

Written Answers.

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

Questions Nos. 1 to 14, inclusive, answered orally.

Housing Policy

15. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on the need for developers and the State to prioritise housing development. [37796/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Housing is a top Government priority and there is clear evidence that the Government's comprehensive Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, is working. Under the Plan, the social housing needs of over 137,000 households will be met, supported by over €6 billion of investment, and housing supply more generally is targeted to increase to at least 25,000 new homes per year by 2020.

Nearly 26,000 social housing supports were delivered in 2017, significantly ahead of the target of 21,000. In terms of boosting the supply of housing more broadly, the Government is investing nearly €300m in enabling infrastructure to open up key residential sites for early development, has streamlined planning systems through An Bord Pleanála for large-scale housing developments and also updated guidance to provide more flexibility in the design and siting of apartments. Development finance is also to be made available under the €750m Home Building Finance Ireland initiative and policy reforms such as the vacant site levy have been introduced to deter the hoarding of land and encourage early development.

In addition, the new Land Development Agency will bring together both public and private sector interests to deliver up to 150,000 new homes over the next 20 years, and will have access to capital funding of up to €1.25 billion to assist it in fulfilling its mandate.

All housing activity indicators continue to show encouraging trends, with almost 19,500 new residential construction commencements notified in the year to end-July 2018, up 17% year-on-year, and planning permission granted for some 26,700 new homes in the year to end June 2018, up 39% year-on-year.

Progress on the different targets under Rebuilding Ireland is kept under regular review and I meet with all housing stakeholders regularly to discuss progress. While the housing system was badly damaged in the downturn and is taking time to correct, I am confident that full implementation of the comprehensive set of actions laid out in Rebuilding Ireland will result in a sustainable housing system that can meet the current and future needs of the population, with consequential wider social and economic benefits.

Legislative Process

16. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government further to the passing of Second Stage of the Urban Regeneration and Housing (Amendment) Bill 2018, if his Department will work with the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government with a view to enabling the Bill to be enacted as soon as possible; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39098/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): As outlined during the 2nd Stage debate on the Urban Regeneration and Housing (Amendment) Bill 2018 introduced by Deputy Wallace which, among other things, proposes a number of amendments to the vacant site levy provisions, the Government shares the same overall objective as the Deputy regarding the need to tackle land hoarding and ensure that vacant under-utilised sites are brought back into productive use for housing and other development.

In this regard, a number of Government reforms have already been advanced that address many elements contained in that Bill. The Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2018, enacted on 19 July last, introduced amendments to the vacant site levy provisions which collectively aim to further strengthen these provisions. In line with the commitment in Budget 2018, the principal amendment was to increase the rate of levy from 3% to 7% for sites on the vacant site register for the year 2019 onwards.

With a view to further addressing the broader issue of land hoarding, the 2018 Act also amends existing provisions in the planning code relating to the extension of duration of planning permission with the aim of ensuring that planning permissions are activated earlier and that the development works are completed earlier.

However, as indicated in the debates, significant concerns remain in relation to the Deputy's Bill, primarily relating to legal and constitutional issues, which will require further detailed examination during pre-legislative scrutiny before it can advance further. I expect that these issues can be further explored during the Oireachtas pre-legislative scrutiny process pertaining to Private Member Bills.

Housing Adaptation Grant Funding

17. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to increase the housing adaptation grant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38949/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The funding provided for the Housing Adaptation Grants for Older People and People with a Disability Scheme to support people living in private houses, has increased year on year since 2014. From a funding level five years ago of €43m, supporting 7,000 people, this year I have made a total of €66.25m available nationally for the schemes, which will directly benefit 10,000 people. This is an increase of some 11% on the 2017 level of funding.

In line with the Programme for a Partnership Government and the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan, I will give further consideration to increasing this funding over the coming years, as I am conscious of the social benefit accruing from these grants in terms of facilitating older people and people with a disability to remain living independently in their own homes.

My Department works closely with the local authorities to achieve a full drawdown of the available funding each year. There will continue to be careful scrutiny of spend over the course of the rest of this year, with any underspend redistributed to those local authorities with high levels of grant activity who seek additional funding.

Local Authority Boundaries

18. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he has engaged with the members of Cork County Council to discuss the issues of concern expressed by it in respect of the city council boundary expansion, specifically in the areas of financial settlement arrangements, outstanding charges from the development contribution scheme and transfer of liabilities, respectively; and the way in which he plans to address same. [39010/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Cork boundary alteration is the most significant local government boundary alteration to be undertaken since the foundation of the State. The change, which will see a population increase in the city of some 83,000, will drive sustainable economic growth and strengthen Cork's position as Ireland's second city and an "economic engine" for the wider southern region, with implications for business development, population growth, housing provision and associated infrastructure.

The Local Government Bill 2018 published in July 2018 provides for the boundary alteration and also for the establishment of the Cork Oversight Implementation Committee, with general responsibility for overseeing the alteration of the boundary between the respective areas of jurisdiction of Cork City Council and Cork County Council. This will be undertaken in accordance with a detailed implementation plan and the aim will be to ensure, as far as possible, that such arrangements are progressed effectively throughout the implementation process. Responsibility for the detailed planning and implementation of the reorganisation process rests primarily with the local authorities, subject to guidance and oversight by the Oversight Committee and compliance with the implementation plan.

In the interim, the non-statutory Cork Implementation Oversight Group has been working consistently with both authorities to prepare for the transition. Both authorities have dedicated teams in place and are engaging with an independent transition Manager as part of this process.

While the boundary alteration and transfer of local authority jurisdiction will take full legal effect in mid-2019, the legislation provides appropriate flexibility in relation to operational arrangements so that transfer of practical responsibility for certain functions can proceed on a more gradual basis, as necessary, to allow time for organisational changes to be completed.

Local Authority Housing Funding

19. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the overall funding allocated to the 31 local authorities for void refurbishment in 2017 and to date in 2018; the conditions attached to receiving funding for a void refurbishment; if he is satisfied that this scheme has been given the necessary budget to be a success; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39100/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Under my Department's Voids Programme, funding is provided to support local authorities

in remediating those social housing homes that may require a greater level of investment than the normal level of pre-letting repairs that local authorities would ordinarily carry out, as part of their on-going repair and maintenance of local authority housing.

During 2017, my Department provided funding of almost €24.7 million to local authorities to enable them to bring some 1,757 properties back to productive use under the programme.

Local authorities are actively encouraged to ensure that all vacant properties are brought back into active use as expeditiously as possible and to assist in this regard, my Department has approved some 1,470 properties for funding under the Voids Programme this year. To the end of Q2 2018 some 387 vacant units were returned to productive use and €4.5m was drawn down by local authorities through the Voids Programme.

The works carried out focus not just on returning vacant social homes to use as quickly as possible, but also on remediation work bringing long-term benefits, including insulation retro-fitting which means the home, when re-let, has high comfort levels and is more economical to heat for the incoming tenant.

Vacant Sites Data

20. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 731 of 10 October 2017, the status of the registers of vacant sites for Galway city and county; the number and location of vacant sites on the registers; the steps he is taking to ensure compliance by local authorities with the provisions of the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39086/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015 introduced the vacant site levy, which is a measure aimed at incentivising the development of vacant, under-utilised sites in urban areas. Under the Act, planning authorities are required to establish a register of vacant sites in their areas, beginning on 1 January 2017.

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

My Department does not maintain a central register of vacant sites as each local authority administers the vacant site register in respect of their functional area. As provided for under the Act, the register in respect of each local authority is available for inspection at its offices and on-line on its website.

Following enquiries made by my Department with both Galway City and Galway County Councils, I understand that they are both continuing to undertake the necessary preparatory and site assessment work before entering sites on their registers.

In relation to implementation of the levy provisions generally, on foot of a review of the on-line registers, I understand a total of 16 planning authorities have populated their vacant site registers with over 280 sites, of which over 160 were on registers on 1 January 2018 and in respect of which the levy can be applied in January 2019.

My Department has actively engaged with local authorities in relation to the implementa-

tion of the vacant site levy in order to ensure a consistent application of the levy provisions across all city and county areas and to facilitate the sharing of best practice. My Department has provided guidance and advice and also organised three separate information seminars for local authorities, most recently on 1 May 2018. My Department will continue to engage proactively with local authorities to ensure the vacant site levy achieves its full potential.

Social and Affordable Housing Funding

21. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when he will introduce a State-wide affordable housing scheme for local authorities; and the reason the €75 million allocated for O Cualann type affordable housing developments has not been made available to local authorities. [39021/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): In terms of affordable housing for purchase, local authority sites can be progressed 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 Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council and Dublin City Council.

€75 million of Exchequer funding is being provided under the Serviced Sites Fund to provide enabling infrastructure to facilitate the delivery of affordable homes on local authority and Housing Agency sites. The focus is on areas where increasing house prices and rents have created a significant affordability gap for first-time buyers and for those wishing to rent, those being Dublin, Kildare, Meath, Wicklow, Louth, Galway City, Cork City and Cork County. With the local authority contribution, €100 million will be allocated in total under the Fund. The maximum grant per site is €40,000 and, on this basis, there is scope to provide grant funding for at least 2,500 affordable homes under the Fund.

A call for proposals issued under the Fund on 29 June 2018, with a closing date for receipt of submissions of 31 August. Nine local authorities have submitted a total of fifteen proposals under this first call, and these are currently being assessed in my Department. We are working toward completing the assessments and awarding funding next month.

Local Authority Housing

22. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on reports that Dublin City Council approached a company (details supplied) to rent blocks of units for social housing tenants; his further views on whether this development may contribute to rent increases; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39099/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE) is provided by Dublin City Council as the lead statutory local authority in the response to homelessness in Dublin. The DRHE is responsible for the planning, co-ordination and administration of funding in relation to the provision of quality services to people who are homeless in the Dublin area, and for the development of responses to prevent homelessness.

The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme, particularly Homeless HAP, is a significant mechanism used by the DRHE to transition qualified households from emergency accommodation into private rented tenancies. The HAP Place Finder service is a targeted support for homeless households who may find it difficult to secure HAP tenancies. Between February 2015

and end June 2018, more than 3,600 households were supported by the scheme.

The operation of the DRHE and its engagement with property owners to secure appropriate accommodation is a matter for the local authority in the first instance. As part of its day-to-day operations the DRHE may engage with property owners, such as the one referred to by the Deputy, to establish whether additional units are available which could be used to successfully meet the housing need of many families who would otherwise have to enter or remain in emergency accommodation.

The HAP scheme has specific rent limits for each local authority. The DRHE, in recognition of the difficulty homeless households face in sourcing and securing properties in a highly competitive rental market, have discretion to go 50% above the prescribed rent limits. The statistics show the DRHE do not need to use discretion in all cases, and where that discretion is used, the average rate is 33%.

Local Authority Housing Provision

23. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to fund local authority house building in counties Roscommon and Galway in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39085/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Government's Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness is firmly focused on increasing supply to meet social housing needs under a range of programmes in all counties, including Roscommon and Galway, with the target to deliver 50,000 social homes through build, acquisition and leasing in the period to 2021, as well as meeting the housing needs of an additional 87,000 households through the Housing Assistance Payment scheme and the Rental Accommodation Scheme. The Action Plan is supported by €6 billion in funding, which means that local authorities have the financial support available to them to deliver on their local targets.

Earlier this year, I wrote to all local authorities, including Roscommon and the two Galway councils, setting out their individual social housing targets across all delivery streams, including build. Details of these targets are available on the Rebuilding Ireland website at the following link:

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

My Department also publishes information on approved social housing construction projects in all counties via quarterly Construction Status Reports. The most recent report is available at the following link:

<http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-publishes-latest-social-housing-construction-report/> and includes the approved projects for Roscommon and Galway. Since the period covered by this last published Construction Status Report, further construction projects have been approved for Roscommon and Galway and updated Construction Status Reports will continue to be published on a quarterly basis.

The timing and delivery of each of these projects is a matter for the local authorities and the approved housing bodies (AHBs). I am keen, however, that all local authorities, including Galway and Roscommon, further accelerate their programmes and I have assured them that the necessary funding to support their activity is available.

My Department will continue to fund social housing construction in Roscommon and Galway in 2018, 2019 and in later years, in line with the Councils' programmes to deliver on their targets.

Question No. 24 answered with Question No. 7.

Approved Housing Bodies

25. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of his Department's attempt to secure the reclassification of AHBs as off-Government balance sheet. [39018/18]

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

Following the SPU, further work has been on-going in order to fully assess the implications of the reclassification decision. My Department is continuing to engage with the Departments of Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform, with technical support from the Housing Finance Agency (HFA) and the Housing Agency (HA), in order to ensure that AHBs can continue to fulfil their full potential in the delivery of the targets set out in the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan .

My Department is also engaging with the AHB sector and constructive discussions have taken place with representative bodies from the sector on the issue. The sector itself has engaged its own research on the matter, and my Department is evaluating that research as part of its ongoing wider consideration of the issue.

The AHB representative bodies have committed to continue to undertake further research and analysis into this issue over the coming months. This will assess the options available to create the necessary conditions to allow this classification decision to be revisited in the future. An important part of this exercise will be to examine what measures could be taken to develop the AHB sector in such a way so that it could be reclassified as being off the Government's balance sheet in the longer term.

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

Housing Assistance Payment Administration

26. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the inadequacies with the new housing assistance payment scheme will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38908/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) provides fast, flexible housing support to households

in an area of their choice. Individuals with a housing need, who in the past were reluctant to avail of full time work as they would lose their Rent Supplement support, can now move to HAP and avail of full-time work and retain their housing support, with an adjustment in their differential rent.

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

At the end of Quarter 2 2018, over 37,750 tenancies were being supported by the HAP scheme, including over 9,000 additional households in 2018. There are now 21,000 separate landlords and agents currently in receipt of monthly HAP payments.

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

In addition, guidelines on inter-authority movement were introduced in 2017, to allow for local authorities to facilitate movement of HAP households in cases where a tenant, currently on a local authority waiting list, wishes to access rented accommodation with HAP support in another local authority area, subject to conditions.

In relation to specific HAP supports available to homeless households, the Homeless HAP Place Finder Service operating in the Dublin local authorities, and in Cork City Council, is a targeted support for homeless households who are finding it difficult to secure HAP tenancies. The Place Finder Service has been successfully utilised by the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive (DRHE) across the Dublin local authorities since February 2015, with more than 3,000 households being supported by the Homeless HAP scheme at end Q2 2018. A similar service began operating in Cork City in 2017.

In order to further assist homeless households in exiting emergency accommodation the Homeless HAP Place Finder Service is now available to each of the 31 local authorities, with the options to pay deposits and advance rental payments for any households in emergency homeless accommodation, in order to secure accommodation via the HAP Scheme.

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

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

27. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on the recommendation in the IGEES current and capital expenditure on social housing delivery mechanisms report from July 2018 which states that there should be a greater emphasis on construction and acquisition rather than leasing, HAP and RAS for the delivery of social housing particularly in areas in which rents and property prices are high in the interests of value for money; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38898/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The review of Current and Capital Expenditure on Social Housing Delivery Mechanisms, prepared by the Irish Government Economic & Evaluation Service (IGEES) and published earlier

this summer, focussed on an examination of the housing supports provided through capital and current funding mechanisms, the trends and cost developments in housing expenditure and also considered broader issues relevant to overall housing policy development.

In examining the overall blend of housing delivery mechanisms, the review recognised that, in addition to cost factors, there are a range of other factors, which need to be considered in terms of housing delivery, including flexibility and speed of delivery to meet immediate housing need.

Addressing increased social housing need and delivering the greatest number of social housing supports at this time has required the development and implementation of a range of flexible and innovative mechanisms, which take account of available resources and market conditions. Harnessing private investment remains an important element in the overall delivery of social housing, including through supporting local authorities in meeting the needs of households on their waiting lists.

Notwithstanding the cost comparisons set out in the review, it remains the case that it would not be possible to deliver the same number of social housing homes in higher value rental areas exclusively through capital funded build and acquisition programmes. This will continue to be an important consideration in the context of the future availability of capital funding and the resourcing and capacity required to escalate local authority build and acquisition programmes to the level required to meet the current level of social housing need.

In relation to there being a greater emphasis on construction and acquisition, it should be noted that of the 50,000 social housing homes to be delivered under Rebuilding Ireland out to 2021, 33,500 of these will be built and 6,500 of these will be acquired. In addition to these 40,000 social housing homes that will be built or acquired, a further 10,000 homes will be leased under long term leasing arrangements and a further 87,000 households will have their housing need met through HAP and RAS.

Clearly, it is important at this time that a blended approach to the delivery of social housing homes is pursued in order to deliver and provide immediate housing supports to those households on local authority waiting lists across the country. Earlier this week, I published the 2018 Summary of Social Housing Assessments, which shows that there are 71,858 households on local authority social housing lists, a reduction of 13,941 or 16.2% on the last assessment in June 2017. The findings of the IGEES review highlight the need for a blended approach to delivery at this time in order to meet urgent housing need and are consistent with the planned evolution of the composition of the social housing programme over the years ahead under Rebuilding Ireland.

Social and Affordable Housing Data

28. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the estimated cost of an affordable home under the Land Development Agency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38901/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): To enable more delivery of social and affordable homes on public lands, the Government, in parallel with the establishment of the new Land Development Agency (LDA), has approved a new affordability requirement in relation to publicly owned lands, whereby a minimum of 30% of any housing developed must be reserved for affordable purposes in addition to the 10% statutory social housing requirement under Part V of the Planning and Development Act, whether

such development is being progressed by the LDA or any other market operator. Furthermore, public bodies, such as local authorities and the Housing Agency, engaging with the LDA in relation to their lands will also be in a position to condition their release for development to reflect their own policy requirements.

Therefore, complying with the Government's new public lands affordability requirement above, the LDA will be capable of progressing a significant level of both Affordable Purchase Scheme based and cost rental-based projects on lands forming part of its portfolio of sites, working within the broader policy framework for the delivery of affordable housing set by the Government.

In line with the general internationally accepted principle that households should not be spending more than a third of their income on housing costs, and using similar maximum gross income thresholds to the new affordable scheme (i.e. €50,000 for single-income and €75,000 for two-income households), my Department is working with the LDA to ensure that it can deliver housing for both purchase and rental purposes within such parameters.

In relation to affordable homes for purchase, the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan sets a maximum value of homes that can be bought/built at €320,000 in the Greater Dublin Area, Cork and Galway cities, and €250,000 elsewhere in the country.

A maximum dual-income threshold under the new Affordable Purchase Scheme is set at €75,000 (which would enable a first-time buyer to afford repayments of around 35% of net income on a 90% LTV mortgage, using the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan, of around €285,000), enabling an overall maximum house purchase price of €320,000.

Analysis of projects supported under the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund indicates that, on just under three-quarters of all 30 sites funded, there will be homes available to purchase for less than €320,000 (at today's prices).

In relation to affordable rental delivery, my Department believes that, in line with the public lands affordability requirement mentioned above, the availability of such public lands at low or no cost to underpin cost rental projects, including those progressed by the LDA, would be capable of delivering rents at around 20% below comparable market rates in the area, but this will vary, depending on the development potential of a given site, costs of providing site infrastructure, etc.

In addition, the LDA will have to demonstrate and report on how it is meeting the policy requirements under Part V and the new public lands affordability requirement, using the range of relevant affordable schemes and mechanisms.

It should also be noted that where public lands are being sold and developed by other market operators including private developers, these same affordability requirements will apply.

Repair and Leasing Scheme

29. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the reason there has been such a slow uptake in the repair and leasing scheme by local authorities throughout the country in view of the extent of the housing crisis and the ability of the scheme to help alleviate some of the problems; the applications received, delivered and tenanted by county for 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39084/18]

31. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of units brought into operation through the repair and lease scheme in 2018. [38903/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 29 and 31 together.

The Repair and Leasing Scheme (RLS) was initially piloted in Carlow and Waterford and the pilot has been rolled out nationally since 23 February 2017. The scheme is one of a suite of measures available to local authorities to bring vacant properties back into use. Since the national roll out, my Department has been working intensively with local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) to develop and implement the scheme. There have been a number of national and local press advertising initiatives, as well as targeted online promotion, in an effort to ensure that property owners who can benefit from the scheme are aware of the benefits.

A detailed breakdown of the RLS data up to end Q4 2017 is set out in the following table:

LA	Number of Applications Received end Q4 2017	Number of Agreements to Lease Signed end Q4 2017	Number of Properties Operational end Q4 2017
Carlow	20	3	0
Cavan	25	0	0
Clare	8	0	0
Cork City	11	0	0
Cork County	65	0	0
DLR	9	1	1
Donegal	52	0	0
Dublin City	12	0	0
Fingal	20	0	0
Galway City	5	0	0
Galway County	63	0	0
Kerry	91	0	0
Kildare	6	0	0
Kilkenny	16	0	0
Laois	5	0	0
Leitrim	8	0	0
Limerick	49	2	0
Longford	18	0	0
Louth	15	0	0
Mayo	31	0	0
Meath	8	0	0
Monaghan	12	0	0
Offaly	12	0	0
Roscommon	40	0	0
Sligo	6	0	0
SDCC	0	0	0
Tipperary	45	1	0
Waterford	106	14	6

LA	Number of Applications Received end Q4 2017	Number of Agreements to Lease Signed end Q4 2017	Number of Properties Operational end Q4 2017
Westmeath	22	0	0
Wexford	33	10	2
Wicklow	7	0	0
	820	31	9

While the current figures for RLS are low, it should be remembered that this is a new scheme which was only rolled out to local authorities at the end of February last year.

It was clear from end 2017 output, that RLS has not yet delivered the level of new social housing homes envisaged. The operation of the scheme was reviewed, as part of the review of Rebuilding Ireland, and it was concluded that the scheme has significant potential but there are areas where it can be improved to make it more attractive and effective. Accordingly, from 1 February 2018, a number of key changes were being made to the scheme. These include:

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

Data up to end Q2 2018 has shown an increase in the number of applications although given the lead in time of at least 6 months for most applications, it is probable that the true impact of the recent changes to the scheme will not become apparent until later in the year. Over recent weeks, local authorities have indicated that the changes have been well received by property owners.

A detailed breakdown of the RLS activity in 2018, on a local authority basis, up to Q2 2018 is set out in the following table:

Table: RLS Q1 and Q2 2018

LA	No. of applications received	Number of Agreements to Lease Signed	Number of Properties Operational
Carlow	2	1	2
Cavan	19	0	0
Clare	1	0	0
Cork City	2	0	0
Cork County	20	0	0
DLR	17	0	0
Donegal	8	0	0
Dublin City	5	1	0
Fingal	3	4	0
Galway City	0	0	0
Galway County	4	0	0

LA	No. of applications received	Number of Agreements to Lease Signed	Number of Properties Operational
Kerry	3	0	0
Kildare	0	1	0
Kilkenny	3	1	0
Laois	2	0	0
Leitrim	4	0	0
Limerick	22	6	5
Longford	1	0	0
Louth	3	0	0
Mayo	9	7	0
Meath	0	1	1
Monaghan	7	0	0
Offaly	7	0	0
Roscommon	10	2	0
Sligo	8	0	0
SDCC	0	0	0
Tipperary	7	0	0
Waterford	4	33	5
Westmeath	1	1	0
Wexford	45	2	9
Wicklow	0	0	0
	217	60	22

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

30. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will facilitate a meeting with Dún Laoghaire Deputies, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council and officials from his Department to discuss and progress the plans for 100% social and affordable housing at the Shanganagh Castle site; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38897/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The development of key local authority residential sites in Dublin, where undersupply and affordability issues are being experienced most acutely, is a major priority for the Government. 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.

My Department has met with Council officials on a number of occasions with regard to the site and I understand that a project board is now in place to drive delivery, and that the Council is currently working with the National Development Finance Agency (NDFA) to financially model and compare the optimal development approaches for the site.

I recently wrote to the Council, indicating that I am anxious to hear of the progress being made and to discuss the Council's proposal to develop Shanganagh in greater detail. In terms of timing, and to ensure the optimal outcome from any such meeting, it would be important that

the financial modelling on all the options is completed and the report submitted to my Department for review before the meeting takes place.

For my part, I have made it clear to the Council that direct Exchequer funding will be provided for any social housing element of this mixed-tenure development.

Question No. 31 answered with Question No. 29.

Question No. 32 answered with Question No. 13.

National Development Plan Funding

33. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the guidelines for indigenous businesses and enterprises to access the €2 billion urban regeneration and development fund and the €1 billion rural regeneration and development fund that he recently announced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30458/18]

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.

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.

My Department has encouraged participation by the business and enterprise sector in the application process, as long as proposals are public sector-led in an overall sense and in line with the stated criteria as set out in the application form.

Detailed information on the URDF and the application process, including a detailed explanatory note, is available at the following links: www.gov.ie/urdf and www.npf.ie/urdf.

Local Authority Staff Data

34. **Deputy Darragh O’Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his Department has undertaken a review of the resources and personnel in local authori-

ties' housing departments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38902/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department provides the local authority housing sector with significant resources to provide necessary housing and planning supports. Local authorities generate income from a variety of sources including commercial rates, charges for goods and services and funding from Central Government. Across all schemes and funding programmes, my Department provided a total of €1.26bn to local authorities in 2015, €1.45bn in 2016 and €1.849bn in 2017. My Department works closely with all local authorities to ensure the local government sector can meet existing and emerging challenges.

In terms of local authority staffing, my Department oversees workforce planning for the local government sector and has agreed and approved workforce plans with each of the individual local authorities. Since 1 January 2014, my Department has received 876 housing-related staff sanction requests from local authorities, 861 of which have been approved.

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. In this regard, it is a matter for each Chief Executive to ensure that staff are optimally deployed to ensure that appropriate service levels are provided. It is within the remit of the Chief Executive to reassign staff between programme areas to meet emerging demands and it is clear that local authorities have increased staffing numbers in their Housing Departments to deliver on increased demands.

The accelerated delivery of housing, including social housing, is of critical importance to this Government. My Department has recognised the need to support local authorities in their efforts to increase both capacity and output in this regard. In addition to substantial capital and current funding provided under Rebuilding Ireland, my Department is providing a range of staff related supports including:

Local authorities have designated Vacant Homes Officers, to act as a central point of contact and to provide information and advice for owners of vacant homes and to deal with queries from members of the public in respect of private residential vacant properties in their administrative area. My Department has provided funding for each local authority (€50,000 per annum, for a period of two years (i.e. a total of €100,000 to each local authority for 2018 & 2019) to support the work of the Vacant Homes Office. This provision of central funding will allow for focus to be given to the role of the Office in establishing a co-ordinated approach to the implementation of their Vacant Homes Action Plans and will reinforce the capacity of the Department's Vacant Homes Unit to liaise with and seek information/statistics from a dedicated contact point within each local authority. The Vacant Homes Office is expected to play a key role in the co-ordination of this work within the local authority.

Earlier this year my Department advised local authorities of arrangements for the appointment (where required) of a dedicated staff member to provide assistance in seeking out potential properties; establishing relationships with local property agents and landlords; and supporting those homeless households to exit emergency accommodation and secure a tenancy. An allowance towards the staffing cost of this officer is recoupable from the Department via the homeless services ('Section 10') recoupment arrangements.

The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme, the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) and a range of different leasing schemes funded by the Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme (SHCEP) all provide local authorities with administrative payments in respect of new households entering the schemes and for certain on-going monitoring and management expenses. The purpose of these payments is to recognise the resources required by local au-

thorities in respect of the set up and management of tenancies under these programmes.

Local authority in-house professional services assigned to the delivery of new capital funded social housing build projects can be recouped from my Department at a percentage of the approved tender cost, with the actual percentage depending on the services provided. Services covered include architectural and other design team professional services, contract monitoring and management and the assigned certifier role.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

35. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he has reconsidered the proposal for a dynamic housing executive for the greater Dublin region in view of the low delivery of new social and affordable housing in the region and especially by Dublin City Council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38910/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I refer to the reply to Question No. 258 of 26 September 2018, which sets out the position on this matter.

Housing Assistance Payment Data

36. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount of funding paid to landlords through the housing assistance payment in the past year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39095/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) is a flexible and immediate housing support that is now available to all eligible households throughout the State. HAP plays a vital role in housing eligible families and individuals. At end Q2 2018, there were more than 37,700 households having their housing needs met via HAP and over 21,000 landlords and agents in receipt of HAP payments.

In respect of the provision of HAP funding, Limerick City and County Council provides a highly effective HAP transactional-shared service on behalf of all local authorities. This HAP Shared Services Centre (SSC) manages all HAP related rental transactions for the tenant, local authority and landlord. Accordingly, my Department does not recoup individual local authorities in respect of HAP rental payments in their administrative areas but rather recoups all landlord costs via the HAP SSC.

The amount of funding which has been paid to landlords for HAP tenancies for the past 12 months (1 September 2017 to 31 August 2018) is €295 million. The HAP scheme is funded through a combination of Exchequer monies and tenant differential rents collected in respect of HAP tenancies. It is important to note that the landlord payment combines the tenant contribution (differential rent paid) and the exchequer contribution.

Budget 2018 increased the Exchequer funding for the HAP scheme by €149m to €301 million. This will allow for the continued support of existing HAP households and also enable the additional 17,000 households targeted under Rebuilding Ireland to be supported by HAP in 2018.

Land Development Agency

37. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the financing arrangements envisioned in the delivery of social, affordable and market priced housing on the first eight sites to be developed by the Land Development Agency. [39019/18]

52. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the proposed projects that the Land Development Agency will enter into with private developers; the way in which an affordable home under such partnerships will be defined; and the estimated time it will take to build social and affordable homes in projects under the charge of the agency. [39090/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 37 and 52 together.

Along with my colleague the Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform, I signed the Establishment Order for the new Land Development Agency (LDA) on 13 September 2018. This Order was made under the Local Government Services (Corporate Bodies) Act 1971.

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

The LDA has a number of financing options available to it, including direct funding by the LDA from its own capital, the deployment of third-party capital or a combination of both.

Significant preparatory work is required in relation to the initial portfolio of eight sites and as part of this process, funding structures will be devised on a case by case basis, taking account of the scale of each project, value for money for the State, risk and pace of delivery.

To enable more delivery of social and affordable homes on public lands, the Government has, in parallel with the establishment of the LDA, approved a new affordability requirement in relation to publicly owned lands, whereby a minimum of 30% of any housing developed must be reserved for affordable purposes in addition to the 10% statutory social housing requirement under Part V of the Planning and Development Act, whether such development is being progressed by the LDA or any other market operator. Furthermore, public bodies, such as local authorities and the Housing Agency, engaging with the LDA in relation to their lands will also be in a position to condition their release for development reflecting their own policy requirements.

Therefore, complying with the Government's new public lands affordability requirement above, the LDA will be capable of progressing a significant level of both Affordable Purchase Scheme based and cost rental-based projects on lands forming part of its portfolio of sites, working within the broader policy framework for the delivery of affordable housing set by the Government.

In line with the general internationally accepted principle that households should not be spending more than a third of their income on housing costs (e.g. rent or mortgage), and using similar maximum gross income thresholds to the new affordable scheme (i.e. €50,000 for single-income and €75,000 for two-income households), my Department is working with the LDA to ensure that it can deliver housing for both purchase and rental purposes within such parameters.

In relation to affordable homes for purchase, the Rebuilding Ireland Home loan sets a maximum value of homes that can be bought/built at €320,000 in the Greater Dublin Area, Cork and Galway cities, and €250,000 elsewhere in the country.

A maximum dual-income threshold under the new Affordable Purchase Scheme is set at €75,000 (which would enable a first-time buyer to afford repayments of around 35% of net income on a 90% LTV mortgage, using the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan, of around €285,000), enabling an overall maximum house purchase price of €320,000.

Analysis of projects supported under the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund indicates that, on just under three-quarters of all 30 sites funded, there will be homes available to purchase for less than €320,000 (at today's prices).

In relation to affordable rental delivery, my Department believes that, in line with the public lands affordability requirement mentioned above, the availability of such public lands at low or no cost to underpin cost rental projects, including those progressed by the LDA, would be capable of delivering rents at around 20% below comparable market rates in the area, but this will vary, depending on the development potential of a given site, costs of providing site infrastructure, etc.

In addition, the LDA will have to demonstrate and report on how it is meeting the policy requirements under Part V and the new public lands affordability requirement, using the range of relevant affordable schemes and mechanisms.

The LDA is in the process of commencing feasibility, planning and other preparatory works on its sites immediately, with construction envisaged to be commencing on the first homes in 2019 for delivery in 2020, with progress ramping up in line with an overall business plan which is also being advanced as a matter of urgency.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

38. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on whether his Department's insistence on mixed tenure developments is having a negative consequence on the delivery of social housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39096/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The scale and relevant tenure mix for new social housing developments are, in the first case, matters for the relevant local authority, whether those developments are contracted by the authorities themselves or by Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) operating in their areas. Central guidance for housing developments is set out in my Department's publication 'Quality Housing for Sustainable Communities' which is available on my Department's website at the following link:

<https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/migrated-files/en/Publications/DevelopmentandHousing/Housing/FileDownload%2C1979%2Cen.pdf>

This advises, inter alia, that good quality, sustainable housing development should be socially and environmentally appropriate, where the mix of dwelling type, size and tenure should support sound social, environmental and economic sustainability policy objectives and contribute to the integrated development of the areas in which they are located.

This guidance also recommends that in the case of social housing, the mix of dwellings

should have regard to the need to achieve a balance in home types, sizes and tenure, but should be based primarily on the results of the most recent assessment of housing need and the characteristics of households likely to be accommodated in the scheme.

I consider that this guidance is appropriate and logical and will contribute to the long-term, sustainable development of communities. In applying this guidance, local authorities or AHBs are not prohibited from developing new schemes of any particular size where they are working within the guidance on sustainable communities. The current portfolio of projects under development includes a wide range of different sized schemes.

A key determinant of the scale of new social housing developments is the consideration of such proposals by elected members of local authorities, through the planning process. I hope that they will continue to support the advancement of such projects by their councils at the required speed and scale.

Local Authority Housing Waiting Lists

39. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the progress being made on reducing the social housing waiting lists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38907/18]

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

The combination of 50,000 social housing homes and 87,000 HAP and RAS social housing supports, which are being funded by the Government in the period 2016 to 2021, means that over 137,000 long term and flexible options will be made available to those on housing waiting lists under Rebuilding Ireland.

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

In 2017, 25,901 households had their housing need met, with some 7,095 of these properties delivered through the build/acquisition and long-term leasing mechanisms.

Data relating to overall social housing delivery in 2017 and to end Q2 2018, across all local authorities, is published on my Department's website at the following link:

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

In 2018, I expect to see at least 25,500 households having their housing need met. 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 which can be accessed on the Rebuilding Ireland website at:

<http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-publishes-social-housing-delivery-tar>

gets-for-local-authorities-2018-2021/.

Details on the number of households qualified for social housing support in each local authority area are provided in the statutory Summary of Social Housing Assessments (SSHA) which has been carried out on an annual basis since 2016. The results of each SSHA are available on my Department's website and include breakdowns by each local authority across a range of categories. Full details in relation to the 2018 assessment are available on my Department's website at the following link

https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/summary_of_social_housing_assessments_2018_-_key_findings.pdf

This shows a decrease of 16.2% from SSHA 2017, with the number of qualified households recorded on local authority lists dropping from 85,799 in 2017 to 71,858 this year. This follows on from a reduction from 2016 into 2017, when the number of qualified households on local authority lists reduced from 91,600 to 85,799 a reduction of 6.3%. Overall, the progress made in the first two years of Rebuilding Ireland has resulted in the number of qualified households on local authority lists reducing by a cumulative 22%.

Local Authority Housing Data

40. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the average length of time taken for each local authority to reallocate homes under their remit after they have been vacated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38906/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department does not keep data on turnaround times, from void to occupancy, for local authority dwellings. Statistics in relation to social housing are compiled by the National Oversight and Audit Commission (NOAC) in its annual reports on Performance Indicators in Local Authorities. These statistics are set out by local authority and include the average time from date of vacation of the dwelling to the date when a new occupancy had commenced, with the most recent report relating to 2016. This report is available on the NOAC website at the following link: *<http://noac.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/2016-PI-Report.pdf>*.

NAMA Social Housing Provision

41. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number and location of all properties conveyed by NAMA to Galway City and County councils; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39087/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) plays an important role in the delivery of social housing. To end June 2018, a total of 2,474 residential properties have been delivered for social housing providers comprising of 2,407 completed properties with a further 67 that have been contracted where completion work is on-going.

As at end June 2018, a total of 228 units across Galway City and County had been completed or contracted for delivery. These and other statistics are available on the website of the Housing Agency at the following link:

<https://www.housingagency.ie/Housing/media/Media/Social%20Leasing%20Library/NAMA%20Status%20Reports/Breakdown-by-County-July-2018.pdf> .

Details of the location of individual schemes involved may be obtained from individual local authorities directly.

Local Authority Housing Provision

42. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount of local authority owned potential building lands available for local authority affordable housing in the greater Dublin area with particular reference to those counties immediately adjacent to Dublin; if a particular reason has emerged which might inhibit progress of a major house building campaign to meet the demands of the local authority waiting lists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39102/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Local authorities have a significant residential land bank that needs to be developed as soon as possible. In bringing forward proposals, the optimal tenure mix and most appropriate procurement approach are key issues in order to balance housing outcomes, while achieving value for money. The State residential landbank, incorporating lands in the ownership of the Housing Agency and local authorities, has been detailed and mapped and is available at

<http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/rebuilding-ireland-land-map/>.

At this point, after a concerted effort across the Local Government sector, there is a significant social housing construction programme of more than 16,000 new homes, much of which is being delivered from this land bank. The latest quarterly Social Housing Construction Status Report can be accessed at the following link:

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

The development of major local authority residential sites in Dublin and the Greater Dublin Area (GDA), where undersupply and affordability issues are being experienced most acutely, is a major priority for the Government. We are working with all local authorities in these areas, to see their sites brought forward as quickly as possible. It is of course, in the first instance, a matter for each local authority and its elected members to agree the optimal approach to development and financing.

In terms of affordable housing for purchase, sites can now be progressed 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 the Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council and Dublin City Council areas.

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.

Local Authority Housing Data

43. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Gov-

ernment the number of likely local authority housing starts that can possibly take place in the next six months by county but with particular reference to those counties immediately adjacent to Dublin which are already heavily overburdened with applicants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39101/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): All local authorities are being funded to significantly increase their delivery of social housing as part of Rebuilding Ireland and a strong social housing construction pipeline is already in place for local authorities and approved housing bodies.

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. These reports provide information on the construction programme underway for each local authority area, including the counties adjacent to Dublin.

The report covering the period up to end Quarter 2 2018 is available on the Rebuilding Ireland website at the following link:

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

It 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 1,067 schemes (or phases of schemes) in place, delivering 16,351 homes. Of this total, 3,518 units have already been delivered during 2016, 2017 and up to Q2 2018, while a further 4,602 are on site and under construction.

Almost 1,600 are at the final pre-construction stage and the remainder are progressing through the various stages of planning, design and procurement. It will be these schemes that will form the bulk of the housing starts and delivery over the course of the next 6 months and beyond, although further projects will continue to be added to the pipeline on an ongoing basis.

The timing, delivery and tenanting of schemes is a matter in the first place for each local authority. I am pleased to see the progress being made on projects building on what has been already delivered, but I am keen that all local authorities further accelerate their programmes and I have assured them that the necessary funding is available to support their work in this regard.

Social and Affordable Housing Eligibility

44. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to increase the income eligibility limits for social housing particularly in areas such as counties Cavan and Monaghan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38953/18]

53. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the review of income eligibility limits for social housing will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38952/18]

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

The Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011 prescribe maximum net income limits for each local authority, in different bands according to the area, with income being defined and assessed according to a standard Household Means Policy.

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

As part of the broader social housing reform agenda, a review of income eligibility for social housing supports is underway. The Housing Agency is carrying out the detailed statistical work which will underpin this review on behalf of my Department.

The review will obviously have regard to current initiatives being brought forward in terms of affordability and cost rental and will be completed when the impacts of these parallel initiatives have been considered.

Defective Building Materials

45. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if families whose homes are affected by mica in County Donegal will receive at least the same redress as those families whose homes were affected by pyrite; when a redress scheme will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38913/18]

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

The Panel had the following terms of reference:

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

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

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

(iv) To submit a report within six months.

On 13 June 2017, the report of the Expert Panel was published and included eight recommendations which my Department is actively progressing with the relevant stakeholders, prioritising the implementation of Recommendations 1 and 2.

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

ings since. The standardised protocol will inform the course of action in relation to remedial works for all affected householders. The draft standard was published on 6 June 2018 for public consultation and ran for a period of six weeks to 18 July 2018. The Technical Committee are currently in the process of considering the submissions received with a view to publishing the final standardised protocol shortly.

The draft standard, I.S. 465 - Assessment, testing and categorisation of damaged buildings incorporating concrete blocks containing certain deleterious materials , outlines a protocol which will be used to assess and categorise the damage in properties where the concrete blocks are suspected to contain the minerals mica or pyrite. Previously, there was no common way for engineers or homeowners to assess the damage caused by defective concrete blocks to help decide what, if any, remedial work could be carried out.

This standard:

1. establishes a protocol for assessing and determining whether a building has been damaged by concrete blocks containing certain excessive amounts of deleterious materials (free or unbound muscovite mica, or aggregate with potentially deleterious quantities of pyrite);
2. describes methods for establishing the extent of the problem;
3. describes the scope of any testing required; and
4. categorises buildings, in accordance with this Standard, providing competent persons with guidance on the appropriate measures to be taken.

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

Last year, I visited Donegal and Mayo and met with key stakeholders, including affected homeowners, elected members and officials of the local authorities and other interested parties. On 18 December 2017, I again visited Donegal and met with key stakeholders to provide an update on the progress to date. I made a similar visit to Mayo on 26 January 2018 and again to Donegal on 13 July 2018.

I will be in a position to provide a further update following the publication of the standardised protocol in the coming weeks.

Vacant Properties

46. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of privately owned homes brought back into use as a result of the vacant homes strategy of Rebuilding Ireland; his plans to amend the incentives and penalties to encourage more owners of empty dwellings to provide them for housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38904/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The National Vacant Housing Reuse Strategy, which I published in July, contains a range of objectives and key actions which will be pursued in partnership with stakeholders and agencies across the housing sector to address vacancy in our housing stock. It draws together all of

the strands of ongoing work in one document with a clear vision for progressing the return of vacant homes to use over the next few years.

The Strategy acts as an overarching roadmap and a focal point for the co-ordination and implementation of initiatives right across Government to ensure that we are using our existing housing stock to the fullest extent possible, aiming to return as many recoverable vacant properties back to viable use as possible, increasing the supply of sustainable housing, while also revitalising the vibrancy of local communities.

While the Strategy has only recently been published, my Department and local authorities have already been very proactive in dealing with vacant properties and there are a number of schemes available to incentivise the return of suitable dwellings into the liveable housing stock.

We are regularly considering new and improved ways of reducing the number of vacant residential dwellings. While the initial national roll-out of the innovative Repair and Lease Scheme did not yield the level of response hoped for, improvements have been made to the scheme with the intention of increasing interest from those who wish to bring their vacant property back into use. We will continue to review all initiatives with a view to offering the best incentives to those who wish to bring homes back into use.

In tandem with the incentives and schemes available centrally, the website *www.vacanthomes.ie* was developed by Mayo County Council in July 2017 on behalf of the local government sector to serve as a central portal for individuals to anonymously log possible vacant homes and alert local authorities so that they can follow up with the registered owners, with a view to ascertaining the potential for bringing these homes into productive use for residential purposes.

The latest statistics from the site indicate that in excess of 2,000 properties have been registered as vacant to date, with the breakdown by province being Leinster 53%, Munster 30%, Connaught 14% and Ulster 3%. Mayo County Council has informed my Department that it is also getting increased interest from property owners in relation to the updated Repair and Lease Scheme.

Local authorities have been asked to provide information regarding vacancy to the Department's Vacant Homes Unit on a quarterly basis, with material due to be submitted shortly, which will allow for further analysis of the work being undertaken at a local level in respect of vacant residential property.

The analysis undertaken by the Central Statistics Office on the number of houses connected to the ESB grid also provides some useful information on the number of vacant dwellings that have been reconnected after two or more years. The CSO's latest data for Q2 2018 shows that since the start of 2016, over 6,400 vacant homes have been brought back into use across the country, adding to the significantly increasing number of new homes connected to the grid for the first time. The full data is available on the CSO website at the following link:

<https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/ndc/newdwellingcompletionsq22018/>.

National Planning Framework

47. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the timelines for completion of regional planning strategies under the regional spatial and economic strategies; the way in which they will implement with population targets in the national development plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39093/18]

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

The National Planning Framework (NPF), published together with the National Development Plan (NDP) as part of Project Ireland 2040 earlier this year, is intended to provide the strategic context for future planning, development and investment over the next two decades. In addition, the NPF represents a long-term strategy for Government Departments, State agencies, State-owned enterprises, regional and local authorities and others to support communities to achieve their potential for economic, social and infrastructural development through a shared set of strategic objectives and key principles.

As a strategic document, the NPF is currently being given further and more detailed expression at the regional level through preparation, by the Regional Assemblies, of statutory Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSEs) for the three Regional Assembly areas. The RSEs process formally commenced earlier this year and draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies are currently in preparation for public consultation later in the Autumn.

The finalisation of these regional strategies in the first half of 2019 will in turn prompt reviews and updates of individual county and city development plans to ensure strategic co-ordination and consistency between national, regional and local levels.

To assist in the preparation of these important plans, my Department published the Implementation Roadmap for the National Planning Framework in July 2018. Appendix 2 of this document provides details on transitional regional and county population projections for 2026 and 2031.

These projections take account of the fact that, cumulatively, current city and county plans are based on post-2006 population projections and provide for a quantum of significantly greater population growth than previously occurred and that also exceeds any likely scenario identified as part of the NPF/NDP preparation process.

The transitional regional and county population projections provided in the Roadmap set a growth trajectory approximately mid-way between what is currently proposed for in statutory development plans and a more evidence-based nationally coherent scenario to 2031 and 2040.

The Implementation Roadmap is available to view on my Department's website at the following link:

<https://www.housing.gov.ie/search/archived/current?query=Circular+FPS+04%2F2018>.

The RSEs process, and the subsequent individual county/city development plan reviews, must address the growth of each region in accordance with the overall parameters set out in the NPF. The transitional population projections provided in the Roadmap are part of these parameters. The review process is intended to strengthen the settlement strategy within counties in light of more relevant and updated population projections whereby towns with capacity will be enabled to continue their logical planned growth within a coordinated county-wide strategy.

Regional and local decision-making at the appropriate level is also provided for through the approach above to shape how the development of all parts of the country can be assured and guided through to 2040, including in the matter of ensuring that housing is provided at appropriate locations across the country and in line with infrastructural and service availability in place and planned for those locations.

NAMA Social Housing Provision

48. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if an explanation was sought from the relevant local authority CEOs or the Housing Agency as to the reason only 2,717 units were taken up by county councils when a total of 6,984 social housing units were offered to their sector by NAMA. [39009/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): At the end of June 2018, a total of 6,984 residential properties had been identified by NAMA as potentially available for social housing.

Local authorities, together with the Housing Agency and my Department, have worked systematically through the full list of units with NAMA to determine if there is a social housing demand for the properties identified as potentially suitable for social housing. As part of the process the Housing Agency has been liaising and in direct contact with all the relevant local authorities to discuss the demand requirements and to co-ordinate the response to NAMA. Where a demand is identified, this information is provided to NAMA and efforts are made to secure as many of the suitable properties as possible for social housing. This process is ongoing and demand has been confirmed by the local authorities for 2,717 of the properties to end June 2018.

The properties under consideration are part of the security for loans that NAMA has acquired. In the majority of cases, properties remain in the ownership of the original borrowers. The remaining properties are controlled by receivers appointed by NAMA. Once a demand has been identified, NAMA makes contact with the relevant property owner/receiver to determine if the properties are still available and to discuss how these properties can be best utilised.

2,424 of the properties have been notified by local authorities to the Housing Agency as unsuitable by reference to sustainable planning and housing policy or are located in areas with no demand. A further 1,843 properties have been sold or privately let by the owners or receivers.

To date, a total of 2,474 residential properties have been delivered for social housing providers comprising of 2,407 completed properties with a further 67 that have been contracted where completion work is on-going.

Of the units declined, in the majority of cases it was because of the need to avoid over concentration of social housing units, either directly within an estate or within the wider geographic area, potentially isolated from the main urban centres.

In many cases, where larger numbers of units were offered, local authorities indicated demand for a lesser, more sustainable number than that offered and all stakeholders endeavoured to facilitate this. Units may have also been in unfinished developments outside of urban centres without infrastructural or community supports.

Although the majority of properties were declined on the basis of local demand or sustainable communities, a small number of properties were declined on the basis that they were not suitable for social housing, either by virtue of the nature of the development, e.g. holiday home type developments, or the units were in areas of exceptionally high market rents or required high management service charges and therefore were not financially viable to be acquired or leased for social housing purposes.

While NAMA, together with the Housing Agency, actively monitor activity related to units that may have been declined and which may still be available, the consultative process undertaken with local authorities to date has been considerable.

Transparency around the NAMA Social Housing process is ensured through regular updates to the websites of the Housing Agency and NAMA. The following link provides detailed data

in this regard, broken down by local authority across a range of categories:

<https://www.housingagency.ie/Our-Services/Housing-Supply-Services/NAMA.aspx>.

Home Loan Scheme

49. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of approvals granted under the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme; his plans to modify the deposit requirement particularly in circumstances in which applicants can show that they have been paying high rents for an appropriate period of time prior to their application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38905/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): As with the previous local authority home loan offerings, loan applications under the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan are made directly to the local authority in whose area the property proposed for purchase is situated.

My Department 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:

<http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/house-prices-loans-and-profile-borrowers/local-authority-loan-activity>.

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; 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, of which 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.

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.

To support prudential lending and consistency of treatment for borrowers, a Loan to Value ratio of 90% applies to the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan as per the Central Bank’s prudential lending guidelines. Therefore, in order to avail of the loan, applicants must have a deposit equivalent to 10% of the market value of the property, and there are no plans to change this requirement.

Applicants must provide bank or similar statements (such as post office, credit union etc.) for a 12-month period immediately prior to making an application, clearly showing a credible and consistent track record of savings. The cash savings should be no less than 3% of the market value of the property. Credit committees may, under certain limited circumstances, permit exceptions to this where the applicant or applicants can demonstrate credible rent payments through their bank account.

For prospective purchasers of newly built properties, the availability of the Help to Buy Initiative for first-time buyers through the Revenue Commissioners may provide additional as-

sistance to prospective applicants for the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan.

Local Authority Housing Data

50. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of local authority new builds to be completed and ready for occupation by the end of 2018, by local authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38909/18]

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 2 2018 is available on the Rebuilding Ireland website at the following link:

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

It 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 available.

Rent Pressure Zones

51. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the measures he plans to take to deal with the widespread breaching of rent increases in rent pressure zones; and if his Department is independently investigating such breaches or monitoring the levels of rent increases in these zones. [39091/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): In April 2018, the Government approved the priority drafting of a new Bill to amend the Residential Tenancies Acts 2004-2016 to enhance the powers of the RTB to protect both tenants and landlords in the residential rental sector, particularly with regard to enforcement of the annual rent increase limit in Rent Pressure Zones.

This Bill's provisions are intended to strengthen further the effectiveness of the rent set-

ting and rent review laws by empowering the RTB to investigate any contravention of the law around rent increase limits (4% per annum) in Rent Pressure Zones (RPZs) and to take enforcement action, if necessary. The provisions involved include power for the imposition of sanctions on landlords in breach of the legal requirements and power for the RTB to investigate without the need for a complaint to be made.

My Department is working closely with the RTB to appropriately resource and develop its capacity to implement tenancy law. The proposed new powers for the RTB are a crucial first step in expanding its overall role and function as part of a multi-annual change management programme to proactively enforce tenancy law. The RTB publishes its quarterly Rent Index and advises my Department on the residential rental market on a continuous basis which informs policy development in this area.

My Department is working closely with the Office of the Attorney General in the drafting of the Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Bill and I hope to bring the Bill to Government in the coming weeks for approval to publish.

Question No. 52 answered with Question No. 37.

Question No. 53 answered with Question No. 44.

Housing Provision

54. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of units due to be provided under the serviced sites fund in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38899/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I refer the Deputy to my reply to Question No 5 on today's Order Paper which sets out the position in relation to this matter.

Defence Forces Remuneration

55. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the status of the review into pay and allowances for members of the Permanent Defence Forces; if allowances which were previously paid will be fully restored; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39279/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Defence Forces pay is increasing in accordance with public sector pay agreements. The focus of these increases is weighted in favour of those on lower pay. Members of the Permanent Defence Force have received the pay increases due under the Lansdowne Road Agreement.

In addition in 2017, following negotiations with PDFORRA improved pay scales were implemented for general service recruits and privates, who joined the Permanent Defence Force post 1 January 2013.

The Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020 provides for increases in pay ranging from 6.2% to 7.4% over the lifetime of the Agreement. The first increase due from 1 January 2018 has been paid to Permanent Defence Force personnel and a second increase is due to be applied from 1 October 2018. Further increases are scheduled for 2019 and 2020.

By the end of the current Public Service Pay agreement (end 2020), the pay of all public servants (including members of the Defence Forces), earning under €70,000 per annum, will be restored to pre FEMPI levels. The restoration of the 5% reduction to allowances cut under FEMPI is also scheduled in the agreement.

New entrants to the Defence Forces will also benefit from the measures which were recently announced in relation to amendments to the pay scales for new entrant public servants recruited since January 2011.

The Public Service Pay Commission was established to provide objective advice to Government in relation to Public Service remuneration policy. In 2017, under my direction, the Department of Defence brought issues of recruitment and retention in the Defence Forces to the attention of the Public Sector Pay Commission (PSPC). As a direct result of that initiative the PSPC is conducting an in-depth evidence based examination of those issues.

The Department of Defence has provided data as requested by the PSPC for consideration. The Commission's work is on-going. The Department of Defence will continue to engage with the Public Service Pay Commission throughout the process and will give due consideration to the findings and recommendations that arises from the work of the Commission.

Ministerial Meetings

56. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence when he last met officials from his Department to discuss defence policy. [38844/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): A range of powers and responsibilities were delegated to me as Minister with Responsibility for Defence by the Defence (Delegation of Ministerial Functions) Order 2017, made on 5 July 2017 under s. 2(1) of the Ministers and Secretaries (Amendment) (No. 2) Act 1977. In that role, I am in daily contact with my officials as part of the on-going business of the Department including defence policy matters. The Taoiseach is briefed as required on defence issues.

Defence Forces Recruitment

57. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence further to Parliamentary Question 14 of 7 September 2018 (details supplied), if minutes of these meetings were actually taken as distinct from being circulated between the attendees. [39237/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I can confirm that a note of the meeting was taken by a Department official. This note is for the purpose of an aide memoire and does not constitute formally agreed minutes of the meeting.

Brexit Issues

58. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if additional financial resources have specifically been given to his Department to prepare for the possibility of a no-deal Brexit; if members of the Defence Forces have undergone training in order that they are equipped to deal with a no-deal Brexit; if so, the details of that training; if his Department has undertaken an analysis of the resources, financial, staffing and otherwise that it will require in the event of a no-deal Brexit; if his Department has a detailed contingency plan in

place that is ready to be operationalised in the event of a no-deal Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39253/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): As the Deputy will be aware, responsibility for the security aspect of border control in Ireland rests with A Garda Síochána, while the Revenue Commissioners also have responsibilities relating to their particular mandate. Among the roles assigned to the Defence Forces in the White Paper on Defence is the provision of aid to the civil power and civil authorities. The Defence Forces at all times keep operational plans under constant review and there will continue to be ongoing close liaison between An Garda Síochána and the Defence Forces regarding security matters, including through regular coordination and liaison meetings.

In respect of the border, the potential implications in this regard will continue to emerge during the course of the negotiations. It is the Government's stated goal to try to ensure that the current on-island border arrangements are maintained to the greatest extent possible. The Brexit negotiations are ongoing and all parties - the EU, Ireland and the UK - agree that there should be no return to a hard border and as such no need for border checkpoint infrastructure or personnel on the land frontier. In this regard, the Irish Government notes Prime Minister May's clear statement on Friday that she will fulfil her commitment of last December for no return to a border between Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Defence Forces training is designed to enable Defence Forces personnel address all potential calls on them arising from changes in the security situation on island within the framework of any roles assigned to them by Government, including aid to the civil power and aid to the civil authorities. Prudent planning in relation to all security situations which may require a Defence Forces response is part and parcel of the day to day operations of the Defence Forces and, as such, is addressed within existing resources.

Should a situation arise beyond the contingent requirement for Defence Forces deployment already provided for in the Defence vote, this will be addressed in the normal course within the budgetary discussions on defence funding.

Human Rights Cases

59. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the arrest and imprisonment of a political activist (details supplied) in India; and if he will he urge the Indian authorities to release the person and review the case against them. [39152/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am aware of the case of Mr Thirumurugan Gandhi, and of his arrest in August. The promotion and protection of human rights is an integral part of Ireland's foreign policy. Ireland works closely with Human Rights Defenders to protect the work they do and to promote the value of civil society space. Article 19 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights sets out that every person has the right to freedom of opinion and expression. This means that people are free to hold opinions without interference and may share these opinions through the media without fear of reprisal. In light of Mr Thirumurugan Gandhi's arrest, I have requested that the Irish Embassy in New Delhi raise this case with the EU Office in New Delhi. In general, it is more effective if we raise concerns through the EU rather than bilaterally. I can assure the Deputy that Embassy New Delhi will continue to take an interest in the case and that I have requested to be kept informed of developments.

Departmental Staff Data

60. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of staff employed in the press office of his Department, both at official and non-official level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39164/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): There are six staff in the Press Section of the Communications Unit in my Department. There are a further four officers engaged in the area of public outreach and five officers covering web and digital issues. Two additional officers in the Unit are dedicated to Brexit and European Union-related communications. These staff are overseen by a Head and a Deputy Head of Communications. There are also press officers posted to diplomatic missions in London, Brussels and Washington D.C. Two Special Advisors in my Department, along with other duties, advise on media matters.

Public Relations Contracts Data

61. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of public relations companies that have been recruited by his Department in 2018; the areas and campaigns in which they have given advice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39165/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department has not recruited any public relations companies in 2018, nor incurred expenditure on external public relations. While my Department has from time to time commissioned companies with a public relations and communications background, this has been done with a view to the provision of other professional services such as project management, logistics and event management, including in relation to Irish Aid public outreach activities.

Brexit Supports

62. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the campaigns he is undertaking to inform persons on Brexit; the format these will take; if he has sought external advice on same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39166/18]

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. Our revamped Brexit website, www.dfa.ie/brexit is a key source of information on Brexit preparedness for citizens and businesses, as are the websites of other relevant Government Departments and agencies. 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 agrifood 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.

International Criminal Court

63. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if Ireland will be supporting the UN Security Council referring Burma to the International Criminal Court (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39171/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Ireland is not currently a member of the UN Security Council, and is therefore not in a position to formally offer support on the question of referring Myanmar to the International Criminal Court. However, as the Deputy notes, the findings of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar (IIFFM) make for harrowing reading. The report corroborates many of the eyewitness accounts which have emerged from Myanmar in recent times. It provides credible findings that human rights violations amounting to crimes against humanity and war crimes have been committed by members of the Burmese Military (Tatmadaw) and other security forces in Rakhine, Kachin and Shan States. These crimes include the widespread killing of civilians; rape and sexual violence; torture and enforced disappearances. The IIFFM's report also finds that there is sufficient evidence of the crimes committed in Rakhine State being so grave that they warrant a competent court to determine the liability for the crime of genocide of those in the Tatmadaw chain of command.

Having considered this evidence, Ireland would support the referral by the Security Council of the situation in Myanmar to the ICC. The Security Council is the only competent body that can take this step.

However, given the political and legal difficulties that surround such a referral, our focus in ensuring accountability and investigation of the allegations is necessarily elsewhere. We are working closely with international partners in other fora including the UN Human Rights Council and the EU to ensure that measures are put in place to allow the investigation of human rights violations and that those who have perpetrated these crimes are held to account.

In particular, at the current session of the Human Rights Council, Ireland is working in Geneva with the EU and other international in support of a resolution which seeks to establish an effective accountability mechanism to hold responsible those who have committed human rights violations.

Middle East Peace Process

64. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on his meeting with the Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas; his views on the recognition of the state of Palestine; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39231/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): When I

visited Ramallah last January, I extended an invitation to President Abbas to visit Ireland again, ten years after his last visit. I was delighted that he took up this invitation last weekend, and was pleased to be able to welcome him to Ireland. The Taoiseach and I had a substantive and useful meeting with President Abbas at Farmleigh on 22 September, following on from his meeting with President Higgins earlier in the day. I also hosted a working dinner for President Abbas and his delegation that evening. The presence of a large delegation accompanying him to the UN General Assembly in New York meant that the meetings also benefitted from the presence of other senior Palestinian leaders, including Saeb Erekat, Chief Negotiator and Secretary General of the PLO; Deputy Prime Minister Dr. Ziad Abu-Amr; Foreign Minister Riad Malki; and others. This contributed to a very full and useful discussion. The topics we covered included the current situation in Palestine, and issues arising from the occupation, including settlements; the situation in Gaza; the funding crisis facing UNRWA; the international environment and prospects for any political initiative; human rights issues in Palestine, especially in Gaza; and the forthcoming United Nations Ministerial sessions and related meetings.

President Abbas and his colleagues expressed their strong hope that Ireland would soon recognise the State of Palestine. I explained the Government's position, our consistent support for the achievement of a fully sovereign Palestinian state, and my continuing assessment of whether and when formal recognition by Ireland could be most helpful. I made clear in my public remarks with Minister Malki that the growing general concern about the evolution of the situation on the ground – which the Government fully shares – was itself also a relevant factor in that assessment.

I also discussed with the Palestinian delegation the idea of Ireland hosting an informal meeting of a small number of Arab and European Ministers with Palestinian representatives, to reflect privately on how to advance the cause of peace. We are working to develop this concept, in consultation with partners, over the coming weeks.

In terms of practical assistance which Ireland can offer to the Palestinian people, I announced an additional €1 million in Irish Aid funding for UNRWA, bringing Ireland's total funding to UNRWA to €7 million this year, the highest it has ever been. I underlined the Government's strong support for the Agency and the essential work it is carrying out under difficult conditions.

Northern Ireland

65. Deputy Brendan Smith asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has had recent discussions with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and with the political parties on the need to have the Stormont Assembly and executive restored without further delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39281/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am engaging closely and on an ongoing basis with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Karen Bradley, as both Governments continue to work together as co-guarantors of the Good Friday Agreement, to address the continuing absence of the power-sharing Executive and Assembly in Northern Ireland, as well as the North-South Ministerial Council. I met with Secretary of State Bradley most recently on 24 August and on 17 September in Dublin and we plan to meet again in Belfast on 8 October. We also remain in regular contact by phone. I have conveyed to Secretary of State Bradley the Government's deep concern at the continuing impasse with the devolved institutions, which she shares.

Both Governments are determined to get the devolved institutions up and running again and

I am actively engaging with Secretary of State Bradley on how that can now be most effectively advanced.

I am hopeful that in the period ahead it will be possible to commence a political process to get beyond the current impasse and seek an agreement between the parties on operating the devolved institutions again, consistent with the full and effective implementation of the Good Friday Agreement and subsequent Agreements.

I do not underestimate the way to go in achieving that, but I firmly believe that a resolution is possible and that the calls from across all sections of the community in Northern Ireland for the devolved institutions to operate will be heeded.

I will continue to engage intensively, working with Secretary of State Bradley and the leaders of all of the political parties, to seek a way forward that will give the best prospects for getting the devolved institutions operating again as soon as possible.

The devolved, power-sharing institutions are at the heart of the Good Friday Agreement and are the best means for achieving accountable, representative decision-making for all the people of Northern Ireland.

The Good Friday Agreement is the indispensable framework for providing stable, inclusive, power-sharing government for all the people of Northern Ireland and for sustaining our interlocking relationships – within Northern Ireland, on the island of Ireland and between the UK and Ireland.

The Government will continue to do everything in its power, consistent with its responsibilities as a co-guarantor of the Good Friday Agreement, to secure the effective operations of all of the institutions of the Agreement.

Mortgage Lending

66. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if banks have the discretion to grant a mortgage to a person without adequate life assurance and-or mortgage protection cover in place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39161/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Central Bank has advised that when an individual(s) applies for a mortgage loan to buy a home, the individual(s) will generally be required to take out mortgage protection insurance. This is a particular type of life assurance taken out for the term of the mortgage and is designed to pay an amount equal to the outstanding principal amount of the mortgage on the death of the borrower or joint borrower.

In most cases, a lender is legally required under section 126 of the Consumer Credit Act 1995 to make sure that a mortgage applicant has a mortgage protection insurance before granting a mortgage loan. However, there are certain exceptions to this requirement which are:

(a) the house in respect of which the loan is made is, in the mortgage lender's opinion, not intended for use as the principal residence of the borrower or of his dependants,

(b) loans to persons who belong to a class of persons which would not be acceptable to an insurer, or which would only be acceptable to an insurer at a premium significantly higher than that payable by borrowers generally,

(c) loans to persons who are over 50 years of age at the time the loan is approved,

(d) loans to persons who, at the time the loan is made, have otherwise arranged life assurance, providing for payment of a sum, in the event of death, of not less than the estimated outstanding principal amount of the mortgage.

Revenue Commissioners

67. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance the reason the Revenue Commissioners' office in Tralee, County Kerry is closed to the public; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39196/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that it has significantly enhanced its overall customer support infrastructure in recent years to assist taxpayers in managing their tax affairs in an environment that is both efficient and convenient. In particular, the provision of enhanced online and telephone services has resulted in very significantly reduced demand for the traditional 'walk-in' services to public offices.

Notwithstanding the introduction of such high-quality on-line facilities, Revenue remains very conscious that these products may not suit everybody, for example the elderly or customers with limited access to broadband, and for that reason has further enhanced its overall service by introducing standardised public office opening hours, a specific 'Business Taxes' telephone service as well as an appointments service in a number of public offices, including Tralee.

The appointments service, which is supported by a dedicated telephone number, facilitates taxpayers in meeting with Revenue officials at a time that best suits individual circumstances and for the most part removes the potential for delays or queuing. Revenue has confirmed that this service is fully available in the Tralee office from 9.30am to 4pm each day and appointments can be made by contacting telephone number 066 716 1108. Revenue has also confirmed that the service provides both face to face meetings and access to the various on-line facilities if required.

Tax Reliefs Availability

68. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance the tax incentive schemes that exist to encourage employers to take on new employees; and the cost of these in a full year. [39255/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): There are a range of tax measures designed directly or indirectly to encourage employers to take on new employees. These include the following:

Key Employee Engagement Programme (KEEP): The policy objective of KEEP is to assist small to medium size businesses in competing with larger companies when attempting to attract and retain key employees. Share options can provide key employees with a financial incentive linked to the success of the company and may improve the attractiveness of an SME employment offer. The incentive provides that the value of the benefit to the employee on exercise of a qualifying share option will be subject to capital gains tax when the employee subsequently disposes of the shares. In the absence of the KEEP incentive, such gains would be subject to income tax, USC and PRSI at the time of exercise.

As this is a new measure, there will be no immediate cost in 2018 as the share options must, with limited exceptions, be held for a minimum of twelve months before they can be exercised

under this scheme. It is also likely that employees may hold the KEEP share options for a number of years before exercise, as the options must be granted at not less than market value on the date of grant, so a benefit will only arise to the employee if the shares increase in value from that date. It is estimated that the eventual full-year cost of the Key Employee Engagement Programme will be in the region of €10m.

Key Employee R&D Tax Credit: Separate from KEEP, this key employee provision allows for the transfer of the financial benefit of the R&D tax credit from a company to an individual employee. The key employee measure is designed to assist companies in the State to attract and retain employees with key skills in the field of R&D. Such skills are necessary to allow companies innovate, expand and develop. The generation of new products, processes and innovations should lead to more jobs being created in the economy. The cost of the measure in 2015, the latest year for which data are available, was less than €0.05m.

The Employment and Investment Incentive: The Employment and Investment Incentive (EII) is a tax relief incentive that provides tax relief for investment in certain corporate trades and is targeted at job creation and retention. The scheme replaced the Business Expansion Scheme (BES) which had been in place from 1984. The incentive allows an individual investor to obtain income tax relief on investments, up to a maximum of €150,000 per annum, in each tax year up to 2020. Relief is initially available to an individual up to a maximum of 30% of the amount invested. A further 10% tax relief is available where it has been proven that employment levels have increased at the company at the end of the specified period (3 years) or where evidence is provided that the company used the capital raised for expenditure on research and development. The cost of EII in 2016, the latest year for which data are available, was €32m. A review of the scheme is currently underway.

The Special Assignee Relief Programme (SARP): SARP is aimed at reducing the cost to employers of assigning key individuals already employed by their companies from abroad to take up positions in the Irish based operations of the employer. The intention is that the recipients of SARP will assist with the establishment of additional functions for their companies in Ireland and, due to a transfer of skills, these functions will be able to operate without the assistance of SARP after a period. The existing SARP scheme is limited to existing overseas employees of companies and is not available to new hires. The cost of SARP in 2015, the latest year for which data are available, was €9.5m. This scheme is subject to a sunset clause with an end date of 31 December 2020.

Start Up Relief: Three Year Start Up Relief (Section 486C TCA 1997) provides for relief from corporation tax for start-up companies in their first three years of trading. The relief was introduced to provide support to new business ventures in their critical early years of trading, thereby supporting the creation of additional employment and economic activity in the State. The relief is granted by reducing the corporation tax payable on the profits of the new trade and gains on the disposal of any assets used for the purpose of the new trade. The relief exclusively supports start-up companies that create and maintain jobs, by restricting the relief available to a company by reference to its Employers' PRSI payments. The cost of the measure in 2016, the latest year for which data are available, is provisionally set at €5.7m.

Film Relief: Section 481 of the TCA 1997 requires that a producer company that receives the relief employs a certain amount of trainees on the production for which the relief is received. The number of trainees is directly linked to the amount of corporation tax relief claimed. A production must have two trainees for every €335,000 of relief claimed, this is capped at a maximum of eight trainees per production. There isn't a specific costing for the trainee element of Film Relief as this measure is a requirement for obtaining the relief.

Budget Submissions

69. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Finance if consideration will be given to the request of an organisation (details supplied) on the rate of VAT applicable to a sector in view of its importance to the economy and particularly rural Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39261/18]

77. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Finance if consideration will be given to the requests of representative organisations (details supplied) on the rate of VAT applicable to a sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39317/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 69 and 77 together.

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.

Sale of State Assets

70. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Finance the location the proceeds from the sale of Bord Gáis currently lie in view of the fact that €10 million is allocated per year for a pilot scheme on social housing; the rate of return these proceeds are earning; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39276/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): There is an obligation under Article 11 of the Constitution to pay moneys due to the State in to the Central Fund unless there is a law stating that they can be paid somewhere else.

The special dividends related to the sale of Bord Gáis can be divided into two categories:

(i) As the Deputy will be aware from a number of previous PQ responses to him on this issue, the €648 million in net proceeds from the sale of Bord Gáis is being paid by way of special dividends from Ervia to the Exchequer, based on a payment schedule agreed with Government in order to maximise the potential to use the funds in a manner which is efficient from the point of our general government balance.

(ii) Payment of additional special dividends by Ervia to the Exchequer of €330 million over time, where the debt originally associated with the Bord Gáis Energy business that was repaid from the sale proceeds is effectively replaced over time. These payments, which commenced in 2017, are expected to continue for around 20 years and are being utilised by Government to support additional activity in its housing programmes. Such housing programmes are a matter for the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government.

The annual rate of return on the amounts that have been transferred to the Exchequer to date would be equivalent to the cost of issuing debt instead of utilising these funds for expenditure on public services. This cost has been approximately 1% per annum for recent debt issuances. The annual rate of return for the funds that remain to be paid by Ervia would be the return earned by Ervia.

VAT Rate Reductions

71. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated cost of reducing to 0% the current 23% VAT on digital school books; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39288/18]

74. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated cost of reducing VAT on condoms to 0%. [39313/18]

75. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated cost of reducing VAT on all menstrual products from 23% to 0% and 13.5%, respectively, including but not limited to such products as menstrual cups, disc and reusable menstrual underwear; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39314/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 71, 74 and 75 together.

I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the VAT rating of goods and services is subject to EU VAT law, with which Irish VAT law must comply. In accordance with the EU VAT Directive the standard rate of VAT, currently 23%, applies to the supply of digital school books.

The VAT Directive also provides that Member States may apply either one or two reduced rates to certain goods and services listed in Annex III of the Directive, including the supply of products used for contraception and sanitary protection. Under Irish legislation the supply of condoms is subject to the reduced rate of VAT, currently 13.5% and the supply of menstrual products, excluding sanitary towels and tampons, is subject to the standard rate of VAT, 23%.

In addition, the Directive allows for historic VAT treatment to be maintained under certain conditions and Ireland has retained the application of the zero rate of VAT on certain goods such as sanitary towels and sanitary tampons, but is prohibited from extending or applying this rate to other goods.

I am further advised by the Revenue Commissioners that traders are not required to separately identify the VAT yield generated from a particular product type or activity on their VAT returns. Therefore, it is not possible to provide an estimated cost of reducing the VAT rates on the specific products referred to by the Deputy.

Illegal Fuel Sales

72. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the widespread illegal importation of smoky coal from Northern Ireland and its adverse impact on legitimate businesses here; the measures he plans to implement to deal with this illicit trade; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39302/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As I, and my predecessor, have pointed out before, the collection of solid fuel carbon tax is heavily reliant on the regulatory regime covering the marketing, sale, distribution and burning of solid fuels in the State. This regulatory regime is operated by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment and is enforced by local authorities. This regime, which imposes higher environmental standards on coal in the State than applies in Northern Ireland, enables local authorities to undertake enforcement action to prevent the sale or distribution of coal that does not meet our standards.

European Union Single Market constraints preclude the use of any cross-border movement controls in the administration of Solid Fuel Carbon Tax. Therefore, Revenue has no authority

to stop vehicles and physically inspect loads of such fuel. Similarly, the transport or possession of solid fuel that originated in Northern Ireland are not, in themselves, Revenue offences and Revenue's officers have no authority to challenge such transportation or possession. It is important to note that liability to Solid Fuel Carbon Tax does not arise on the physical presence of the goods in the State, but on first supply in the State by the supplier who is obliged to register with Revenue, make a return and pay the tax. This return must be made one month after the two-month accounting period provided for in law.

I am advised that Revenue is in contact with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment to discuss the effectiveness of the regulatory regime for solid fuel and to explore how to improve matters in light of continuing concerns that fuel sourced from Northern Ireland is getting onto the market here, including the scope for cooperation to ensure improved compliance in the sector.

Tax Credits

73. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated cost of increasing the earned income tax credit from its 2018 level of €1,150 to €1,650 to match the PAYE credit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39305/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The estimated cost of increasing the Earned Income Tax Credit from €1,150 to €1,650 to match the PAYE Credit can be found on page 6 of the Revenue Pre-Budget 2019 Ready Reckoner, available at <https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/documents/statistics/ready-reckoner.pdf>.

The estimated first year cost is €68 million and the full year cost is €121 million.

Questions Nos. 74 and 75 answered with Question No. 71.

Tax Data

76. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Finance the likely revenue that would accrue to the State on the closure of existing tax breaks for real estate investment funds including section 110 special purpose vehicle exemptions related to foreign housing and rental investors, exemptions from capital gains tax, DIRT and corporation tax; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39316/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): A number of legislative changes have been made in recent years to ensure that income and gains arising to real estate investment funds active in the Irish property market are subject to tax.

For example, Finance Act 2016 made certain changes to the taxation of companies set up under section 110 companies of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (TCA), which is designed to create a tax neutral regime for bona-fide securitisation and structured finance purposes. Section 110 companies can only hold certain qualifying assets. Real property is not an asset that these companies can hold, however they can hold loans and other financial assets that derive their value therefrom. The Finance Act 2016 changes related to the taxation of profits which were derived from Irish land and buildings and provided a restriction on the amount of interest which is deductible against such profits, thereby excluding businesses with loans which are secured over, or derive their value from, an interest in Irish land from using the provisions of section 110 to avoid payment of Irish tax on profits made on Irish property transactions. Those changes

took effect from 6 September 2016.

The Deputy will also be aware of the REIT regime introduced in Finance Act 2013 and the IREF regime introduced in Finance Act 2016. Both regimes, which apply to collective investment vehicles, in general terms provide that profits arising from Irish rental property are taxed at the investor level rather than at the investment vehicle level. That is, the vehicle is not subject to corporation tax or capital gains tax because the income and/or gains are taxed at the level of the investor when they receive a payment from that vehicle. Under both regimes a 20% withholding tax applies on dividends paid out of Irish property profits or gains to non-resident investors.

There are a number of exceptions from the operation of the IREF and REIT withholding tax such as for pension schemes and charities as they are more generally exempt from tax.

DIRT does not apply to deposits held by companies who have supplied their tax reference number to a deposit taker. I would note however while DIRT is not collected at source, such companies are subject to tax on the interest income. There is no specific exemption from DIRT for section 110s, REITs or IREFs. The nature of investment vehicles is such that they are unlikely to hold significant deposits for any period of time.

I am advised by Revenue that it is not possible to calculate the amount of tax that would be paid if:

- a company had not submitted a notification to Revenue that it is a qualifying company for the purposes of section 110 TCA 1997,
- the REIT regime was not in existence, or
- the IREF regime was not in existence.

Any such calculation would require a wide range of assumptions as to what activity would have taken place in the absence of these regimes.

Question No. 77 answered with Question No. 69.

Public Sector Staff Remuneration

78. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the relevant information in respect of the professional added years schemes pertaining to staff who joined the Civil Service prior to 1993, prior to 1997 and new entrants from 2011 will be provided; if the same information pertaining to staff that joined non-commercial semi-State bodies (details supplied) prior to 1993, prior to 1997, prior to 2005 and new entrants from 2011 will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39138/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Professional added year's schemes, in both the Civil Service and State-Sponsored Bodies, apply to pensionable employees appointed to a professional, technical or specialist post where the essential requirements specified in the competition (e.g. qualifications / experience / minimum entry age) result in all candidates from the competition being over the age of 25 on appointment.

1. Professional added years schemes which operate in the Civil Service

Relevant dates	Relevant scheme for assessment of award	Circular
Retired before 1 January 1993	- Old Scheme	Circular 11 of 1985: Ad hoc arbitration finding on a claim for the award of added years to certain civil service grades
Serving at any time between 1 January 1993 and 31 March 1997	Staff have a choice between: - Revised Old Scheme - New Scheme	Circular 12 of 1997: Revised schemes for the award of professional, technical and specialist added years to certain civil servants
Appointed on or after 1 April 1997	- New Scheme	Circular 12 of 1997: Revised schemes for the award of professional, technical and specialist added years to certain civil servants
Appointed as a new entrant by competition advertised on or after 1 April 2005	- New Entrant Scheme	Circular 8 of 2005: Public Service Pension Reform: New Scheme for the award of professional, technical and specialist added years to certain entrant staff of the Civil and Public Service
Appointed as a Single Scheme member on or after 1 January 2013	- N/A*	- N/A

* Please note members of the Single Public Service Pension Scheme are not entitled to professional added years.

1. Professional added years schemes which operate in State- Sponsored Bodies

Relevant dates	Relevant scheme for assessment of award	Circular / Letter to Depts.
Serving on 1 July 1987	- Original scheme	Letter to Departments 9 May 1988: Scheme for the grant of “professional added years” for superannuation purposes to staff of State-Sponsored bodies
Serving at any time between 1 April 1997 and 31 December 2004.	Staff have a choice between:- Original scheme Revised scheme	Letter to Departments 19 November 2004: Revised scheme for the award of professional, technical and specialist added years to certain staff of State-Sponsored Bodies

Relevant dates	Relevant scheme for assessment of award	Circular / Letter to Depts.
Appointed as a new entrant by competition advertised on or after 1 April 2005	- New Entrant Scheme	Circular 8 of 2005: Public Service Pension Reform: New Scheme for the award of professional, technical and specialist added years to certain entrant staff of the Civil and Public Service
Appointed as a Single Scheme member on or after 1 January 2013	- N/A*	N/A

*Please note members of the Single Public Service Pension Scheme are not entitled to professional added years.

Public Sector Staff Remuneration

79. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the estimated cost of increasing the minimum public sector wage to €11.90 per hour. [39315/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The detailed costings sought in this request would require detailed data on the position of staff on each salary scale across the public service and details of the standard working hours per week for each individual grade. This data is not available to the Department.

Pay band data available to the Department indicates that some 96% of all public service staff are on salary points in excess of €25,000 per annum. The suggested wage at €11.90 per hour based on the Civil Service 37 hour standard net working week equates to an annual salary of €22,975.

Data based on Civil Service staff only at the end of June 2018 indicates that only some 1% of staff (FTE) in the Civil Service are on salary points less than €22,975. The estimated cost within the civil service, which is some 11% of the overall public service, would be some €3.9m (Headcount). Based on the above costing, assuming the same wage profile to the wider Public Service, it is estimated that it would cost €35.4m to introduce a minimum wage across the Civil and Public Service.

However it should be noted that any of those currently on an annual salary of less than €22,975 could be receiving remuneration in excess of the suggested minimum wage through additional premium payments in respect of shift or atypical working hours or are on salary scales that progress to the suggested minimum wage through incremental progression.

Furthermore, the pay increases under the new Public Services Stability Agreement 2018-2020: 1% October 2018; 1% for those earning under €30,000 January 2019; 1.75% in September 2019 and 2% in October 2020 will further reduce those earning less than the rate the Deputy has mentioned.

Departmental Correspondence

80. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when

a reply will issue to correspondence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39130/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will now be aware, a reply to your correspondence issued on Monday 24th September.

The delay in replying to the Deputy is regretted. It was an administrative oversight, recognising the time of year where the primary focus of the department has been on the preparation for the forthcoming Budget.

Public Appointments Service

81. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if a Public Appointments Service campaign for a post (details supplied) is still ongoing; when applicants under consideration for appointment will receive correspondence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39170/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Public Appointments Service (PAS), an independent statutory recruitment body, advertised a competition for Investigation Officers in the Protected Disclosure Unit, Garda Ombudsman Commission in July 2017.

Following the selection process conducted by PAS a panel of candidates was formed. Should any of these candidates come under consideration for a position they are informed of this and corresponded with thereafter as and when necessary.

However, prior to any offer of appointment candidates must also undergo and satisfy a rigorous and potentially lengthy clearance process, given the nature of the position.

Budget 2019

82. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform further to Parliamentary Question No. 64 of 20 September 2018, if current spending overruns of €209 million according to the August Fiscal Monitor if maintained to the end of the year will be filled by capital spending underspends of €361 million; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39273/18]

83. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if there are capital underspends in Departments at the end of the year if these underspends are automatically carried over to 2019; if not, if that funding will be drawn from the capital funding allocation for 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39274/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 82 and 83 together.

As outlined in the August 2018 Fiscal Monitor published by the Department of Finance, overall gross voted expenditure to the end of August 2018 was €39,449 million. This was €152 million, or 0.4 per cent, below profile and €2,874 million, or 7.9 per cent, higher than expenditure for the same period in 2017. Gross voted current expenditure of €36,770 million was €209 million, or 0.6 per cent ahead of profile and €2,353 million, or 6.8 per cent ahead of the same period last year. At the end of August 14 out of 17 Ministerial Vote Groups were either broadly in line or below profile, with an aggregate underspend of €207 million versus their current ex-

penditure profiles. Health, Education and Skills, and Justice were ahead of their gross current expenditure profiles by an aggregate amount of €416 million.

Given the scale of gross voted expenditure, €62 billion in aggregate for 2018, the need for Supplementary Estimates or the surrender of funds to the Exchequer at end-year can arise for a number of reasons. Additional funding requirements in one area may be partly offset by underspends in another area. The exact scale of any underspends is difficult to assess at this stage in the year. However, the expenditure outturns for the last two years provide an indication of the potential range.

As reported in the December 2017 Fiscal Monitor, gross voted expenditure in 12 out of 17 Vote Groups was in line or below profile for the year. These profiles reflected the allocations set out in the Revised Estimates for Public Services 2017 published in December 2016 and the Further Revised Estimates presented to the Dáil on 17th October 2017. The aggregate underspend on current expenditure across these 12 Vote Groups was €208 million. As set out in the December 2016 Exchequer Statement, gross voted expenditure in 11 out of 16 Ministerial Vote Groups finished the year at or below their total expenditure profile. The aggregate underspend on current expenditure across these 11 Vote Groups was €238 million. Consequently, based on the level of current expenditure underspends over the last two years in Vote Groups that underspent relative to their profiles, voted current expenditure underspends in the region of c €0.2 billion could be expected to partly offset the expenditure pressures emerging in Health, Education and Justice.

At the end of each financial year, unspent voted allocations must be surrendered to the Exchequer. However, as set out in the Public Financial Procedures, there is an exception in relation to voted capital. Section 91 of the Finance Act 2004 provides that a maximum of up to 10% of the capital envelope of each Vote may be carried over to the following year by way of ‘deferred surrender’ to be spent that year on priority capital programmes. The total amount of capital carryover at end-2017 was €70.3 million.

At the end of August, gross voted capital expenditure of €1,679 million was €361 million, or 11.9 per cent below profile and €521 million ahead of end-August 2017. The Department of Housing was €175 million below profile with a significant proportion of this capital underspend being due to a timing issue relating to Irish Water, which is expected to revert to profile. Consequently, excluding the Department of Housing, gross voted capital expenditure is €186 million below profile. At end-August 2017, the equivalent underspend was €163 million. At end-December 2017, after taking capital carryover of €70 million into account, the equivalent capital underspend, excluding the Department of Housing, amounted to €54 million, which is approximately 1 per cent of the overall capital allocation. However, given the nature of spending on capital projects there is a particular difficulty in assessing the potential full year outturn at this point in time.

Managing the delivery of public services within budgetary allocations is a key responsibility of each Minister and their Departments. Taking into account the level of underspends in previous years outlined above, it is important that where Departments have expenditure pressures arising in certain programmes the scope to reallocate expenditure from other programmes is fully examined in order to mitigate the risk of an overspend. Any increase in expenditure in one sector, unless offset by expenditure underspends elsewhere, either voted or non-voted, or additional revenues, would result in a deterioration in the general government deficit from a projected 0.2 per cent of GDP this year and 0.1 per cent of GDP next year. Consequently, as part of the Budget process, work is ongoing to determine the scale of any potential Supplementary Estimate requirements for this year, the potential impact on aggregate voted expenditure in both 2018 and 2019, and potential offsetting revenue or expenditure across all areas of General

Government.

Community Employment Schemes Supervisors

84. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to provide funds to address the issue of providing a pension and gratuity to retiring and retired community employment supervisors as per a recommendation of the Labour Court; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39360/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I refer the deputy to my previous response to PQ 35780/18.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

85. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the estimated cost of removing the anomaly in which lone parents in receipt of one-parent family payment and jobseeker's transition payment and rent supplement are not eligible for SUSI maintenance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39309/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In general terms, there is nothing preventing a lone parent who is in receipt of Rent Supplement, One Parent Family Payment and/or Jobseeker's Allowance Transition payment(s) from applying to SUSI for maintenance funding under the Student Grant Scheme. As such no additional costs would accrue.

Rent Supplement, Housing Assistance Payment, Rental Accommodation Scheme, One Parent Family Payments (where paid to the applicant) and Jobseeker's Allowance Transition (where paid to the applicant), are all treated as income disregards for the purposes of the Student Grant Scheme and are not included in the calculation of reckonable income. Furthermore, the One Parent Family Payment and Jobseekers Allowance Transition payments are eligible payments for the special rate of maintenance grant.

If an individual applicant considers that she/he has been unjustly refused a student grant or that the rate of grant awarded is not the correct one, she/he may appeal, in the first instance, to SUSI. Where an individual applicant has had an appeal turned down in writing by SUSI and remains of the view that the scheme has not been interpreted correctly in his/her case, an appeal form outlining the position may be submitted by the applicant to the independent Student Grants Appeals Board within the required timeframe.

School Transport Provision

86. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a school transport service will be provided for a person (details supplied). [39127/18]

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 child referred to by the Deputy has recently commenced on a school transport service.

School Transport Administration

87. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to issues regarding the school transport scheme; if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that many children are not able to get to and from school on a daily basis due to problems with the scheme; if the case of a person (details supplied) will be examined in order to ensure that a child with a disability can get to school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39132/18]

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.

Under the terms of the Primary and Post-Primary Transport Schemes, children are generally eligible for school transport if they satisfy the distance criteria and are attending their nearest school.

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.

Under the terms of the School Transport Scheme for Children with Special Educational Needs, children with special educational needs are eligible for school transport if they are attending the nearest recognised mainstream or special school that is or can be resourced, to meet their special educational needs under Department of Education and Skills' criteria. Eligibility is determined following consultation with the National Council for Special Education through its network of Special Education Needs Organisers.

The child referred to by the Deputy is eligible for school transport and Bus Éireann has advised that he commenced on a school transport service on Monday 24th September 2018.

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

Schools Building Projects Status

88. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the development of a building project by a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39151/18]

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

In that regard a technical site visit was carried out by my Department at the school's current site with a view to developing the project brief, which is currently being finalised. My Department will continue to liaise with the school authority in respect of the project.

School Staff

89. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a primary school (details supplied) in County Cork will remain a four teacher school for the 2018-2019 school year; if an appeal mechanism is open to the school in the event that it does not meet the minimum number of 81 pupils on 30 September 2018 for the retention of four teachers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39199/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The criteria used for the allocation of teaching posts is published annually on the Department website. The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September. The staffing schedule also includes an appeals mechanism for schools to submit an appeal under certain criteria to an independent Appeals Board.

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

The school referred to by the Deputy submitted an application for consideration by the Appeals Board at its March 2018 meeting under the small school criterion. The appeal was provisionally approved by the Appeals Board pending confirmation of the actual enrolments on the 30th September 2018. If the school fails to achieve the required enrolment of 81 pupils on 30th September the post will be suppressed with effect from 26th October 2018.

The Primary Staffing Appeals Board will meet in mid-October to consider appeals for the 2018/19 school year. Application forms are available in Circular 0010/2018, published on the Department of Education website. The closing date for receipt of appeals for this meeting is 8th October 2018.

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

Schools Data

90. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of non-DEIS primary schools with two special classes other than ASD classes designated for pupils with special educational needs; the number of these schools that have a teaching principal; and the number that have an overall school enrolment between 113 and 175 inclusive that have a teaching principal. [39225/18]

91. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of non-DEIS primary schools with two special classes other than ASD classes in which the overall school enrolment is between 113 and 175 inclusive; the number in which the principal has administrative status; the name, address and roll numbers of these schools; and the criteria on which these positions of administrative principal were sanctioned. [39226/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 90 and 91 together.

The information sought by the Deputy is not routinely collated by my Department.

I will arrange to have the material compiled and forwarded to the Deputy as soon as it is available.

Emergency Works Scheme Applications

92. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department is in receipt of an emergency works application from a primary school (details supplied) in County Mayo; the status of the application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39260/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm that my Department recently received an Emergency Works application from the school to which the Deputy refers. This application is currently being assessed and a decision will issue directly to the school authority in due course.

Commencement of Legislation

93. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when he will commence the provisions of the Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018. [39270/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018 was signed into law by the President on the 18th July 2018.

In relation to commencement of the various sections of the Act my Department has sought the advice of the Office of the Attorney General (AGO) in respect of which sections can be commenced immediately. Other sections will require regulations and procedures to be drafted following consultation with the Education Partners before they can be commenced.

The commencement of the Act remains a priority and I will consider which sections of the Act can be commenced and appropriate timelines, following advice from the AGO in this regard.

Teachers' Remuneration

94. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress to date in resolving the issue of lower paid teachers whose salaries were reduced in context of emergency economic measures; if recognition is being given to their situation with a view to resolution; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39345/18]

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.

Student Grant Scheme Administration

95. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason income allegedly derived from parents was used in the calculation of entitlement to a higher education grant in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39349/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): For student grant purposes, students are categorised according to their circumstances either as an independent student or a dependent student.

An applicant’s class is defined at his/her first point of entry or re-entry to an approved course and will continue for the duration of his/her studies.

In order to be classified as an independent applicant a student must:

- Be over 23 years of age on the first of January of the year in which s/he enters or re-enters an approved PLC or higher education course, and

- Not ordinarily reside with his/her parent(s) from October of the year before the first point of entry or re-entry to an approved higher education course.

If an individual applicant considers that s/he has been unjustly refused a student grant or that the rate of grant awarded is not the correct one, s/he may appeal, in the first instance, to SUSI. Where an individual applicant has had an appeal turned down in writing by SUSI and remains of the view that the scheme has not been interpreted correctly in his/her case, an ap-

peal form outlining the position may be submitted by the applicant to the independent Student Grants Appeals Board within the required timeframe.

Direct Provision Expenditure

96. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the budget that was given to private companies to run direct provision centres in each of the years 2012 to 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39246/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): The Reception & Integration Agency (RIA) of my Department is provided with an annual budget under the vote of the Department of Justice to provide applicants for protection with accommodation for the duration of the application process. No budgets are given to private companies for this purpose. RIA seeks to have services provided under contract at centres located throughout the state.

The following table provides a breakdown of the RIA budget spend for the years 2012-2017.

Expenditure Type	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Accommodation (includes commercial, State-owned & self-catering)	€59.971m	€53.307m	€51.071m	€54.895m	€60.327m	€65.407m
Pre-school (contributions towards some costs)	€0.114m	€0.112m	€0.101m	€0.127m	€0.112m	€0.095m
Additional costs at State-owned centres (incl. gas, oil, water, sewage, etc.)	€2.109m	€1.746m	€1.972m	€1.879m	€3.558m	€1.742m
Transport costs (under dispersal policy)	€0.071m	€0.036m	€0.046m	€0.103m	€0.129m	€0.093m
Miscellaneous	€0.064m	€0.027m	€0.027m	€0.021m	€0.011m	€0.022m

Expendi- ture Type	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Total Bud- get	€62.329m	€55.228m	€53.217m	€57.025m	€64.137m	€67.359m

Immigration Support Services

97. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the funding provided for immigration integration services in each year since 2011; the services provided with this targeted funding; the amount each service received in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39249/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): I wish to inform the Deputy that service provision to migrants is mainstreamed across all Government Departments. The following table sets out the budget allocation for each year from 2011 to 2018 in respect of the Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration which operates in the Department of Justice and Equality.

2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
3,638	2,502	2,344	2,312	2,346	4,445	4,957	5,196
2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
3,638	2,502	2,344	2,312	2,346	4,445	4,957	5,196

The Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration operates a number of funding schemes in the area of migrant integration which includes the integration of refugees. It administers a National Funding Programme to Promote Integration of Migrants (a scheme for grants spread over 3 years) and a small grants scheme (maximum grant of €5,000 per project) under the Communities Integration Fund. The EU Funds Unit of the Department administers generally larger grants and for multi-annual projects using funding from European sources, including the Asylum Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and the European Social Fund (ESF).

Details of funding amounts and services provided are attached where available as follows:

A; National Funding Programme to Promote the Integration of Migrants

B. Communities Integration Fund 2017

C. Communities Integration Fund 2018

D. Asylum Migration and Integration Fund 2017 - 2019

E. European Integration Fund 2009/2010

F. European Integration Fund 2013/2015

G. European Refugee Fund 2009/2010

H. European Refugee Fund 2013/2015

I. European Social Fund PEIL 2.7 Integration and Employment of Migrants

j. Dormant Accounts Fund Measure 4 - Preactivation Supports for Female Refugees

[debates%20authoring/webattachments.nsf/0/442676765E8929648025831600333B35/\$File/H.%20European%20Refugee%20Fund%202013-2015.

pdf?openelement">Table1]

[Table2]

[Table3]

[Table4]

[Table5]

[Table6]

[Table7]

[Table8]

[Table9]

[Table10]

Civil Legal Aid

98. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the estimated cost of abolishing financial contributions to civil legal aid for victims of domestic violence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39292/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I can inform the Deputy that, from 1 January 2018, a contribution is no longer required of persons granted legal aid in connection with proceedings where the sole remedy sought is an order pursuant to the Domestic Violence Act 1996. Statutory Instrument 626 of 2017, which I signed in December 2017, gave effect to this. Based on 2016 contribution figures, the estimated cost of implementing this change is €150,000 per annum.

Legislative Reviews

99. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the review of the Defamation Act 2009; and if there is a timeline for the review to be completed. [39177/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware the Defamation Act 2009 codified and reformed Irish Defamation law. Section 5 of the 2009 Act requires my Department to undertake a review of the operation of the Act and this review is currently ongoing.

The parameters of the review were published on the website of the Department of Justice and Equality as well as a call for submissions for a public consultation on the operation of the Defamation Act. Submissions to this public consultation were also published on the Department's website. In announcing the review, I stated that the central focus for the review is to ensure that our law strikes the correct balance between the right to freedom of expression in a democratic society, and an individual's right to protect their good name and privacy against unfounded attack – rights which are protected both under our Constitution and under the European Convention on Human Rights.

Amongst other matters, the review is addressing whether any changes should be made to the level or type of damages which may be awarded in defamation cases, or to the factors to be taken into account in making that determination. In addition, the review is addressing whether any changes should be made to the respective roles of judge and jury in High Court defamation cases. The review is also addressing the adequacy of the current range of defences under the 2009 Act, including the defence of fair and reasonable publication on a matter of public interest.

My officials have completed extensive work on the review, which includes a comparative examination of the law of defamation in other jurisdictions, including in relation to assessment of damages and the respective roles of judge and jury. The timeframe for the review was extended due to requests by stakeholders for more time to prepare their submissions, the complexity of the issues under consideration, the wide scope of the submissions received, other urgent legislative priorities for the Department, and significant intervening judgments of relevance from the European Court of Human Rights and the Supreme Court.

The review will culminate in a report to that will be submitted to me and that will include a range of options for reform of the 2009 Act. My officials have informed me that it is expected that the draft report with options for reform will be submitted to me before the end of 2018.

Immigration Status

100. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 333 of 18 September 2018, if his attention was drawn to the fact that the person was on maternity leave; if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that they are trying to return to work, which they cannot do unless their stamp 4 is updated; if this principle is generally applicable in cases in which a woman due to a pregnancy had to leave the workforce as provided for under national and international law; if the decision in this case is a breach of equality legislation; if previous holders of stamp 4 residential status did not have such rights; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39201/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have been informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned was granted permission to remain in the State as an exceptional measure on an individual and personal basis on 13 July 2015.

This permission is subject to a number of conditions including that the person concerned does not become a burden on the State and must be in a position to show evidence of employment or self-sufficiency when renewing their immigration permission. Information available shows that the person concerned was on maternity leave from 28 April 2017 to 26 October 2017 and has been on Job Seekers Allowance since this date. Records further show that the person concerned ceased employment on 18 October 2017, prior to the cessation of the maternity leave. On 18 July 2018 the individual attended their local registration office where the request to renew their permission was refused as the individual was unable to show that they met the criteria outlined in the permission.

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

101. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the capacity of Mosney direct provision centre in each of the years 2011 to 2017 and to date in 2018; the number of residents living in Mosney direct provision centre as of 1 September in each of the years 2011 to 2018; the details of expansion to the centre since 2011; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39247/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): As a demand led organisation, the Reception & Integration Agency (RIA) of my Department of Justice & Equality manages its accommodation portfolio by reference to the accommodation requirements and needs at any time. Thus, capacity at centres can increase or decrease from contract to contract as needed.

In the case of Mosney, the total available capacity at the centre is 800, however, the Minister has only availed of such peak capacity under periods of particular pressures of need.

The contracted capacity at Mosney on 31st December each year between 2011 and 2017 was 600. During this period, when numbers exceeded 600, additional spaces were incorporated into the contract for services when it was certain that the requirement remained.

In 2016, the Irish Refugee Protection Policy (IRPP) was established and utilised the additional available capacity of 200 places in Mosney as an EROC (Emergency Reception & Orientation Centre). Following the completion of a public procurement process, long term contracts for EROCs are being put in place.

While the total contracted capacity including the EROC is now at 800, additional spaces remain available where an exceptional need arises.

The following table outlines the information requested and indicates the capacity usage of the centre.

Year/Month	Contracted Capacity (Q 1)	Occupancy(Q 2)	Contracted Capacity EROC	Occupancy-EROC
2011 September	600	576	N/A	N/A

Year/Month	Contracted Capacity (Q 1)	Occupancy(Q 2)	Contracted Capacity EROC	Occupancy-EROC
2012September	600	535	N/A	N/A
2013 September	600	613	N/A	N/A
2014 September	600	617	N/A	N/A
2015September	600	665	N/A	N/A
2016 September	600	580	200	28
2017 September	600	673	200	54
2018 September	600	674	200	144

Direct Provision Data

102. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the contract values for direct provision centres for 2016 and 2017 will be released; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39248/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): All accommodation centres for those persons seeking protection, whether State-owned or privately owned, are operated by commercial companies. There are currently 36 accommodation centres being operated (including the Reception Centre at Baleskin, Co. Dublin) under the direct provision system.

Extensive and detailed information on the amount paid by my Department to each company contracted to provide direct provision accommodation every year up to and including 2015 can be found on the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) website www.ria.gov.ie under the 'Contract Values' section of the website - <http://www.ria.gov.ie/en/RIA/Pages/ContractValues>.

This is in accordance with the RIA's policy on disclosure of financial information which was agreed with the Office of the Information Commissioner. Under this policy, a table of Contract Values is published on the RIA website, excluding the most recent previous two years. Therefore, in 2018, contract values up to 2015 were published on the website. Contract values for 2016 will be published in 2019 and contract values for 2017 will be published in 2020. The Deputy will appreciate that it is not appropriate to provide values for current contracts entered into by my Department. Negotiations take place with a number of commercial entities on an on-going basis with a clear focus on achieving the best value for money in respect of each contract. It is not in the interests of yielding best value for the taxpayer that details of current individual contracts are made available to other commercial bodies who are, or may be in the future, engaged in these negotiations.

Direct Provision Data

103. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the integration services provided within direct provision services; the cost of these services in each of the years 2011 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39250/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): Funding for integration services provided within accommodation centres contracted as part of the direct provision system is not recorded as a separate item.

However, under the European Union's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) 2014-2020, the EU Funds Unit of the Department of Justice and Equality is currently funding eight projects under the Asylum Specific Objective, with the total AMIF grant allocations amounting to €2.28 million. Most of the projects were formally approved (following an Open Call for Proposals) in April/May 2017 and will be delivered over three years, ending in 2020.

The objectives of the eight projects relate to supporting the needs of persons in the international protection process through a range of means, typically around information, advice, advocacy and service referral. Again, in the main, these supports are provided at a local level and are not made within accommodation services or directly to centres.

The projects are:

Project	Grant Amount	Location
KASI	€180,000.00	Kerry
South West Mayo Development Company	€265,814.00	Mayo
Laois Partnership Company	€150,000.00	Laois
Galway City Partnership	€201,000.00	Galway
Spirasi	€750,000.00	Nationwide
Dorus Lumní	€234,245.00	Limerick / Mid-west
NASC - the Irish Immigrant Support Centre	€200,000.00	Cork
Irish Refugee Council Ireland	€300,000.00	Nationwide

Since the publication of the McMahon Report (Working Group on Improvements to the Protection Process, including Direct Provision and Supports to Asylum Seekers), integration efforts have also been focused on the voluntary work of the Friends of the Centre groups, as recommended in the report.

Friends of the Centre groups are made up of residents, centre managers, local people and representatives from non-governmental groups. The emphasis of Friends groups is on fostering active engagement between centre residents and the local community as one of the simplest and most meaningful form of integration. As the Report stated "Work to develop community linkages should focus on developing reciprocal linkages with residents participating in activities in the local community and vice versa. The centre management should consider making facilities in the centre, e.g., meeting rooms and grounds, available for meetings and other activities to create and strengthen two-way links between residents and the local community." These groups aim to encourage and facilitate the active participation of asylum seekers in local community life and the activities developed by this network promote a self-help approach.

During 2017 and 2018, in particular, many events have been organised through the Friends of the Centre groups. Open Days were held in all family centres, helping to break down barriers, both real and perceived, between the centres and the local community.

Deportation Orders

104. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 289 of 18 September 2018, if he will respond to the question regarding the statistics for prisoners on protection in Irish prisons as opposed to those on restricted regimes;

and the figures for the daily average of prisoners on protection in 2017. [39251/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I can advise the Deputy that as per my reply to Parliamentary Question 442 for written answer on 7 September 2018, there are no prisoners on protection who are not on a form of restricted regime with the exception of one prisoner on Portlaoise Campus.

A prisoner may, either at his/her own request or when the Governor considers it necessary, in so far as is practicable and subject to the maintenance and good order and safe and secure custody, be kept separate from other prisoners who are reasonably likely to cause significant harm to him/her. This is provided for under Rule 63 of the Prison Rules 2007.

In addition, the Governor may decide, for the maintenance of good order in the prison, to remove a prisoner from general association or structured activity to reduce the negative effect that a prisoner or prisoners may have on the general population. This is provided for under Rule 62 of the Prison Rules 2007. There may also be a smaller number of prisoners who would be restricted for medical (Rule 64) or discipline reasons (Rule 67).

The Census undertaken by the Irish Prison Service on a quarterly basis provides figures in respect of all of these categories of restricted regime prisoners.

As the information is compiled on a quarterly basis, data in relation to daily averages is not available.

Prisoner Discipline

105. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 292 of 18 September 2018, his views on the measures to reduce the number of prisoners on restricted regimes in view of the fact that the number has increased from 339 in 2013 to 536 in July 2018; and his plans to review the current policy. [39252/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I wish to advise the Deputy that I am satisfied that every effort is being taken by my officials in the Irish Prison Service to reduce the number of prisoners on restricted regimes.

The Deputy will be aware that there are a number of serious gangland feuds occurring in Dublin and elsewhere leading to serious crimes being committed and persons being sentenced to imprisonment for committing those crimes. The tensions being generated on the 'outside' are imported into the prison system resulting in an increase in tension and a feeling among prisoners that they do not wish to mix with the general population in individual prisons. The emergence of these feuds, coupled with other factors has resulted in greater numbers of prisoners seeking 'protection'. While every reasonable effort is being taken to encourage prisoners to mix within the general population, it is also the case that there is no provision available to 'force' prisoners off protection. The vast majority of prisoners on protection are there at their own request.

The Director General of the Irish Prison Service continues to Chair a high-level group which considers various measures to reduce the number of prisoners held on restricted regimes, which includes prisoners on protection. Since the introduction of the quarterly Census of Restricted Regime Prisoners the number of prisoners on 22/23 hour restricted regime has actually decreased by 176 or 83% from 211 in July 2013 to 35 in July 2018.

Brexit Issues

106. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if additional financial resources have specifically been given to An Garda Síochána to prepare for the possibility of a no-deal Brexit; if members of An Garda Síochána have undergone specific training in order that they are equipped to deal with a no-deal Brexit; if so the details of that training; if his Department has undertaken an analysis of the resources, financial, staffing and otherwise that it will require in the event of a no-deal Brexit; if his Department has a detailed contingency plan in place that is ready to be operationalised in the event of a no-deal Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39254/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade is coordinating the whole-of-Government response to Brexit. In this capacity, he is working closely with all Ministers, including myself, to address the many challenges Brexit will present. However, I do want to emphasise that it is this Government's firm intention that the same border arrangements as currently apply on the island of Ireland will continue into the future. In its approach to the Brexit negotiations, the Government has ensured that protecting the gains of the Peace Process and the avoidance of a hard border is a high priority for Ireland, our partner Member States and the European Commission.

As the Deputy is aware, the Garda Commissioner is the Accounting Officer for the Garda Vote and as such is responsible for the effective and efficient use of the resources at his disposal, including personnel. Those resources have reached unprecedented levels, with an allocation for 2018 of more than €1.6 billion. This budgetary provision as well as the significant capital investment in An Garda Síochána in recent years are 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.

Garda management keep the distribution of resources under active review in line with operational and security demands, as determined by the Commissioner, including any possible policing requirements post Brexit. In that respect, I am assured that An Garda Síochána is preparing for Brexit with a wide-ranging focus to determine operational requirements, including personnel and technology. I am assured that An Garda Síochána will continue to progress their contingency preparations, and is committed to ensuring the organisation is prepared for the associated policing implications and challenges arising therefrom.

My Department is engaged on an on-going basis with An Garda Síochána as part of the deep and detailed work being undertaken right across Government and the public sector in response to the UK's decision to leave the EU. Indeed, in June Department officials and a member of An Garda Síochána met with the European Commission in Brussels to discuss North-South cooperation in the areas of law enforcement and police and judicial cooperation. Earlier this week, in the latest in a series of such meetings, senior officials from my Department met with An Garda Síochána to further discuss Brexit preparations. Furthermore, An Garda Síochána is represented at a senior level in the ongoing discussions between my Department and the UK's Home Office in relation to the operation of the Common Travel Area.

An Garda Síochána works very closely with the Police Service of Northern Ireland in combatting cross-border crime, including in the pursuit of individual criminal investigations. This ongoing close co-operation, across the full range of policing responsibilities of both services, is in place and will continue in place regardless of the final shape of Brexit. Joint working is central to the shared objectives of An Garda Síochána and the Police Service of Northern Ireland to combat crime of all sorts and to promote community safety on the island of Ireland. There are many collaborative policing initiatives in place including the cross border policing strategy, updated and published by both police services in 2016, the annual cross border policing seminar

on organised crime as well as formal protocols for secondments and exchanges between the two jurisdictions. In November 2015, the British and Irish Governments and the Northern Ireland Executive agreed a series of measures in the agreement A Fresh Start, The Stormont Agreement and Implementation Plan, as part of a concerted and enhanced effort to tackle organised and cross jurisdictional crime. These measures included the creation of the Joint Agency Task Force, which builds on existing law enforcement frameworks and to increase the collective effectiveness of operational law enforcement actions. These examples of the intensification of police co-operation are driven by a shared imperative to ensure normalisation in the security and policing environment, to promote reconciliation and to enhance community safety for all communities on the island. It is imperative that strong political leadership is in place to drive and further develop these initiatives on both sides of the border. In this regard I am sure that the Deputy will join me in calling for the full restoration of the Executive in Stormont as a matter of urgency.

And so I want to assure the Deputy that An Garda Síochána has the full support of the Government in dealing with the implications of Brexit and will provide whatever resources are required to keep our people and our communities safe. This is clearly demonstrated by this Government's track record of investment in An Garda Síochána and in the Government plan for an overall Garda workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021, including 15,000 Garda members, 2,000 Reserve members and 4,000 civilians. 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 of whom 214 have been assigned to the Northern Garda Region. Taking account of projected retirements, Garda numbers are expected to reach 14,000 by the end of this year and 15,000 during 2021.

Undoubtedly, the ongoing recruitment process will support all Garda activities and enhance visibility within our communities and will enable the Commissioner to deploy additional resources to meet the challenges of Brexit, should he deem it necessary.

Immigration Status

107. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of residency in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39335/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I refer the Deputy to the reply given to his recent Parliamentary Question No. 277 of Tuesday 18th September 2018. The status of the person concerned is as set out in that reply:

I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned presented a new passport on 5 April 2018 at the Burgh Quay Registration Office. The passport was referred to An Garda Síochána technical bureau for examination and the matter is now being dealt with by An Garda Síochána.

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

Immigration Status

108. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 422 of 7 of September 2018, if provision will be made to update a stamp 4 in the case of a person (details supplied); the reason their documentation has not been updated with particular reference to the fact that a number of members of their family are Irish citizens; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39336/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that, as previously stated in my response to Parliamentary Question No. 422 of 7 of September, 2018, it would appear this person's presence in the State may be unlawful as their most recent permission to remain in the State expired in December, 2011.

In order to allow for a full examination of the person's circumstances, the person concerned should write to Unit 2, Domestic Residence and Permissions Division, INIS, 13/14 Burgh Quay, Dublin 2 and provide a detailed account and documentary evidence of their personal circumstances since the expiration of their permission to reside in this State.

This account may also include the circumstances of family members of the person concerned.

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

Immigration Status

109. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current and expected residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39337/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned was granted permission to remain in the State, on a stamp 4 basis, as the parent of an Irish citizen child on 1 March, 2002. The permission was subsequently renewed with the latest permission granted up to 21 July, 2016 by the Garda National Immigration Bureau.

I am further informed that representations were received from the person concerned on 23 January, 2018. INIS was in contact with the person concerned on 29 January, 2018 seeking supporting documentary evidence, however, INIS has no record of a response. I understand it remains open to the person concerned to provide the required information and the application will be given detailed consideration by INIS.

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

INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Immigration Status

110. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if and when leave to remain will be granted in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39339/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that it would appear the person referred to by the Deputy has been unlawfully in the State since the expiration of their most recent permission to reside on 31 October, 2015.

The Deputy will appreciate that, under the relevant provisions of the Immigration Act, 2004, a non-national may not be in the State other than within the terms of a permission from the Minister for Justice and Equality. In order to allow for a full examination of the person's circumstances, the person concerned should write to Unit 1, Domestic Residence and Permissions Division, INIS, 13/14 Burgh Quay, Dublin 2 and provide a detailed account and documentary evidence of their personal circumstances since the expiration of their permission to reside in this State.

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

Immigration Status

111. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if further consideration will be given to the case of a person (details supplied) with particular reference to updating their leave to remain; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39340/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have been informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned applied on 14/04/2016 for a residence card as a family member of an EU citizen under the provisions of the European Communities (Free Movement of Persons) Regulations 2015 and Directive 2004/38/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council. They stated at that time that they were a sibling of a Union citizen.

The person concerned was informed on 06/04/2017 that their application had been refused. They were advised at that time that they had failed to submit satisfactory documentary evidence of their dependence on the EU citizen, including dependence prior to residing in the State. On the basis of the documents supplied, the person concerned had failed to establish that they were a permitted family member of a Union citizen in accordance with the Regulation 2015.

The person concerned requested a review of that decision on 15/05/2017, which is currently being processed. INIS will correspond with the person concerned should further documentation, information or clarification be required. Applications are dealt with in strict chronological order and a decision will issue to the person concerned in due course. Although the EU Treaty

Rights Review Unit is experiencing delays in processing due to an unprecedented number of applications, there will be no avoidable delay in completing the application made by the person concerned and they should expect a decision on their application in the coming weeks.

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

Immigration Status

112. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a person (details supplied) has permission to remain here as the spouse of an Irish national who currently cannot be considered along with their spouse for accommodation purposes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39341/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that an application for permission to reside in the State was received from the person concerned on 3 April, 2018, based on their marriage to an Irish national.

The Deputy will appreciate that such applications are dealt with in chronological order. It should be noted that marriage to an Irish national does not confer an automatic right of residence in the State and I understand that INIS will write to the person concerned in relation to the progress of their application in due course.

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

Immigration Status

113. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the case of a person (details supplied) will be reconsidered; if an application for residency will be entertained on this basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39342/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that there is no record of a request from the person concerned for permission to reside in the State.

The Deputy will appreciate that, under the relevant provisions of the Immigration Act, 2004, a non-national may not be in the State other than within the terms of a permission from the Minister for Justice and Equality. In order to allow for a full examination of the person's circumstances, the person concerned should write to Unit 2, Domestic Residence and Permissions Division, INIS, 13/14 Burgh Quay, Dublin 2 and provide a detailed account and documentary evidence of their personal circumstances since the expiration of any permission to reside in the

State previously held.

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 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 Question 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.

Deportation Orders Re-examination

114. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a deportation order will be set aside in the case of a person (details supplied) on the basis of their marriage to an Irish citizen; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39343/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned is the subject of a Deportation Order signed on 29 September 2017. This Order requires the person to remove themselves from the State and remain outside the State. The enforcement of the Deportation Order is a matter for the Garda National Immigration Bureau.

Representations were received, and acknowledged, on 10/01/2018 in relation to an application by the person concerned for permission to remain in the State on the basis of her marriage to an Irish national. This application was refused as the person concerned was subject to a Deportation Order. The representations are now being considered in accordance with the provisions of Section 3(11) of the Immigration Act, 1999 (as amended).

The Deputy might wish to note that any such decision will be to 'affirm' or 'revoke' the existing Deportation Order. In the meantime, the deportation order remains valid and in place.

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

Departmental Staff Careers

115. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if and when an appeal in respect of a work record and opportunities for promotion can be progressed in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39346/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, the Civil Service has a comprehensive suite of policies and protocols for the support and management of all staff. The details of engagements between individual staff members and Human Resources is strictly confidential but I am assured that the individual who is the subject of this Question is being given every consideration and support in accordance with the principles of natural justice and subject to the terms and conditions of their employment.

Wards of Court

116. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the extent to which funding of wards of court is adequately catered for with particular reference to the need to ensure the availability of sufficient funding to meet the requirements of wards in view of the circumstances and costs of care in individual cases; if the management of funds is sufficiently sensitive to general and individual needs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39347/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The High Court has jurisdiction in wards of court matters and management of the courts is the responsibility of the Courts Service, which is independent in exercising its functions under the Courts Service Act 1998.

As the Deputy may be aware, it is a matter for the presiding judge, who is, under the Constitution, independent in the exercise of their judicial functions, to determine the level of funding awarded in individual cases. As the Deputy may also be aware, wardship funds are not public funds. The funds of a person who is taken into wardship move into the custody and supervision of the High Court which then holds and invests those funds as appropriate for the benefit of the ward.

However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has advised that the management of court funds by the Courts Service is sensitive to, and takes full account of, the needs of the wards of court in the management and investment of the available funds. The Courts Service has further advised that the Wards of Court Office appoints a case officer for each ward of court when the person is brought into wardship who meets with the committee appointed by the President of the High Court and liaises with that committee throughout the wardship to ensure that the care and monetary needs of the ward are met taking into account the initial award.

It is standard procedure for funds of the ward to be brought under the custody of the court for investment by the Accountant of the Courts of Justice in accordance with the directions of the President of the High Court and the Registrar of the Office of Wards of Court. Investment of court funds is carried out in line with the strategies devised and reviewed on a regular basis by the Investment Committee, chaired by the President of the High Court.

The Investment Committee reviews the investment strategies with the assistance of its investment advisors to ensure the protection and suitable investment of funds of wards, minors and others lodged in court for the benefit of those persons. Investment policies and orders made thereunder must be in accordance with the Trustee (Authorised Investments) Act 1958. This procedure was examined and approved by the court in the case entitled “In the Matter of M. H., a Ward of Court” [2011] IEHC 129.

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

Finally, I am delighted to inform the Deputy that I have signed the Commencement Order bringing Parts 1, 2 and 3 of the Civil Liability (Amendment) Act 2017 into operation with effect from 1 October 2018. The Act, which allows courts the power to award periodic payments

rather than a lump sum payment in cases of catastrophic injury, will provide much needed financial security to persons requiring lifelong care and assistance following a catastrophic injury. I believe that the availability of a periodic payment to catastrophically injured persons will ensure that they will receive the care and assistance they require for the rest of their lives.

Work Permits Appeals

117. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the status of an urgent work permit appeal by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39128/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Employment Permits Section of my Department inform me that following the submission and consideration of additional information at review stage a decision has been made to award a General Employment Permit to the person concerned and the permit issued on 26th September 2018.

Health Services Staff Remuneration

118. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the pay arrangements that apply for nurses and consultants involved in a certain hospital activity (details supplied); and the per patient fee for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39180/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Outpatient Waiting List remains a significant challenge to be addressed in 2018. Waiting list figures for August 2018 show there are over 514,500 patients on the outpatient waiting list. Each year, 3.3 million patients attend hospital outpatient clinics for appointments.

The HSE, in consultation with the NTPF and the Department of Health, is in the process of finalising an Outpatient Action Plan for the remainder of 2018 which will support the HSE's compliance with its National Service Plan targets, reduce the growth in the number of patients waiting for outpatient services. The Plan will include initiatives to improve the accuracy of the waiting list through the establishment of central waiting list validation function in the NTPF. In addition, the NTPF has invited proposals from hospital groups, which has resulted in the approval of 12,600 outpatient appointments.

The NTPF will deliver additionality to the health system through both outsourcing and HSE insourcing. NTPF insourcing arrangements are governed by a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the NTPF and the public hospital. In order to avoid double payment to the public hospital, the conditions for insourcing include the following:

The treatment to be provided further to the MoU is additional to and separate from treatment provided further to funding received from any other source, including treatment provided under the National Service Plan.

The cost of the treatment charged to the NTPF shall only relate to the additional costs incurred by the Treating Hospital in providing the required treatment relative to the costs that would have been incurred by the Treating Hospital if the treatment had not been provided.

In relation to the particular question raised regarding Outpatient Clinics, the NTPF does not pay nurses and consultants, payments are made to the hospitals only. The NTPF pays for additional activity only at a marginal cost. Additional activity could cover extra OPD clinics,

evening or weekend clinics for instance. The marginal cost can therefore cover overtime paid by the hospital but does not include basic pay.

Ministerial Meetings

119. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health when the promised and deferred meeting with an organisation (details supplied) will take place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39133/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Owing to scheduling difficulties, it was not possible for me to meet with MS Ireland in June. However, I am willing to meet with MS Ireland on a mutually convenient date.

Service Level Agreements

120. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Health the timeline for implementation of the service level agreement being drafted between University of Limerick Hospital group and Saolta University Health Care group to enable a person (details supplied) to provide TAVI services on behalf of UL Hospital group; and his views on whether it is imperative that this service level agreement is implemented in view of the fact that the procedure is life saving. [39134/18]

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

Disabilities Assessments

121. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of medical assessments for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39136/18]

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.

Services for People with Disabilities

122. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the options, services, facilities or initiatives available to young adults with disabilities (details supplied) that finish full-time education at 18 years of age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39142/18]

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 servic-

es 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.

Disability Services Funding

123. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health if funding will be provided for an organisation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39144/18]

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.

Patient Data

124. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of occasions on which persons under 18 years of age received treatment in the United Kingdom in each of the past four years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39145/18]

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.

National Dementia Strategy

125. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health his plans to put in place services for persons with dementia under 65 years of age and their families; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39146/18]

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

National Dementia Strategy

126. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the status of supports for persons with dementia in County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39147/18]

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.

Primary Care Centres Provision

127. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the status of the development of a new primary care centre at a location (details supplied) in County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39148/18]

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.

Primary Care Centres Provision

128. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the status of the development of a new primary care centre at a location (details supplied) in County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39149/18]

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.

National Dementia Strategy

129. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health if an organisation (details supplied) will be assisted with its plans for better services in County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39150/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As a response to the challenges facing people with dementia and their families and carers, the National Dementia Strategy was launched in December 2014. The Strategy contains 35 priority and additional actions and its implementation is being led by the National Dementia Office in the HSE. The office has made substantial progress towards developing evidence-based care pathways for people with dementia. Progress made to date and future plans, are recorded in the mid-term review of the Strategy's implementation, which was published in May this year.

The Strategy's implementation was boosted at the time of its launch through a joint programme of investment by the HSE and the Atlantic Philanthropies. This €27.5 million investment allowed for a number of key actions within the strategy to be resourced and implemented. It funded the PREPARED programme, which offers education and clinical resources for GPs and Primary Care Teams; intensive homecare packages for people with dementia; the Understand Together awareness campaign; and the establishment of the National Dementia Office, which has an important role in implementing the Strategy. The Office has made substantial progress towards developing evidence-based care pathways for people with dementia. Additional projects are being funded through €6.26 million in Dormant Accounts funding secured by the Department of Health in the 2016, 2017 and 2018 Dormant Accounts Fund Action Plans.

In 2016 and 2017, the National Dementia Office partnered with the Alzheimer Society of Ireland on a project to map dementia-specific community-based services and supports. It pro-

vides a useful snapshot and baseline study into what, where and when dementia services are being offered. The study has also been used to inform a service finder hosted on the National Dementia Office's website. This allows people to search for dementia-specific community services in their area. There are gaps in access to services and a large variance in what services are provided across the country. The National Dementia Office has met with senior HSE officials in each Community Healthcare Organisation region to highlight gaps in each area and to develop local action plans to improve service provision.

The National Dementia Office has also developed a needs analysis framework to support local dementia service planning and development. This framework is a mechanism to help the Office direct time, energy and resources into dementia care that most appropriately meets the needs of people with dementia. It will be used to make dementia service development more responsive and consistent across the country.

The National Dementia Strategy calls for the HSE to consider the provision of dementia advisers, based on the experience of demonstrator sites. An evaluation of the Dementia Adviser Service was published on 26th September. It recommends the continuation and expansion of the service to ensure equity of access countrywide.

A priority action in the National Dementia Strategy is the appointment of key workers to coordinate each patient's care and promote continuity, and ensure that the patient knows who to access for information and advice. It is proposed that the key worker will be responsible for the coordinated planning and delivery of individually tailored care plans, developed in consultation with the person, their family carers and a range of health and social care practitioners. The key worker will also provide expert knowledge and leadership in dementia.

The Department of Health has secured funding through the 2018 Dormant Accounts Action Plan to continue funding in 2019 for the Dementia Community Activation Coordinator post which has been co-funded through a partnership between the Alzheimer Society of Ireland and the HSE during 2018. The Community Activation Coordinator is working with national organisations and key community stakeholders to support community dementia champions across Ireland. The Coordinator will seek to grow the number of champions and people within communities to take action to create sustainable dementia inclusive communities.

With regard to the specific request for additional support for dementia services in Co. Wexford referred to by the Deputy, the level of funding available for the Department of Health in 2019 and the quantum of services to be provided by the HSE will be considered as part of the national Estimates and budgetary process and National Service Planning.

Pharmacy Regulations

130. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the definition of temporary absence arrived at by an organisation (details supplied) with the permission of his Department in the case of pharmaceutical assistants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39153/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Pharmacy Act 2007 the sale and supply of medicinal products must be carried out by or under the personal supervision of a registered pharmacist at all times. Section 30 of the Act allows however for an exceptional circumstance where a registered pharmaceutical assistant may act on behalf of a registered pharmacist during the temporary absence of the registered pharmacist.

In the circumstances provided for in Section 30 of the Act the PSI, subject to the consent of the Minister, may define for how long a pharmacist may be temporarily absent from a pharmacy

and what may be done in this absence in circumstances where a registered pharmaceutical assistant acts in the temporary absence.

On Thursday, 20th September 2018, the Council of the PSI, the pharmacy regulator, approved proposed draft rules regarding the length of time that it is permissible for a pharmacy to operate in the absence of a pharmacist.

I understand that the draft statutory rules— Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (Temporary Absence of a Pharmacist from a pharmacy) Rules 2018— propose that a pharmacist may be absent from a pharmacy for a total one hour per day only, and in these circumstances a registered pharmaceutical assistant may act in the temporary absence of the pharmacist.

Although the draft rules as approved by the Council rules are publically available, under the Act I, as Minister, must await the receipt of the Rules for my consideration from the PSI and until that time I am unfortunately not in a position to discuss the matter raised any further.

Pharmacy Regulations

131. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the evidential research that was used to substantiate the definition of temporary absence for pharmaceutical assistants arrived at by an organisation (details supplied) with the permission of his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39154/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In October 2013 the Council of the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (PSI) considered a memorandum from the Registration and Qualification Recognition Committee and the Inspection and Enforcement Committee (Both advisory committees to the Council). It was outlined that during inspections it has been found that some Pharmaceutical Assistants had been working outside the 1994 Code of Practice regarding covering temporary absences. Council of the PSI requested that a policy position be developed to enable and facilitate the drafting of rules in line with the requirements of Section 30(2) of the Act.

In March 2017, the PSI Council considered the matter of temporary absence and a proposed draft set of rules under section 30 of the Act. At this meeting the Council heard a presentation from the Chair of the Pharmaceutical Assistants' Association, following an invitation. The Council decided to reject the proposal presented at that time and requested further examination of the issue of temporary absence, and what would be covered within the scope of the rules.

A Working Group was established to produce a report, which was submitted to Council on the 17 May 2018. The membership of the Working group was based on competency requirements, and the Group would provide expertise, advice and input to assist in developing policy options, and drafting rules.

The working group comprised of persons combining expertise across the areas of operation of, management of, and supervision of an Retail Pharmacy Business (RPB) including where there is practical use of “temporary absence cover” as currently understood and operated; professional registration and continued competence; regulation; inspection of RPB; risk and quality expertise; public and patient interest/advocacy and policy development.

The Pharmaceutical Assistants Association were invited to nominate a member to the Working Group and nominated its Chairperson.

The terms of reference of the Group (Remit and Terms of Reference of the Group consid-

ered and agreed at its first meeting on 21 June 2017) and the competencies of its members are contained in Appendix 2 of the Working Group Report, which is available on the PSI website.

The Working Group Report details the considerations of the group, which were informed by an independent report from UK NARIC benchmarking the Pharmaceutical Assistant qualification, and centred on patient safety, public protection, and risk in proposing how long a pharmacist may be absent from a pharmacy. The Group considered the current legislative provisions pertaining to pharmacists and pharmacies in Ireland under the Pharmacy Act 2007; the governance and accountability requirements provided, and the regulatory framework which provides patients with the expectation of appropriate regulatory protections. Pharmaceutical assistants fall outside the current regulatory disciplinary mechanism with no disciplinary recourse available against the actions taken by any individual pharmaceutical assistant, and outside the mandatory competence assurance schemes notwithstanding that individual registered pharmaceutical assistants would undertake CPD and CE.

The draft Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (Temporary Absence of Pharmacist from Pharmacy) Rules 2018, were produced on foot of the Working Group Report and were subject to a public consultation process. These draft Rules were approved by the PSI Council on September 20th and have yet to be submitted for my consent as required by the Act.

Pharmacy Regulations

132. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the tasks a pharmaceutical assistant may not perform during their temporary absence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39155/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): A clinical governance framework governing the operation of registered Retail Pharmacy Businesses is created by Sections 26, 27, 28 and 29 of the Pharmacy Act 2007, and Regulations made under Section 18 of the Act further elucidate the specific responsibilities of the pharmacy owner, the superintendent pharmacist, the supervising pharmacist and the registered pharmacist.

Under the Pharmacy Act 2007 the sale and supply of medicinal products must be carried out by or under the personal supervision of a registered pharmacist at all times. Section 30 of the Act allows however for an exceptional circumstance where a registered pharmaceutical assistant may act on behalf of a registered pharmacist during the temporary absence of the registered pharmacist.

Section 30 (2) (a) provides for what may or may not be done by a registered pharmaceutical assistant when acting on behalf of a registered pharmacist in his/her temporary absence.

I understand that the proposed draft Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (Temporary Absence of Pharmacist from Pharmacy) Rules 2018 rules allow for the Council to approve and publish a professional task list; this task list has not yet been defined by the Council. The draft Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (Temporary Absence of Pharmacist from Pharmacy) Rules 2018 were approved by the PSI Council on September 20th and have yet to be submitted for my consent as required by the Act.

The current activity of a pharmaceutical assistant when providing skilled assistance to a pharmacist, is subject to the governance mechanisms instituted by each superintendent pharmacist in the pharmacy practice which determines the parameters of the professional activity undertaken.

Legislation precludes pharmaceutical assistants from providing vaccinations to patients, or from undertaking the governance roles provided for in the Pharmacy Act 2007 (supervising and superintendent pharmacists) when operating in the temporary absence of the pharmacist.

Pharmacy Regulations

133. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the conflicts that arise between the definition of temporary absence arrived at by an organisation (details supplied) with the permission of his Department for use with pharmaceutical assistants and public safety issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39156/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Pharmacy Act 2007 creates a framework whereby patients and members of the public can expect that a pharmacist will be available and practising within a pharmacy when they visit to have medicines dispensed or to obtain advice on a health or medicines matter. The Act provides a robust structure of public safety assurance by requiring that the pharmacist is subject to mandatory CPD, Fitness to Practice, a Code of Conduct and a Core Competency Framework.

A clinical governance framework governing the operation of registered Retail Pharmacy Businesses is created by Sections 26, 27, 28 and 29 of the Pharmacy Act 2007, and Regulations made under Section 18 of the Act elucidates the specific responsibilities of the pharmacy owner, the superintendent pharmacist, the supervising pharmacist and the registered pharmacist.

Under the Pharmacy Act 2007 the sale and supply of medicinal products must be carried out by or under the personal supervision of a registered pharmacist at all times. Section 30(1) of the Act allows however for an exceptional circumstance where a registered pharmaceutical assistant may act on behalf of a registered pharmacist during the temporary absence of the registered pharmacist.

In this context, Section 30 (2) permits the Council of the PSI, subject to the consent of the Minister, to make rules to provide further 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.

It is in the interest of good regulation, using the framework available, that the Council of the PSI has undertaken to propose the draft Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (Temporary Absence of Pharmacist from Pharmacy) Rules 2018.

National Dementia Strategy

134. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Health if consideration will be given for the funding of a dementia adviser in County Kildare. [39159/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): In order to meet the challenges faced by people with dementia, the Irish National Dementia Strategy was launched in December 2014. The Strategy aims to improve dementia care to allow people with dementia to live well for as long as possible and to deliver improved services and supports. The Strategy contains 35 priority and additional actions and its implementation is being led by the National Dementia Office in the HSE. The office has made substantial progress towards developing

evidence-based care pathways for people with dementia and progress to date, as well as future plans, is recorded in the mid-term review of the Strategy's implementation, which was published in May this year. Plans are progressing to further implement the Dementia Strategy through the National Dementia Office, including in the area of diagnosis, post-diagnostic supports and care pathways.

The National Dementia Strategy calls for the HSE to consider the provision of dementia advisers, based on the experience of demonstrator sites. An evaluation of the Dementia Adviser Service was published on 26th September, and recommends the continuation and expansion of the service to ensure equity of access countrywide. I welcome the positive results of the evaluation and will continue to work to improve service delivery for people with dementia.

The level of funding available for the Department of Health in 2019 and the quantum of services to be provided by the HSE will be considered as part of the national Estimates and budgetary process and National Service Planning.

Health Services

135. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the status of the review of a facility (details supplied) in County Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39167/18]

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.

Disability Services Data

136. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons employed at a facility (details supplied); the number of service users who are enrolled to attend services in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39168/18]

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 Properties

137. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the development of a site (details supplied); and the timelines and dates for same. [39169/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the management of the healthcare property estate, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to you in relation to this matter.

Health Services Provision

138. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for Health if additional resources, including funding and locations, will be made available for inpatient nut allergy testing for children in

view of the fact that there are long waiting lists at the two centres in Cork and Crumlin, Dublin 12; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39184/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have requested the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

139. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health the number of patients awaiting cataract surgery in County Limerick; the average waiting times for such procedures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39190/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Waiting list figures provided by the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) advise that at the end of August there were 665 patients on the Cataract waiting list in University Hospital Limerick, waiting an average of 167 days.

Waiting list figures have improved at University Hospital Limerick. In July 2017 there were 1,025 patients awaiting cataract surgery at University Hospital Limerick, this number fell to 782 by end December 2017, during this period 454 patients were added to the waiting list.

From the end of December 2017 to the end of August 2018, the numbers waiting fell by further 117 patients while in the same period, 389 patients have been added to the UHL cataracts waiting list.

Reducing waiting times for Cataract surgery remains a top priority in 2018. Under the Inpatient Day Case Action Plan, launched in April, the NTPF commits to offer treatment to all clinically suitable patients waiting more than 9 months for a cataract procedure.

The Action Plan 25% (5,000 out of 20,000) of the planned National Treatment Purchase Fund procedures has been allocated for treatment for cataract patients.

In addition, under the Plan my Department continues to work with the HSE and the NTPF to identify sustainable initiatives to improve waiting times. In line with the Action Plan, July marked the opening of a dedicated Cataract theatre in Nenagh Hospital. The HSE advise that since the service commenced, 53 patients have been treated and it is expected that over 200 cataract procedures will be undertaken by year end.

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

140. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health the number of patients awaiting colonoscopy and gastroscopy examinations, respectively in County Louth; the average waiting times for such procedures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39191/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Improving waiting times for hospital procedures is a key commitment in the Programme for Government and in 2018 €50 million was allocated to the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) to provide treatment for patients. Under the Inpatient/Day Case Action Plan, which was launched in April 2018, the NTPF will arrange 4,000 Gastrointestinal Scopes this year.

The NTPF advise that the waiting list for Colonoscopy and Gastroscopy in County Louth is:

	0-3 Months	3-6 Months	6-9 Months	18+ Months	Grand Total
Sum of WL Records	16	12	1	1	30

Average waiting time is 102 days.

Hospitals Data

141. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health the number of hip replacements carried out at Our Lady’s Hospital Navan in 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018, respectively; the number of persons awaiting hip replacement operations at the hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39192/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the query raised regarding hip replacements at Our Lady’s Hospital, Navan, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

142. **Deputy Frank O’Rourke** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive an ENT appointment at Tallaght University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39195/18]

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

143. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the status of the provision of a helicopter landing facility at Cork University Hospital; when the matter will progress; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39198/18]

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.

Medical Card Eligibility

144. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health his plans to remove means-testing for medical cards for children who are orphaned and cared for by family members; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39202/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): There are no proposals at present remove means testing for medical cards for children that are orphaned and cared for by family members.

However, every effort is made by the HSE, within the framework of the legislation, to support applicants in applying for a medical card and, in particular, to take full account of the difficult circumstances in the case of applicants who may be in excess of the income guidelines. In certain circumstances, the HSE may exercise discretion and grant a medical card, even though an applicant exceeds his or her income threshold, where he or she faces difficult financial circumstances, such as extra costs arising from an illness. Social and medical issues are considered when determining whether undue hardship exists for an individual accessing general practitioner or other medical services. The HSE affords applicants the opportunity to furnish supporting information documentation to fully take account of all the relevant circumstances that may benefit them in the assessment, including medical evidence of cost and necessary expenses.

Hospital Beds Data

145. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the average annual operational cost of a filled acute bed in a public hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39229/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of health services, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to you.

Hospital Beds Data

146. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the average annual operational cost of a filled palliative care bed in a public hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39230/18]

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.

Pharmacy Regulations

147. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if the status of pharmaceutical assistants following recent recommendations made by an organisation (details supplied) will be protected; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39232/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Pharmaceutical Assistants are a grade of pharmacy professionals who are permitted, under section 30(1) of the Pharmacy Act 2007, to act on behalf of a registered pharmacist during the “temporary absence” of the registered pharmacist.

Section 30(2) of the Pharmacy Act 2007 permits the Council of the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (PSI) 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.

These Rules are made by way of Statutory Instrument requiring the formal consent of the Minister for Health.

Following a public consultation process, which ran from 17 July until 14 August 2018, the Council of the PSI approved the draft Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (Temporary Absence of Pharmacist from Pharmacy) Rules 2018 at its meeting on 20 September 2018.

My role in relation to this process is limited to the consideration of any such Rules once submitted for my approval. No rules have yet been submitted to me by the PSI.

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.

Drugs Payment Scheme Coverage

148. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if approval will be given for the use of the drug pembrolizumab in the case of a person (details supplied). [39235/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the pricing and reimbursement of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Healthcare Infrastructure Provision

149. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 418 of 13 February 2018, the status of the construction of a helipad at Cork University Hospital to facilitate an air ambulance service; if discussions with the IAA have concluded; if planning permission has been sought and approved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39223/18]

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.

Hospital Consultant Recruitment

150. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the circumstances which lead to the unplanned long-term leave of a consultant paediatrician at the National Rehabilitation Hospital resulting in the cancellation of inpatient appointments; the steps being taken to recruit a replacement; when inpatient appointments will resume; and if he will make a statement on the

matter. [39238/18]

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.

Disabilities Assessments

151. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the number of children awaiting an assessment of needs in County Tipperary; the length of time they have been waiting; the age of the children waiting; the number of those that have appealed the wait time; the length of time it has taken to process the appeal; the avenues available to them in view of the failure by the HSE in its obligations under section 9 of the Disability Act 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39240/18]

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 Administration

152. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health if the provision of an art assist device on the medical card scheme has been considered for patients who have been prescribed same by their doctor; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39241/18]

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

Ministerial Meetings

153. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Health when a meeting with a group (details supplied) will be arranged with relevant health professionals, the National Cancer Control Programme, the HSE and Saolta University Hospital group in view of the fact that the organisation has been requesting a meeting since November 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39244/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): A meeting had previously been arranged with this group but it was necessary to postpone it due to other issues arising.

It is intended that the meeting will be re-scheduled for a suitable date in the coming months.

Hospital Facilities

154. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health if the lack of disability access on the grounds and hospital of St. Columcille's, Loughlinstown, will be investigated (details supplied); if these issues will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39265/18]

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 Waiting Lists Data

155. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting for cataract operations in the South/South West hospital group sites; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39267/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Reducing waiting times for Cataract surgery remains a top priority in 2018. In the Inpatient Day Case Action Plan, launched in April, 25% (5,000 out of 20,000) of the planned National Treatment Purchase Fund procedures were allocated for cataract patients.

Under the Action Plan, the NTPF commits to offer treatment to all clinically suitable patients waiting more than 9 months for a cataract procedure.

The impact of the Action Plan can be seen in the improvements to the Waiting Lists for Cataracts which have seen a reduction of over 3,100 over the past 13 months. August figures for cataracts show that there are now 6,868 on the waiting list, compared to over 10,000 in July 2017. The number of patients waiting over 9 months for a cataract procedure has gone from over 4,300 in July 2017 to 1,078 in August 2018, with 64% of patients waiting 3 months or less.

While the Department does not routinely collect data at procedure level by group, waiting list figures from the NTPF indicate that since July 2017, the numbers on the Inpatient/Daycase list for ophthalmology in the SSW hospital group has fallen from 3,509 to 2,826 at the end of August 2018. Cataracts would make up a significant proportion of the ophthalmology waiting lists. The percentage of ophthalmology patients on the IPDC list waiting 9 months or more at the end of August 2018 is 27%.

I will ask the NTPF to provide information on the number of cataracts patients in SSW to the end of August and I will provide this information to the Deputy directly.

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

156. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting for orthopaedic operations in the South/South West hospital group sites; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39268/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Improving waiting times for hospital procedures is a key commitment in the Programme for Government and in 2018 €50 million was allocated to the NTPF to provide treatment for patients. The recently launched Inpatient/Day Case Action Plan outlines the combined impact of HSE and NTPF activity in 2018 to reduce the number of patients waiting for treatment.

As of the end of August 2018, the orthopaedic waiting list for the south-southwest hospital group stood at 1,001 patients, representing a reduction of 74 patients (7%) when compared to the numbers waiting at August 2017.

The majority of patients (439) are listed for South Infirmery Cork, a further 285 patients are awaiting treatment at Lourdes Orthopaedic Hospital Kilcreene. The remaining patients are waiting at Cork University Hospital (16), University Hospital Kerry (124) and University Hospital Waterford (137).

It is important to note that as of the end of August 86% of all orthopaedic patients of the South-Southwest Hospital group were waiting less than 9 months for treatment, while only 9% are waiting more than 1 year.

Cross-Border Health Initiatives

157. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons who have availed of the cross-border directive to have cataracts removed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39269/18]

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.

Medical Card Administration

158. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health if consideration has been given to including an art assist device on the medical card scheme for persons who have been prescribed it by their doctor (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39271/18]

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

Cross-Border Health Initiatives

159. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons who have availed of the cross-border directive for orthopaedic operations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39272/18]

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.

Equine Identification Scheme

160. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of prosecutions since January 2013 with regard to the failure of owners to chip their horses. [39162/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The current rules in relation to the identification of equines came into effect on 1st January 2016 and are governed by Commission Implementing Regulation 262/2015, as transposed into national legislation via S.I 62 of 2016 (as amended). This legislation provides that all equines must be identified with a passport no later than 12 months from the date of birth of the animal. Each equine must be implanted with a microchip by a veterinary practitioner, the number of which must be recorded on the corresponding passport, on the database of the issuing Passport Issuing Organisation (PIO) and on the central equine database maintained by my Department. This establishes the link between the animal and its passport document.

The implantation of a microchip in an equine by a veterinary practitioner became a requirement under the provisions of Commissions Regulation (EU) 504/2008, which came into effect on 1st July 2009 in respect of all equines identified with a passport from that date.

Equines identified with a passport prior to 1st July 2009 are deemed to be properly identified even though they have not been implanted with a microchip.

Proper identification of an equine cannot be established visually. The physical identification document issued in respect of an equine records the required identification details of the animal, and it is from that data that the requirement for a microchip is determined.

Enforcement of equine identification legislation is largely undertaken by authorised officers across the regional offices my Department who liaise with authorised officers in the Local Authorities and other organisations as required.

While S.I. 62 of 2016 (as amended) provides for the prosecution of keepers who have unidentified equines in their care, it also provides for the issuing of compliance notices. My Department's policy is to adopt a fair and proportional approach in dealing with breaches of equine identification legislation. In this regard, authorised officers engage with keepers to ensure that they understand their responsibilities and where breaches of the legislation are identified, they generally provide an opportunity for non-compliant keepers to rectify the position within a specified timeframe. This approach is considered to be effective.

There have been no prosecutions since January 2013 with regard to the failure of owners to chip their horses.

Weather Events

161. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the supports that can be made available to farmers who suffered damage to maize crops during Storm Ali and subsequently cannot harvest and process the crop; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39175/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Maize is a crop that is predominantly grown in a covered system (under plastic film) and is typically harvested between the end of September and the end of October. While many crops were unaffected by Storm Ali, I am aware of some crops in localised areas were adversely impacted to varying degrees.

It is my understanding that the majority of the affected maize crops remain salvageable with some additional attention required at harvesting.

As this storm and other recent weather events have shown, farmers require access to measures that improve their capacity to respond to these occurrences. I have asked my officials, in the context of the upcoming CAP reform, to examine all available risk management tools to determine which of these may be most appropriate to the farming sector. A programme of assistance in respect of Storm Ali is not being considered at present.

Young Farmers Scheme

162. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if an anomaly concerning young farmers (details supplied) will be examined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39185/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named submitted an application under the 2018 National Reserve and the Young Farmers Scheme on 8th May 2018 under a herd number held jointly with his son as the young farmer. One of the eligibility criteria under the 2018 schemes is that the young farmer must have successfully completed a recognised course of education in agriculture giving rise to an award at FETAC Level 6 or its equivalent by the closing date for receipt of applications of 15th May 2018. Where an applicant has completed the course by 15th May 2018 but has not received final verification, the applicant should submit a Confirmation of Education form which is available for downloading as part of the online application facility. This form should be signed and stamped by the education course provider and also signed by the applicant to confirm that the applicant has fully completed his/her course, including exams, practicals and course work by the 15th May.

On 8th May 2018, in support of the application to the schemes, the applicants submitted a letter from Teagasc confirming the young farmer was a registered student, he was progressing through the relevant education course and would on successful completion of the course be issued with a certificate in September 2018. On 2nd August 2018 my Department issued a letter to the applicants acknowledging that the confirmation of education had been received and asking that a copy of the education certificate be forwarded once available.

On 10th September 2018 the applicants uploaded a copy of the education certificate awarded to the young farmer. In order to ensure compliance with the relevant educational qualification eligibility criteria of the schemes, as set down in the Terms and Condition of the 2018 National Reserve and the Young Farmers Scheme, my Department must receive confirmation that the applicant had successfully completed all elements of his education course by 15th May 2018. In this regard, on 13th September a letter issued to the applicants seeking confirmation from the education course provider regarding the completion date for the young farmer's Level 6 Specific Purpose Certificate in Farm Administration course. As soon as this confirmation is submitted to my Department the applications can be further processed with a view to being finalised.

Sheep Welfare Scheme

163. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the proposal by an organisation (details supplied) regarding the sheep welfare scheme. [39351/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The EU Regulations governing payments under the Sheep Welfare Scheme state that payments may be made from 1st December. The Regulation also allows for advance payments to be made in advance of this where all administrative checks have been completed.

Under the Sheep Welfare Scheme advance payments commenced in Year 1 in November once administrative checks were completed. The balancing payment could then only be made when the range of further validation checks were completed. Given the structure of the Scheme and the timing of the scheme actions to be carried out by farmers, these validation checks on actions cannot be finalised until later in the Scheme year, and thus the balancing payment is required by regulation to issue at a later date.

Animal Diseases

164. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the contingency plans deployed in terms of monitoring and biosecurity measures in view of the confirmation of the spread of African swine fever to western Europe; and the supports that will be available to pig farmers. [39352/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): African Swine Fever (ASF) is a very serious and usually fatal viral disease of pigs. The disease has been spreading in Europe since it first entered the Eastern part of the European Union in 2014. The disease has spread to a number of EU Member States including Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and more recently Belgium, where the disease was confirmed in wild boar. The disease does not affect other animal species or humans and there are no food safety implications.

Specific EU legislation (Directive 2002/60/EC) is in place that sets out the control measures to be implemented in the event of an ASF outbreak in an EU member state in order to control the disease and prevent any spread. These control measures include, for example, culling of animals in affected herds, animal and animal product movement restrictions, investigation into the source of disease and surveillance of susceptible populations. These control measures are being implemented in the affected countries.

ASF has never been detected in Ireland. A significant risk factor for the introduction of ASF into Ireland would be the illegal or inadvertent importation of meat or meat products from infected pigs particularly as the virus is very stable and can survive for months in uncooked or cured pork and pork products e.g. salami, sausages. The feeding of such products to pigs could then result in a disease outbreak here. A further risk would be the inadvertent spread of the virus by humans on clothing, footwear etc, who may have been exposed to the virus in affected countries. Wild boar which are also affected by the disease have played a major role in the spread of ASF in Eastern Europe. Ireland does not have a sustained population of wild boar.

DAFM has a contingency plan in place setting out the procedures and protocols that would be followed in the event of a suspected or confirmed case of ASF here. DAFM also has an on-going early warning system and awareness campaign in place for all exotic diseases including ASF. Measures to protect the Irish pig industry from the threat of ASF have been stepped up in recent months and include for example:

- Close monitoring of the situation in EU member states and liaising with our EU neighbours on a regular basis.
- Circulation of regular information on ASF to targeted stakeholders to keep them informed

of the current situation in Europe and the risk to Ireland. These documents are also made available at the disease control section of the DAFM website.

- Production of disease factsheets on ASF for both vets and farmers and their circulation to stakeholders for example as part of the annual pig census. They are also available on the DAFM website.

- Production of a multilingual poster warning of the dangers of visitors or staff returning from affected regions of the EU and bringing back meat or meat products onto Irish pig farms and its circulation to over 300 commercial pig farms in recent months.

- Biosecurity advice detailing measures that can be taken to prevent entry of the disease is available on the disease control section of the DAFM website for both the intensive commercial sectors and the less intensive pig farmers such as organic and outdoor production systems.

- Posters advising members of the public of the risks of ASF are in place at airports and ports.

- Specific advice regarding the risk of ASF was recently circulated to Irish livestock transporters who may travel to or transit through areas of the EU affected by ASF this summer.

- DAFM regularly tweets exotic disease information including biosecurity advice for farmers and specific information on ASF.

- Staff from DAFM's veterinary service manned an information stand at the Ploughing Championships 2018 where ASF was a featured disease.

The Department continues to review all aspects of its contingency arrangements in relation to ASF in light of any emerging veterinary or scientific information and introduces such measures as are considered appropriate.

State Aid

165. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the European Commission's proposal to increase the state aid threshold for farmers to €25,000 per producer following the Commission's public consultation process on this matter; the latest discussions and timeline for agreement at European Council; and his proposal for the national threshold limit. [39353/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The CAP *de minimis* regulation covers the provision of small non-market distorting aid that can be paid to individuals without requiring notification to the Commission or the seeking of a block exemption.

Discussions on the Commission's proposals as part of its review of the agriculture *de minimis* regulations took place earlier in 2018 and a final decision is awaited. As part of its Impact assessment, the Commission undertook an economic analysis of the potential distortive effects of increased threshold ceilings. The Commission assessed a number of options as part of this exercise and presented different options for Member States to consider. Having considered the options, which included proposed sectorial caps and additional governance structure for higher levels of *de minimis* aid, I considered that an option of an increased threshold of €20,000 combined with an increased national cap of 1.25 to be most appropriate for Ireland.

It is the intention of the Commission to introduce the revised regulation by the end of 2018.

Food Labelling

166. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the obligatory labelling of country of origin on vegetables, fruit and potatoes in supermarkets as proposed by farming organisations. [39354/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Under Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) No. 543/2011 country of origin labelling is currently mandatory for almost all fresh fruit and vegetables. This Regulation does not apply to potatoes. However under the “Food Information to the Consumer Regulation” (Regulation (EU) No. 1169/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council) the country of origin must be labelled on potatoes offered for sale where a failure to declare the country of origin might mislead the consumer. For example potatoes offered for sale in Ireland must have their country of origin labelled if they were not grown in Ireland.

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine is involved in enforcing both of these pieces of legislation.

Brexit Issues

167. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the timeline and deadlines that have been agreed for recruitment of veterinary inspectors in the event of a no-deal hard Brexit scenario; the amount of funds ring fenced to enable recruitment targets to be met; the advertising and promotion of these new places planned; the budget for same; the budget allocated for training of new inspectors for third country trading status with the UK; and if plans for the hiring of new inspectors have been sufficiently flexible to cater for soft and no-deal scenarios. [39355/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department has been working intensively, with other Departments and agencies, through whole-of-Government coordination structures, on all aspects of Brexit preparedness. From an agri food perspective, this will include the provision of the necessary infrastructure and resources to carry out import controls at ports and airports on animal, plants, and products of animal and plant origin imported from the UK, as well as to provide any necessary export certification required by the UK in respect of such products. We will also have to ensure that arrangements are in place to facilitate rapid transit of product via the UK landbridge between Ireland and other Member States.

The introduction of these measures will involve the allocation of significant additional infrastructural, staffing and IT resources at ports, airports, exporting plants and Department offices. From a staffing perspective, my Department’s immediate planning relates to the phased recruitment of staff for Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS), and fisheries controls over the period to 2021. This will commence with Phase One in 2019, which will involve the recruitment of an additional 116 SPS and fisheries control staff, as agreed by Government on 18 September. Arrangements are currently being put in place to commence this recruitment process.

Fur Farming

168. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of fur farms by county; the number employed in such farms in each county; and

the domestic and European regulations in place including animal welfare regulations regarding this activity in tabular form. [39356/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): There are currently three fur farms licensed by my Department to operate in Ireland. These farms are located in Donegal, Laois and Kerry. Staffing in the farms is a matter for the operators and my Department does not regulate staff numbers.

The relevant regulations in terms of fur farming and as applied by the Department are as follows:

Regulations
European Communities (Welfare of Farmed Animals) Regulations 2010
Statutory Instrument No 311/2010
Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013
Musk Rats Act 1933 (No 16 of 1933)
Musk Rats Act 1933 (Application to Mink) Order 1965 SI 199 of 1965

Trade Agreements

169. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on discussions by the European Commission with the US Administration on renegotiating the EU's annual 45,000 tonne quota for hormone-free beef and allocation a larger share of that quota exclusively to the United States of America; the State's position on same; the State's position on the EU's negotiation mandate (details supplied); and the steps he is taking to protect beef farmers here from increased market access to the EU market by third country competitors. [39357/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I was pleased to see the Commission's proposal seeking a negotiating mandate to modify the existing agreement in relation to the import into the EU of hormone-free beef, including the introduction of a country-specific allocation. I note also the broad agreement among Member States at the Trade Policy Committee meeting in Brussels on 14 September that this issue should be resolved quickly, a view that Ireland shares. This is a long-standing issue, with both political and economic sensitivities, and the most important consideration is the need to avoid a return to sanctions.

I have been in close contact with Commissioner Hogan on this issue. The intention is that the existing hormone-free beef quota of 45,000 tonnes will remain at exactly the same level, with the main change arising in relation to the amount of the quota to be "ring fenced" for the US. This amount is still to be finalised, but Irish and European beef producers need have no fears that the adjustment to the quota arrangements would see any more than the existing quota limit of hormone-free beef enter the EU. It is also clear that any change in the existing arrangements will have to be in compliance with WTO rules.

On the question of increased market access into the EU for beef from third countries, Ireland's position is well-known, in that we vigorously defend the interests of the Irish and EU beef sectors against any outcome from trade negotiations that would have negative consequences for the sector. For example, all through the EU-Mercosur negotiations Ireland has been very strong in its opposition to concessions from the EU in relation to beef, a position that has been maintained by myself, my colleague Andrew Doyle, the Taoiseach, and by my colleagues in Government, as well as by my officials and officials from other Departments in the course of

our ongoing engagement with EU institutions at all levels.

I believe there is a need for continued vigilance in relation to the conduct of trade negotiations. I will continue to insist that they are handled appropriately and in a manner that safeguards the interests of the Irish and European beef sector. I will also continue to work very closely with Member State colleagues in this regard. In particular, I believe full account must be taken of the findings of the Commission's own assessment of the cumulative impact of trade deals on the agri food sector, and the potentially very damaging impact of Brexit on an already delicately balanced EU beef market.

EU Directives

170. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the joint statement by a group of European farming and food organisations (details supplied) calling for all participants in the food supply chain to be protected from unfair trading practices regarding EU proposals on unfair trading practices. [39358/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The draft Directive on Unfair Trading Practices proposes the prohibition of certain Unfair Trading Practices (UTPs) which occur in relation to the sales of food products in the food supply chain across the EU:

- by an SME supplier, including farmers
- to a buyer, that is a large entity, i.e. larger than an SME.

The EU definition of SME is : “Enterprises which employ fewer than 250 persons and which have an annual turnover not exceeding €50 million, and/or an annual balance sheet total not exceeding €43 million.”

The legal basis on which the Directive is based is Article 43(2) of the TFEU (Common Agricultural Policy) which allows for the Council to establish the Common market for Agriculture and Fisheries to pursue the objective of Article 39(b), which ‘is to ensure a fair standard of living for the agricultural community, in particular by increasing the individual earnings of persons engaged in agriculture’. The Directive is therefore seeking to contribute to ensuring a fair standard of living for those producers who are particularly vulnerable to UTPs, who have the least bargaining power, and are least able to address UTPs without negative effects on their economic viability, particularly as agricultural products are perishable and seasonable, and subject to adverse weather conditions.

The issue of the scope of the proposed Directive in terms of the size of the entities concerned has been a key issue for debate at the working groups and the Special Agriculture Committee. Some Member States have suggested that, rather than being confined to small sellers and large buyers, the scope should be extended to also provide protection to large sellers, and that the Directive should also apply to small SME buyers.

However, the Council and Commission Legal Services have both advised that the legal basis of Art 43.2 of the EU Treaty, which is being used for the proposed Directive, would be open to a legal challenge if the scope of the Directive is extended. It is on the basis of this legal advice that Ireland, while recognising the desirability of extending the scope of the Directive to address the issue of unfair practices irrespective of the size of the entity, acknowledged at the recent SCA meetings the concerns of the legal services about the legal basis for further extending the scope. Ireland also recognised the possibility, set out in Article 8 of the draft Directive,

for Member States to lay down or maintain stricter rules, to extend the scope to other types of buyers and suppliers and to prohibit other UTPs in national legislation.

Electricity Transmission Network

171. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if areas on boil water notices will be prioritised for power restoration in the event of power outages due to poor weather in view of the added cost and implications for households; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39129/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The priority for the restoration of outages caused by severe weather is an operational matter for ESB Networks, but my Department has raised this matter with the ESBN, which has provided the following information: - Prioritised power restoration proceeds when conditions allow for this to be undertaken safely. Power restoration takes place in an organised way with the prioritisation of resources to worst affected areas and locations where there are medically vulnerable households.

- ESB Networks works with a range of stakeholders to prioritise restoration of electricity in a safe and efficient manner. One of these stakeholders is Irish Water. During severe storms, ESB Networks and Irish Water maintain a direct line of communication to allow Irish Water to provide detailed information to ESB Networks about locations where power outages are impacting its operations. These can be locations where power outages are affecting water pumping, sewage treatment or other Irish Water activities, including where Boil Water notices are in place.

- Where possible and safe to do so, ESB Networks prioritises the restoration of electricity to those locations identified by Irish Water. Where prioritisation is not possible, or restoration is scheduled over an extended period of time, ESB Networks provides information to Irish Water on the forecast power restoration schedule for these locations which helps Irish Water to plan its response to the weather event effectively.

Broadband Service Provision

172. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the supply of high-speed broadband to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39137/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): According to my Department's High Speed Broadband Map, available at www.broadband.gov.ie, the Minister's constituent's premises is one which is indicated as having been passed by eir as part of its rural deployment of high speed broadband. According to roll-out information given by eir to my Department a high speed broadband connection should be available from eir to the Minister's constituent. I understand an official from my Department has been in contact with the Minister's constituent to assist in resolving the issue.

Broadband Service Provision

173. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans for fibre broadband at a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39140/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): As the Deputy will be aware from my reply to his previous question, the two businesses in question are in the AMBER area according to my Department's High Speed Broadband Map, available at www.broadband.gov.ie. 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. Deployment schedules will be available following conclusion of contract.

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>.

Waste Disposal Charges

174. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the reason for his determination that the allowance of €75 would cover the cost of the disposal of incontinence products; if he will consider increasing the amount in budget 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39141/18]

176. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if an implementation date been reached regarding the pay-by-weight for household waste and the allowance of €75 for households with medical waste; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39158/18]

178. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the position regarding the introduction of a €75 allowance for persons with incontinence in respect of pay-by-weight refuse charges; the level of engagement between his Department and the Department of Health, HSE, Office of the Data Protection Commissioner and stakeholders on this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39258/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 174, 176 and 178 together.

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 average 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.

Subsequent to the announcement of the support, my Department has continued to engage with the HSE, the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner and other relevant stakeholders in an effort to complete the roll-out of the scheme. I can assure the Deputies that I am committed to introducing the annual support as soon as practically possible in conjunction with relevant agencies and stakeholders.

The figure of €75 represents the estimated average cost of disposal (at landfill or waste to energy plants) for medical incontinence products and was arrived at following an analysis of the issue and discussion with groups representing those with lifelong or long-term medical incontinence. My focus is on getting the scheme up and running and while I have no plans at this time to increase the level of support available, it will be subject to review in the future.

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.

Renewable Energy Feed in Tariff Scheme

175. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to examine the reason electricity companies do not give credits or payments for excess electricity generated by solar panels on individual homes in view of the fact that in Northern Ireland home owners receive credits; the steps that can be taken to address this difference; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39143/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Since February 2009 Electric Ireland had offered a feed-in-tariff on a commercial basis to domestic micro generators. They have extended the scheme payments on several occasions since then and last year they decided to continue payments up until the end of 2018. No other electricity supplier has chosen to provide such a tariff, to either domestic or commercial customers, although they have been invited to do so by the Commission for the Regulation of Utilities (CRU). Responsibility for the regulation of the electricity and gas markets is a matter for the CRU, which is an independent statutory body. Last year, my Department assessed micro generation, across a number of renewable electricity generating technologies, as part of the economic analysis to underpin the new Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS). The assessment identified technical and financial challenges which may need to be addressed before a broader support scheme for micro generation can be introduced. This is in line with international and EU experience, where many member states who have introduced supports for micro generation have had to reform them or cancel them altogether. In March 2017 the UK Government closed down the Renewables Obligation (RO) Scheme to new applicants. Under the RO scheme generators (including homeowners and farmers across Northern Ireland) received payment for each unit of electricity they produce from solar PV. Interestingly, prior to closing the

scheme, the UK Government had reduced the generation tariff from 16p per unit of electricity generated, to 12p and finally down to 8p.

The reality is that bringing micro generation onto a system designed for large generators is complicated. It impacts how we pay for the network, how we manage regulation and how we technically manage the system.

In July, I announced details of a new pilot scheme to support micro generation, initially targeting solar PV, homeowners and self-consumption. The data gathered during the pilot scheme will inform potential future phases of support for micro-generation in Ireland that may be appropriate, as we align with the ambition and requirements of the recast Renewable Energy Directive (RED) that recognises the rights, entitlements and obligations of renewable self-consumers.

My Department is continuing to work closely with the micro-generation sector and the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) to better understand how to validate and further develop these policies in a fair and cost effective manner.

Question No. 176 answered with Question No. 174.

Fisheries Protection

177. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when the eel fisherman hardship fund will be introduced; and the amount of compensation that will be available to affected fisherman. [39163/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne): Ireland's Eel Management Plan (EMP), including the closure of commercial fishing, was approved, in 2009, by the European Commission under EU Regulation 1100/2007. Fishing for eel was by way of public licence and therefore the issue of compensation does not arise. However, both Minister Naughten and I have secured Exchequer funding for a support measure. Officials have engaged with the European Commission in relation to Ireland's proposals to fund a support scheme for former eel fishermen and the Department has received written advice from the Revenue Commissioners as regards the tax treatment of any payments under such a scheme.

It is intended that the scheme will be open to former fishermen who held an Inland Fisheries Ireland eel fishing licence or a permit from ESB in the period prior to the closure. Officials are liaising with IFI and ESB to verify catch records declared by fishermen and I expect that an announcement of the scheme and a call for applications will be made shortly.

Question No. 178 answered with Question No. 174.

Bituminous Fuel Ban

179. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the smoky coal ban commencing 1 September 2018 with all stocks of smoky coal to be sold off and burnt by 1 September 2019 which has not been enacted as promised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39266/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The ban on the marketing, sale and distribution of bituminous coal, or 'the smoky coal ban' as it is commonly known, was first introduced in Dublin in 1990, and subsequently

extended to our major cities. Following a public consultation process, it was further extended in 2012, and now applies in 26 urban areas nationwide. The ban has proved very effective in reducing particulate matter and sulphur dioxide levels and has had the effect of significantly improving public health. Research indicates, for example, that the ban has resulted in over 350 fewer annual deaths in Dublin alone. In light of its significant health and environmental benefits, I decided to extend the ban to the entire territory of the State beginning this Autumn. This process is on-going but necessarily involves discussion and consultation with a wide number of stakeholders, including with the European Commission, relevant Government Departments and Agencies and the residential fuel industry. Discussions with all these stakeholders on issues that may arise in connection with the proposed nationwide ban are underway.

EU Directives

180. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if a 3% annual rate of renovation for Government owned and occupied buildings as required by Article 5 of the Energy Efficiency Directive 2012/27/EU and Article 4 of the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive 2010/31/EU has been achieved for each of the years 2014 to 2017, respectively; if the 3% target has been achieved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39293/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Energy Efficiency Directive sets out measures Member States must take for the EU to meet its 20% energy efficiency target by 2020. Article 5 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 rather than a focus only on renovation. Article 4 of The Energy Performance of Buildings Directive deals with cost optimal energy performance requirements. As you will be aware, Ireland set a more ambitious energy efficiency objective for our public sector than required under the EU Directives. In 2009 in our first national Energy Efficiency Action Plan gave our public sector bodies a more ambitious 33% target - going beyond the 3% renovation requirement in the EU directive.

Progress is monitored annually in terms of the overall levels of energy use and efficiency across the sector. Details of efficiencies achieved by all public bodies is published in the Annual Report on Public Sector Energy Efficiency Performance - available on the SEAI website. Progress been good with the most recent report (covering energy use data to end 2016) showing a 20% improvement in energy efficiency achieved across the public sector by then. The detailed monitoring and reporting shows that there has been a steady increase in efficiency achieved from c.5% in 2009 to c.20% in 2016. The figures for the 2017 performance will be available later this year once all of the data has been analysed. The cumulative energy savings from 2009 to 2016 also amount to 2.6 million tonnes of CO₂ emissions reduction and €737m in energy spend avoided.

To further drive the effort required to achieve the 33% target, I published the first Public Sector Energy Efficiency Strategy in 2017. It introduces new governance structures, enhanced support measures, and provides clarity on the retention of financial savings achieved by public sector bodies from the energy efficiency measures they implement. Since the launched of the Strategy in 2017 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, to further support the Strategy I have also 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.

Illegal Fuel Sales

181. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his attention has been drawn to the widespread illegal importation of smoky coal from Northern Ireland; the measures being implemented to deal with this illicit trade; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39301/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Local Authorities are primarily responsible for the enforcement of legislation on solid fuel including the 'smoky coal' regulations within their functional areas. The powers that Local Authorities have in this area are extensive. For example: - Local Authority staff may undertake inspections of premises and vehicles being used for the sale and distribution of solid fuel as well as collect samples

- A Local Authority may bring a prosecution under the Air Pollution Act for breaches of the Regulations

- The maximum fine amounts for breaches of the Regulations is €5,000 on summary conviction

- Fixed payment notices (or 'on the spot fines') applied by the Local Authority are in operation for alleged offences relating to the marketing, sale and distribution of prohibited fuels in Low Smoke Zones (LSZs).

In addition, coal and low-smoke coal based products being offered for sale within the State must meet environmental specifications. The National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI) has prepared an annual traceability audit system, known as SWiFT 7, for showing compliance these specifications. Bagging operators placing these products on the market must have the SWiFT7 certificate and must also register with the EPA.

My officials are also currently examining other enforcement options to ensure the continued success of the existing smoky coal ban in urban areas, including the establishment of multi-agency teams. This is in line with other areas of environmental enforcement such as waste, where such an approach has proved successful.

Complaints regarding the sale of prohibited fuels, smoky emissions or other breaches of the regulations should, in the first instance, be reported to the Environment Section of the Local Authority concerned.

Sports Capital Programme

182. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of an approved sports capital grant application by a group (details supplied); and if he will

make a statement on the matter. [39131/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The organisation referred to by the Deputy has been allocated a total of €500,000 under various rounds of the Sports Capital Programme. I understand that only the most recent grant of €44,000, from the 2015 round of the programme is still outstanding. The organisation were given formal approval for this grant in June 2018 and were informed that they could proceed with the project. There will be no undue delay in paying out the grant once the standard necessary documentation is submitted to my Department by the organisation.

Road Signage

183. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if requests by the local community in Tallaght village to have a “Welcome to Tallaght” sign erected by Transport Infrastructure Ireland will be supported; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39174/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have overall responsibility for roads policy in Ireland. However, under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the planning, design and implementation of individual road projects on national roads is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland in conjunction with the relevant local authority and is a matter for the relevant local authority in the case of regional and local roads.

Should the request, therefore, relate to the location of a sign on a national road, then it would be a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) in conjunction with the relevant local authority. However, should the request relate to the location of a sign on a regional or local road, then it is a matter for the local authority itself, which in this case would be South Dublin County Council.

In either case, the Traffic Signs Manual (TSM) stipulates the traffic signs to be used on Irish roads, their layout and symbols, the circumstances in which each sign should be used and the rules for positioning them. The TSM constitutes a Ministerial Direction to road authorities under section 95(16) of the Road Traffic Act 1961, and is available from my Department’s website.

Road Tolls

184. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the contract for the operation of the secondary toll ramps on the M1 entering Drogheda town will conclude; if the ramps in question will be managed by public authorities on conclusion of the contract; the cost if the remaining years of the contract were to be bought out by the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39193/18]

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.

More specifically, the statutory powers to levy tolls on national roads as well as regional and local roads, to make toll bye-laws and to enter into toll agreements with private investors are vested in TII (for national roads) and each local authority (for regional and local roads) under Part V of the Roads Act 1993 (as amended by the Planning and Development Act 2000 and the Roads Act 2007). Accordingly, the information requested all falls within the operational capacity of TII.

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.

Railway Stations

185. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the National Transport Authority plan to commission a feasibility study for a train station for the northside of Drogheda; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39194/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA), working with other relevant State bodies, is responsible for ensuring the planning, development and delivery of the public transport infrastructure priorities, including train station developments, in the Greater Dublin Area including Drogheda.

In light of the NTA's role, I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for their response regarding this matter.

Driver Test Data

186. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on recent statistics confirming a high failure rate among driver test candidates in County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39197/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): This is a matter for the Road Safety Authority. I have referred the question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response is not received within 10 days.

Light Rail Projects

187. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if studies and appraisals conducted by his Department in designing the MetroLink project will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39207/18]

190. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has commissioned a business case appraisal of the MetroLink project. [39210/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 187 and 190 together.

As the Deputy is aware the National Transport Authority (NTA) has responsibility for the development and implementation of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area

(GDA), including light rail.

The development of the proposed MetroLink has been subject to a number of studies and appraisals, the most current of which are available to view on the project's dedicated website www.metrolink.ie

All Exchequer-supported capital projects are subject to applicable guidelines and procedures including the Public Spending Code and projects within the transport sector are also subject to the Common Appraisal Framework for Transport Projects and Programmes.

In line with the requirements of both the Public Spending Code and the Common Appraisal Framework, a cost benefit analysis (CBA) of the MetroLink project was commissioned by the NTA, and it was published earlier this year. That analysis indicated that "investment in MetroLink is worthwhile, based on economic benefits alone and the scheme will provide a high level of value for money ." This CBA report is available to view on the project's dedicated website www.metrolink.ie and I would encourage all interested parties to read it and the various other studies and reports relating to the project which are available to view on that website.

The Deputy may be aware that a public consultation on the "Emerging Preferred Route" for the Metrolink was conducted earlier this year and the NTA and Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) are now carefully considering the views elicited and matters raised during the consultation, as these will inform the development of the actual route for the project. It is expected that a report of that public consultation process will be published later in the year.

Light Rail Projects Expenditure

188. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the cost of constructing the Luas cross city with reference to the cost of land, the amount spent on analysis from engineers and other consultants and the cost of materials used will be published. [39208/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the development and implementation of public transport in the Greater Dublin Area, including the Luas Cross City project.

In light of the NTA's responsibility in the matters raised, I have referred the Deputy's question to the Authority for a more detailed reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Light Rail Projects

189. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his Department or transport agencies have commenced a feasibility study on the introduction of light rail in Cork city and suburbs. [39209/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As stated in the National Development Plan (NDP) the relevant local authorities, in partnership with both the National Transport Authority and Transport Infrastructure Ireland, are currently finalising a Cork Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy.

The Strategy will include proposals for a revised bus system for Cork and enhancements to the commuter rail service in Cork including additional stations and rail fleet. As referenced in the NDP, the Strategy will also provide for the evaluation of the potential of a Bus Rapid Transit or Light Rail corridor to serve the increased population growth out to 2040 as envisaged by the National Planning Framework.

The Strategy will be subject to public consultation prior to finalisation.

Question No. 190 answered with Question No. 187.

Commencement of Legislation

191. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason section 17 of the Dublin Transport Authority Act 2008, has not been commenced. [39211/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Dublin Transport Authority Act 2008 provided for a new authority to oversee the development of transport in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA). Section 17 of the Act allowed for the setting up of an Advisory Council of a Chairperson and 23 ordinary members. Under the Act, a majority of the Council would comprise officials and elected members of the various local / regional authorities in the GDA.

However, given that the remit of the Authority has been broadened over the years since 2008 especially by bringing national transport issues within its remit (rather than exclusively GDA matters), establishing an advisory council solely for GDA transport (as enabled by the legislation) would probably no longer be appropriate.

However, I am open to considering the merits of a broader national level advisory council and this is one of the broad range of matters that is within the scope of the Public Transport Policy Review which my Department is currently undertaking. I intend to launch a public consultation on the Review around the end of October.

Cycling Facilities Funding

192. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount of funding which has been made available to local authorities for the maintenance of cycle paths in each year since 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39213/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. Allocation of funding and details of individual cycle lane projects are managed by the National Transport Authority (NTA), in conjunction with the relevant local authorities. Once a cycle lane has been completed, maintenance is entirely a matter for the Local Authority.

As the Deputy is aware I secured over €110m in capital funding in Budget 2018 which is specifically allocated to develop cycling and walking infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area, Galway, Limerick, Cork and Waterford over the period 2018-2021.

A further €135m capital funding was allocated over this same period for investment in Sustainable Urban Transport projects, this investment includes projects that will provide either direct or indirect improvements for urban cycling. Also in the budget there was a doubling of investment in Greenways, with a capital allocation of €53m being made available over the 2018

to 2021 period for the construction of Greenways.

Furthermore, investment of more than €750m on the BusConnects Programme in the same period, will deliver a transformative investment package that will finance new and expanded bus routes, greatly improve bus access, and includes over 200km of, where possible, designated segregated cycle lanes.

Weather Events Response

193. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if funding will be provided to local authorities in order to treat footpaths in freezing weather conditions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39214/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads (including footways and footpaths) in its area, is a statutory responsibility of each road authority in accordance with the provisions of section 13 of the Roads Act, 1993. Works on such roads are a matter for the relevant local authority to be funded from its 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.

In January this year, I announced the €417m investment programme for regional and local roads in 2018. From this investment, over €70.6 million has been allocated to local authorities under a Discretionary Grant (DG) programme. Councils have discretion in using DG grants for a multiplicity of eligible works which include footway repairs and winter maintenance. It is therefore open to local authorities to fund these types of works either from their DG allocation or alternatively from its own resources should it so wish.

In addition I have recently supplemented funding for the purchase of salt by €700,000 in order to further rebuild salt stocks for the forthcoming winter. Some of those stocks will of course be available to local authorities for the salting of footways.

Cycling Facilities Data

194. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of kilometres of cycle lanes in Cork city by dedicated separate cycle lanes and shared cycle lanes. [39215/18]

195. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of kilometres of cycle lanes in Dublin city by dedicated separate cycle lanes and shared cycle lanes.. [39216/18]

196. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of kilometres of cycle lanes in Galway city by dedicated separate and shared cycle lanes. [39217/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 194 to 196, inclusive, together.

As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. However, I am not involved in the day-to-day operations of public transport, including the number of kilometres of cycle lanes in any particular town or city.

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The National Transport Authority (NTA) is responsible for the development and implementation of public transport and sustainable transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) and the regional cities.

Noting the NTA's responsibility in the matter, I have referred your question to the NTA for a more detailed reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Bus Services

197. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of buses using the recently opened coach park facility on Sheriff Street in each week since its opening. [39218/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the development and implementation of public transport in the Greater Dublin Area including the provision of the North Wall Coach Park

In light of the NTA's responsibility in the matter, I have referred the Deputy's question to the Authority for a more detailed reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Public Transport

198. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if licensed commercial coach operators are permitted to use bus lanes. [39219/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Yes, licensed commercial coach operators are permitted to use bus lanes.

Bus lanes can be used by large public service vehicles, which are defined in the Road Traffic Act 1961 (as amended) as mechanically propelled vehicles used for the carriage of persons for reward having seating passenger accommodation for more than 8 passengers exclusive of the driver.

Park and Ride Facilities

199. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the location and capacity of each publicly owned park and ride facility in tabular form. [39220/18]

200. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if new sites for park and ride facilities have been identified; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39221/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 199 and 200 together.

As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. However, I am not involved in the day-to-day operations

of public transport, including the capacity of each publicly owned Park and Ride facility.

The National Transport Authority (NTA) is responsible for the development and implementation of public transport and sustainable transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) and the regional cities, including the provision of Park and Ride facilities.

Noting the NTA's responsibility in the matter, I have referred your question to the NTA for a more detailed reply with regard to this particular project. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Taxi Licences

201. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the way in which taxi plates are transferred from parent to child will be examined; his views on whether a transfer based solely on the death of the licenceholder is fair in view of the fact that it does not take into account the holder's retirement age; his plans to review the arrangements; if there is scope for the taxi NTA to investigate the practice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39283/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The regulation of the small public service vehicle (SPSV) industry is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the provisions of the *Taxi Regulation Act 2013*.

At present, the transfer of SPSV licences is prohibited under section 14(1) of the 2013 Act which was commenced with effect from 6 April 2014. However, in the case of the death of a licence holder, section 15 of the same Act applies special provisions. In such circumstances, a SPSV licence may continue to be operated by a person who was nominated by the licence holder in advance of his or her death. I have no plans at present to adjust these provisions.

Given the particular role of the Authority in these matters, I have referred your question to the NTA for direct reply to you. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

Sports Capital Programme Administration

202. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when funding will be made available to a club (details supplied) in County Donegal as a result of the flooding that occurred in Inishowen in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39303/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The club referred to by the Deputy was allocated €139,200 under the Sports Capital Programme to make repairs to their sports facilities after the flood damage of 2017. I understand that the Chief State Solicitor's Office and the club's solicitor continue to engage in order to finalise the legalities necessary to protect the state's investment in this facility. As soon as these formalities are completed the club will be issued with formal approval and they can begin to draw down the grant.

Child and Family Agency Services

203. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the process for handling subject access requests to Tusla; the personnel involved by name, job title and grade; the expenditure to third parties to date in 2018 in carrying out that function; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39236/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The subject raised by the Deputy is a matter for Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. I have asked Tusla to respond directly to the Deputy on this matter.

Community Services Programme Funding

204. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if additional supports, including funding, will be made available to community organisations which provide community services through the community services programme administered by Pobal; if his attention has been drawn to the financial difficulties being experienced by such organisations owing to minimum and living wage increases, the cost of which are not fully met by funding allocated through the scheme; the additional assistance such organisations may avail of should they experience such difficulties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39262/18]

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 (FTE) positions. More than €46 million is available to support community organisations under the programme in 2018.

The CSP provides a fixed annual of contribution of €19,033 per FTE and €32,000 per manager. The contribution is not aligned with the national minimum wage. Organisations are required to provide a top-up of €2,000 per FTE from other sources to meet minimum wage requirements, for example, from income received for the use of facilities and services.

A CSP Support Fund was established in 2016 to provide additional funding to certain organisations to help them secure their financial sustainability and meet their minimum wage obligations. My Department will commence a review of the CSP shortly. The review will consider *inter alia* funding levels and funding structures under the programme.

Social Insurance Payments

205. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the calculation method for employee's PRSI contribution for those earning between €352.01 and €424 will be simplified (details supplied); if not, if the entry level will be increased to €424; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39160/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): In general employees pay PRSI at the Class A rate of 4% of their weekly earnings. For weekly earnings of €352 or less no PRSI is charged. Once weekly earnings exceed €352, Class A PRSI at the rate of 4% is charged on all earnings. Prior to the introduction of the PRSI credit in January 2016, the weekly PRSI charge for employees whose earnings for the first time exceed €352 increased from nil to €14.08. This "step effect" created a significant poverty trap for those who received an increase in their earnings or who increased their engagement in the workforce.

The PRSI credit was introduced in 2016 to address this “step effect” by reducing the weekly PRSI charge from €14.08 to €2.08, at earnings of €352.01. For weekly earnings between €352.01 and €424.00, the maximum weekly PRSI credit of €12 is reduced on a tapered basis. At earnings of €424.01, the credit is exhausted.

The fact that the PRSI credit applies between €352 and €424 means that the measure is targeted at those in the earnings range directly affected by the previous “step effect” and ensures the cost efficiency of the measure. It is estimated that the credit will have a cost of €18.3m in 2019. While it is appreciated that there is a calculation involved in the determination of the level of credit to apply to individual employees, this calculation is fully explained on the Department’s website, www.welfare.ie and in the Department’s information guides and leaflets.

Increasing the PRSI employee threshold to €424 would lead to the creation of a new “step effect” where no PRSI charge would arise at €424 but an increase in pay would mean a charge of €16.94 would arise. This new, higher, “step effect” would create a new poverty trap which would have to be alleviated by the introduction a new PRSI credit. This would incur further costs to the Social Insurance Fund.

Increasing the employee PRSI threshold to From €352 to €424 would cost €25.8m and affect 102,000 employees.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Guardian’s Payment

206. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to remove means-testing for guardian’s payments for children who are orphaned and cared for by family members; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39203/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Guardians Payments scheme, first introduced in 1936, was originally called orphan’s payment. It was renamed guardian’s payment in July 2006, in recognition of the fact that the original remit of the scheme had been extended to include certain children who had not lost both parents through bereavement.

There are two Guardians Payment schemes: Guardian’s payment (contributory), based on the PRSI contributions of the orphans parents or step-parent; and guardian’s payment (non-contributory), which is based on the means of the orphan.

A Guardians payment is made to a person caring for a child who satisfies the definition of an “orphan” under social welfare legislation. A child is considered an orphan if they are under 18 (or 22 if in full time education) and both parents are deceased; or one parent is either dead or unknown or has abandoned and failed to provide for the child and the other parent is unknown or has abandoned and failed to provide for the child.

Currently, there are around 1,600 people receiving guardian’s payments in respect of approximately 2,300 children; approximately 1,100 are in receipt of guardians payment (contributory) and approximately 500 are in receipt of guardians payment (non-contributory). Expenditure on guardian’s payments schemes (contributory and non-contributory) was €19.7 million in 2017.

If either of the child’s parents or step parents paid 26 weeks social insurance contributions, the orphan is entitled to Guardian’s payment (contributory), provided they satisfy the other

conditions. If no entitlement to guardian's payment (contributory) exists, an assessment for entitlement to guardian's payment (non-contributory) is made. Qualification for guardians payment (non-contributory) is determined based on the means of the orphan - not the person receiving the payment.

Means assessments for qualification for other services and supports are a matter for the relevant authority. For example, there no automatic entitlement to a medical card for a child in respect of whom a guardian's payment is being made and any proposal to extend medical card eligibility to these children is a matter for consideration by the Minister for Health.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Guardian's Payment

207. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the previous occasion on which her Department reviewed guardian payments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39204/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): One of the roles of the Department is to provide income support to families with children in the State. Guardian's payment (contributory) and guardian's payment (non-contributory) are, respectively, social insurance and social assistance (means-tested) payments made to a person caring for a child, where that child is defined as an orphan under social welfare legislation. The purpose of the guardian's payment scheme is to provide income support in respect of those children whose parents are unable to provide for them, through death or other circumstances.

Currently, there are around 1,600 people receiving guardian's payments in respect of approximately 2,300 children. Expenditure on guardian's payments schemes (contributory and non-contributory) was €19.7 million in 2017.

The guardian's payments scheme was reviewed in 2011. The main recommendation from that review was that my Department should consult with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs [then the Department of Health and Children] regarding the possible alignment of the foster care allowance scheme and guardians payment. That consultation has highlighted that there are very different policy perspectives and principles governing both schemes, that the nature and purposes of the schemes are diverse, and that the qualifying and operating conditions of the schemes vary considerably.

Since that review, budget increases of €20 per week have been implemented in Budgets 2017 and 2018. The latest increase of €5 per week, implemented from March 2018, brings the weekly rate to €181; the highest rate of weekly child income support paid by my Department.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Free Travel Scheme Administration

208. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the existing fare agreements with transport providers involved in the free transport scheme; the year in which these fares were agreed upon; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39212/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Un-

der the National Recovery Plan 2011 – 2014 funding for the Free Travel Scheme was frozen at €77m per annum, equivalent to the levels of expenditure on the scheme in 2010. Prior to this cap on expenditure the rate of payment to operators participating in the scheme was reviewed regularly and adjusted on the basis of changes in rates of fares. Funding for the scheme was increased by €3m in Budget 2016 to allow more operators join the scheme and by a further €10m in 2018, bringing the current allocation to €90m.

Payments to private travel operators participating in the free travel scheme are determined by way of a survey of their passenger numbers. An average fee is agreed on foot of surveys undertaken over a six month period and based on the operator's own fare charges. This is then discounted by 30% to reflect the fares foregone nature of the scheme. New private operators seeking to enter the scheme or existing operators seeking an increase in their payments must engage in this survey process. At any given time, there are some private operators engaged in the survey process.

In relation to the CIÉ Group, rather than carrying out specific surveys of usage, my Department moved many years ago to a service model based on the transportation infrastructure and the introduction of new services e.g. DART, LUAS and removal of the restrictions on free travel during peak hours. At each stage, my Department has negotiated rates and discounts to reflect these developments.

My Department pays the CIÉ Group centrally in respect of transport services provided nationwide by Bus Átha Cliath, Iarnród Éireann and Bus Éireann PSO routes. Provision was made in Budget 2018 to allow for the reduction in the level of discount required from Bus Éireann Expressway from 40% to 30%, putting it on an equal footing with other commercial operators participating in the scheme.

I hope that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility

209. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated cost of allowing lone parents in employment to receive both the jobseeker's transition payment and working family payment until their child has finished secondary school; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39284/18]

219. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated cost of allowing lone parents in employment whose children are aged between seven and 14 years of age to receive both the jobseeker's transition payment and working family payment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39312/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 209 and 219 together.

My Department provides a number of options for income support to lone parents once their entitlement to the One-Parent Family Payment (OFP) ceases. These include the Jobseeker's Transitional Payment (JST) payment where the youngest child is aged 7-13 years (inclusive) and the Jobseeker's Allowance (JA) payment which may be paid to lone parents where the youngest child is aged 14 or over. The Working Family Payment (WFP), is also available to lone parents who are working 19 or more hours per week. Lone parents who move to WFP may also apply for the Back to Work Family Dividend (BTWFD).

The concurrent payment of JST and WFP contradicts the policy goal of the changes to the

OFP scheme, which were to tackle long-term social welfare dependency - and its associated poverty risks - through a tapering of income supports and a more active engagement process offering enhanced educational, training and employment supports.

Lone parents currently on JST who increase their working hours to 19 or more per week can transfer from JST to WFP. A lone parent in receipt of WFP is not at risk of poverty and so the goal of income adequacy is met without the need for the concurrent payment of JST and WFP.

The cost of concurrently paying JST and WFP or of increasing the age limit for a qualified child for the jobseeker's transitional payment (JST) to while the youngest child remains in secondary school is not easily estimated.

There are significant barriers to undertaking such an exercise. For example, customers may no longer be within the welfare system, while others could seek to move from alternative payments such as Jobseekers Allowance (JA), the Working Family Payment (WFP) and the Back to Work Family Dividend (BTWFD) back to JST. It would be difficult for my Department to estimate the magnitude of this flow into and between schemes with any degree of accuracy.

Likewise, the number of young people 18 years of age and over who are still in secondary education, and the proportion of those who are the children of lone parents in receipt of benefits is not readily available or easily estimated. As these unknown factors are critical to providing a reliable costing my Department is not in a position to provide the costing requested.

Child Benefit Eligibility

210. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated cost of removing the habitual residency condition as a condition for access to child benefit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39289/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Child Benefit is a monthly payment made to families with children in respect of all qualified children up to the age of 16 years. The payment continues to be paid in respect of children up to their 18th birthday who are in full-time education, or who have a disability. Child Benefit is currently paid to almost 628,000 families in respect of over 1.2 million children, with an estimated expenditure of more than €2 billion in 2018.

In order to qualify for payment of child benefit, a person must satisfy what is known as the Habitual Residence Condition. It is not possible to predict with any degree of accuracy the cost of removing the habitual residency condition for access to Child Benefit.

For example, and to consider just one group of people who may not meet this condition, according to figures produced in July of this year by the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) there were just over 1,500 children resident in RIA accommodation. However, as this Department does not hold information regarding their ages or school attendance records it is not possible to provide an accurate estimate of the numbers eligible or the cost of extending child benefit to these children. Other groups who may not initially meet the HRC condition could include returning immigrants or people temporarily resident or resident for short stays, who retain a centre of interests elsewhere. As these numbers vary constantly a reliable estimate of cost is not possible.

As a general guide on cost, every 1,000 additional Child Benefit claims would cost €1.68 million.

Social Welfare Benefits Data

211. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the cost of equalising to the adult rate reduced rate pensions and jobseeker's allowance for those under 26 years of age; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39290/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The full year cost of increasing the reduced personal weekly rates for those aged 66 and over in receipt of the State Pension Contributory and the Widow/er's and Surviving Civil Partner's Contributory Pension to the maximum weekly rate of €243.30 is estimated at c. €333 million in 2019. This cost includes proportionate increases for qualified adults, where applicable. It does not include the cost of increasing pro-rata pension payments to the maximum rate.

The full year cost of increasing the age-related reduced rates of Jobseeker's Allowance for those under 26 years of age, from €107.70 per week and €152.80 per week to the maximum rate of €198 per week, is €59.6 million. This includes the cost of increasing the €107.70 rate qualified adult rate to the maximum €131.40 per week, and any associated costs in the Supplementary Welfare Allowance scheme.

It should be noted that these costings are subject to change in the context of emerging trends and associated revision of the estimated numbers of recipients for 2019.

Child Benefit Data

212. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated cost of making child benefit payable to families with children over 18 years of age who are enrolled in secondary school reflecting the higher educational costs for families with adolescents; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39291/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Child Benefit is a monthly payment made to families with children in respect of all qualified children up to the age of 16 years. The payment continues to be paid in respect of children up to their 18th birthday who are in full-time education, or who have a disability. Child Benefit is currently paid to more than 631,000 families in respect of over 1.2 million children, with an estimated expenditure of more than €2 billion in 2018.

Based on Department of Education and Skills figures on the numbers of 18 and 19 year olds in full-time secondary education in 2017, the estimated annual cost of extending the upper age limit to include 18 and 19 year olds in full-time secondary education is in the region of €65 million.

The Deputy's question indicates no upper age limit and would therefore also include young people of 20 years and above, thus giving rise to costs in excess of this figure.

Given the universal nature of Child Benefit, making it payable in respect of young people over 18 years of age for the duration of their enrolment in second-level education would not be a targeted approach. Any adjustment to the payment can result in benefits being spread very thinly, rather than making a difference where there is most need.

Under EU regulations Child Benefit is defined as a family benefit and is exportable in cases where the claimant is working in Ireland but where the children are living abroad. We have no way of predicting with any degree of accuracy the potential in-flow in this category for young people who turn 18 and remain in second level education in other Member States.

Social Welfare Benefits Data

213. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated cost of extending statutory paid maternity and paternity leave to a year, both shared and unshared; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39304/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department's maternity benefit scheme is payable for 26 weeks and paternity benefit for 2 weeks. The 2018 Estimates provides for expenditure of approximately €264 million on Maternity Benefit and €16 million on paternity benefit. The estimated weekly cost of extending the duration of maternity and paternity benefit, based on 2019 estimated average weekly recipients, is approximately €9.7 million and €6 million respectively.

The following table provides details of the additional full year cost of increasing the duration of maternity benefit by 24 weeks and paternity benefit by 50 weeks, providing a total of 52 weeks for each parent.

The table also provides details of the cost of increasing the duration of paternity benefit by 24 weeks to bring the leave for both parents to a combined total of 52 weeks (when added with the existing 26 weeks already available to mothers).

Estimated annual cost of increasing the duration of maternity & paternity benefit based on 2019 estimated recipients at a rate of €240 per week

No. of additional weeks	Estimated cost (€m)
24 weeks maternity benefit	233
50 weeks on paternity benefit	300
24 weeks on paternity benefit	144

Any extension to schemes can only be considered as part of the budgetary process in the context of overall welfare improvements.

The Deputy is advised that there are additional costs to the Exchequer as these estimates do not include the costs of salary top-ups for public/civil servants or substitution costs.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits Data

214. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated cost of increasing the weekly allowance for children living in direct provision to the current rate for a qualified child including a €5 increase for over 12's and the adult weekly allowance to €38.80 as recommended by the working group on the protection process; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39306/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Ireland has opted in to the EU (recast) Reception Conditions Directive with effect from 30 June 2018. As a result, direct provision allowance is being renamed daily expenses allowance. The Government has provided over €5.6 million for the allowance in 2018. This is paid to applicants for international protection who live in the direct provision system where they are provided with full board accommodation and other facilities/services by the Reception and Integration Agency of the Department of Justice and Equality.

The allowance is currently paid at the rate of €21.60 per week per adult and per child. There are approximately 3,700 adults and 1,500 children residing in the system of direct provision in respect of whom the allowance is being paid.

The McMahon Report on Improvements to the Protection Process recommended that the adult rate of the allowance should be increased to €38.74.

The additional full-year cost, based on the current numbers, of increasing the weekly adult rate, for each adult, from €21.60 to €38.74 is approximately €3.3 million.

The additional full-year cost, based on the current numbers, of increasing the weekly child rate, for all children, from €21.60 to €31.80 is approximately €795,600.

The additional full-year cost of providing an extra €5 per for children aged over 12 years is approximately €58,500.

Any increases to the rate of this allowance would have to be approved by Government and considered in a budgetary context.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits Data

215. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated cost of increasing universal child benefit by €5. [39307/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The estimated full-year cost of increasing the monthly rate of Child Benefit by €5, from €140 per month to €145 per month, is €73.29 million.

It should be noted that this costing is subject to change in the context of emerging trends and associated revision of the estimated numbers of recipients for 2019.

Social Welfare Benefits Data

216. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated cost of increasing the one-parent family payment and jobseeker's transition payment to €161 per week; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39308/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I understand the Deputy to be referring to the income disregard applying to these payments, rather than the payments themselves.

Based on the income data for existing customers on one parent family payments and jobseekers transition payments, the estimated cost of increasing the income disregard for the one-parent family payment and jobseeker's transitional payment for this cohort from €130.00 to €161 per week is in the region of €8 to €8.5 million per year.

Social Welfare Benefits Data

217. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protec-

tion the estimated cost of extending the jobseeker's transitional payment until the youngest child is 18 years of age and until a child finishes secondary school, respectively; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39310/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The policy goal of the changes to the OFP scheme were to tackle long-term social welfare dependency - and its associated poverty risks - through a tapering of income supports and a more active engagement process offering enhanced educational, training and employment supports.

My Department continues to provide a range of options for income support to lone parents once their entitlement to the Jobseeker's Transitional Payment (JST) payment ceases. These include the Jobseeker's Allowance (JA) payment which may be paid to lone parents where the youngest child is aged 14 or over, and the Working Family Payment (WFP), available to lone parents who are working 19 or more hours per week. Lone parents who move to WFP may also apply for the Back to Work Family Dividend (BTWFD).

There are significant barriers to accurately estimating the cost of extending the jobseeker's transitional payment (JST) until the youngest child is eighteen years of age, and until a child finishes secondary school. For example, some customers may no longer be within the welfare system, while others could seek to move from alternative payments such as Jobseekers Allowance (JA), the Working Family Payment (WFP) and the Back to Work Family Dividend (BTWFD) back to JST. It would be difficult for my Department to estimate the magnitude of this flow into and between schemes with any degree of accuracy.

Likewise, the number of young people 18 years of age and over who are still in secondary education, and the proportion of those who are the children of lone parents in receipt of benefits is not readily available or easily estimated. As these unknown factors are critical to providing a reliable costing my Department is not in a position to provide the costing requested.

Social Welfare Benefits Data

218. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated cost of increasing the threshold for one-parent family payment and jobseeker's transition payment to an increased limit of €500 per week with a €50 increase for each additional child; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39311/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): In the case of One Parent Family payment (OFP), the earnings data necessary to enable a reliable calculation is not available to the Department, as claimants with earnings above the €425 threshold will have exited the scheme and the Department will have no sight of their numbers or earnings.

Insofar as the jobseekers transitional (JST) payment is concerned there is no specific "earnings threshold" in place. The allowance ceases to be paid when the means (as assessed by the Department) exceeds the payment amount for the individual, which is in turn based on the personal rate plus the relevant number of child dependant increases payable for the particular claimant.

Question No. 219 answered with Question No. 209.

Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility

220. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated cost of removing the means-test for maintenance payments, particularly for rent allowance payments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39286/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Rent supplement plays a vital role in housing families and individuals, with the scheme supporting approximately 27,400 recipients for which the Government has provided €180 million for in 2018.

Rent supplement is a statutory means tested scheme, payable at differentiated rates of payment according to the applicant's means and accommodation requirements, and is normally calculated to ensure that a person, after the payment of rent, has an income equal to the rate of supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) appropriate to their family circumstances, less a weekly minimum contribution which recipients are required to pay from their own resources.

For rent supplement, maintenance payments of up to €95.23 per week are fully assessable on the basis that vouched accommodation costs of up to this amount are disregarded in the assessment of weekly social assistance payments such as jobseeker's allowance and one-parent family payment. Where a person has weekly maintenance payments of more than €95.23, the next €75 is disregarded in full with 25% of any additional maintenance above €170.23 also disregarded. The contribution towards a customer's rent is the aggregate amount of: €95.23 primary payment disregard plus 75% of any maintenance payments in excess of €170.23 plus the customer's €30 minimum contribution. The interaction between rent supplement, the primary scheme and maintenance ensures that recipient retains their full primary payment entitlement whilst making a reasonable contribution towards their accommodation costs.

Any alteration in the amount of maintenance payment being disregarded for rent supplement would have to consider reciprocal alterations in the disregards of the respective primary payments. Any unilateral changes to the rent supplement scheme, i.e., not altering primary payment schemes' disregards, could only be considered in a budgetary context and within the scope of the overall resources available.

The cost impact of this exercise, of a unilateral removal of the €95.23 rent supplement provision, is not possible to calculate at this time .

The calculation of differential rents for HAP with respect to maintenance payments is a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government.

Carer's Allowance Appeals

221. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a carer's allowance appeal by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39135/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an oral hearing of the appeal of the person concerned took place on 22nd August 2018 and that the Appeals Officer is now considering the appeal in the light of all of the evidence submitted, including that adduced at the oral hearing. The person concerned will be notified of the Appeals Officer's decision when the appeal has been determined.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals

against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Fuel Allowance Eligibility

222. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason a homeless person on a community employment scheme is not eligible for the fuel allowance when they are housed and were not in receipt of fuel allowance previously; and her views on whether this effectively penalises a person that is on a community employment scheme and then secures a long-term home. [39139/18]

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. It is not intended to meet those costs in full. One allowance is payable per household. Those participating on work schemes such as Community Employment (CE) are entitled to Fuel Allowance if they fulfil the conditions for receipt of same. CE participants who are not in receipt of the allowance can have their entitlement to Fuel Allowance reviewed if their circumstances change while they are participating on the scheme.

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.

If the Deputy has a particular case in mind and wishes to forward the details I will ensure that it is examined by the Department.

Disability Allowance Payments

223. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason a person (details supplied) is receiving a reduced rate of disability allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39172/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Disability Allowance is a means tested payment.

The person concerned is in receipt of DA since 8 November 2016 at a reduced rate as he was assessed with means from property he owns.

Notification of this decision issued to the person concerned on 8 November 2016. They were also notified of their right to a review of this decision or to appeal it to the independent social welfare appeals office (SWAO). No request for a review or appeal was received.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Payments

224. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason payments to a person (details supplied) were reduced; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39173/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The person concerned was awarded Invalidity Pension from 20 September 2018.

The payment of Illness Benefit for €34.93 for the person concerned is a two day payment for the dates 18th and 19th September 2018.

I hope this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

Fuel Allowance Eligibility

225. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason a homeless person on a community employment scheme is not eligible for the fuel allowance when they are housed and were not in receipt of fuel allowance previously (details supplied). [39234/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The fuel allowance is a payment of €22.50 per week for 27 weeks (a total of €607.50 each year) from October to April, to over 368,000 low income households, at an estimated cost of €227 million in 2018. The purpose of this payment is to assist these households with their energy costs. The allowance represents a contribution towards the energy costs of a household. It is not intended to meet those costs in full. Only one allowance is paid per household.

Participants on a Community Employment scheme can be paid fuel allowance where they had applied for or were awarded fuel allowance prior to commencing on the scheme and where they satisfy or continue to satisfy the conditions. Claimants moving to a Community Employment scheme cannot accrue entitlement to fuel allowance while on the scheme.

Any decision to include a Community Employment scheme as a qualifying payment for fuel allowance would have budgetary consequences and would have to be considered in the context of budget negotiations.

Under the supplementary welfare allowance scheme, a special heating supplement may be paid to assist people in certain circumstances that have special heating needs. Exceptional needs payments (ENP) may be made to help meet an essential, once-off cost which an applicant is unable to meet out of his/her own resources and this may include exceptional heating costs.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance Scheme Data

226. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of back to school grant applications received from persons living in direct provision in each year since 2012; the number of these grants which were successful; the reasons given for unsuccessful applications in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39245/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The back to school clothing and footwear allowance (BSCFA) scheme provides a once-off payment to eligible families to assist with the extra costs when children start school each autumn. The Government has provided €49.5 million for the scheme in 2018 which operates from June to September.

BSCFA, unlike most other means assessed schemes, is not subject to the habitual residence condition and is payable to eligible families living in the direct provision system.

Statistics are maintained relating to payments under the BSCFA scheme, however they are not maintained on the number of applications or the outcome of those applications. The tabular statement below shows the number of BSCFA payments made to families residing in the direct provision system in the years 2013-2018. Statistics are not available for 2012.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Tabular Statement: Number of Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance Payments made to families residing in the Direct Provision system, 2013-2018:

Year	Number of Payments
2013	680
2014	660
2015	530
2016	430
2017	530
2018 (provisional, up to 21/9/2018)	480

JobsPlus Scheme

227. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the employers' PRSI incentive schemes that exist to encourage employers to take on new employees; and the cost of these in a full year. [39256/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Deputy is advised that the employers' PRSI exemption scheme was replaced by the JobsPlus Scheme on 1 July 2013.

JobsPlus provides a direct monthly financial incentive to employers who recruit employees who are long-term on the live register and transitioning into employment. It provides employers with two levels of payment: €7,500 and €10,000.

The €7,500 is paid primarily to those who are 12 months or more on the live register with the higher grant paid in respect of those who have been unemployed for more than 24 months. The incentive is paid in monthly instalments over a two year period provided the employment is maintained.

There is currently sanction for up to 6,000 employments to be supported through JobsPlus, with a projected expenditure estimate of €30 million for 2018.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility

228. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if eligibility for the household benefits package and the fuel allowance could be affected in a situation whereby the child of a parent who is in receipt of disability allowance commences employment. [39264/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The fuel allowance is a payment of €22.50 per week for 27 weeks (a total of €607.50 each year) from October to April, to over 368,000 low income households, at an estimated cost of €227 million in 2018. The purpose of this payment is to assist these households with their energy costs. The allowance represents a contribution towards the energy costs of a household. It is not intended to meet those costs in full. Only one allowance is paid per household.

To qualify for a fuel allowance under the fuel allowance scheme, a person must satisfy a number of criteria, including live alone or only with a qualified spouse/civil partner/cohabitant or qualified child(ren). For the purposes of fuel allowance and household benefits, a qualified child is one for whom an Increase for a Qualified Child (IQC) is payable.

If an IQC is no longer in payment for a son or daughter who commences work and is not in receipt of a qualifying or disregarded Social Protection payment then entitlement to the fuel allowance payment will be affected.

The household benefits package (HHB) comprises the electricity or gas allowance, and the free television licence. The package is generally available to people living in the State, aged 66 years or over who are in receipt of a social welfare type payment or who satisfy a means test. For a child to be an excepted person for HHB purposes the claimant must be in receipt of an IQC for the child or the child is in receipt of a qualifying payment in their own right. If an IQC is no longer in payment for a son or daughter who commences work and who is not in receipt of a qualifying or disregarded Social Protection payment then entitlement to the HHB package will be affected.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension Eligibility

229. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the class or rate of contributions that must be paid by a person seeking an invalidity pension; if voluntary contributions paid by a person are reckonable for invalidity pension purposes; the nature of contributions paid by a person (details supplied) for the past ten years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39278/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Invalidity pension (IP) is a payment for people who are permanently incapable of work because of illness or incapacity and who satisfy the pay related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions.

To qualify for IP a claimant must, inter-alia, have at least 260 (5 years) paid PRSI contributions since entering social insurance and 48 contributions paid or credited in the last or second last complete contribution year before the date of their claim.

Only PRSI classes A, E, H or S contributions are reckonable for IP purposes. Voluntary contributions are not reckonable to qualify for IP.

Over the past ten years the gentleman referred to has paid Class S contributions and, in more recent years, voluntary PRSI contributions.

The Department received a claim for IP for the gentleman concerned on the 7 December 2017. His claim was disallowed on the grounds that the contribution conditions for the scheme were not satisfied. He was notified on the 10th January 2018 of this decision, the reason for it

and of his right of review and appeal.

The gentleman referred to requested a review of the decision of 10 January 2018 and following a review of all the information available to the department it was decided that there was no change to the original decision. He subsequently appealed the decision and his appeal was disallowed by the Social Welfare Appeals Office.

Disability Allowance Applications

230. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the position on an application for disability allowance by a person (details supplied) for the past ten years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39280/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): I can confirm that my department received an application for disability allowance (DA) from this lady on 19 July 2018.

On 24 September 2018 the person concerned was requested to supply supporting documentation required by the deciding officer in order to make a decision on her eligibility. On receipt of this information a decision will be made on her DA application and the person concerned will be notified of the outcome.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Fuel Allowance Payments

231. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to increase the fuel allowance for vulnerable households to remove the extra costs of increasing the carbon tax to €20 and €30 per tonne, respectively; the estimated cost of same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39287/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The fuel allowance is a payment of €22.50 per week for 27 weeks (a total of €607.50 each year) from October to April, to over 368,000 low income households, at an estimated cost of €227 million in 2018. The purpose of this payment is to assist these households with their energy costs. The allowance represents a contribution towards the energy costs of a household. It is not intended to meet those costs in full. Only one allowance is paid per household.

My Department also pays an electricity or gas allowance at an estimated cost of €237 million in 2018.

Additionally, under the supplementary welfare allowance scheme, a special heating supplement may be paid to assist people in certain circumstances that have special heating needs. Exceptional needs payments may be made to help meet an essential, once-off cost which an applicant is unable to meet out of his / her own resources.

It is not possible to state the cost of the measure proposed by the Deputy, as the relevant cost of any increase in carbon tax would vary upon a number of factors, notably the energy efficiency of the homes of Fuel Allowance recipients, and the amount and type of fuel they use.

Any decision to increase the fuel allowance payment to cover the cost of energy or carbon taxes would have budgetary consequences and would have to be considered in the context of

budget negotiations.

In 2016 the Government launched a comprehensive Strategy to Combat Energy Poverty following extensive public consultation. This Strategy is spearheaded by the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment. It sets out the Government's commitment to protecting vulnerable households from energy poverty through a combination of supports, investment in schemes to improve energy efficiency, and energy efficiency awareness initiatives. One of the best ways to tackle fuel poverty in the long term is to improve the energy efficiency of the dwelling through proper building and household insulation. The Warmer Homes Scheme, administered by Sustainable Energy Authority Ireland, is designed to do that. Earlier this year, this scheme was expanded to include recipients of Domiciliary Care Allowance and further expansion to include carers is under consideration. I understand the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment is reviewing the scheme and my officials will participate in that. It is clear that, in addition to assisting Ireland in reducing carbon emissions, it will also reduce the impact of carbon tax on householders which have benefitted from this scheme.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Creative Ireland Programme

232. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if her Department will expand the Creative Ireland social welfare pilot beyond writers and visual art artists to include the performing artists and makers (details supplied); the estimated cost of extending the scheme to these artists; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39294/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): 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. The initiative, which is a commitment under the Creative Ireland Programme, involved collaboration between my Department and what is now the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, with the support and advice of the Arts Council. It was decided after a process of consultation that the initiative would apply to members of Visual Arts Ireland (VAI) and the Irish Writers Centre (IWC).

A key feature of the initiative is that it acknowledges the status of self-employed artists and writers and gives them a 12 month window to focus on building up their work before they become subject to labour market activation services provided by my Department. Applicants must satisfy all of the usual qualifying conditions for jobseeker's allowance, including a means test.

It is not possible to estimate the cost of extending this pilot initiative to categories listed by the Deputy as there is no data available on the numbers of people who are likely to qualify on the basis of their status as a self-employed professional artist.

It is planned that a review of the pilot initiative will commence shortly and the findings of the review will inform any further decisions regarding its future.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy at this time.

Social Welfare Appeals Status

233. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the progress to date in the determination of an appeal against a decision to refuse disability allowance or an invalidity pension in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39344/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an Invalidity Pension appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 7 March 2018. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant papers and comments by or on behalf of the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought from the Department of Social Protection. These papers were received in the Social Welfare Appeals Office on 20 September 2018 and the case will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Jobseeker's Allowance Payments

234. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if jobseeker's allowance claims are being paid up to date in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39348/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned is currently not in receipt of a Jobseekers Allowance payment. Regretfully he has failed without good cause to attend an Activation Review Meeting on the 25th July 2018 or to make contact with his Case Officer to rearrange this meeting. The sanctions imposed have led to both a penalty rate and a benefit suspension on his payment. Decisions in relation to the imposition of sanctions on Jobseekers Allowance payments are undertaken in accordance with Section 141A of the Social Welfare (Consolidation) Act, 2005. He was due to attend an appointment on the 19th September 2018 at 15:00 pm however he failed to attend or to make contact with his Case Officer.

A review of the person concerned Jobseekers Allowance payment for the period 10th January 2018 to the 12th March 2018 confirms that he was paid correctly. Arrears for the period in question & his €102.70 weekly payment for the 14th March 2018 to 20th March 2018 where paid in Leixlip Post Office on the 20th March 2018.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Jobseeker's Allowance Payments

235. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the correct level of jobseeker's allowance payable in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39350/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned is in receipt of a Jobseekers Allowance payment of €393.00 per week from the 11th September 2018. The weekly payment is made up of a personal allowance of €198.00,

an adult dependent allowance of €131.40 and a child dependent allowance of €31.80 per each child. There are 2 child dependents. This is the correct level of Jobseekers Allowance payable.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility

236. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the estimated cost of removing the means-test for maintenance payments, particularly for housing assistance payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39286/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): As the social housing support system is demand driven and given the wide variations in maintenance payments that can arise in relevant individual households, it is not possible to provide the costing requested.

Mortgage Protection Policies

237. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the compulsory mortgage protection insurance on the Rebuilding Ireland scheme costs far above market rates; the reason recipients of Rebuilding Ireland mortgages are not free to obtain their own mortgage protection insurance at market rates; and the steps he will take to ensure that recipients are not obligated to pay over the odds for mortgage protection insurance as part of the scheme. [39176/18]

242. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will report on the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme; the reason persons are not allowed to shop around for mortgage protection insurance options under this scheme; his views on whether their consumer rights are being restricted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39222/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 237 and 242 together.

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

The Local Authority Mortgage Protection Insurance scheme is a group scheme and is designed to provide an appropriate level of insurance cover to those who wish to avail of the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan. It is overseen by the Mortgage Protection Insurance Committee, a sub-committee of the County and City Management Association (CCMA) with representatives from the CCMA, local authorities, the Housing Finance Agency, as well as my Department and has applied to all house purchase loans approved by local authorities since 1 July 1986.

One of the conditions of the group policy scheme is that it is obligatory for all borrowers who meet the eligibility criteria to join the scheme. Altering this condition would have a negative impact on the scheme and increase the cost for all existing borrowers.

The local authority MPI is designed to provide an appropriate level of insurance cover to those who wish to avail of the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan. It offers a number of additional features over and above the standard MPI products available on the market. Standard MPI products are individually priced, based on a member's age, amongst other factors, whereas the

local authority MPI scheme is a group arrangement, offering a single group rate per €1,000 sum assured to all participants in the scheme.

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

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

Local Authority Housing Data

238. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of new direct local authority built social housing units in the Louth County Council administrative area which came on stream in each of the years 2011 to 2017 and to date in 2018; the location of each development; the number of units built by voluntary housing bodies and allocated to tenants in County Louth; the location of each development in each of the years 2011 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39186/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Statistical information in relation to local authority social housing delivery is published on the statistics page of my Department's website. Data in relation to local authority direct delivery between 2004-2015 is available at the following link:

www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/attachments/la_build_2004-2015.xlsx .

From 2015, a single table broken down by each local authority of all social housing delivery, including local authority new build, and Approved Housing Body (AHB) new build, has been published. This is available at the following link:

www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordble/overall-social-housing-provision.

AHBs may deliver social housing under a variety of delivery schemes, and in some cases through own finance arrangements that do not require Departmental funding. My Department monitors delivery, as it relates to output under schemes funded by the Department, and therefore would not have full visibility on non-funded units, which have been allocated to tenants in a particular local authority. Data in relation to AHB build delivery between 2004 and 2015 is available under the headings "Capital Assistance Scheme" and "CLSS" at the second weblink above.

Detailed scheme level information in relation to the location and status of new build social housing delivery by local authority and AHBs has been published by my Department since 2016 under the Social Housing Construction Status Report. The most recent version of this report, setting out the position at end Q2 2018, is available on the Rebuilding Ireland website at

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

Planning Guidelines

239. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the new revised guidance for local authorities on one-off rural housing regulations will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39187/18]

253. **Deputy Darragh O’Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the position regarding the working group comprising officials from planning authorities and his Department which was established to review and revise the 2005 planning guidelines on sustainable rural housing; if the review has concluded; if he has engaged with the European Commission on proposed changes to the guidelines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39299/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 239 and 253 together.

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.

Local Authority Boundaries Review

240. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number and nature of service level agreements formally agreed and signed between Louth and Meath county councils arising from the recommendations of the 2016 report of the Drogheda boundary commission; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39188/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): The report of the Drogheda Boundary Committee, published in February 2017, recommended that there be no change to the existing boundary, subject to a set of recommendations, including the creation of a unified vision for Drogheda, a joint area plan for the greater Drogheda area, a joint retail strategy and a joint initiative to improve community cohesion and identity being carried out.

However the two authorities involved, Louth and Meath, indicated concern with this approach, particularly in relation to the staffing and financial overheads required and the practicality of decision making where any recommendations would need to be approved separately by both Councils.

It is my intention, therefore, to address the issue of cross boundary cooperation through legislative provision and work on this is at an advanced stage in my Department.

Fire Stations Upgrade

241. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when capital funding will be provided for the upgrade of Rathdowney fire station County Laois; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39205/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The provision of a fire service in its functional area, including the establishment and maintenance of a fire brigade, the assessment of fire cover needs and the provision of fire station premises, is a statutory function of individual fire authorities under section 10 of the Fire Services Act 1981. My Department supports the fire authorities through setting general policy, providing a central training programme, issuing guidance on operational and other related matters and providing capital funding for priority infrastructural projects.

Under the 2006 Fire Service Capital Programme a proposal by Laois County Council to build a new fire station at Rathdowney was received by my Department and approval in principle was granted to proceed to the planning stages. Laois County Council submitted cost and design plans on 2 June 2009 for consideration by my Department. At that time Laois County Council were asked to review these plans with a view to finding savings as it was felt the project offered insufficient value for money.

A re-assessment of fire station projects was undertaken in 2015. This graded proposals on the basis of:

- Area Risk Categorisation of the Fire Station (population, fire risks etc.)
- Established Health and Safety Needs
- The state of development of the project (is site acquired etc.?)
- The Value for Money offered by the proposal

In February 2016, my Department announced a five-year Fire Services Capital Programme with an allocation of €40 million, based on an annual €8 million allocation, to be used for the purchase of fire appliances and specialist equipment, building or upgrading of prioritised Fire Stations, an upgrade of the Communications and Mobilisation system and improvements to Training Centres. Under this programme, the list of priority projects to be progressed will be kept under review on an annual basis.

A fire station project for Rathdowney is not included in the current 5 year programme, but my Department will have regard to Laois County Council's priorities and the totality of requests from fire authorities countrywide for funding in further considering any proposal. Refurbishments of Fire Stations in Mountmellick and Mountrath are included in the 5 year programme and my Department continues to work with Laois County Council to progress these projects.

Question No. 242 answered with Question No. 237.

Shared Ownership Scheme

243. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the reintroduction of a shared ownership scheme in partnership with local authorities is being considered for families and persons saving to secure a mortgage in view of the relative success of the previous shared ownership scheme; and if he will make a statement on

the matter. [39224/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): In 2011, the Government announced the standing down of all affordable housing schemes, including the Shared Ownership scheme, given the changes in the property and lending markets. From 1991 to 2010, some 16,500 loans were issued under the scheme.

While I have no plans at this time to reintroduce the Shared Ownership scheme, I have commenced the provisions in Part 5 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 to re-introduce an affordable purchase scheme for first-time buyers. Replacing the time-limited claw-back which applied under the various affordable housing schemes in operation previously under the scheme now being introduced, the local authority will have a fully repayable equity stake equivalent to the discount provided (relative to the market price), repayable on re-sale or within the charge period of at least 25 years.

An Affordable Dwellings Fund, managed by the Housing Finance Agency, will be established under the legislation into which funds accruing, in due course, from repayments of equity stakes by purchasers will be lodged, providing a long-run funding stream for affordable housing.

The scheme is targeted at low- to middle-income households with a maximum gross income of less than €50,000 (single applicants) and €75,000 (joint applicants). The new affordable purchase scheme is complementary to other Government schemes which help first-time buyers to buy a home, such as the Help to Buy Scheme and the new Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan.

Student Accommodation

244. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the measures in place to deal with the projected shortfall of in excess of 16,000 student beds by 2024 as outlined in the Rebuilding Ireland national student accommodation strategy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39227/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): In July 2016, the Government's Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness identified the under-supply of purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA) in Ireland and the significant related adverse impact that this deficit was having on the wider private rental sector. The increased provision of PBSA was established as a key priority in addressing the current wider housing crisis.

My Department is continuing to support the Department of Education and Skills, through the Inter-Departmental Working Group on Student Accommodation, in examining the issue of student housing and potential policy measures to increase accommodation supply. This Group, which includes stakeholders from the Higher Education Institutes, Union of Students in Ireland and other Government Departments, highlighted important issues in developing new student accommodation projects, including the planning and development finance aspects in assembling new development projects.

The work of this Group led directly to the initiation of reforms in the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016 which provided for the fast-tracking of planning applications for student housing construction projects of greater than 200 bed spaces to An Bord Pleanála. In addition, the legislation provides for the availability of low-cost financing from the Housing Finance Agency to the Higher Education Institutes specifically for new student accommodation projects.

My Department has also assisted in the preparation of the National Student Accommodation Strategy which was launched by the Department of Education and Skills in July 2017 – a specific action committed to under Rebuilding Ireland. This policy document was developed with input from the key stakeholders in the sector and includes eight key targets and 27 actions to support the delivery of an increased supply of purpose-built student accommodation.

These, and other measures by my Department, have assisted in delivering a significant increase in the level of purpose-built student accommodation projects coming forward nationally.

Recent analysis from the Higher Education Authority has indicated that, by May 2018, approximately 3,000 bed spaces had been delivered since the publication of Rebuilding Ireland and some further 7,250 bed spaces are currently under construction nationally. In addition, over 7,000 bed spaces have received planning permission but are yet to commence construction and a further 1,200 are seeking planning permission. The scale of this level of additional student accommodation is on course to meet the 7,000 new bed space target by 2019 identified in Rebuilding Ireland and the 21,000 new bed space target by 2024 identified in the National Student Accommodation Strategy .

In tandem with measures to increase new purpose-built student accommodation supply, my Department has supported the initiative of the Minister for Finance in increasing the availability of student accommodation in private homes through the “rent a room” provisions whereby a tax exemption for the homeowner of up to €14,000 per year can be availed of.

Since 2016, in conjunction with the Department of Education and Skills, my Department has also provided funding to the Union of Students in Ireland for their ‘Homes for Study’ campaign – this essentially funds a website and activities to match students with rooms in private houses through the following weblink: <http://homes.usi.ie/>.

Housing Adaptation Grant Funding

245. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if additional funding will be allocated to a local authority (details supplied) in respect of schemes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39239/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department has received a request from Cavan County Council for increased funding and it is currently being examined with a view to a decision being made shortly. My Department works closely with local authorities to achieve a full drawdown of their funding allocations and there is careful scrutiny of spend, with any underspend redistributed to those local authorities with high levels of grants activity who seek additional funding.

Planning Guidelines

246. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if planning guidelines account for future coastal erosion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39242/18]

247. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if planning guidelines account for the likely impacts of climate change on coastline and weather patterns here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39243/18]

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

propose to take Questions Nos. 246 and 247 together.

The 2009 Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines clearly set out planning policy with respect to flood risk assessment and the planning system. These guidelines are applicable to assessing the implications of coastal flooding which may arise from climate change or major weather events. Clear technical guidance is given as to how to assess the implications of flooding (including coastal) in the context of spatial plan-making and the assessment of development proposals. It is considered that current planning policy is robust and sufficient to effectively assess, mitigate and manage the implications of climate change on our coastline and its effects on coastal communities.

In addition, Ireland is currently developing a National Marine Planning Framework (NMPF) to stand as a marine parallel to the National Planning Framework. The NMPF will enable the Government to set a clear direction for managing our seas, to clarify objectives and priorities, and to direct decision makers, users and stakeholders towards more strategic and efficient use of marine resources. It will inform decisions about the current and future development of the marine area, aiming to integrate needs. The NMPF will bring climate change into decision-making around marine planning, through considering climate change from two perspectives; how actions under the marine plan may help to mitigate climate change and how actions under the plan need to be adapted to take account of the effects of climate change.

The Government published its NMPF Baseline Report on 18 September 2018 for a three-month consultation period. I expect to be in a position to publish the first draft plan in mid-2019 with the final statutory NMPF due for adoption by 2021.

Sale of State Assets

248. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the location the proceeds from the sale of Bord Gáis currently lie in view of the fact that €10 million is allocated per year for a pilot scheme on social housing; the rate of return these proceeds are earning; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39275/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Prior to publication of the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, it was planned to establish a financial vehicle to facilitate the aggregation of private investment into a fund for subsequent lending as project finance. The intention was that this investment would be off-balance sheet and in Budget 2015, the Government announced that €400m of public investment would be made available, including the proceeds from the sale of Bord Gáis, to provide 2,000 homes. The objective was that this investment could leverage private sector finance from the EIB, ISIF, pension funds, credit unions and other financial institutions.

A structured, formal process was put in place to facilitate engagement with these bodies. A body called the Social Housing Investment Proposals Clearing House Group was established to examine and consider proposals and to meet with the companies, groups and institutions involved. However, despite a detailed investigation of options to use the available funding in this way, including a high level of engagement with potential social housing providers and potential financiers of social housing, no new model that would, of itself, be capable of providing and/or financing social housing on an off-balance sheet basis could be identified that would be capable of utilising the available funding.

In response to this outcome, it was decided to modify the original commitment in relation to the €400m funding to provide €10m per annum, indexed for inflation, over a longer period (20

years). As indicated in the Government's 2018 Expenditure Report, this €10 million allocation is built into my Department's current ceiling for 2018, and is being utilised to support the delivery of social housing programmes in accordance with the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan, as outlined in previous Parliamentary Question replies. As also outlined previously, the affordable rental concept is now instead being progressed on publicly owned lands, using a cost rental approach, through two initial projects being rolled out in Dublin, with others to follow.

Tenant Purchase Scheme Administration

249. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding the sale of local authority housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39277/18]

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

The Housing (Sale of Local Authority Houses) Regulations 2015 governing the Scheme provide for a number of specified classes of houses to be excluded from sale, including houses provided to local authorities under Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, houses specifically designed for older persons, group Traveller housing and houses provided to facilitate people with disabilities transferring from institutional care to community-based living.

Local authorities may also, within the provisions of the Regulations, exclude certain houses which, in the opinion of the authority, should not be sold for reasons such as proper stock or estate management. It is a matter for each individual local authority to administer the Scheme in its operational area in line with the over-arching provisions of the governing legislation for the scheme, and in a manner appropriate to its housing requirements.

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

The review is now complete and a full report has been prepared setting out findings and recommendations.

In finalising the report some further consultation was necessary and due consideration had to be given to possible implementation arrangements. These matters are now almost completed and I expect to be in a position to publish the outcome of the review in the near future.

Vacant Sites Levy

250. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount of revenue which would be raised if the vacant site levy was applied to all sites above 100 m and below 500 sq m; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39295/18]

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

Under the Vacant Site levy provisions, planning authorities are empowered to apply a vacant site levy of 3% of the market value of relevant vacant sites where a site exceeds 0.05 hectares in area, was in the planning authority's opinion vacant or idle in 2018, and is in an area identified by the planning authority in its development plan or local area plan for residential or regeneration development. As signalled in Budget 2018, the rate of the levy has increased to 7% for sites on the register from 2019 onwards.

My Department does not maintain a central register of vacant sites, as each local authority administers the vacant site register in respect of their functional area. As provided for under the Act, the register in respect of each local authority is available for inspection at its offices and online on its website. However, on foot of a recent review of the on-line vacant site registers across all local authority areas, I understand that there are collectively almost 290 individual sites currently on the local registers. Over 160 of these sites were entered on the local vacant site registers on 1 January 2018 and will therefore be subject to the levy in 2019, unless development works are activated in the interim.

The specific information sought by the Deputy in relation to the amount of the levy that would be raised in particular circumstances is not available in my Department. However, based on current legislative provisions and a recent review of the sites currently listed on local authority registers, it is estimated that the levy proceeds nationally could be €8.3m in 2019 (applying the current 3% levy rate) and €29.4m in 2020 (applying the increased 7% levy rate). The latter estimate for 2020 is based on the number of sites currently included on the local vacant site registers and in respect of which market valuations have been attached to the registered sites. It is expected that the number of registered sites in respect of which market valuations will be obtained will increase in the coming months which should result in an increase in the estimated levy proceeds nationally for 2020.

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

Development Contributions

251. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount of unpaid development levies due by local authority. [39297/18]

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

Development contributions are levied as conditions attached to planning permissions and are payable prior to commencement of development or as otherwise agreed by the local authority. Local authorities may facilitate the phased payment of contributions, such as when units are completed or when a stage is reached in the development.

Local authorities operate on an accrual accounting basis and recognise income and expenditure as incurred relating to the period it falls due, regardless of the cash transactions. Note 5 of the Local Authorities' Annual Financial Statements (AFS) shows short-term current debtors gross of any bad debt provisions. The bad debt provisions are reported within note 5 and are deducted from gross current debtors but do not provide a breakdown that identifies the element relating to current development contribution debtors. The reporting of long-term development contribution debtors and deferred income in respect of development contributions was amended with effect from AFS 2016 so they are no longer shown separately.

The Current Development Levy debtors' balances, gross of any provision for bad debts, for the financial year ending 31/12/2016, which is the most recent year for which full audited figures are available, is set out in the following table.

Local Authority	Current Development Levy Debtors as at 31/12/2016€
Carlow	2,732,339
Cavan	738,271
Clare	4,222,049
Cork City	3,805,685
Cork County	11,760,032
Donegal	549,468
Dublin City	23,823,089
Dun Laoghaire Rathdown	13,000,000
Fingal	62,636,222
Galway City	3,247,592
Galway County	1,432,014
Kerry	2,242,771
Kildare	4,821,155
Kilkenny	7,971,362
Laois	799,310
Leitrim	578,093
Limerick City and County	4,392,782
Longford	3,430,903
Louth	7,834,116
Mayo	8,010,204
Meath	22,484,596
Monaghan	3,153,086
Offaly	2,126,501
Roscommon	9,082,065
Sligo	138,250
South Dublin	10,568,889
Tipperary	7,371,475
Waterford City and County	1,601,921
Westmeath	2,958,010
Wexford	10,722,497
Wicklow	2,162,198
Total	€240,396,946

Source: Audited Annual Financial Statements 2016

Approved Housing Bodies

252. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the position regarding the EUROSTAT classification of approved housing bodies as on balance sheet; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39298/18]

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

In April, the Minister for Finance published the Draft Stability Programme Update (SPU) for 2018. This included an analysis of the financial impact of the Eurostat decision to reclassify the majority of Tier 3 Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) as part of the local government sector. This was an important first step in the Government's assessment as to the impact of the Eurostat decision.

Following the SPU, further work has been on-going in order to fully assess the implications of the reclassification decision. My Department is continuing to engage with the Departments of Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform, with technical support from the Housing Finance Agency (HFA) and the Housing Agency (HA), in order to ensure that AHBs can continue to fulfil their full potential in the delivery of the targets set out in the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan.

My Department is also engaging with the AHB sector and constructive discussions have taken place with representative bodies from the sector on the issue. The sector itself has engaged its own research on the matter, and my Department is evaluating that research as part of its ongoing wider consideration on the issue.

The AHB representative bodies have committed to continue to undertake further research and analysis into this issue over the coming months. This will assess the options available to create the necessary conditions to allow this classification decision to be revisited in the future. An important part of this exercise will be to examine what measures could be taken to develop the AHB sector in such a way so that it could be reclassified as being off the Government's balance sheet in the longer term.

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

Question No. 253 answered with Question No. 239.

Planning Investigations

254. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he sought legal advice on the senior counsel report to him regarding planning matters in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39300/18]

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

The Review Into Certain Planning Matters In Respect Of Donegal County Council by Mr. Rory Mulcahy SC was received by my Department in June last year.

Following initial analysis and assessment of the report's findings and recommendations, including interaction with the Department's own legal advisors and the Attorney General's Office, a comprehensive set of queries and a request for advice was submitted to the Attorney General's Office.

I received the Attorney's advice in July of this year and a comprehensive submission in relation to same has been finalised for my deliberation. I am presently considering the matter and expect to be in a position to make a further statement regarding Counsel's report in the near future.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

255. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of local authorities that have lands within their possession that are serviceable or serviced on which local authority and affordable houses can be started as a matter of urgency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39318/18]

259. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the extent to which in order to plan for future housing needs a calculation has been done as to the precise number of local authority and affordable houses required on an annual basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39322/18]

262. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of contractors available to undertake local authority or affordable housing construction in County Kildare; when such works will start in view of the large number of applicants on the waiting list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39325/18]

263. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the emergency measures he will take to make an immediate impact on the housing shortage with particular reference to local authority and affordable housing in the counties immediately adjacent to Dublin such as County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39326/18]

264. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the degree to which he continues to have discussions with Kildare County Council with a view to action likely to make a major impact on the housing situation with particular reference to ensuring the availability of sufficient new housing starts in order to meet the requirements of the affordable and local authority housing sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39327/18]

265. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the lands now immediately available in the counties adjacent to Dublin to facilitate immediate local authority and affordable housing starts; the extent to which planning requirements in this regard have been complied with; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39328/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 255, 259 and 262 to 265, inclusive, together.

The active management of the publicly owned housing land bank continues as a key part of a range of complementary actions being progressed under the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, designed to accelerate and increase housing output. To this end, details of some 1,700 hectares of land in local authority and Housing Agency ownership were published on the Rebuilding Ireland Housing Land Map, with the potential to deliver some 42,500 homes nationally. This includes circa 135 hectares in the functional area of Kildare County Council. These mapped sites can be viewed at the following link:

<http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/rebuilding-ireland-land-map/>.

Local authorities will continue to maximise the use of publicly owned lands for social housing, affordable purchase, and cost rental.

In addition to the active management of the publicly owned land bank, assessments of

population and housing need are required. The Summary of Social Housing Assessments is conducted annually, specifically assessing the social housing needs of the population. The 2018 summary which has been published this week and is available on the Department's website, show that 71,858 households were assessed as qualified and being in need of a social housing support as of 11 June 2018; this represents a decrease of 13,941 households or 16% on the last assessment in June 2017. Indeed, since Rebuilding Ireland, the numbers of those waiting on social housing homes, has dropped from 91,600 to 71,858. In Kildare, there has been a 22% in 2018 in the number of households qualifying for social housing support, down from 5,103 households in June 2017 to 3,962 in 2018.

With specific reference to Co Kildare, the Council has prepared the Kildare County Development Plan 2017-2023, which seeks, amongst other things, to address housing needs specific to Kildare, particularly in section 2.8 - Population and Housing Growth. The plan is available at the following link:

www.kildare.ie/countycouncil/Planning/developmentplans/KildareCountyDevelopment-Plan2017-2023/.

Also, an overall Housing Need Demand Assessment (HNDA) will be required to be undertaken in future planning, in accordance with the vision as set out in Project Ireland 2040 and the National Planning Framework.

With regard to social housing delivery in County Kildare, this data is published quarterly. The most recent report which I published today, reflects the position at the end of Quarter 2 of 2018 and is available on the Rebuilding Ireland website at the following link:

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

This latest report shows 544 homes added to the social housing stock in County Kildare through build, acquisition and leasing in the first six months of this year.

Regarding affordable housing, a multi-pronged approach is being pursued, targeting households on low to moderate annual gross incomes of maximum €50,000 for a single applicant and maximum €75,000 for joint applicants.

In terms of affordable housing for purchase, the relevant provisions of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 have now been commenced.

In terms of affordable rental I am determined that cost rental homes become a major part of our rental landscape in the future, making a sustainable impact on housing affordability, national competitiveness, and the attractiveness of our main urban centres as places to live as well as work. Two cost rental projects have previously been announced for Emmet Road, Inchicore, and at Enniskerry Road, Dundrum. On foot of these pilots, cost rental will be rolled out across other suitable sites.

In order to support local authorities to get their sites ready for affordable housing, I am providing Exchequer funding of €75 million for enabling infrastructure via the Serviced Sites Fund over the four years to 2021. When local authority co-funding is included, an overall minimum investment of €100 million will be available under the Fund to offset the costs of providing both on-site and off-site enabling infrastructure for sites in order for them to be brought into use for affordable housing.

A total of €15 million Exchequer funding has been allocated for 2018, to which the local authority minimum contribution of €5 million will be added. This should enable the provision of

infrastructure for some 500 affordable homes this year, based on a maximum level of €40,000 infrastructure investment per home. The bids that have been received from 9 local authorities, including from Kildare County Council, under the first call are now being assessed, and I expect to make initial funding awards next month.

From engagements with the local authorities in Dublin, the wider Greater Dublin Area as well as Cork and Galway cities, their initial estimates suggest that they have lands with the potential to deliver some 4,000 new affordable homes. My Department is continuing to work with the key local authorities and the Housing Agency to identify sites for at least 10,000 new affordable homes from local authority owned land.

In addition, the Government has now launched the Land Development Agency, which will be aiming to deliver some 150,000 new homes over the next 20 years. The new Agency has an immediate focus on managing the State's own lands to develop new homes, and regenerate under-utilised sites, and will deliver at least 40% of any housing potential on such lands for both social and affordable housing purposes.

My Department is continuing to work with all local authorities and State bodies to ensure that housing is delivered from appropriately located and publicly owned sites to meet our current and future housing requirements.

My Department does not maintain a record of private contractors. Rather, construction tenders are publicly available online at www.etenders.gov.ie, where contractors may tender for public construction work available in local authority areas.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

256. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will address the issue whereby applicants for local authority and affordable houses are excluded from the local authority housing lists on the basis of excessive income and excluded from Rebuilding Ireland loans on the basis of insufficient income; if regulations to address this issue will be introduced as a matter of urgency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39319/18]

257. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the steps he will take to address the housing need of extra applicants for affordable and local authority housing in view of housing repossessions by lending institutions in respect of buy to let developments and individual households; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39320/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 256 and 257 together.

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

The accepted benchmark of housing affordability is that households, particularly low- to moderate-income households, should not be paying more than one third or 35% of their dispo-

able income on accommodation costs and the income thresholds for access to social housing support generally achieve this. Recognising that there are people who do not qualify for social housing but find it very challenging to purchase or rent at market rates, the Government has brought in new measures specifically targeted at delivering affordable homes.

Affordable housing is generally targeted at households earning a maximum gross income of €50,000 (single applicant) or €75,000 (joint applicant). Affordable homes to buy will be delivered under a new statutory Scheme; the relevant provisions of Part 5 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 have been commenced and regulations & guidance are being finalised.

This new Scheme replaces all previous affordable purchase schemes; is led by housing authorities; is a shared equity scheme with a fully repayable equity share/discount; eligibility and priority are set out in the legislation and will be expanded upon in the regulations; and the equity repayments will be pooled into a strategic affordable housing fund managed by the HFA.

The Scheme is complementary to other Government schemes which help first-time buyers to buy a home, such as the Help to Buy Scheme and the new Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan. The Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan was introduced from 1 February 2018, following a review of the two existing local authority home loan schemes, the House Purchase Loan and the Home Choice Loan. The new loan enables credit worthy first time buyers to access sustainable mortgage lending to purchase new or second-hand properties in a suitable price range. The low rate of fixed interest associated with the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan provides first time buyers with access to mortgage finance that they may not otherwise be able to afford at a higher interest rate.

Single applicants for the loan may earn up to €50,000 gross per annum, while the combined income of joint applicants may be up to €75,000 per annum. These income limits are unchanged from the previous local authority loan offerings. The maximum dual-income threshold also applies to the new Affordable Purchase Scheme which will enable a maximum purchase price of c. €320,000, which is in line with the purchase limits set out under the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan.

It is important to note that there are no set minimum income limits for the scheme; however, applicants must be capable of repaying the mortgage in accordance with the statutory credit policy underpinning the loan.

Full details of the loan's eligibility criteria and other information are available from the dedicated Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan website:

<http://rebuildingirelandhomeloan.ie/>. Subject to certain conditions, any person who meets the eligibility criteria may apply for a loan regardless of whether or not they are on the local authority housing list or qualified for social housing support.

There is also a gap between social housing and the rental market that needs to be filled, in order to support housing affordability, national competitiveness and the attractiveness of our main urban centres as places to live as well as work. Cost rental is an important component of progressive housing systems around Europe and after detailed financial modelling by my Department, the National Development Finance Agency and the European Investment Bank/Housing Finance Agency, Dublin City Council is working on the first major cost rental project to deliver over 300 cost rental homes at Emmet Road, Inchicore, as part of a mixed-tenure development of some 470 homes in total.

In parallel, the Housing Agency, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council and a number

of Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) have been working on a smaller-scale cost rental pilot, at Enniskerry Road, the tenders for which have been issued. Learning from these pilot projects, cost rental will now be rolled out across other suitable sites.

As part of the broader social housing reform agenda, a review of income eligibility for social housing supports is underway. The Housing Agency is carrying out the detailed statistical work which will underpin this review on behalf of my Department. The review will obviously have regard to current initiatives being brought forward in terms of affordability and cost rental and will be completed when the impacts of these parallel initiatives have been considered.

Home Repossessions

258. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will approach the lending institutions with a view to the temporary cessation of home repossessions in order to reduce the number of applicants being forced onto the local authority waiting lists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39321/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): As Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, I have no role or function in the regulation or policy making in relation to the banking sector. Regulation of banking and financial services comes within the remit of my colleague, the Minister for Finance.

Question No. 259 answered with Question No. 255.

Local Authority Housing Data

260. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of new housing applicants registered with the various local authorities throughout the country in each of the past three years to date; the number housed by the local authorities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39323/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Details on the number of households qualified for social housing support in each local authority area are provided in the statutory Summary of Social Housing Assessments (SSHA). The most recently conducted SSHA, carried out in June 2018, details the number of households on all local authority waiting lists as at 11 June 2018 (the count date).

The SSHA has been conducted on an annual basis since 2016, links to the relevant reports for 2016, 2017 and 2018 are below. Table 2.9 in these reports provides data on the length of time a household has been deemed qualified for social housing support. It should be noted that the SSHA is a point in time exercise and does not necessarily reflect the dynamic nature of entry to and exit from the list.

2016: https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/summary_of_social_housing_assessments_2016.pdf

2017: https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/sha_summary_2017.pdf

2018: https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/summary_of_social_housing_assessments_2018_-_key_findings.pdf.

While my Department reports quarterly on the number of social housing supports delivered through the range of Government funded schemes, this does not take account of other households that may have been housed by local authorities or Approved Housing Bodies through, for example, routine relettings. The allocation of social housing support is a matter for the relevant local authority in accordance with the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009, and associated regulations. Section 22 of the 2009 Act requires all local authorities, as a reserved function, to make an allocation scheme determining the order of priority to be accorded in the allocation of dwellings to households qualified for social housing support and to households approved for a transfer, the allocation of which would, in the opinion of the authority, meet the accommodation needs and requirements of the households. The manner in which the allocation process is managed is a matter for the relevant local authority concerned.

Local Authority Housing Provision

261. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the steps which can be taken to arrange for the immediate commencement of local authority housing schemes and or the provision of serviced local authority sites for use by eligible applicants in the short term; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39324/18]

270. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the extent to which delays in the provision of local authority houses have been caused by logistics such as planning permission, availability of services or other issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39333/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 261 and 270 together.

The Government's Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness is firmly focused on increasing supply to meet social housing needs under a range of programmes in all counties, with the target to deliver 50,000 social homes through build, acquisition and leasing in the period to 2021, as well as meeting the housing needs of an additional 87,000 households through the Housing Assistance Payment and the Rental Accommodation Scheme. The Action Plan is supported by €6 billion in funding, which means that local authorities have the financial support available to them to deliver on their local targets.

I have provided all local authorities with their individual social housing targets across all delivery streams, including build. Details of these targets are available on the Rebuilding Ireland website at the following link:

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

My Department also publishes information on the approved social housing construction projects in all counties via quarterly Construction Status Reports. The most recently available report is at the following link:

<http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-publishes-latest-social-housing-construction-report/> and includes the approved projects for all local authority areas.

The timing and delivery of each of these projects is a matter for the local authorities and the approved housing bodies. 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. This includes developing their own land banks and working with approved housing

bodies and developers on all new opportunities.

Logistical challenges will always arise with a significant programme of new construction but my Department works with all local authorities, approved housing bodies and other statutory bodies to overcome these. My Department's engagement with the local authorities regarding the delivery of social housing includes ongoing contact on a very regular basis on individual projects and structured quarterly meetings to review progress on all projects. These engagements can also involve site visits to review project activity at first hand.

Elected Members play an important role in relation to social housing delivery in terms of approving new projects under the Part 8 process. They can also play an important role in overseeing their authority's work to make sure projects are advanced in a timely manner. Elected members on Housing Strategic Policy Committees can play a particularly important role in scrutinising delivery.

Questions Nos. 262 to 265, inclusive, answered with Question No. 255.

Local Authority Housing Waiting Lists

266. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the extent to which the number of local authority housing lists have been reduced in the past 12 months whether on income grounds or new house building; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39329/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Details on the number of households qualified for social housing support in each local authority area are provided in the statutory Summary of Social Housing Assessments (SSHA). The most recently conducted SSHA, carried out in June 2018, details the number of households on all local authority waiting lists as at 11 June 2018 (the count date).

The results show that, on the count date, 71,858 households were assessed as qualified and being in need of a social housing support. This represents a decrease of 13,941 households or 16.2% on the last assessment in June 2017. Since commencing Rebuilding Ireland, Action Plan for Housing and Homeless in 2016, the numbers of households on social housing waiting lists have dropped from 91,600 to 71,858 – a reduction of 22%.

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

The combination of 50,000 social housing homes and 87,000 HAP and RAS social housing supports, which are being funded by the Government in the period 2016 to 2021, means that over 137,000 long term and flexible options will be made available to those on housing waiting lists under Rebuilding Ireland.

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

In 2017, 25,901 households had their housing need met, with some 7,095 of these properties

delivered through the build/acquisition and long-term leasing mechanisms.

Data relating to overall social housing delivery in 2017 and to end Q2 2018, across all local authorities, is published on my Department's website at the following link:

www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision.

In 2018, I expect to see at least 25,500 households having their housing need met. 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 which can be accessed on my Department's website at the following link:

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

Home Loan Scheme

267. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of persons who have made an application for Rebuilding Ireland loans; the number granted, refused and pending, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39330/18]

268. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if and when responsibility for processing local authority housing loans will be given to each individual local authority with a view to shortening the process period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39331/18]

269. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the reason most commonly given for refusal of Rebuilding Ireland loans to young couples; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39332/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 267 to 269, inclusive, 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:

<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. 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.

As has been the case since the introduction of the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan, applications are made directly to the local authority in which the applicant wishes to purchase a property. Applications are then processed by the local authority before being sent to the Housing Agency for assessment. Based on this comprehensive financial analysis, the Housing Agency makes a recommendation to the local authority on each application.

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

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

Of the 1,989 applications underwritten to the end of August 2018, 49% were not recommended for approval. Reasons for applications not being reconsidered under the scheme include an inability to satisfactorily demonstrate sufficient repayment capacity for the loan, or having an unsatisfactory savings record.

Question No. 270 answered with Question No. 261.

Special Areas of Conservation Management

271. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will liaise with the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to review a more workable system to allow farmers in designated SAC areas who are not in REPS or GLAS to farm their lands sustainably; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39157/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): Ireland is bound by the EU Habitats and Birds Directives, as transposed in the 2011 Natural Habitats Regulations, and must therefore protect habitats and species in the sites for which they are designated. I understand that it is a condition of the Basic Payment Scheme that farmers must be compliant with the requirements of the Habitats and Birds Directives.

In order to avoid both accidental or deliberate damage in designated sites, it is necessary to have a system by which potentially damaging activities require consent before they can be carried out. This consent is required from me as Minister or, as appropriate, from another licensing or permitting authority. Each regulatory authority must take into account the requirements of the Habitats and Birds Directives before consenting to an activity, as is the case of the approval of GLAS plans by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. In some cases, planning permissions may be required.

Where consents are required of my Department, these are referred to as Activities Requir-

ing Consent. The Activities Requiring Consent are most often applicable to new activities, or an intensification of existing activities, but this is not always the case. Depending on the scale and type of activity proposed, my Department's staff may be able to make a determination on consent or may require further information to make such a determination. This is not a matter of qualification or experience - it is incompatible with the Directives, and Irish law, to make such determinations without adequate information.

This matter is one of the subjects under discussion in a series of meetings currently underway between my officials and the farming organisations. The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine participates in these meetings.

Waterways Issues

272. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if the difficulty between a person (details supplied) and Waterways Ireland has been resolved; if not, if efforts can be made to ensure that the difficulty can be resolved without delay in their case; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39200/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): Waterways Ireland has informed me that a formal application for the permission in question has not yet been received. However, Waterways Ireland has been liaising on this matter.

Once a formal application is in hand Waterways Ireland will be required to obtain approval from the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC). Waterways Ireland has in the meantime provided a Draft Licence, which has been accepted, as an interim measure to facilitate a related transaction.

Wildlife Protection

273. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht further to Parliamentary Question No. 252 of 26 April 2018, the European regulation that obliges member states to protect against double funding for delivery of the same objective; and if it is EU or national policy that deems participation in both GLAS and the NPWS farm plan scheme simultaneously as not permissible. [39359/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): Article 28 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) states that "payments shall be granted annually and shall compensate beneficiaries for all or part of the additional costs and income foregone resulting from the commitments made". It is a fundamental principle underpinning the rules for public expenditure in the EU that costs for the same activity cannot be funded twice and that double funding must be avoided, including between EAFRD co-financed schemes and schemes funded from the national exchequer. To protect against double funding, a national policy decision has been taken to not administer separate payments to farmers in both the NPWS farm plan scheme and GLAS.