areas of apartment buildings; and
- a fire risk assessment methodology for professional advisors to prioritise the remedial actions, if any, that may need to be carried out on a dwelling.

The Framework 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. In addition to owners and occupants, the Framework will also be of assistance to professional advisors both in developing strategies to improve fire safety and in developing strategies to enable the continued occupation in advance of undertaking the necessary works to ensure compliance with the relevant Building Regulations.

The framework is available on my Department’s website at the following link:

*[http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/framework\\_for\\_enhancing\\_fire\\_safety\\_in\\_dwellings.pdf](http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/framework_for_enhancing_fire_safety_in_dwellings.pdf)*.

Additionally, in the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower tragedy in June 2017, and in recognition of fears expressed for fire safety, I asked my Department’s National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management to convene and coordinate a Task Force to lead a re-appraisal of our approach to fire safety in Ireland. The work of the Task Force has now been completed and its findings are reflected in “Fire Safety in Ireland: Report of the Fire Safety Task Force”, which is available on the Department’s website at the following link:

*[https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/fire\\_safety\\_in\\_ireland\\_-\\_report\\_summary\\_of\\_conclusions\\_and\\_recommendations.pdf](https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/fire_safety_in_ireland_-_report_summary_of_conclusions_and_recommendations.pdf)*.

## **Rent Controls**

524. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on whether rent in towns in west County Meath are too high; when rent caps will be imposed in these towns; and the reason it has not been done to date. [38427/18]

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

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

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

(ii) The average rent for tenancies registered in the area with the RTB in the last quarter must be above the average national rent (the National Standardised Rent in the RTB’s Rent Index Report) in the last quarter (€1,060 per month in Q1 2018).

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

Further information on Rent Pressure Zones and designations is available on my Department’s website at <https://www.housing.gov.ie/PUBLICATIONS> by searching ‘rent pressure zones – information’ in the “Housing Publications” section.

There are 6 local electoral areas in County Meath - Kells, Navan, Trim, Ratoath, Ashbourne, and Laytown-Bettystown. Three of these in the East of the County - Ratoath, Ashbourne and Laytown-Bettystown - were designated as Rent Pressure Zones in January 2017.

The data from the Rent Index Report for Q1 2018 relating to the 3 local electoral areas in County Meath which have not been designated as Rent Pressure Zones is detailed in the following table:

Local Electoral Area	Quarters 7%	Average 2018 Q1 (€)
Kells	2	794.35
Navan	5	978.63
Trim	4	989.83

In each of the three County Meath Electoral Areas which have not been designated as RPZs, the average monthly rent is below the national standardised rent of €1,060 per month. Therefore, none of these Local Electoral Areas meet the criteria for designation at present.

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

### Housing Adaptation Grant Expenditure



525. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the budget spent, unspent and or allocated to date in 2018 for housing adaptations for older persons and persons with a disability living in private houses by county in tabular form. [38436/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** My Department provides funding under the suite of Housing Adaptation Grant Schemes for Older People and People with a Disability, in respect of private housing. The schemes are 80% funded by my Department, with a 20% contribution from the local authorities.

For 2018, the financial provision for the Schemes is €66.25 million, comprising €53 million exchequer funding and €13.25 million from local authority resources, an increase of some 11% on 2017. Funding for these schemes has been increasing year on year since 2014 and 9,080 households benefitted in 2017, with 10,000 expected to benefit in 2018.

Over the course of the year, my Department works closely with the local authorities to monitor spend and to achieve a full drawdown of the available funding. This allows any underspends to be redistributed to local authorities with high levels of grant activity who seek additional funding.

The following table contains details of the 2018 allocations and expenditure to date for each local authority:

Local Authority	Full 2018 Allocation	Expenditure to Date
Carlow	€1,559,146	€1,085,641
Cavan	€1,457,964	€1,043,593
Clare	€2,141,596	€1,473,340
Cork County	€5,617,405	€2,272,979
Cork City	€1,752,056	€703,525
Donegal	€1,186,107	€541,135
Dublin City	€7,526,784	€6,289,785
DLaoire/Rathdown	€2,043,336	€509,983
Fingal	€2,976,232	€1,311,665
Galway County	€2,358,810	€1,100,150
Galway City	€1,100,374	€976,894
Kerry	€2,312,004	€1,443,302
Kildare	€3,012,220	€1,369,559
Kilkenny	€1,869,630	€753,571
Laois	€1,110,130	€321,080
Leitrim	€489,993	€99,368
Limerick	€3,243,814	€1,549,251
Longford	€794,920	€682,810
Louth	€1,498,067	€632,839
Mayo	€3,111,216	€1,019,590
Meath	€2,035,699	€1,330,238
Monaghan	€1,237,425	€1,261,206
Offaly	€1,203,009	€498,279
Roscommon	€1,039,559	€243,676
Sligo	€1,367,534	€1,149,274

Local Authority	Full 2018 Allocation	Expenditure to Date
South Dublin	€2,168,650	€956,569
Tipperary	€3,130,163	€2,244,163
Waterford	€1,957,519	€684,423
Westmeath	€1,247,360	€725,310
Wexford	€2,165,026	€1,457,641
Wicklow	€1,536,252	€203,210

### Local Authority Members' Remit

526. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the review of the role of elected members of local authorities; when the report will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38464/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan):** On 21 June 2018 I announced that I was commissioning a review of the role of elected members of local authorities. I appointed Ms. Sara Moorhead SC to conduct this review, which is being informed by input from my Department as well as the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

The review is now underway. Ms. Moorhead has held a number of meetings with both Departments as well as councillors' representative organisations. My Department has also received submissions for consideration from key stakeholders and will shortly be undertaking wider consultation with local authorities as well as individual councillors.

The review is due to produce an interim report within five months of the commencement of its work, with the timing of a final report to be considered thereafter. When the review is completed, its findings will be the subject of discussion between both Departments. It will be submitted thereafter for the consideration of the Government and published in due course.

### Departmental Expenditure

527. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the expenditure savings that are earmarked for his Department for 2019 that are not accounted for in the mid-year expenditure report or are not included in the fiscal space calculations for 2019. [38489/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** The Mid-Year Expenditure Report 2018, published by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform last July, sets out expenditure ceilings in respect of my Department in 2019, including an increase of €402 million in capital expenditure over 2018. The figures set out in the Report do not include expenditure savings targets specifically earmarked for my Department. The specific capital and current allocations for my Department's programmes next year will be decided in the context of Budget 2019.

### Housing Assistance Payment

528. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to increase housing assistance payment, HAP, rates for single persons in County

Meath to assist in meeting the new market realities; and if so, when the increase will be made to same. [38503/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Under the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP), a tenant sources their own accommodation. The tenancy agreement is between the tenant and the landlord and is covered by the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 (as amended). The accommodation sourced by tenants should be within the prescribed maximum HAP rent limits, which are based on the household size and the rental market within that area.

Each local authority has statutory discretion to agree to a HAP payment up to 20% above the prescribed maximum rent limit in circumstances where it is necessary, because of local rental market conditions, to secure appropriate accommodation for a household that requires it. It is a matter for the local authority to determine if the application of the flexibility is warranted on a case by case basis.

My Department is aware that some HAP recipients are making payments directly to their landlords, beyond the amount of HAP being paid on their behalf. There is no legislative provision precluding HAP supported households contributing towards the monthly rent to their landlord. Local Authorities have a responsibility to ensure that tenancies are sustainable and are advised not to provide HAP support to tenancies where the household would not be in a position to meet the rental costs being sought.

At the end of Q2 2018, 21.3% of the total number of households being supported by HAP were benefitting from the additional flexibility (excluding those households accommodated through the homeless HAP arrangements in Dublin). In those cases, the average rate of discretionary payment being used was 15.7% above rent limits provided. In the Meath County Council area, at the end of Q2 2018, 46.6% of households had benefitted from additional discretion with the average rate being 14.4% above the relevant rent limits.

The data available to my Department indicates that the current rent limits and the flexibility to exceed those rent limits provide local authorities with sufficient capacity to assist households in securing rented accommodation that meets their needs.

Increasing the HAP rent limits in particular local authority areas could have further inflationary effects, leading to a detrimental impact on the wider rental market, including for those households who are not receiving HAP support.

My Department closely monitors the level of discretion being used by local authorities, taking into consideration other sources of data, including Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) rent data published on a quarterly basis. I am satisfied that the maximum rent limits, together with the additional flexibility available to local authorities, are generally sufficient to support the effective operation of the HAP scheme. However, I will continue to keep the matter under review.

### **Capital Assistance Scheme**

529. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to a delay in a housing project (details supplied); if the project will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38512/18]

544. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the reason a project (details supplied) has been delayed in view of the fact that funding has been approved, a design team is in place and the housing association concerned has a

track record of delivering in the area concerned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38827/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 529 and 544 together.

While this project is being developed by an approved housing body (AHB), its approval is a matter for Limerick City and County Council, in line with the arrangements under the Capital Assistance Scheme. At the request of the Council, my Department issued initial project approval in February 2017 for this project, involving the construction of 10 units of accommodation. This approval was subject to the project being advanced to the satisfaction of the Council.

I understand that the Council is working with the AHB on the design of the scheme and, at this stage, my Department is awaiting more detailed project plans. I am keen to see this and other such projects brought forward with completed designs as soon as possible and, accordingly, all parties should work to agree a design approach at the earliest possible opportunity.

### **European Court of Justice Rulings**

530. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the working group established to examine the judgment of the European Court of Justice regarding the construction of one-off houses also known as the Flemish Decree; the reason the deadline for this group to report back has been missed by almost a year; when the group will report back; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38538/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** 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 senior representatives from my Department and planning authorities, was established in May 2017 to review and, where necessary, recommend changes to the 2005 Planning Guidelines on Sustainable Rural Housing, issued under section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended. The objective is to ensure 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.

The Working Group has concluded its deliberations 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 revisions to the 2005 Guidelines that take account of the relevant ECJ judgment to planning authorities by the end of this year.

### **Social and Affordable Housing**

531. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if any local authority in 2016, 2017 or to date in 2018 sought a derogation from applying the 10% social housing levy within their administrative areas; if so, the name of the authority, the development in question and the compensation received; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38553/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** I am not aware of any local authority seeking such a derogation and I as Minister have no power, under Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, to give such a deroga-

tion.

Part V provides (section 94) that a planning authority's housing strategy shall provide that as a general policy a specified percentage, not being more than 10 per cent, of the land zoned for residential use, or for a mixture of residential and other uses, shall be reserved for the provision of housing for the purposes of social or affordable housing (planning authorities have been informed by my Department, however, that they should seek to focus on social housing under Part V agreements).

It also provides (section 95) that a planning authority must include objectives in the development plan in order to secure the implementation of the housing strategy, including objectives requiring that a specified percentage of land zoned solely for residential use, or for a mixture of residential and other uses, be made available for the provision of social and affordable housing.

Section 95(1)(d) however provides that in order to counteract undue segregation in housing between persons of different social backgrounds, the planning authority may indicate in respect of any particular area referred zoned solely for residential use or, for a mixture of residential and other uses, that there is no requirement for social or affordable housing in respect of that area, or that a lower percentage than that specified in the housing strategy may instead be required.

### **Irish Water Staff**

532. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans for the redeployment of staff who work in the water services section of a local authority, now that Irish Water has taken full responsibility for the provision and administration of all matters in relation to the provision of commercial and domestic water; his further plans to redeploy some staff within the public sector to Irish Water; the estimated impact this will have on the individual staff members' terms and conditions of employment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38617/18]

**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. Irish Water has entered into service level agreements (SLAs) with each local authority for the provision of water services. Staff members working under these arrangements remain local authority employees while continuing to perform key water services functions with local authorities acting as agents of Irish Water. Staffing arrangements are an operational matter for Irish Water and local authorities within the context of the SLA arrangements currently in place.

In January 2018, I requested that a process of engagement be undertaken involving Ervia / Irish Water, the County and City Management Association and the Irish Congress of Trade Unions to address proposals for a transformation process leading towards Irish Water integrating its operations to become the single public water services authority. This followed from a process of consideration by Ervia where it examined the options to meet its regulatory and business plan targets and concluded that the public water system would benefit from greater integration of operations into a single utility. Following this consideration, my Department was informed that the Ervia Board had decided in principle not to renew the SLAs with local authorities beyond 2025 when they are due to expire, and that it would work with local authorities and unions to move to the integrated model within the life of the current Business Plan which runs to 2021. The Government noted this position in September 2017.

I have met will all of the parties involved and requested that they would participate in dia-

logue with each other. This is on the understanding that the current SLAs between Irish Water and local authorities will remain in place until an alternative is agreed. It is also on the understanding that no compulsory redundancies would arise as an outcome from the transformation process. Furthermore, the Water Services (No.2) Act 2013 provides a mechanism for dealing with the transfer of staff in situations where Service Level Agreements come to an end. This provides for the protection of terms and conditions and superannuation benefits of staff in such circumstances.

In May 2018 I asked the Director General of the Workplace Relations Commission to undertake an exercise with the parties and to report to me on the key issues of concern arising. I received this report on 19 September 2018. A copy of the report is available on the website of the WRC at the following weblink.

I will now reflect on the Report and consider the next steps to be taken, taking account of the fact that water services are essential to the daily lives of our citizens and to our economy and the consequent need to ensure that the best and most appropriate arrangements possible are in place for the delivery of these vital services.

### **Local Government Reform**

533. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the procedure will be put in place to designate Drogheda as a city in view of the fact that it meets the EU criteria for city status and in further view of the fact that its location, population and strategic importance make it suitable to the role of regional capital of the north east; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38630/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan):** Local government areas are specified in primary legislation. The Local Government Act 2001 (as amended) currently provides for 3 cities, Cork, Dublin and Galway, and for each of these to have a city council.

If an additional city council were to be established, this would have significant implications for the county in which the area concerned is situated, particularly loss of functions of the relevant county council. Provision for this and in relation to other consequential matters would have to be made in the relevant legislation. I have no plans for legislation in this regard.

### **Referendum Campaigns**

534. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the timetable for the holding of referendums agreed on 26 September 2017 relating to voting at 16 and extending the franchise at presidential elections; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38634/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan):** The Government announced on 26 September 2017 that it had agreed an indicative timetable for the holding of a number of referendums on proposals for amendments to the Constitution arising from the work of the Citizens’ Assembly and the Convention on the Constitution.

In this context, my Department will be responsible for bringing forward appropriate Constitution Amendment Bills on reducing the voting age to 16 and on extending the franchise at

Presidential elections to Irish citizens resident outside the State. These referendums will address two of the recommendations of the Convention on the Constitution. Work is being progressed in my Department to inform the development of the appropriate Constitution Amendment Bills.

Subject to the passage of the Constitution Amendment Bills by the Houses of the Oireachtas, it is proposed that these referendums will be held on the same day as the local and European elections which will take place in late May 2019.

### **Social and Affordable Housing Provision**

535. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the process involved in releasing funds and agreeing the proposal for 100% social and affordable housing on the Shanganagh Castle site in Shankill, County Dublin; the way in which the promised announcement of an affordable housing scheme relates to same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38639/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** The development of major local authority residential sites in Dublin, where undersupply and affordability issues are being experienced most acutely, is a major priority for the Government. We are working with all Dublin local authorities, including Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council (DLRCC), to see their sites brought forward as quickly as possible, with the optimum tenure mix and ensuring the greatest value for money for the taxpayer. It is, of course, in the first instance, a matter for the local authority and its elected members to agree the optimal approach to development and financing.

Shanganagh Castle is an excellent site, close to amenities and public transport and it is very positive that the Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown Council Members have come together, on a cross-party basis, with a view to achieving the optimal housing outcome for this site which can deliver over 500 new homes on a mixed-tenure basis.

In terms of affordable housing for purchase, it can be pursued in accordance with the provisions of Part V of the Housing Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2009, which are now commenced. Affordable housing for rental can be pursued under the cost rental option being piloted on two sites in DLRCC and Dublin City Council. Significant modelling of these approaches have been carried out by the National Development Finance Agency (NDFA), working with local authorities and my Department. In addition, my Department has engaged extensively with the European Investment Bank (EIB) with regard to exploring financing options and also leveraging the Bank's vast experience and knowledge in developing and supporting public housing projects in other Member States. Local authorities have also engaged directly with the EIB for the same purpose.

I understand that DLRCC is currently working with the NDFA to financially model and compare the optimal development approaches for the Shanganagh Castle site. I look forward to receipt of a report from the Council, once this work has been finalised. For my part, I have made it clear that direct Exchequer funding will be provided for any social housing element of this mixed-tenure development.

To further support the delivery of affordable housing on such local authority sites, additional funding is being provided for enabling infrastructure via the Serviced Sites Fund. When local authority co-funding is included, an overall minimum investment of €100 million will be provided over the next four years to those sites that require infrastructural investment in order for them to be brought into use for affordable housing. At this point, applications for funding

under the Serviced Sites Fund have been received in my Department and are currently being assessed. While the Shanganagh site was not included by DLRCC at this time, it may feature in a submission under a future call for proposals, once the infrastructural master-plan is available.

Finally, Woodbrook-Shanganagh is also a designated 'major urban housing development site'. In recognition of this, I am keen to support its development and have committed funding of just over €4m under the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund to build public infrastructure which will open up the site for early development.

My Department and I will continue to work with Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council on the development of this mixed-tenure housing project at Shanganagh Castle, to help ensure the optimal delivery outcome.

### **Local Authority Housing Data**

536. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of proposals for social housing from local authorities being processed by his Department by local authority, date of receipt of proposal, stage the proposal is at and expected date of sign-off; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38640/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** The number of proposals for social housing from local authorities approved and being processed by my Department is set out in the Social Housing Construction Status Report, which is published on a quarterly basis. The report covering the period up to end Quarter 1 2018 is available on the Rebuilding Ireland website at the following link:

*<http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-publishes-social-housing-construction-status-report-q1-2018/>*

and provides project details of the social housing construction pipeline in place at that time for all local authorities, including those being delivered in partnership with approved housing bodies.

The report reflects an increase in the scale of the social housing build programme, with 930 schemes (or phases of schemes) in place, delivering 14,813 homes. Of this total, 2,964 units have already been delivered during 2016, 2017 and Q1 2018; a further 3,932 are on site and under construction, almost 2,000 more are at the final pre-construction stage and the remainder are progressing through the various stages of planning, design and procurement.

The timing, delivery and tenanting of these schemes is a matter in the first place for each local authority. I am pleased to see the continued progress with new projects, building on what has been already delivered. I am keen, however, that all local authorities further accelerate their programmes and I have assured them that the necessary funding to support their activity is available.

### **Tenant Purchase Scheme Review**

537. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when he will finalise a report on the review of the tenant purchase scheme (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38661/18]

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



The position as outlined in the details supplied remains the current position. However, I expect to be in a position in the very near future to publish the outcome of the review.

### **Proposed Legislation**

538. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to update the Fire Services Act 1981; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38663/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English):** The Fire Services Act 1981 provides for the establishment of fire authorities and the organisation of fire services and for life safety, fire fighting, the protection and rescue of persons and property and related matters. The Act was amended in 2003 by the Licensing of Indoor Events Act 2003, primarily to strengthen the powers of fire authorities to prosecute summary offences and to update provisions in relation to penalties and service of notices.

The Fire Services Acts 1981 and 2003 are generally considered fit for purpose. However, the Report of the Fire Safety Task Force, established in the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower tragedy and overseen by my Department's National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management, makes a number of recommendations for enhancing the current fire safety system.

The statutory responsibilities of the "person having control" of premises, as set out in section 18 of the Fire Services Act 1981, emerged as a key area of focus for the Task Force and it proposes a number of amendments to the current regulatory system in order to enhance and ensure fire safety in certain categories of buildings, in particular in certain forms of residential/sleeping accommodation identified as a priority area for fire safety efforts. The legislative amendments proposed by the Task Force seek to clarify and simplify the statutory obligations imposed on the 'person having control' as well as introducing a number of new reporting mechanisms through which the fire safety arrangements in place in premises and sleeping accommodation are brought to the attention of the public. To ensure that "persons having control" of premises take action to fulfil their statutory obligations, the Task Force recommends also that a revised focus on enforcement be put in place in parallel to eliminate any disregard for fire safety considerations.

I have accepted the Task Force's recommendations and have requested the Management Board of the National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management to carry through the recommendations of the report within my direct ambit and to oversee and report on the implementation of other recommendations.

Copies of both the Report and the Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations are available on my Department's website at the following links:

Fire Safety Task Force Report:

*[http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/fire\\_safety\\_in\\_ireland\\_-\\_report\\_of\\_the\\_fire\\_safety\\_task\\_force.pdf](http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/fire_safety_in_ireland_-_report_of_the_fire_safety_task_force.pdf)*

Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations:

*[http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/fire\\_safety\\_in\\_ireland\\_-\\_report\\_summary\\_of\\_conclusions\\_and\\_recommendations.pdf](http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/fire_safety_in_ireland_-_report_summary_of_conclusions_and_recommendations.pdf)*

## **Youth Homelessness Strategy**

539. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the measures he is taking along with the Minister Children and Youth Affairs to ensure that no child spends longer than six months in emergency accommodation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37911/18]

**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. The provision of accommodation and related services for homeless persons rests with individual housing authorities.

Key to reducing the numbers of families in emergency accommodation is increasing the supply of social housing. Rebuilding Ireland targets the delivery of an additional 50,000 social homes. However, more immediately, my Department is working closely with the local authorities on the delivery of family hubs to provide more appropriate emergency accommodation for families. Providing accommodation in family hubs allows for the provision of better supports to families experiencing homelessness. In particular, while residing in a hub, families are supported by the local authorities and the operators of the hubs to exit to an independent tenancy.

A record total of 4,729 adults, along with their associated dependents, exited homelessness into an independent tenancy during 2017. My Department is working closely with the local authorities to increase further the numbers of exits. Earlier this year, my Department made the Homeless HAP Place Finder Service available to each of the 31 local authorities. This is a targeted service to support families and individuals experiencing homelessness in securing a HAP-supported tenancy in the private rented sector.

The welfare of families and children is an absolute priority for my Department and I work closely with the Minister of Children and Youth Affairs to ensure that robust child protection measures, inspection arrangements and health supports are in place in emergency accommodation for families.

## **Regeneration Projects Funding**

540. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if an application has been received from Louth County Council in regard to urban regeneration funding; if so, the details of same; and when he expects decisions to be made on the projects. [38695/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** I launched the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) in July, as part of Project Ireland 2040, to support the compact growth and sustainable development of Ireland's five cities, regional drivers and other large urban centres. The URDF is designed to leverage a greater proportion of residential and commercial development, supported by infrastructure, services and amenities, within the existing built-up areas of our larger urban settlements.

My Department has responsibility for implementing the URDF, which has an allocation of €2 billion over the 10-year period of the National Development Plan (NDP) to 2027. The first call for proposals under the URDF is currently open and will run until 28 September. My Department has not as yet received applications for funding. Assessment of proposals will begin once the deadline has closed and decisions will be announced as soon as the assessment process

is completed.

Proposals under the Fund, which will operate on a competitive, bid-based Exchequer grant basis, are required to demonstrate that they will be:

- Innovative and transformational urban regeneration projects;
- Public-sector led and with the option of community and/or private sector partners;
- Matched by at least 25% direct funding from other public and/or private sources;
- Based on a minimum bid of €2m;
- A catalyst for development that would not otherwise occur; and
- Likely to leverage significant further public and private sector investment.

Detailed information on the URDF and the application process is available at the following links: [www.gov.ie/urdf](http://www.gov.ie/urdf) and [www.npf.ie/urdf](http://www.npf.ie/urdf).

### **Local Authority Housing Data**

541. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of local authority new builds by local authority to be completed and ready for occupation by the end of 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38696/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** I have advised all local authorities of their minimum social housing targets across build, acquisition and lease both for 2018 and also for the multi-annual period to 2021. Details of the targets for each local authority can be accessed on the Rebuilding Ireland website at the following link:

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

The 2018 build target is for the delivery of almost 5,000 additional active social housing homes, including the construction of 3,800 new homes by local authorities and approved housing bodies. A strong pipeline is already in place for local authorities and approved housing bodies to deliver on these targets.

A detailed breakdown of the construction programme of new social housing build is set out in the Social Housing Construction Status Report which is published on a quarterly basis. The report covering the period up to end Quarter 1 2018 is available on the Rebuilding Ireland website at the following link:

*<http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-publishes-social-housing-construction-status-report-q1-2018/>*

and provides project details of the social housing construction pipeline in place for all local authorities, including those being delivered in partnership with approved housing bodies. The tenanting of these schemes is a matter in the first place for each local authority.

I am pleased to see the continued progress with new projects, building on what has been already delivered. I am keen, however, that all local authorities further accelerate their programmes and I have assured them that the necessary funding to support their activity is avail-

able.

### **Home Loan Scheme**

542. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if visa stamp 4 holders are eligible for the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme; if his attention has been drawn to the confusion with regard to the eligibility of visa stamp 4 holders applying for the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38737/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** The Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan (RIHL) enables credit-worthy first-time buyers to access sustainable mortgage lending to purchase new or second-hand properties or self-build in a suitable price range. As with the previous local authority loan offerings, the RIHL is available to first-time buyers only, to ensure the effective targeting of limited resources.

The final decision on loan approval is a matter for each local authority and its Credit Committee on a case-by-case basis. Decisions on all housing loan applications must be made in accordance with the statutory credit policy that underpins the scheme, in order to ensure consistency of treatment for all applicants. Under that policy, applicants must either be citizens of an EU or EEA country, or have a legal right to remain in the State on a long-term basis.

Loan applicants who are dissatisfied with a loan application decision of a local authority Credit Committee may appeal that decision to the local authority. Details of the appeals process can be obtained from the relevant local authority.

### **Home Loan Scheme**

543. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of Rebuilding Ireland home loans approved and drawn down in each local authority area in tabular form. [38781/18]

547. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of applications for loans in each local authority; the number approved and rejected, respectively; the number still being processed; the average loan amount under the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38884/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 543 and 547 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 loan applications received by each local authority.

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 Q4 2017 is available on the Department's website at the following link: [www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/house-prices-loans-and-profile-borrowers/local-authority-loan-activity](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.

In addition, the Housing Agency provides a central support service which assesses 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 on the numbers of applications that it has assessed and the most recent figures, as at the end of August, indicate that the Agency had received a total of 2,628 applications for assessment from local authorities. The table below provides information on the geographical distribution of applications received centrally by them for assessment since the scheme began:

Region	Feb - Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Total
Cork, Galway, Kildare, Louth, Meath and Wicklow	359	182	193	131	126	991
Dublin	407	214	161	115	91	988
Other	230	107	110	111	91	649
Total	996	503	464	357	308	2,628

Of the 2,628 applications received, 2,074 were deemed to be valid. Of these valid applications, 1,989 had been assessed and 1,024 of these (51%) had been recommended for approval. A breakdown by local authority of the 1,024 applications recommended for approval is set out in the following table.

Local Authority	Approved Applications
Dublin City Council	149
Fingal County Council	138
Meath County Council	91
Cork County Council	89
South Dublin County Council	79
Kildare County Council	60
Wicklow County Council	41
Cork City Council	35
Wexford County Council	30
Galway County Council	30
Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council	28
Laois County Council	26
Kerry County Council	25
Limerick City & County Council	24
Galway City Council	22
Louth County Council	19
Tipperary County Council	16
Sligo County Council	15
Carlow County Council	13
Clare County Council	13
Longford County Council	12
Donegal County Council	12
Roscommon County Council	11

Local Authority	Approved Applications
Mayo County Council	10
Westmeath County	10
Kilkenny County Council	9
Waterford City & County Council	8
Offaly County Council	6
Cavan County Council	1
Monaghan County Council	1
Leitrim County Council	1
Total	1024

The average loan amount across the 1,989 applications underwritten was €160,038.

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

*Question No. 544 answered with Question No. 529.*

### Local Authority Housing Data

545. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of Part V's delivered in 2017, by local authority; the price paid by the local authority; the details of the lease agreements; the length of leases; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38838/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** A total of 522 Part V units were delivered by local authorities and approved housing bodies (AHBs) for social housing in 2017.

There is no single dedicated Part V funding scheme administered by my Department as the mechanism for delivery of homes is a matter for the local authority in the first instance. Instead, local authorities harness the capacity of a variety of funding schemes in addition to utilising their own revenue to deliver Part V homes. Where the outcome of the Part V negotiation is for the local authority to purchase on-site or off-site homes from the developer, then one option for them is to recoup the costs through the main Social Housing Capital Investment Programme (SHCIP). Another option is to allocate the homes for delivery by an AHB who may also be working with the developer to deliver additional homes in the same development; in this scenario, the AHB may apply for Capital Advance Leasing Facility (CALF) funding (where loan funding for up to 30% of the capital cost is provided, with the AHB borrowing the balance) on the overall scheme, with the Part V homes incorporated into overall scheme costs. Finally, where the negotiation between the local authority and the developer results in a long-term lease arrangement, then there is no capital funding requirement and the homes are incorporated into the Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme (SHCEP) leasing scheme. 305 Part V units delivered in 2017 were delivered by AHBs under either the CALF scheme or SHCEP.

A Payment and Availability Agreement (P&A agreement) is the contract which forms the basis of the lease arrangement between the local authority and the AHB for the purposes of leasing a housing unit, regardless of how the housing unit is sourced. Agreements are generally for between 20 and 30 years. The basic principles behind the operation of the agreement are that the local authority identifies and nominates the tenants to be housed in these properties,

and the local authority decides the rent to be paid by the tenant to the AHB in accordance with its Differential Rent Scheme. The local authority makes payments to the AHB on a regular basis which is recouped to the local authority by my Department. These payments are generally around 92% of market rent with rent reviews indexed to CPI every three or four years.

The attached document sets out the total Part V output by delivery stream with an average cost per local authority as at end 2017.

LA	Total Part V output 2017	SHCIP Part V output 2017	Average Cost of SHCIP part V unit €	CAS Part V output 2017	Average Cost of CAS Part V unit €	CALF Part V output 2017	Average total cost of CALF Part V unit €	Average CALF Approved for CALF Part V unit €	Average annual P&A cost for CALF Part V unit €	Leased Part V unit output 2017	Average annual P&A cost €	Non DH-PLG funded Part V units output 2017
Carlow	10	10	184,395			0						0
Cavan	1	1	130,000			0						
Clare	4	4	222,500			0						0
Cork City	0	0				0						0
Cork County	7	5	179,772			0						2
Donegal	0	0				0						0
Dublin City	56	1	240,434			0	-					55
DLR	137	0				8	266,476	15,057	20,021	124	14,210	5
Fingal	101	11	206,855			66	222,464	32,511	14,431			24
Galway	34	2				32	189,287	56,474	9,670			0
Galway City	0	0	137,512			0						0
Kerry	0	0				0						0
Kildare	24	8	181,240			0						16
Kilkenny	3	0				3	93,503	13,090	6,584			0
Laois	1	1	165,000			0						0
Leitrim	0	0				0						0
Limerick	9	9	169,215			0						0
Longford	0	0				0						0
Louth	1	0				0						1
Mayo	0	0				0						0
Meath	23	0				12	233,157	61,458	15,088			11
Monaghan	5	5	206,117			0						0
Offaly	0	0				0						0
Roscommon	0	0				0						0
Sligo	6	0		6	238157	0						0
South Dublin	80	10	220,434	6	200000	36	257,496	64,328	15,346	18	13,754	10
Tipperary	0	0				0						0
Waterford	13	13	178,383			0						0
Westmeath	0	0				0						0
Wexford	6	0				6	203,846	61,154	9,384			0
Wicklow	1	1	315,000			0						0
All LAs	522	81		12		163				142		124

### Local Authority Housing Funding

546. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number and detail of requests for funding by each local authority under the serviced sites fund in 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38883/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** A call for proposals issued under the Serviced Sites Fund (SSF) on 29 June 2018. The closing date for receipt of submissions was 31 August. €75 million of Exchequer funding is being provided under the SSF to provide enabling infrastructure to facilitate the delivery of affordable homes on local authority and Housing Agency sites, in or near centres where increasing house prices and rents have created a significant affordability gap for first-time buyers and for those wishing to rent.

The call for funding is being targeted initially at eleven local authorities, where it has been identified that there is a more pressing need for affordable housing. The local authorities initially targeted are the four Dublin local authorities; Kildare, Meath, Wicklow and Louth, and Galway City; Cork City and County Councils.

Funding will be capped at €30,000 Exchequer contribution per affordable home to be delivered. When combined with the local authority contribution of at least 25% of the cost of the infrastructure bid, this will generally bring the per-unit grant to a €40,000 maximum. On this basis, there is scope to provide grant funding to at least 2,500 affordable homes facilitated under the €100m Fund.

There is €20m public funding available this year and €26.7m in 2019. Nine local authorities have submitted a total of fifteen proposals, which are currently being assessed in my Department, with the aim of working toward completing the assessments and awarding funding next month. The table below provides outline detail of the submissions received. As indicated in the initial call for proposals, my Department will consider issuing a further call for proposals in relation to funding availability over the four years of the programme.

Local Authority	Sites	Number of Affordable Units	Total Suggested Funding Requirement (Exchequer and LA Contribution) €
Cork County	1	20	1,500,000
Cork City	2	147	4,968,366
		21	1,410,551
Dublin City	3	215	7,645,415
		74	4,135,351
		83	3,975,000
DLRCC	1	50	4,537,576
Fingal	4	753	11,000,000
		74	1,500,000
		101	2,198,667



		122	3,552,500
Galway	1	45	2,174,128
Kildare	1	10	300,000
Meath	1	33	1,662,729
Wicklow	1	24	380,000
Total	15	1,772	50,940,283

*Question No. 547 answered with Question No. 543.*

### Public Sector Staff Sick Leave

548. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will address a matter regarding sick leave in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38316/18]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** While I cannot comment on individual cases or circumstances, the following sets out the position in relation to Health Appointments.

Where a sick absence is incurred due to a Health Appointment, evidence of attendance from the relevant hospital, clinic, medical practitioner is required and must be submitted to People-Point for the sick leave to be recorded as Certified. Confirmation of the appointment alone is not sufficient.

#### Doctor / Dentist / Hospital Appointments

- If a member of staff is absent due to attending a doctor/dental/hospital appointment for either a full day or a half-day (a.m. or p.m.) the absence in question should be recorded as sick absence.

- If however the staff member has attended for work prior to/after the appointment they can claim time for a sick absence on the following basis:

#### Morning appointments

- If staff attending a health appointment in the morning do not have any clocking during the morning (up to 12.30pm) – this must be claimed as a half day's sick leave.

- However, core time credit up to 12.30pm will be given provided a reasonable (i.e. approx 1 hour) period of morning attendance has been recorded prior to or after the absence in question. An officer must also be clocked in by 1.30pm in order to reclaim the credit.

#### Afternoon Appointments

- If staff attending a health appointment in the afternoon do not have any clocking during the afternoon (up to 5.00pm) – this also must be claimed as a half day's sick leave.

- However, core time credit until 4.00pm will be given provided a reasonable (i.e. approx 1

hour) period of afternoon attendance has been recorded prior to or after the absence in question. An officer must also be clocked in until at least 1.15pm in order to reclaim the credit.

#### All Day Appointment

- If staff do not attend work at all during the day of a health appointment then this must be classed as one full day sick leave and the manager must report it to PeoplePoint via this portal.

The 'protective year' was applied so that someone who had returned to work following Critical Illness Pay (CIP) could avail of remaining CIP leave for subsequent non-critical illnesses/injuries.

Within the 12 month period from the date of return to work after a civil servant suffers with a critical illness/injury they can continue to access the extended sick pay limits normally given for critical illness/injury only (i.e. 365 days), even where they are not critically ill, provided that:

- the civil servant has previously been absent because of a critical illness/injury; and
- the civil servant suffers from a non-critical illness/injury during the 12 months following the first day of the return to work following a critical illness/injury absence.

While I have outlined the general provisions for health appointments, it is the individual's circumstances, including their sick leave record and the nature of the illness, that determines their access to sick leave and Temporary Rehabilitation Remuneration (TRR). I am satisfied that the scheme ensures that all staff who have serious illness are protected.

### **Structures at Risk Fund**

549. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if an application by a church (details supplied) for the structures at risk fund in respect of restoration works to a church building in County Donegal has been received; when a decision in respect of the application will be made; if due consideration will be given to the architectural and historical significance of the structure for which this funding is being sought; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38395/18]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** My Department provides financial support for the protection of heritage buildings and historic structures through a number of schemes which are generally administered by local authorities.

The Structures at Risk Fund (SRF) enables conservation works to heritage structures in both private and public ownership, which are deemed to be at significant risk of deterioration. I have allocated €1.3m for the SRF in 2018. Details of the projects approved under the SRF are published on my Department's website and local authority websites.

While the closing date for the SRF 2018 has now passed, officials of my Department remain in contact with local authorities throughout the year to ensure the best use of all funds under the scheme, including the reallocation of funds which may become available where, for example, projects do not proceed.

My Department occasionally receives applications for urgent funding where a need has arisen in the course of the year. Such applications are subject to the availability of funding and are considered on a case by case basis. The architectural and historical significance of the structure is, of course, taken into account. This is just one of the assessment criteria used. The full

list of assessment criteria and the terms and conditions governing the Structures at Risk Fund are available on my Department's website and all local authority websites.

In relation to the structure mentioned by the Deputy, I understand that extensive advice and assistance has been provided by my Department officials and the Architectural Conservation Officer in the local authority and on foot of this advice an application for urgent funding was submitted very recently. This application will now be assessed in the usual way and a decision will be issued in due course.

In the meantime, the best advice for owners, in relation to individual historic structures, is generally to remain in contact with the Architectural Conservation Officer in their local authority who is well placed to provide expert advice and assistance.

### **Special Protection Areas Designation**

550. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will receive submissions requesting a geographical extension to a special protection area (details supplied) to include additional lands; the issues she must take into consideration when deciding whether or not to grant such an extension; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38429/18]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** Ireland has identified 439 sites for protection as special areas of conservation under the EU Habitats Directive and 154 sites for protection as special protection areas under the Birds Directive.

The designation process is almost complete although the National Raised Bog Special Areas of Conservation Management Plan 2017-2022 includes proposals to designate two new special areas of conservation, which are more than 50 per cent in State ownership. My Department is in the process of reviewing the marine special protection area network to determine if it is sufficient to meet Ireland's requirements under the Birds Directive.

Given the comprehensive network of terrestrial protected sites already in place in Ireland in accordance with the Nature Directives and a number of reviews of the sufficiency of the network of sites, I currently have no further plans to propose sites for designation as special areas of conservation or terrestrial special protection areas or to propose extensions to such sites.

### **Departmental Expenditure**

551. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the expenditure savings that are earmarked for her Department for 2019 that are not accounted for in the mid-year expenditure report or are not included in the fiscal space calculations for 2019. [38482/18]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** Details of the financial allocations for my Department for 2019 will be made available as part of the Budget Estimates 2019 which will be published on Tuesday, 9 October. Whilst, it is too early at this point in time to accurately forecast the full end of year outturn for my Department for 2018, I can advise that all current funding is expected to be expended in full and no significant capital savings are envisaged at present. All expenditure within my Department's Vote will continue to be carefully monitored between now and year-end to ensure the best use of all available financial resources.

## **National Parks and Wildlife Service**

552. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if officials from the National Parks and Wildlife Service will meet with fishermen to discuss the seal population at a location (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38501/18]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** With regard to the Deputy's request on behalf of the fishermen in County Kerry and for a meeting with the NPWS officials of my Department, I have instructed my regional staff in the area to contact the group in question directly.

## **Departmental Communications**

553. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if Ministers, ministerial advisers or officials in her Department have ever used private email to communicate on departmental issues between one another or with other persons or organisations; if so, the reason; if so, if she will publish these emails; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38562/18]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** Official email business in my role as Minister is conducted via Department and Oireachtas email accounts. On occasion, when outside the office, I make use of a private g-mail account on my mobile phone to forward information of a non-sensitive nature to my private office, generally relating to diary appointments or constituency matters.

Minister of State Joe McHugh has confirmed that only Oireachtas and Department e-mail addresses are used for official business and that no personal e-mail accounts are used for business purposes. Very occasionally, when out of the office, he would access information such as constituency issues, appointments and draft press releases on his email account.

All official business carried out by Ministerial Advisers and officials in my Department is conducted via Department email accounts.

For completeness, I would advise the Deputy that, while my Department operates an Acceptable Usage Policy in relation to the use of ICT equipment, this policy does not specifically preclude the use of personal email accounts for official purposes.

## **Labour Activation Programmes Data**

554. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of persons employed by the eight national cultural institutions under the labour activation schemes, on zero-hour contracts and unpaid internships; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38693/18]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** In respect of the Cultural Institutions under the remit of my Department, I am advised that no persons are engaged in either Labour Activation schemes or zero hour contracts.

Cultural Institutions operate both paid and unpaid internships. Paid internships are funded from a number of sources.

Regarding unpaid internships, the Cultural Institutes are regularly approached by students and recent graduates seeking internships, in what are specialised areas such as conservation. In many instances, these internships form part of the students course requirement. The internships tend to be short term in nature and are facilitated where possible.

The National Cultural Institutions are independent bodies under the aegis of the Department: it is a matter for these bodies if they are able to facilitate requests for short term internships from students and others interested in developing a career in the sector.

The approximate Full Time Equivalent (FTE) headcount for the eight National Cultural Institutions is 600 persons and the number of unpaid internships represents less than 2% of the total headcount.

Details are outlined in the table below regarding the number of unpaid internships currently being facilitated:

NCI's	Labour Activation Scheme	Zero Hour Contract	Unpaid Internships
Chester Beatty Library	Nil	Nil	Nil
Crawford Art Gallery	Nil	Nil	Nil
IMMA	Nil	Nil	3
National Archives of Ireland	Nil	Nil	Nil
National Concert Hall	Nil	Nil	Nil
National Gallery of Ireland	Nil	Nil	3
National Library of Ireland	Nil	Nil	Nil
National Museum of Ireland	Nil	Nil	5

### Heritage Schemes

555. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the funding in place to renovate old houses with heritage features that are not in GLAS (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38768/18]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** My Department provides financial support for the protection of heritage buildings and historic structures through a number of schemes which are generally administered by local authorities.

The Structures at Risk Fund (SRF) enables conservation works to heritage structures in both private and public ownership, which are deemed to be at significant risk of deterioration. I have allocated €1.3m for the SRF in 2018.

The Built Heritage Investment Scheme is a scheme for the repair and conservation of protected structures, designed to leverage private capital for investment in small scale conservation projects across the country and to support the employment of skilled conservation professionals and tradespeople. I have allocated funding of €2m nationally for this Scheme in 2018. Details

of all projects approved for funding under both of these schemes in 2018 are published on my Department's website and local authority websites.

While no specific structure has been mentioned by the Deputy, the best advice for owners in relation to individual historic structures is to contact the Architectural Conservation Officer in their local authority who is very well placed to provide expert advice and assistance.

The closing date for the 2018 schemes has now passed. My Department remains in contact with local authorities throughout the year to ensure the best use of all funds under the schemes, including the reallocation of funds where, for example, projects do not proceed.

In terms of future funding, Investing in our Culture, Language and Heritage 2018 – 2027 represents a major capital investment scheme of €1.2 billion in funding over the next 10 years. This plan will see increased investment in protecting and celebrating our built heritage across the country. More details on the commencement and completion dates for projects and programmes, as well as the timing of the expenditure in relation to them, will emerge as we go through the process of appraisal and planning as required under the Public Spending Code.

The Heritage Council, which my Department funds, also provides grants for the protection and preservation of the built heritage. It is primarily a matter for the Heritage Council to decide how its funding should be allocated across the range of research, education and conservation programmes it supports. Grant schemes are advertised by the Heritage Council on its website [www.heritagecouncil.ie](http://www.heritagecouncil.ie).

### **Arts Funding**

556. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the funding that has been approved for a theatre (details supplied) over the past five years; the name of the schemes under which the funds were approved; and when the funds were applied for. [38780/18]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** My Department has approved capital funding of €250,000 in respect of the theatre to which the Deputy is referring. The amount is payable to the relevant Local Authority towards the restoration and enhancement of this theatre, pending clarity on all reinstatement issues including the contribution from insurances, and subject to the acceptance of the Local Authority of the conditions attached to the funding. This funding was applied for in September 2016 under the Arts and Culture Capital Scheme 2016-2018.

25 September 2018