

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 6, inclusive, answered orally.

National Broadband Plan

7. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the national broadband plan tender process; when all homes and business in County Donegal will have access to high-speed broadband; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41061/18]

30. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the commitment to provide high-speed broadband to each house and business in County Donegal; the deadline for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41060/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 7 and 30 together.

As I have previously informed the House, my Department has recently received the submission of a final tender from the bidder in the National Broadband Plan procurement process. This is a significant milestone and brings Ireland a step closer to realising the ambitious goals of the NBP, which is to bring a high speed broadband connection to every premises in the country.

The procurement process to appoint a bidder for the State intervention network is now at the final stage. Evaluation of the final tender submission is ongoing and will be allowed the time required. On conclusion of the evaluation, my Department will make a recommendation to me on whether to appoint the bidder as preferred bidder and I will bring the matter to Government for decision.

There are just over 101,000 premises in Co Donegal. Commercial operators are providing, or have indicated plans to provide high speed broadband to approximately 61,600 of these premises. eir has plans to deliver access to high speed broadband to a further 5,000 premises in Donegal as part of its ongoing rural fibre deployment.

The remaining approximately 34,400 premises, some 33% of all premises in Donegal, will be included in the network to be built under the National Broadband Plan State led intervention.

This Government has set the bar high through its ambitious National Broadband Plan. Commercial operators have reacted to Government setting out its aim that every premises in Ireland would have access to a high speed broadband network. When this Government came into office in 2016, only 48% of premises in Donegal had access to a high speed broadband service. Today,

61% of premises in Donegal have access to a high speed broadband service and this is set to increase in the months ahead.

The Government's objective for the NBP are being realised through a combination of commercial investment and the State intervention. The commitment by Government has acted as a catalyst in encouraging very significant investment by commercial operators in deployment of high speed broadband networks.

In addition to theeir rural fibre deployment, other commercial operators are investing significantly in rolling out high speed broadband infrastructure throughout Ireland. For example, SIRO has committed €450 million to providing fibre broadband to 500,000 regional homes and businesses in 51 towns across Ireland, including in County Donegal. SIRO currently offers high speed broadband services in Letterkenny and has plans for Ballybofey, Ballyshannon, Buncrana, Bundoran and Donegal Town.

Questions Nos. 8 to 13, inclusive, answered orally.

Energy Resources

14. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the immediate steps he is taking to ensure Ireland takes responsibility for its own energy supply; the increases there have been in the generation and supply of wind energy, solar PV energy, locally sourced biomass and biogas in each of the years 2015 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41059/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The 2009 EU Renewable Energy Directive sets Ireland a legally binding target of meeting 16% of our energy requirements from renewable sources by 2020, Ireland is committed to achieving this target through meeting 40% of electricity demand, 12% of heat and 10% of transport from renewable sources of energy. Despite starting from the fifth lowest level of renewable energy sources in our energy mix in the 2005 reference year, very considerable progress has been made with the SEAI's most recent projections indicating an outturn in the range of 90% of the target likely to be achieved. In terms of the Electricity component of the overall target, latest data from the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) indicate that 30.1% of our electricity came from renewable sources in 2017.

Electricity production from wind energy has increased to the point that it accounted for 84% of the renewable electricity generated in 2017. The following table sets out the contributions from the different renewable energy sources in the period referred to in the Question.

Renewables Electricity %	2015	2016	2017
Hydro (normalised)	2.5	2.5	2.4
Wind (normalised)	21.3	22.0	25.2
Biomass	1	1.6	1.8
Landfill Gas	0.6	0.6	0.5
Biogas	0.1	0.1	0.1
Solar	0.01	0.01	0.04
Renewables Electricity (overall)	25.2	26.8	30.1

Provisional figures for 2018 up to the end of August show that wind generation has increased by 6.6% while overall electricity demand increased by 2.4%. Electricity generated from biomass accounted for 6% of renewable electricity in 2017. Approximately 14% of the biomass used for electricity generation in 2017 was imported.

The Government has also adopted a range of policy measures and schemes to incentivise the use of renewable energy including the Renewable Energy Feed-In-Tariff (REFIT) schemes. In addition, the Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS), approved by Government in July, is designed to assist Ireland in meeting its renewable energy contributions out to 2030. It is expected that the first renewable electricity auctions will take place under the RESS in 2019.

I also launched a Support Scheme for Renewable Heat (SSRH) this year, which is open to all non-domestic heat users not operating in the Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS). The purpose of the scheme is to reduce the use of fossil fuels within the heating sector.

Moreover, the Government has committed significant funding to support electric vehicles through the National Development Plan which includes an allocation of €200 million for the period 2018-2027. This year, there has been 1,686 new electric vehicles sold, which represents a 135% increase on the same point in 2017.

In April 2018, in order to provide certainty to obligated parties, a policy statement on the Biofuel Obligation Scheme was published. This policy statement set out an increase in the obligation to 10% from 1 January 2019, which has already been given effect to by way of a Statutory Instrument, and to 11% from 1 January 2020.

In July, my Department published a National Policy Statement on Electricity Interconnection designed to enhance security of supply in Ireland. Work is underway on a proposed 700MW HVDC electricity interconnector between Ireland and France and the Greenlink Interconnector which is a 500MW HVDC interconnector between Wexford and Pembroke in Wales.

Finally, the SEAI has indicated that the use of renewables in electricity generation in 2017 avoided €276 million in fossil fuel imports.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

15. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if a carbon tax on agriculture in line with Citizens’ Assembly recommendations, with a credit scheme for farmers that utilise lands for the planting of forestry or gift lands to Coillte, has been considered; if similar ideas have been put forward by his Department; his views on the impact of agriculture on global warming and the relevantly low levels of forestry here compared to other European states; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41212/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): In its third report, How the State can make Ireland a leader in tackling climate change, the Citizens’ Assembly recommended the introduction of a tax on emissions from agriculture together with rewards for farmers that undertake land management that delivers enhanced carbon sequestration benefits. In addition, the Assembly also recommended that the State should review and revise regulations and supports for land use diversification for example in relation to supports for planting forests in accordance with best environmental practice and encouraging organic farming.

The report of the Citizens’ Assembly was submitted to the Houses of the Oireachtas in April

of this year, and the Houses subsequently established the Joint Committee on Climate Action to further consider the recommendations and report by the end of January 2019.

In the context of the consideration of each of the recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly it is now a matter for the Joint Committee to consider whether and how each recommendation might be taken up by Government.

In this context, the Committee is engaging with each Government Department, at Secretary General level, on their respective policies in place and position in response to the Citizens' Assembly. In relation to the specific recommendations referred to, the Deputy will be aware that matters relating to taxation policy are the responsibility of the Minister for Finance and matters relating to forestry policy are for the Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

In relation to the overall role that forestry has to play in the achievement of Ireland's long-term decarbonisation objectives, the National Policy Position sets out a long-term objective for Ireland's agriculture and land use sector entailing an approach to carbon neutrality which does not compromise capacity for sustainable food production. Further analysis is now under way, led by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, to consider how this objective can be further articulated and the long-term implications for its achievement. Notwithstanding this ongoing work, I consider it absolutely essential that the State continues to support sustained high rates of annual afforestation into the future to secure the long-term sequestration benefits of forestry in support of the National Policy Position for 2050.

Ireland's National Policy Position is also in line with the Paris Agreement, which recognises the importance of land use activities in mitigation efforts by Parties, including the need to address emissions associated with agricultural activities and deforestation and the role that can be played by the sector in contributing to sequestration of greenhouse gases. The implications of the Paris Agreement objectives for the land use sector will be the subject of a special report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, to be published in 2019, which will address sustainable land management, food security and greenhouse gas emissions from the land use sector.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

16. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if Ireland is supporting proposals for the EU to commit, in the context of forthcoming COP24 in Katowice, to increasing the commitments in its nationally determined contribution to bring it in line with the 1.5°C target in the Paris Agreement. [41106/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I am fully cognisant of the urgent, global challenge of climate change and its effects, particularly those experienced in the developing countries. The publication on Monday of the IPCC Special Report on the Impacts of Global Warming of 1.5°C highlights in stark terms the urgency of managing our global trajectory of emissions. The scale and complexity of this challenge demands a coordinated approach at both national and international levels. Ireland is committed to concerted multilateral action to tackle climate change through the Paris Agreement and to working with our EU and global partners in achieving the objectives of the Agreement. The Paris Agreement, which entered into force in November 2016, aims to hold the global average temperature increase to well below 2 °C above pre-industrial levels, and to pursue efforts to limit this increase to 1.5 °C.

The Agreement is designed to meet this objective through Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) submitted by all parties to the Agreement. Ireland will contribute via the NDC submitted by the EU on behalf of its Member States, and which commits the EU to a 40% reduction in EU-wide emissions by 2030 compared to 1990. In this context, the EU has undertaken to reduce emissions in sectors covered by the Emissions Trading System (ETS) by 43%, and has agreed binding annual targets for each Member State for those emissions falling outside the ETS. Ireland's target under this Regulation will be for a 30% reduction on 2005 levels of emissions by 2030.

Ireland's National Mitigation Plan, published in 2017, sets out the policy measures required in order to manage Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions at a level appropriate for making progress towards our long-term national transition objective, as set out in the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015, as well as to take into account our EU and international obligations. Although this first Plan does not provide a complete roadmap to achieve our national transition objective to 2050, it begins the process of development of medium- to long-term options to ensure that we are well positioned to take the necessary actions in the next and future decades. Building on the National Mitigation Plan, the publication in February 2018 of the National Development Plan, will lead to a significant step change in funding available for climate action over the next decade. Almost €22 billion will be directed, between Exchequer and non-Exchequer resources, to addressing the transition to a low-carbon and climate resilient society. In addition, the NDP allocated a further €8.6 billion for investments in sustainable mobility.

It is important to note that the National Mitigation Plan is a living document that will be updated as ongoing analysis, dialogue and technological innovation generate more and more cost-effective sectoral mitigation options. In accordance with the framework provided by the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015, the Government must prepare and submit to the Oireachtas an Annual Transition Statement. This Statement also serves as a progress report on the implementation of the National Mitigation Plan.

I am required, under the 2015 Act, to bring forward a new National Mitigation Plan at least once every five years. The latest date by which this must happen is, therefore, July 2022. I propose to initiate shortly the process of updating the current Plan in order to facilitate the detailed policy design required to realise the high-level of ambition articulated in the National Development Plan as well as to develop further cost-effective policy options to address Ireland's targets under the Effort Sharing Regulation. This process will also be informed by Ireland's National Energy and Climate Plan, and by a new long-term low emissions strategy, both of which Ireland must prepare and finalise by the end of 2019 under the EU Clean Energy Package. I intend that the long-term strategy will further elaborate sectoral pathways for Ireland to meet its long-term decarbonisation objectives to 2050, as set out in the National Policy Position.

In line with the decision of the European Council of October 2014 on the EU's overall commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, Ireland has fully supported this level of ambition in recent negotiations to reform the EU ETS and to put in place Member State targets for non-ETS sectors under the EU Effort Sharing regulation. In addition, Ireland has also supported the high ambition for the proposals under the EU Clean Energy Package, while seeking to ensure that individual requirements on EU Member States would be fair, affordable and technically achievable.

Ireland also continues to support high ambition in ongoing negotiations at EU level in relation to emissions standards for both Light- and Heavy Duty Vehicles. I consider it essential that the EU seek the maximum possible ambition within these proposals which will contribute to enabling EU Member States, through strong, effective EU regulation, to meeting their respective targets for 2030.

Collectively, high ambition in all of the EU's sectoral policies and targets for 2030 may enable the EU to achieve emissions reductions in excess of those already committed to by EU Heads of State and Government.

Energy Efficiency

17. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the way in which he plans to meet the target of 45,000 deep retrofits per annum by 2021. [41104/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The National Development Plan 2018 -2027 recognises that improving the energy efficiency of the built environment is a central plank of Ireland's action on climate change. Energy efficiency will also realise benefits for air quality, health, social inclusion, business competitiveness and better public services, all of which will make a real and positive impact on people's lives. Exchequer investment of €4 billion, along with taxation and regulatory measures, are provided for under the NDP to drive the step change in energy performance in the residential sector.

Currently Government is funding just under 30,000 home energy efficiency upgrades per annum to an average BER of C. The NDP ambition is to increase grant supported energy efficient renovations to circa 45,000 to a BER of B from 2021.

A number of actions which are outlined in the National Mitigation Plan and Long Term Renovation Strategy are already underway to achieve these levels of retrofit and promote deep retrofit of buildings across all building types and tenure. Those actions which relate specifically to homes are as follows:

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

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

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

To build on what has been achieved through these schemes, and understand how we make the step change necessary to achieve the NDP ambition, we already gathering the real world evidence through two flagship projects, both of which follow international best practice:

- The Deep Retrofit Pilot Scheme, which began in 2017 and will conclude at the end of 2019, is investigating how to create a scalable offering for the deep retrofit of Ireland's housing stock to an A3 Building Energy Rating (BER), while building consumer demand and contractor

capacity for deep retrofit. Under the scheme Government is funding up to 50% of the total capital and project management costs for homes that achieve an A3 Building Energy Rating post retrofit. This will inform a model that can make deep retrofit available to individual homeowners on a larger scale post 2020, and critically will help Ireland move away from fossil fuels to clean renewable heating systems, such as solar and heat pumps.

- The Warmth and Wellbeing Pilot Scheme, funded by my Department, is a joint policy initiative with the Department of Health, and is operated by SEAI and the HSE. It began in 2016 and this first phase will conclude at the end of this year. It is measuring the health and wellbeing impacts associated with improved energy efficiency. Not only is this evidence needed to make a robust business case for further public investment, it is critical for how we communicate the benefits of climate action. Increasing public understanding of the multiple benefits of energy efficiency is critical to motivate people to invest in, and make their contribution to, action on climate change.

While it is necessary to tailor offerings for the different circumstances of householders, the common goal of these actions is to drive the step change we need in energy performance, skills, capacity and investment, and understand how we build demand, grow the supply chain and offer attractive financing to leverage public investment and empower citizens to act on climate change.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

18. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the extent to which Ireland's commitments to climate action and carbon reduction as per international agreements remain likely to be on time; the extent to which corrective measures may be necessary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41204/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The 2009 Effort Sharing Decision (ESD) 406/2009/EC established binding annual greenhouse gas emissions targets for EU Member States for the period 2013 to 2020. These targets concern emissions from most sectors not included in the EU Emissions Trading System (EU ETS), such as transport, buildings, agriculture and waste. For the year 2020 itself, the target set for Ireland is that emissions should be 20% below their value in 2005. This is jointly the most demanding 2020 reduction target allocated under the ESD, and one shared only by Denmark and Luxembourg.

The latest projections of greenhouse gas emissions, published by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in May 2018, indicate that emissions from those sectors of the economy covered by the ESD could be between 0% and 1% below 2005 levels by 2020. While this is very disappointing, it is not surprising given the recent pace of economic growth, with increases in emissions from the agriculture and transport sectors in particular. The projected shortfall to our targets is further exacerbated by both the constrained investment capacity over the past decade due to the economic crisis, and the extremely challenging nature of the target itself. In fact, it is now accepted that Ireland's 2020 target was not consistent with what would be achievable on an EU wide cost-effective basis.

The ESD includes a number of flexibility mechanisms to enable Member States to meet their annual emissions targets. Using banked emissions allocations from the period to 2015, Ireland is projected to comply with its emissions reduction targets in each of the years 2013 to 2017. However, cumulative emissions are projected to exceed annual targets for 2018, 2019 and 2020, which will result in a requirement to purchase additional allowances. While this purchas-

ing requirement is not, at this stage, expected to be significant, further analysis is ongoing to quantify the likely costs involved, in light of the final amount and price of allowances required.

In parallel, I am putting in place a number of additional measures to seek to close the gap to compliance with Ireland's targets under both the Effort Sharing Decision and the Renewable Energy Directive.

In relation to biofuels, in May of this year, I signed an order increasing the obligation rate of fuel suppliers from the current level of 8% by volume to a level of 10% by volume which will come into effect from 1 January 2019. I intend to further increase this obligation to 11% by volume from 1 January 2020 and also carry out a public consultation next year in relation to further increases in the post-2020 period.

In order to promote further penetration of electric vehicles, I have secured Government support to expand the range of measures in place drive the electrification of transport, adding home charger support, Benefit in kind enhancement, toll reduction and support to the taxi/hackney sector.

I opened the first phase of the Support Scheme for Renewable Heat for applications on 12 September. This phase provides a grant of up to 30% of the installation cost of a heat pump system in non-domestic applications.

I launched the first call for applications for the Climate Action Fund on 9 July. This is one of four funds established under the National Development Plan 2018-2027 as part of Project Ireland 2040 and it will have an allocation of at least €500 million over the period to 2027.

I secured Government approval in July for the high level design of the new Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS). The new Scheme has been designed to deliver Ireland's contribution towards an EU-wide renewable energy target of 32% out to 2030, within a competitive auction-based, cost effective framework. The first RESS auction will deliver 'shovel ready' projects, reducing the gap to 2020 and assisting in the early delivery for our trajectory to 2030.

For 2030, the recently agreed EU Effort Sharing Regulation (ESR) sets out binding annual greenhouse gas emission targets for each Member State for the period 2021 to 2030. Ireland's target under this Regulation will be for a 30% reduction in 2005 levels of emissions by 2030. This is where we must now focus our efforts to ensure that at the absolute very least we meet our 2030 target.

To achieve this 2030 target, Ireland may need to avail of flexibility options built into the ESR agreement, including provision to transfer allowances from the ETS to the non-ETS sector and provision to take account of emissions credits attributable to land use, land-use change and forestry (LULUCF) activities.

Television Licence Fee Collection

19. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the reason there is a 15% evasion rate in relation to the television licence fee. [41227/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I am very much aware of the challenges that face the existing TV Licence system, including the current unacceptable levels of evasion. While the rate has fallen from 15.3% at the end of 2013 to the current rate of 14.1%, it is still very high. In light of changes in technol-

ogy and viewing habits, I accept that the current system needs to be reformed.

Having said that, despite its limitations, it's important that I make sure that the current system works as an effective collection mechanism. In that context, my Department has been working with An Post and RTÉ on an ongoing basis so that all steps are being taken to ensure the system is working as effectively as possible. Measures such as marketing campaigns, more evening and weekend inspections and appointment of additional temporary inspectors are just some of the initiatives that have been utilised to enhance sales and improve compliance rates.

As the Deputy will be aware, I obtained Government approval last year to draft a number of legislative amendments to the Broadcasting Act 2009, including amendments for the tendering of TV Licence fee collection.

The proposed amendments were considered under Pre-Legislative Scrutiny by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Communications, Climate Action & Environment and I received their report on March 8th. The Bill is currently being drafted by Parliamentary Counsel and is included as a priority on the Government's Legislative Programme.

As the Deputy is also aware, I requested the Committee to examine the longer term issue of the future funding of public service media and the Committee published their report at the end of November 2017.

Following consideration of the recommendations made in that report, Government approval was received in July 2018 to establish a Working Group on the Future Funding of Public Service Broadcasting. The Working Group will examine a number of options to support future funding and the reform of television licence collection and it is intended that it will report to me in Quarter 1 2019.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

20. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on the Environmental Protection Agency's figures from May 2018 that emissions from those sectors of the economy covered by the 2009 effort-sharing decision could be between 0% and 1% below 2005 levels by 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41176/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The extent of the challenge to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, in line with our EU and international commitments, is well understood by the Government, as reflected in the National Policy Position on Climate Action and Low Carbon Development, published in April 2014, and now underpinned by the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015 which was enacted in December 2015. The National Policy Position provides a high-level policy direction for the adoption and implementation by Government of plans to enable the State to move to a low carbon economy by 2050.

The 2009 Effort Sharing Decision (ESD) 406/2009/EC established binding annual greenhouse gas emissions targets for EU Member States for the period 2013 to 2020. These targets concern emissions from most sectors not included in the EU Emissions Trading System (EU ETS), such as transport, buildings, agriculture and waste. For the year 2020 itself, the target set for Ireland is that emissions should be 20% below their value in 2005. This is jointly the most demanding 2020 reduction target allocated under the ESD, and one shared only by Denmark and Luxembourg.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) produces national greenhouse gas emission projections on an annual basis. These projections are compiled to meet EU reporting obligations and to inform national policy development. The preparation of EPA projections is a collaborative process with input from a range of State bodies and Government Departments.

The latest projections of greenhouse gas emissions, published by the EPA in May 2018, indicate that emissions from those sectors of the economy covered by the ESD could be between 0% and 1% below 2005 levels by 2020.

While this is very disappointing, it is not surprising given the recent pace of economic growth, with increases in emissions from the agriculture and transport sectors in particular. The projected shortfall to our targets is further exacerbated by both the constrained investment capacity over the past decade due to the economic crisis, and the extremely challenging nature of the target itself. In fact, it is now accepted that Ireland's 2020 target was not consistent with what would be achievable on an EU wide cost-effective basis.

The ESD includes a number of flexibility mechanisms to enable Member States to meet their annual emissions targets. Using banked emissions allocations from the period to 2015, Ireland is projected to comply with its emissions reduction targets in each of the years 2013 to 2017. However, cumulative emissions are projected to exceed annual targets for 2018, 2019 and 2020, which will result in a requirement to purchase additional allowances. While this purchasing requirement is not, at this stage, expected to be significant, further analysis is ongoing to quantify the likely costs involved, in light of the final amount and price of allowances required.

Ireland's first statutory National Mitigation Plan, which I published in July last year, provides a framework to guide investment decisions by Government in domestic measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The purpose of the Plan is to specify the policy measures required in order to manage Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions at a level appropriate for making progress towards our long-term national transition objective as set out in the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015, as well as to take into account existing EU and international obligations on the State in relation to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The Plan is a living document that will be updated as ongoing analysis, dialogue and technological innovation generate more and more cost-effective sectoral mitigation options.

Building on these strategies, the publication in February of the National Development Plan, reaffirms the Government's commitment to transitioning Ireland to a low carbon, climate resilient economy and society. It will lead to a significant step change in funding available for climate action over the next decade. This funding commitment provides a clear opportunity for significant up-scaling in our investments to deliver deep emissions reductions in the coming decade and to further develop and implement the National Mitigation Plan and National Adaptation Framework. Reflecting the strong commitment of Government on this issue, almost €22 billion will be directed, between Exchequer and non-Exchequer resources, to addressing the transition to a low-carbon and climate resilient society. In addition, the National Development Plan allocated a further €8.6 billion for investments in sustainable mobility. This means that well over €1 in €5 spent under the National Development Plan will be on climate mitigation, and this capital investment will enable us to deliver a significant reduction in our greenhouse gas emissions over the period to 2030.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

21. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the steps he will take to address the concerns highlighted in the most recent report from

the Climate Action Change Advisory Council indicating that carbon emissions are increasing instead of decreasing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41063/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): As has been highlighted by the Climate Change Advisory Council in its 2018 Annual Review, published on 25 July, meeting Ireland's EU targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 2020 and 2030 will be extremely challenging.

For 2030, the recently agreed EU Effort Sharing Regulation sets out binding annual greenhouse gas emission targets for each Member State for the period 2021 to 2030. Ireland's target under this Regulation will be for a 30% reduction in 2005 levels of emissions by 2030. This is where we must now focus our efforts to ensure that, at the absolute very least, we meet our 2030 target.

To meet these targets, Ireland's first statutory National Mitigation Plan, which I published in July last year, provides a framework to guide investment decisions by Government in domestic measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This Plan very explicitly defined the scale of the challenge Ireland faces in decarbonising its economy and acknowledged that it was a first step and not a complete roadmap to achieve the national transition objective to 2050. Rather it began the process of development of medium- to long-term options to ensure that we are well positioned to take the necessary actions in the next and future decades. The Plan is a 'living document' which is being implemented and updated on an ongoing basis.

Building on these strategies, the publication in February of the National Development Plan, reaffirms the Government's commitment to transitioning Ireland to a low carbon, climate resilient economy and society. It will lead to a significant step change in funding available for climate action over the next decade. This funding commitment provides a clear opportunity for significant up-scaling in our investments to deliver deep emissions reductions in the coming decade and to further develop and implement the National Mitigation Plan and National Adaptation Framework. Reflecting the strong commitment of Government on this issue, almost €22 billion will be directed, between Exchequer and non-Exchequer resources, to addressing the transition to a low-carbon and climate resilient society. This means that well over €1 in €5 spent under the National Development Plan will be on climate mitigation, and this capital investment will enable us to deliver a significant reduction in our greenhouse gas emissions over the period to 2030.

Notwithstanding this, I am required, under the 2015 Act, to bring forward a new National Mitigation Plan at least once every five years. The latest date by which this must happen is, therefore, July 2022. I propose to initiate shortly the process of updating the current Plan in order to facilitate the detailed policy design required to realise the high-level of ambition articulated in the National Development Plan as well as to develop further cost-effective policy options to address Ireland's targets under the Effort Sharing Regulation. This process will also be informed by Ireland's National Energy and Climate Plan, and by a new long-term low emissions strategy, both of which Ireland must prepare and finalise by the end of 2019 under the EU Clean Energy Package. I intend that the long-term strategy will further elaborate sectoral pathways for Ireland to meet its long-term decarbonisation objectives to 2050, as set out in the National Policy Position.

I propose also to respond formally to the recommendations set out in the Council's 2018 Annual Review in the context of the 2018 Annual Transition Statement, which I expect to be in a position to lay before the Houses of the Oireachtas in the coming weeks.

Questions - Written Answers
National Broadband Plan

22. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when the procurement team will announce its decision on the remaining bid for the national broadband plan, NBP; the way in which this procurement process can have competitive tension with just one bidder; if it remains open to the team to reject this bid; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41215/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): On 18 September 2018, my Department received the Final Tender submission from the bidder in the State led intervention. My Department's procurement team is now evaluating the bidder's detailed submission.

The procurement process for the National Broadband Plan has of necessity been a complex and lengthy process. It had the benefit of competing bidders from the outset of the procurement process and until after the Detailed Solutions stage, following which eir withdrew from the process.

Evaluation of the final tender submission is ongoing and will be allowed the time required. On conclusion of the evaluation, my Department will make a recommendation to me on whether to appoint the bidder as preferred bidder and I will bring the matter to Government for decision.

Inland Fisheries

23. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the establishment of an eel hardship fund; when this fund will be issued; the amount that will be allocated; the time period in which eligible applicants will be paid; the qualifying criteria for the scheme; if all licence holders will be paid a fee; if the ESB has provided resources for such a fund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41108/18]

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 for former licensed fishermen.

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 regarding 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 under the EU Regulation of 2007. Officials have also worked with IFI and ESB to verify catch records declared by fishermen.

I expect that an announcement of the scheme, including qualifying criteria and other conditions and a timeframe for prospective payments, will be made shortly.

Online Safety

24. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when the office of the digital safety commissioner will be established; and if he has been lobbied by social media companies that seek to prevent the establishment of such an office. [41229/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Law Reform Commission Report on Harmful Communications and Digital Safety, published in 2016 recommended, inter alia, the establishment of an Office of the Digital Safety Commissioner of Ireland.

As the Deputy is aware, in February the Government did not oppose the passage at second stage of a Private Members Bill by Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire which seeks to establish an Office of the Digital Safety Commissioner. This Bill, the Digital Safety Commissioner Bill 2017, has been referred to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Communications, Climate Action and Environment by the Oireachtas.

The Action Plan for Online Safety was launched by the Taoiseach on 11 July and contains 25 actions to be implemented by the six sponsor Departments over the next 12-18 months. These actions cover a range of activities relevant to the proposed Office of the Digital Safety Commissioner, including education and awareness raising, communicating with the public, and oversight and consultative structures. Action 18 of the plan commits the Government to working with the Joint Oireachtas Committee in relation to Deputy Ó Laoghaire's Bill.

In light of this commitment, I will be appearing before the Committee on 25 October 2018 to discuss the Bill and the issues it raises including possible jurisdictional and legal issues.

I have met representatives of online platforms and have had broad ranging discussions on various aspects of online safety with them.

I am aware that a number of the larger online platforms have publicly expressed concerns regarding how the Digital Safety Commissioner Bill 2017 is drafted. For example in their appearance before the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Communications, Climate Action and Environment on 1 August 2018, representatives of Facebook gave the committee an overview of the issues which they have identified in the text of the Bill. However, online platforms have also indicated that they indeed recognise the positive aspects of such an Office.

Mining Industry

25. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the monitoring and actions to be taken to address the opening of a sinkhole at Magheraclone, County Monaghan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41210/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne): A land subsidence incident in the grounds of the Magheraclone GAA club was reported on Monday morning, 24th September, affecting lands above the disused underground gypsum mine at Drumgossatt, Co. Monaghan. An investigation team engaged by the company, incorporating mining engineers from the UK, arrived at the site to assess the situation and determine the scale and cause of the subsidence and the risk of further events occurring in the area.

My Department's senior geologists and I visited the site on Tuesday 25th September.

Since the subsidence occurred, my officials have been liaising with the relevant regulatory authorities, i.e., Monaghan County Council and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the company on an ongoing basis and have continued to monitor the situation closely.

Both current underground mining operations at Drummond in Co. Monaghan and Tara Mines in Navan, Co. Meath, as well as the recently closed mines at Galmoy and Lisheen, are subject to environmental monitoring, including subsidence monitoring. Operations at the disused Drumgossatt underground gypsum mine ceased in 1989. Subsidence monitoring has been undertaken at this site by Gyproc, the former mining operator, for well over a decade. Gyproc also undertake subsidence monitoring at their nearby current mine (Drummond).

The cause of the collapse is the subject of a detailed investigation by Gyproc and its external mining consultants (SRK). The precise actions to be implemented, including future subsidence monitoring, will be informed by the findings of this report. In the interim, the Department continues to engage closely with Monaghan County Council, the EPA and the operator.

Post Office Network

26. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment further to the announced closure of 159 post offices and the ongoing review process for these post offices, the policy he has developed in terms of making progress towards changes in services available through the post office network or broadening services to maintain a viable network of post offices and maintain an efficient postal delivery service. [41190/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): As Minister, I am responsible for the postal sector including the governance of An Post which is a commercial State company with a mandate to deliver a postal delivery service and a viable post office network. I am acutely conscious of the value placed by communities in both rural and urban areas on services provided by post offices and I am fully committed to ensuring that a sustainable post office network is available to all our citizens for the medium and for the long term.

As a result of various actions taken by Government in the last two years, An Post has been able to construct and begin implementing a strategic plan for a sustainable future. There is widespread acceptance that the post office network requires modernisation to build, to maintain and to protect a service that meetings the needs of communities across the country. As part of its strategic plan, An Post is implementing a renewed vision for the post office network which centres on the availability of new services in a modernised, revitalised network. Such services include a better range of Government services, financial services and e-commerce services for shoppers and small businesses. Investment of €50 million in the network, which is equivalent to €45,000 per post office, is about getting communities to use the enhanced services in their local post office.

As part of its strategy for modernising the post office network, An Post has established a dedicated business unit within An Post, An Post Retail. Additional services that An Post propose to introduce through the network include a better range of Government services, financial services and e-commerce services for shoppers and small businesses. There is already a rapid expansion of banking services happening with the Smart Current Account and enhanced foreign exchange facilities. Post offices will have credit card services and will be able to provide loans to small business and personal loans. A new partnership between Avantcard and An Post will also see personal loan services available in every post office across the country and the creation of new jobs. An Post is committed to ensuring that our post offices will be equipped with the

range of services that will attract and retain footfall but these measures are meaningless unless the public use the services provided. Key to the survival of this renewed network is the willingness of all citizens to use it.

Government business is the backbone of the network. In April this year the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection renewed her Department's contract with An Post to provide pensions, child benefit and other social welfare payments at post offices.

While Government policy is to offer Government services online, there will always be a segment of the population that is not comfortable or proficient accessing online tools or services. The post office network is the obvious choice as an 'offline gateway' for citizens with its nationwide network and existing strong relationship with offline citizens. Government funding of €80,000 has been allocated to roll out a pilot scheme for Digital Assist, which I launched last week, which will see 10 post offices equipped to help citizens with online Government transactions.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

27. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on the introduction of multi-year whole economy carbon budgets as a useful tool to tackle climate change and adhere to targets as has been introduced in the UK; if he has brought this or similar proposals to Cabinet; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41211/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The regulation of greenhouse gas emissions in Ireland is determined through two different mechanisms.

Emissions from power generation and large industrial installations are regulated by the EU Emissions Trading System (ETS), which imposes an overall emissions target at EU level rather than Member State level.

Emissions from other sectors of the economy, including agriculture, transport, buildings, waste, and other industrial sectors are subject to targets at Member State level. The 2009 Effort Sharing Decision (ESD) 406/2009/EC established binding annual greenhouse gas emissions targets for EU Member States for the period 2013 to 2020 for these non-ETS sectors. For the year 2020 itself, the target set for Ireland is that emissions should be 20% below their levels in 2005.

For the period to 2030, the recently agreed EU Effort Sharing Regulation (ESR) sets out binding annual emission targets for each Member State for the period 2021 to 2030. Ireland's target under this Regulation will require a 30% reduction in 2005 levels of emissions by 2030.

Both the Effort Sharing Decision and Effort Sharing Regulation incorporate a number of mechanisms that provide some flexibility to Member States in the achievement of their annual targets. These include provisions to bank or to carry forward allowances from earlier or future years or to purchase allowances from other Member States. These mechanisms are essential to take account of inter-annual fluctuations in greenhouse gas emissions, notwithstanding the objective to reduce overall emissions over time.

A number of further mitigation options are built into the ESR for all Member States, including provision to transfer allowances from the ETS to the non-ETS sector and provision to take account of emissions credits attributable to land use, land-use change and forestry (LULUCF)

activities.

The latest available projections of greenhouse gas emissions, published by the EPA in May 2018, indicate that Ireland's effective emissions budget for the 2021 to 2030 period for non-ETS sectors, arising from the ESR annual ceilings, will be 380.3 million tonnes of CO₂ equivalent.

In light of the fact that key emitting sectors are already subject to effective carbon budgets, either at EU level or Member State level as set out above, I have no plans to introduce an alternative carbon budget along the lines described by the Deputy.

Environmental Policy

28. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the level of use of single use plastics in public buildings; the likely environmental impact of a ban in public buildings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41208/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I am working closely with the European Commission and other EU Ministers for the Environment to agree a Directive that will give Member States the powers to take measures to reduce the impact of single use plastics on the environment. As the Deputy will be aware, all Member States, including Ireland, are prohibited from immediately banning single use plastic packaging, in accordance with the EU Packaging Directive. The proposed Directive will contain monitoring requirements for Member States for a range of single use plastic items, including cutlery and cups. This will be the first time that such data will be collected and monitored in order to assess the impact of reducing the consumption of and banning certain plastic items. However, in the meantime, it is my intention, in advance of the changes envisaged under the Single Use Plastics Directive being finalised, to bring a proposal to Government to ensure that single use plastics will not be used in Government Departments.

Alternative Energy Projects

29. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his policy for the development of alternative energy sources to fossil fuels in respect of the decarbonisation of the environment and reaching emission reduction targets. [41193/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The 2014 National Policy Position on Climate Action and Low Carbon Development sets out an ambitious long-term commitment to reduce carbon dioxide emissions in Ireland by at least 80% (compared to 1990 levels) by 2050 across the electricity generation, built environment and transport sectors; and in parallel, to pursue an approach to carbon neutrality in the agriculture and land-use sector, including forestry, which does not compromise capacity for sustainable food production.

Under the Paris Agreement, the EU has committed to a reduction of at least 40% in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, compared with 1990 levels, to be achieved by reductions in the Emission Trading System (ETS) sector of 43% and in the non-ETS sector of 30%. The EU Effort Sharing Regulation, which entered into force on 9 July 2018, sets out binding annual greenhouse gas emission targets for each Member State for the period 2021 to 2030. Ireland's target under this Regulation will be for a 30% reduction in non-ETS emissions (compared to 2005 levels) by 2030, with a starting point of May 2019, based on average emissions over the period 2016 to 2018.

The latest projections of greenhouse gas emissions, published by the EPA in May 2018, indicate that emissions from those sectors of the economy covered by the 2009 Effort Sharing Decision could be between 0% and 1% below 2005 levels by 2020.

While this is very disappointing, it is not surprising given the recent pace of economic growth, with increases in emissions from the agriculture and transport sectors in particular. The projected shortfall to our targets is further exacerbated by both the constrained investment capacity over the past decade due to the economic crisis, and the extremely challenging nature of the target itself.

Ireland's National Mitigation Plan (NMP), published in 2017, provides a framework to guide investment decisions by Government in domestic measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The Plan sets out the policy measures required in order to manage Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions at a level appropriate for making progress towards our long-term national transition objective, as set out in the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015, as well as to take into account our EU and international obligations. Although this first Plan does not provide a complete roadmap to achieve our national transition objective to 2050, it begins the process of development of medium- to long-term options to ensure that we are well positioned to take the necessary actions in the next and future decades. Building on the NMP, the publication in February 2018 of the National Development Plan (NDP), will lead to a significant step change in funding available for climate action over the next decade. Almost €22 billion will be directed, between Exchequer and non-Exchequer resources, to addressing the transition to a low-carbon and climate resilient society. In addition, the NDP allocated a further €8.6 billion for investments in sustainable mobility.

The 2015 Energy White Paper presents a long-term strategic vision that is intended to guide the direction of energy policy from now until 2030. The White Paper identifies the importance of diversifying Ireland's energy generation portfolio and largely decarbonising the energy sector by 2050 but also recognises that some fossil fuels will remain significant elements of Ireland's energy supply in that transition period.

The 2009 EU Renewable Energy Directive sets Ireland a legally binding target of meeting 16% of our energy requirements from renewable sources by 2020. Good progress has been made to date, but the target remains challenging, particularly in light of economic growth and a growing demand for energy. Latest data from the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) indicates that 10.6% of Ireland's energy requirements in 2017 were met from renewable sources, with an expectation that Ireland will achieve a range of potentially up to 90% by 2020. The SEAI has also estimated that the contribution of renewables avoided €276 million of fossil fuel imports in 2017.

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

Question No. 30 answered with Question No. 7.

Energy Policy

31. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and

Environment the way in which the development of a liquefied natural gas facility here would be compatible with the State's commitment to tackling climate change; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41175/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Ireland's energy policy is fully aligned with the EU's climate and energy objectives on the transition to decarbonisation, which includes continuous and on-going review of policies to reduce harmful emissions, improve energy efficiency, incentivise efficient and sustainable infrastructure investment, integrate markets, and promote research and innovation while ensuring our energy security of supply is maintained and enhanced.

The development of an LNG facility would further enhance Ireland's gas security of supply by increasing import route diversity and would be compatible with the State's commitments to tackle climate change. The 2015 Energy White Paper *Ireland's Transition to a Low Carbon Energy Future* sets out a road-map for Ireland to reduce its Greenhouse gas emissions by 80-95% by 2050. The strategy is clear that non-renewable energy sources will make a significant – though progressively smaller – contribution to our energy mix over the course of the energy transition. The National Mitigation Plan, which I published in July 2017, restates the Government's commitment to move from a fossil fuel-based electricity system to a low-carbon power system. Investment in further renewable generation will be incentivised.

During this transition, gas has the potential to deliver significant and sustained benefits, particularly in terms of enhanced security of supply. Natural Gas has the potential to play an important role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the power generation, industrial and commercial, residential and transport sectors by replacing more CO₂-intensive fossil fuels. In Ireland gas powered generation provides an important back-up for intermittent renewable wind generation.

Waste Management

32. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his Department has considered a different model of household waste collection. [41137/18]

36. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to increase the speed of the roll-out of brown bins for organic waste in view of a recent Competition and Consumer Protection Commission, CCPC, report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41207/18]

37. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the studies his Department has conducted on alternative collection models for household waste here. [41127/18]

38. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his Department has reviewed the current unique model of collection here in view of the difficulties outlined in a recent report by the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission, CCPC, on household waste collection. [41126/18]

40. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to establish a different model of collection for household waste in view of the report from the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission, CCPC, on the household waste collection market. [41191/18]

42. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on the problems of the current household waste market structure here in view of a report by the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission, CCPC, recently. [41138/18]

45. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if a policy review of waste management here will be conducted in view of the publication of the recommendations of the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission's report into the operation of household waste collection. [41062/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 32, 36 to 38, inclusive, 40, 42 and 45 together.

I welcome the publication of the report by the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) on the operation of the household waste market in Ireland, which was published on 27 September 2018.

With respect to organic waste, household & commercial waste management compliance has been a National Waste Enforcement Priority for 2017 and 2018. During this period, the focus of this priority for the Waste Enforcement Regional Lead Authorities (WERLAs) has been the roll out of the household food waste bin. From their inception in 2016, the WERLAs have coordinated local authority actions by way of compliance assistance and enforcement to support the effective roll out of the household food waste bin in the required agglomerations in accordance with the legislation, and this work is on-going. The provision of a brown bin collection service, where it is technically and environmentally practical to do so, continues to be monitored by my Department, together with the regulatory authorities and industry representatives.

With respect to the household collection model and structure, the CCPC, in its report, acknowledged the work of the Price Monitoring Group (PMG), which I established in July 2017, to monitor prices for consumers offered by the waste sector as flat fees were being phased out. It has confirmed that consumers have seen price stability across the sector over the last 12 months with no evidence of price gouging.

The findings of this report also support the approach that I have taken to introduce an incentivised pricing model, rather than a blanket pay-by-kilogramme system as previously proposed. The report shows that household waste collection costs are on average between 63 and 77 cents per day.

The CCPC does not call for a one-size-fits-all type of regulatory approach. In fact, it advises that, based on data collection and consultation, different competition models can be introduced for different geographic areas. The CCPC's findings also state that the current regulatory system needs to be developed to address market structure, customer needs, and environmental targets.

The nature of the market is complex, as both the CCPC and the PMG have identified. Therefore, the findings of this CCPC report must be studied with care and diligence to ensure that consumer wellbeing is protected and that our environmental goals are met. This will require extensive work to be done in relation to data gathering and analysis before any decisions are made in relation to changes to the market structures. This may be a role for a national regulatory authority, as suggested in the CCPC report. The hybrid model suggested could also help to extend the coverage of door-to-door collections nationwide, while ensuring better value for money for the householder and providing certainty for investment by the waste sector.

This report, combined with the on-going work of the PMG, and the finalisation of the European Circular Economy waste legislation framework, will inform the development of a future

waste management policy, including our environmental goals, regulatory and market structures, and policy instruments and tools.

Copyright Infringement

33. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to publish a task force on digital piracy. [41226/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Deputy will appreciate that I have no function in relation to digital piracy, which is a matter for the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation.

National Broadband Plan

34. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the formal or informal discussions he has had with representatives of the remaining consortium competing for the national broadband plan. [41214/18]

39. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the meetings he has had with potential bidders to the National Broadband Plan within the past two months; when the meetings took place; and the topics discussed at the meetings. [41225/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 34 and 39 together.

In my capacity as Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment I regularly meet with a range of representatives from the telecommunications and other sectors. Details of my diary have been placed on the record of the House in response to Question No [41201/18] on today's Order Paper.

Renewable Energy Projects

35. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on the Citizens' Assembly recommendation that there should be community or public ownership of future renewable energy projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41224/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Recommendation 6 of the Third Report of the Citizens' Assembly on Climate Change calls for the State to act to ensure the greatest possible levels of community ownership in all future renewable energy projects, by encouraging communities to develop their own projects and by requiring that developer-led projects make share offers to communities to encourage greater local involvement and ownership. To avoid confusion, recommendation 6 refers to ownership of projects by communities and citizens and not public or state ownership. This recommendation is largely reflective of the ambition laid out in the 2015 Energy White Paper, the development of which revealed a strong citizen and community desire to be consulted on, and participate in, Ireland's energy transition and the development of energy-related projects.

Recommendation 6 also aligns with the policy objectives which have shaped the new Re-

newable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS), the high level design for which was approved by Government in July. As well as delivering Ireland's contributions to an EU-wide binding renewable energy target of 32% by 2030, broadening the mix of renewable technologies and enhancing security of energy supply, the new RESS will deliver on the commitment to increase community and citizen participation in, and benefit from, renewable electricity projects.

Communities have been designed into the fabric of the new scheme, and key to the delivery of this ambition will be the development of an enabling framework for community participation. Two specific measures to be developed as part of the implementation of RESS include: mandatory investment opportunities for communities and citizens in developer-led projects; and financial and technical support for community-led projects including delivery of key capacity building measures. This broadly aligns with the Citizens Assembly recommendations.

Questions Nos. 36 to 38, inclusive, answered with Question No. 32.

Question No. 39 answered with Question No. 34.

Question No. 40 answered with Question No. 32.

Broadband Service Provision

41. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the extent of the progress to date in the provision of high quality, high-speed broadband throughout the country; the progress in respect of the linking up of coverage and elimination of black spots; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41205/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Government's National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to ensure high speed broadband access (minimum 30 megabits per second) to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location. The NBP is being achieved through a combination of commercial investment and a State intervention. Today, over 7 out of 10 premises in Ireland have access to high speed broadband.

The procurement process to appoint a bidder for the State intervention network is now at the final stage. Evaluation of the final tender submission is ongoing and will be allowed the time required. On conclusion of the evaluation, my Department will make a recommendation to me on whether to appoint the bidder as preferred bidder and I will bring the matter to Government for decision.

There are just over 91,000 premises in Co Kildare. Commercial operators are providing, or have indicated plans to provide high speed broadband to approximately 76,000 of these premises. eir has plans to deliver access to high speed broadband to a further 1,400 premises in Kildare as part of its ongoing rural fibre deployment.

The remaining approximately 13,600 premises, some 15% of all premises in Kildare, will be included in the network to be built under the National Broadband Plan State led intervention.

When this Government came into office in 2016, 75% of premises in Kildare had access to a high speed broadband service. Today, 84% of premises in Kildare have access to a high speed broadband service and this is set to increase in the months ahead.

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>

Question No. 42 answered with Question No. 32.

North-South Interconnector

43. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on the findings of two independent studies in relation to the North-South interconnector project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40942/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I commissioned two independent reports dealing with the North-South Interconnector (NSIC) following engagement with members of the Oireachtas and community interests. These were considered by Government last week and are available on my Department's website. One considers the technical feasibility and cost of undergrounding the NSIC, while the second addresses comparative international practice and approaches to compensation of property owners in proximity to high-voltage lines.

On the technical feasibility and cost of undergrounding, the report concludes that from a techno-economic point of view, an Alternating Current Overhead Line is the most beneficial way of meeting the need for enhanced power transfer capability between Ireland and Northern Ireland. An overhead line provides the opportunity for investment along the route of the line and offers a far more balanced electricity network across this country and across this island.

On the report into the comparative international practice in relation to compensation, that report indicates that Ireland has a comparatively generous compensation regime in place.

In addition to publishing the reports on my Department's website, I have forwarded copies of the two Reports to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Communications, Climate Action and Environment.

Energy Prices

44. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to use his powers under the Electricity Regulation Act 1999 to issue a policy direction to the Commission for Regulation of Utilities regarding energy supply markets and its resultant effect on prices for householders. [41192/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Government, or I as Minister, have no statutory function in the monitoring or setting of electricity prices.

Responsibility for the regulation of the gas or electricity markets is a matter for the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU). It is an independent statutory body, and solely accountable to a committee of the Oireachtas for the performance of its functions. Under the current Oireachtas Committee formations, the CRU is responsible to the Committee on Communications, Climate Action and Environment where these matters are discussed as the Committee sees fit.

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

One of Commission's statutory functions is to carry out market monitoring to ensure that competition continues to develop and that customers benefit from competition. As part of its market monitoring work, CRU last year concluded that Irish energy markets are competitive.

Recent announcements regarding electricity price increases reflect that since the final quarter of 2016, average international natural gas prices have increased sharply. They have, more or less, continued to rise through 2017 and on to Quarter 3 2018, with day ahead prices in August being 50% higher than 12 months earlier. Consistent with the upward international gas price trend, average wholesale electricity prices have increased in like manner. After an initial delay, the effect of this protracted rise in the wholesale electricity price since end 2016 has been observed in the retail market, with all significant Irish electricity suppliers announcing household customer price increases.

Section 10A of the Electricity Regulation Act 1999, as amended, sets out the procedure under which I, as Minister, may give "general policy directions". The legislation sets out details on the tasks and inter-alia restrictions, timelines and consultation requirements with the independent regulator and Oireachtas. Energy markets in Ireland operate within a European regulatory regime in which Member States must guarantee the independence of National Regulatory Authorities, which are expressly forbidden from taking direct instructions from government, or any public body. The regime also restricts policy directions in the form of general policy guidelines in certain areas that are prescribed regulatory duties and powers in the EU Third Energy Package. A policy direction in this matter is therefore not being considered.

Question No. 45 answered with Question No. 32.

Defence Forces Review

46. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence further to Parliamentary Question No. 75 of 3 October 2018, if the gap analysis of skills sets in the Permanent Defence Forces has commenced; when it will conclude; and the steps that will be taken following this gap analysis to address skills gaps. [41323/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): As I stated previously, the White Paper on Defence sets the defence policy agenda up to 2025 and includes the identification of some 90 projects/actions to be implemented on a phased basis over the lifetime of the programme.

The project referred to entails a gap analysis of skill sets within the Permanent Defence Force to identify the frequency of gaps and appropriate measures to address them. Joint civil military project planning is underway in relation thereto.

Questions - Written Answers
Defence Forces Personnel

47. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to conduct an independent external review of Defence Forces human resources management in view of the retention crisis in the organisation. [41324/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Permanent Defence Force continues to offer excellent career opportunities for serving personnel and for new entrants. I have acknowledged previously that there are challenges relating to the recruitment and retention of particular personnel within the Defence Forces and I have set out actions being undertaken to address them. The underlying causes for this issue are complex and can include pay and non pay issues.

The Government tasked the Public Service Pay Commission with examining challenges relating to recruitment and retention in the Defence Sector in more detail. The Public Service Pay Commission has commenced this work and it would not be appropriate to speculate on possible outcomes of that work.

The White Paper on Defence sets the defence policy agenda over a ten year period. It includes a broad programme of human resources development for which work is already underway on 11 projects.

The Conciliation and Arbitration scheme for members of the PDF, which provides a formal mechanism for the PDF representative associations to engage with the Official side, affords a facility to assess HR issues. I am currently reviewing the recommendations made in the recently published report on the review of the Scheme. I look forward to engaging with all parties in progressing reforms to the existing Scheme.

In addition to the above, I meet with senior civil and military management on a frequent basis to discuss all aspects matters relating to the Defence Forces. I am satisfied that there is in place a suite of measures that provides a satisfactory framework within which matters relating to Human Resources in the Defence Forces can be addressed as needs arise and, on that basis.

I will continue to work closely with the Chief of Staff and the Secretary General in developing these approaches.

Air Corps Strength

48. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the staffing levels at Baldonnell Aerodrome in each of the years 2011 to 2017 and to date in 2018. [41441/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The military authorities have provided the following table, which contains the details of the staffing levels at Baldonnell Aerodrome for each of the years 2011 and to date in 2018.

YEAR	TOTAL STRENGTH
2011	785
2012	783
2013	769
2014	769
2015	750
2016	704

YEAR	TOTAL STRENGTH
2017	724
2018*	700

*2018 figures correct as of 31 August 2018

As the Deputy is aware, I have previously acknowledged that, in the Air Corps, there are particular challenges with vacancies in certain specialist posts such as Pilots, Air Traffic Controllers and certain Technicians. The level of training and experience gained by members of the Defence Forces makes them attractive to private sector employers. The Defence Forces are not unique in this regard and this is experienced by other parts of the public service and by other military organisations internationally.

Under my direction, the Department brought the issue of recruitment and retention of these specialists to the attention of the Public Service Pay Commission. The Government will study any recommendations arising from the Public Service Pay Commission when they are published.

In addition to availing of traditional recruitment to address vacancies in these specialist positions, I have initiated a range of actions which include the development of alternative recruitment methods. A working group is examining the scope for greater use of direct entry recruitment for certain specialist positions and steps are being progressed to enable former members of the Permanent Defence Force, who have sought after skills, to re-enter the PDF. I will continue to work closely with the Chief of Staff in developing these approaches.

Following recent recruitment competitions, the military authorities have informed me that 7 Cadet Pilots and 20 Apprentice Military Aircraft Technicians were inducted in September.

Air Corps Operations

49. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if the potential of the Air Corps being redeployed to provide helicopter support services for the Irish Coast Guard has been examined; and if a business case or cost-benefit analysis will be requested in order to examine this potential. [41444/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Irish Coast Guard operates under the aegis of the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and has overall responsibility for the provision of Search and Rescue services within the Irish search and rescue region. As such, this is a matter for the Minister of Transport, Tourism and Sport.

Customs and Excise Staff

50. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Finance the status of the recruitment of 450 new customs officials in view of Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41272/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that it will require an additional 600 staff as a result of Brexit, based on a scenario of a transition period to the end of 2020 and a future trade agreement. These posts will be filled by internal, interdepartmental and open recruitment and a recruitment campaign has started with a view to having 200 officers trained and in place before 29 March 2019.

As part of this campaign the Public Appointments Service advertised for Clerical Officers in Customs Trade Facilitation on 30 August 2018 and the closing date for applications was 11 September 2018.

Over 3,000 applications were received and the Public Appointments Service are processing these applications and it is expected that interviews will be held before the end of October. At this juncture I am advised by Revenue that it is envisaged that the balance of 400 staff will be recruited during the transition period from April 2019 to the end of 2020.

VAT Rate Application

51. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Finance his plans in budget 2019 to reduce the rate of VAT on non-oral animal medicines from the current rate of 23% to a rate of 5% as allowable under Directive 2006/112/EC. [41424/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The VAT rating of goods and services is subject to EU VAT law, with which Irish VAT law must comply. As Ireland already operates 9% and 13.5% reduced VAT rates, it is not legally possible to introduce a third VAT rate at 5%. However, it is possible under Annex III of the VAT Directive to apply a reduced VAT rate of 9% or 13.5% to non-oral pharmaceutical products.

In order for a zero rate of VAT to be applied to a good or service, that good or service must have applied at the zero rate on 1 January 1991 and have continued to apply at that rate since. No new items may be charged at the zero rate, where they had not been subject to the zero rate before 1991. In Ireland the zero VAT rate applies to oral medicines, including oral medicines for animals, as they were subject to the zero rate on and since 1 January 1991. However, non-oral animal medicines were not subject to the zero rate on 1 January 1991, so it is not legally possible to apply the zero rate to them now.

Under the EU VAT Directive, Ireland has scope to potentially reduce the rate of VAT on non-oral animal medicines from 23% to a reduced rate. However, such a reduction would have a limited benefit to the farming community, as VAT-registered farmers are entitled to full VAT deductibility on their input costs while unregistered farmers are compensated for their VAT input costs through the flat rate addition they receive on payments for supplies of agricultural produce and services.

Tax Code

52. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Finance if provision will be made in budget 2019 to decouple agricultural property from commercial property; and his plans to make provision for stamp duty rates in line with the current residential rates of 1% and 2%. [41425/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In Budget 2019, I have made no provision for changing the category for agricultural property.

Farming is first and foremost a business, and indeed section 655 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 states “For the purposes of the Tax Acts, farming shall be treated as the carrying on of a trade or, as the case may be, of part of a trade, and the profits or gains of farming shall be charged to tax under Case I of *Schedule D*.”

I have no plans for amending this status.

Corporation Tax

53. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide an analysis of the known losses carried forward for corporation tax purposes at 31 December 2015, 2016 and 2017, respectively, under each heading (details supplied) by general NACE classifications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41279/18]

54. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide an analysis of the known losses carried forward for income tax purposes at 31 December 2015, 2016 and 2017, respectively, under headings (details supplied) by general NACE classifications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41280/18]

55. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide an analysis of known losses carried forward for corporation tax purposes at 31 December 2015, 2016 and 2017 under headings (details supplied) by general NACE classifications, which are more than five and ten years old; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41281/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 53 to 55, inclusive, together.

A sectoral breakdown of Corporation Tax trading losses forward for the tax years 2015 and 2016, which are the latest years available, is contained in Revenue's Corporation Tax Publication (Table 19) at link: <https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/documents/research/ct-analysis-2018.pdf>. The publication also provides information on capital allowances (Table 20) and the R&D credit (Table 21).

The available information in respect of Corporation Tax rental losses carried forward by sector for the tax years 2015 and 2016 is set out in the following table.

Corporation Tax	Rental Losses Carried Forward (€m)	
	2015	2016
Financial and Insurance	147.60	251.96
Administration and Support Services	13.26	13.54
Information and Communications	14.87	21.29
Construction	218.15	226.55
Manufacturing	23.99	23.48
Transport and Storage	11.12	14.27
Wholesale and Retail Trade	37.18	45.31
All Other Sectors	427.06	417.91
Total	893.23	1,014.31

The available information in respect of a sectoral breakdown of losses forward from self-assessed Income Tax returns for the tax years 2015 and 2016, which are the latest years available, is set out in the following table.

Income Tax	Rental Losses Carried Forward (€m)		Trade Losses Carried Forward (€m)	
	2015	2016	2015	2016
Financial and Insurance	29.8	31.2	17	21
Administration and Support Services	7.5	7.0	8.2	8.0

Questions - Written Answers

Income Tax		Rental Losses Carried Forward (€m)		Trade Losses Carried Forward (€m)
	2015	2016	2015	2016
Financial and Insurance	29.8	31.2	17	21
Information and Communications	8.6	7.3	1.6	1.8
Construction	190	174	589	627
Manufacturing	6.7	6.1	6.3	5.9
Transport and Storage	21.9	21.6	13	20
Wholesale and Retail Trade	73	67	56	53
All Other Sectors	1,458	1,339	1,382	1,266
Total	1,795	1,653	2,074	2,001

Revenue has advised me that it is not possible to provide a breakdown of trading losses forward by type of underlying loss or a breakdown by age of losses forward as this information is not separately identified on tax returns.

Information for 2017 will be published in 2019 when Corporation and Income Tax returns for the year have been filed and analysed.

Corporation Tax

56. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance his views on whether it is time to limit all losses forward for income and or corporation tax purposes; the estimated yield of such an action in a full year; if a time to limit was set at five or ten years, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41282/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am informed by Revenue that time-line information in respect of losses (to show the age profile of losses and unused capital allowances associated with claims) is not available on tax returns. While it is likely that restricting the use of these losses, including unused capital allowances, could lead to large theoretical gains depending on the time limit chosen, it is not possible to provide an accurate estimate of this yield in the absence of underlying information.

Tax Collection

57. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated increase in the number of high net worth individuals dealt with by the Revenue Commissioners large cases division if the threshold for inclusion was reduced to €30 million; the additional resources which would be required to provide for such a reduction; if such resources will be made available to the Revenue Commissioners; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41283/18]

58. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated increase in the number of high net worth individuals dealt with by the Revenue Commissioners large cases division if the threshold for inclusion was reduced to €20 million; the additional resources which would be required to provide for such a reduction; if such resources will be made available to the Revenue Commissioners; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41284/18]

59. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated increase in the number of high net worth individuals dealt with by the Revenue Commissioners large cases division if the threshold for inclusion was reduced to €10 million; the additional resources which would

be required to provide for such a reduction; if such resources will be made available to the Revenue Commissioners; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41285/18]

60. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the number of new cases added to the high net worth individuals unit in the Revenue Commissioners large cases division in each year since the unit's formation in 2003; the number of cases dropped and moved to other units of the Revenue Commissioners; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41286/18]

61. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated additional audit yield if a properly resourced high net worth individuals unit took responsibility for those with net assets greater than €10 million, €20 million and €30 million, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41287/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 57 to 61, inclusive, together.

Tax administrations generally use assets and/or wealth as their main criteria for determining a HWI, while some also include income criteria. I am advised by Revenue that its criterion to be considered a HWI and come within the management of the HWI Units of its Large Cases Division is individuals with net assets of over €50 million.

I am advised by Revenue that there is no statutory obligation on individuals to return details of their net worth on returns of income. Accordingly, Revenue does not have the data required to estimate the number of individuals with a net worth within the thresholds requested.

Revenue has had a focus on High Wealth Individuals (HWIs) over a long period. HWIs have been managed by dedicated units within its Large Cases Division since it was established in 2003. Revenue has recently split its Large Cases Division into two divisions, one of which will now focus on HWIs, avoidance and pensions. The new Division is in the process, as reflected in one of the recommendations in the Annual Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG), of reviewing the case base with a view to increasing the number of HWIs managed in the Division. The allocation of resources is a matter for Revenue but I understand that Revenue's structural realignment, of which the setting up of the new Large Cases Division is a part, is being supported by an expansion in the number of specialist and experienced staff assigned to the oversight of the new Division's case base. I also understand that Revenue is also establishing a new Division, the Medium Enterprises Division, to manage the affairs of the tier of cases, both corporate and individuals below the Large Cases Division.

I am advised by Revenue that the case base of the dedicated units within its Large Cases Division is adjusted periodically but not necessarily on an annual basis. The following Table provides the number of HWIs managed in the Division for the years indicated:

Year	Number of HWIs
2004	250
2006	300
2017	571
2018	480

I am advised by Revenue that cases not previously or currently meeting the criteria for inclusion in its Large Cases Division were and are subject to ongoing risk evaluation and, where necessary, intervention programmes. Revenue's overall approach to managing compliance is to make the appropriate intervention following appraisal of the risk factors in each case. This applies to all taxpayers including those not within the responsibility of Large Cases Division.

I am satisfied that the structural realignment being advanced by Revenue combined with the use by Revenue of the powers available to them will continue to deliver an outcome where HWIs pay the appropriate tax in accordance with the legislation. Finally, I am advised by Revenue that it is not possible to estimate additional audit yield related to cases not currently within the responsibility of Revenue's LCD. However, Revenue has pointed out that in the first instance there is a presumption of honesty regarding the behaviour of taxpayers who pay on a self-assessment basis and no category of taxpayer would be regarded, in advance of a case appraisal, as likely to give rise to audit yield. Secondly, all taxpayers are subject to risk evaluation and intervention as appropriate so bringing a particular category of taxpayers within the remit of the Large Cases Division would not, of itself, be a determinant of an increased audit yield.

Over the last number of Budgets/Estimates process I supported the business case put forward by Revenue in relation to additional resources, both personnel and ICT, and I will continue to examine any proposal put forward by Revenue in the future.

Tax Reliefs Availability

62. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 281 of 17 April 2018, his plans to introduce tax relief on membership subscriptions to trade unions as applies to costs for membership or subscriptions to professional bodies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41495/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As I indicated in my reply to the Deputy's question in April last, a review of the appropriate treatment for tax purposes of trade union subscriptions and professional body fees was carried out by my Department in 2016, and included in the 2016 report on tax expenditures published on Budget day 2016.

http://www.budget.gov.ie/Budgets/2017/Documents/Tax_Expenditures_Report%202016_final.pdf

The review concluded that:

"... analysis of the scheme using the principles laid down by the Department's Tax Expenditure Guidelines shows that it fails to reach the evaluation threshold to warrant introduction in this manner.

The reinstatement of this tax relief would have no justifiable policy rationale and does not express a defined policy objective. Given that individuals join trade unions largely for the well-known benefits of membership, and the potential value of the relief to an individual would equate to just over €1 per week, this scheme would have little to no incentive effect on the numbers choosing to join. There is no specific market failure that needs to be addressed by such a scheme, and it would consist largely of deadweight."

Regarding the issue of tax relief on subscriptions to professional bodies, I refer the deputies to the section of the review which addressed this matter, stating:

"There is a fundamental difference between membership of a professional body which is required to practice that profession and membership of a trade union, which is essentially, a personal choice.

Professional bodies often have a regulatory function, governing standards within a particular sector or industry, with practitioners or employees often required to be a member of a professional body in order to engage in employment in particular fields.

A person cannot be refused the right of employment for failure to join a trade union. By contrast, a person can be refused the right of employment as a solicitor, for example, if they fail to hold a practicing certificate.”

My position remains that, given the conclusion of the review, I have no plans to reintroduce such a relief.

Pensions Data

63. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the estimated cost of accrued pension rights for serving civil servants up to 31 December in each of the years 2014 to 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41274/18]

64. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the estimated cost of accrued pension rights for serving primary school teachers up to 31 December in each of the years 2014 to 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41275/18]

65. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the estimated cost of accrued pension rights for serving secondary school teachers up to 31 December in each of the years 2014 to 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41276/18]

66. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the estimated cost of accrued pension rights for all serving health service workers up to 31 December in each of the years 2014 to 2018, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41277/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 63 to 66, inclusive, together.

An actuarial review of the accrued liability in respect of current and former public service employees’ occupational pensions was last carried out by my Department over 2017 in respect of year-end 2015. The latest review was undertaken on behalf of the Central Statistics Office who are required to show the accrued liabilities of all funded and unfunded Irish pensions as part of the National Accounts, under EU Regulation 549 / 2013. Transmission of this data to the European Commission was mandatory from 2017, in respect of valuation year 2015, and at three yearly intervals from that date. The next valuation due is in respect of year-end 2018.

As such, the following is an estimate of the cost of accrued pension rights for serving employees in the civil service, the health sector, and the education sector as at 31 December 2015. The figures represent the present value of retirement benefits to be paid in the future on the basis of accrued pension rights of serving employees.

Sector	Accrued Liability as at 31 December 2015 - Serving Employees
-	€ Bn
Civil Service	8.8
Health	12.2
Education*	17.3

**There is no readily available breakdown of the cost of accrued pension rights for serving employees in the education sector between that corresponding to primary and secondary school teachers.*

It is important to bear in mind that the accrued pension rights of serving civil servants will

fall to be paid over the next 70 years or so; and not in any single year.

It is also important to stress that the government has taken a number of significant steps to improve the long-term sustainability of public service pensions in recent times. For example, the Single Public Service Pension Scheme introduced from 2013 will, in time, reduce liabilities by around 35% from what would otherwise have the case.

Also, an Additional Superannuation Contribution was introduced for public servants under the Public Service Pay and Pensions Bill (Act) 2017. This provides for additional ongoing funding support towards the cost of public service pensions from those that benefit from such pensions from the year 2019.

The full report is published on my Department's website at the following link.

<http://www.per.gov.ie/en/minister-donohoe-publishes-actuarial-review-of-public-service-pension-liabilities/>

Public Sector Staff Retirements

67. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if a matter relating to the plans to increase the compulsory retirement age in the public sector (details supplied) will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41312/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Public Service Superannuation (Age of Retirement) Bill 2018 was published on 9 July and passed all stages in the Seanad on 17 July. The Bill is being treated as a priority and the intention is to secure enactment of the legislation as early as possible in the current term.

Once the Bill is enacted and commenced, the majority of public servants recruited prior to 1 April 2004 will have a new compulsory retirement age of 70. For the most part, these public servants currently have a compulsory retirement age of 65.

Until the commencement of the Bill, the current compulsory retirement age continues to apply and public servants reaching the age of 65 are required to retire. To accommodate public servants who reach the age of 65 in the period between the Government Decision to increase the retirement age and the commencement of the necessary legislation, I arranged for the introduction of interim arrangements.

The interim arrangements must respect the current statutory position of the compulsory retirement age of 65. They provide a temporary solution to affected public servants by allowing them to be re-hired for a period of one year, until they reach the age of eligibility for the State Pension (66). Their new employment contracts make provision for this arrangement.

The general policy across the public service is that, where a retired employee is re-hired, they are paid at the minimum point of the relevant scale, rather than at the pay point they had reached when they retired. This practice is continuing in the context of the interim arrangements.

Once the Bill is commenced the practice of payment at the minimum point will not apply to public servants who choose to remain beyond the age of 65. Those public servants will not be in the position of having retired and been re-hired.

In a case where a public servant makes an application for the interim arrangements and the legislation referred to above is commenced before the individual reaches the age of 65, he/she

will be covered by the proposed legislation. Public servants covered by the legislation, who reach the age of 65 after the date of its commencement, will be able to remain at work on current terms and conditions, including pay, up to the age of 70.

Teachers' Remuneration

68. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if funding will be restored in budget 2019 for middle management teaching posts in national schools. [41417/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Approximately 3,000 leadership posts have been invested in our primary and post primary schools in the past year. 1 in 3 (34.5%) teachers are now in promoted positions in our schools.

Budget 2017 allocated €2.75m to allow for the commencement of restoration of middle management posts as part of an agreed distributed leadership model and meant lifting the rigidity of the longstanding moratorium on these posts at primary and post-primary levels. This recognises the key role school leadership has in promoting a school environment which is welcoming, inclusive and accountable.

This Government is committed to investing to support and empower school leaders and the recent expansion of the School Excellence Fund and an expansion of the coaching service available to school leaders will assist in this.

Schools will shortly be invited to apply to form part of a cluster to work together on innovative projects to enhance their schools in a range of important areas over the next 2 years. There will be scope for up to 42 clusters nationwide in the initial phase with each cluster containing between a minimum of three and a maximum of six schools. Priority will be given to applicant clusters containing at least one DEIS school.

I also announced that further funding is being made available to extend the coaching service currently available to school principals, to the Deputy and Assistant Principals on their leadership teams. The service to date has been one to one coaching for principals only. DEIS schools will be prioritised for the extension of the coaching service to incorporate team coaching for the Principal and their leadership team, with up to four sessions being offered to 100 DEIS schools in the first instance.

These measures are in addition to the other supports recently introduced through the Centre for School Leadership including mentoring, a new postgraduate diploma in school leadership and the additional 3,000 middle management posts in schools.

Disadvantaged Status

69. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if funding resources will be provided in budget 2019 to reduce class sizes in DEIS schools. [41418/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My aim for Budget 2019, as it has been in previous years, is to progressively deliver on the commitments set out in the Action Plan for Education, in the Programme for a Partnership Government and in the Confidence and Supply Arrangement and to meet demographic and demand pressures, which can have significant resource implications. It is in that context that I will formulate my specific budgetary priorities.

I have set 4 key areas where I am seeking to make improvements in order to meet our objective to make the Irish Education and Training service the best in Europe: the quality of the learning experience; the capacity to meet the needs of those at a disadvantage or with special needs to fulfil their potential; the environment for schools to be innovative and continuously improve their capacity to serve their pupils' needs; and the collaboration and bridges which education and training institutions build with their wider communities to meet the changing needs of our country.

DEIS Plan 2017 allows for a reduced class size in Urban Band 1 primary schools to accommodate class size of 20:1 at junior classes and 24:1 at senior classes to support those students at the highest risk of educational disadvantage. Under DEIS Plan 2017, there is a commitment to evaluate the level of teaching resources for schools participating in the School Support Programme to inform future policy in this area and this evaluation is currently underway.

Teachers' Remuneration

70. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if pay equality will be restored for teachers in budget 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41419/18]

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, the current starting salary of a teacher is €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 sectoral 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.

10 October 2018

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.

Capitation Grants

71. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if provision will be made in budget 2019 to increase the capitation grant to primary schools. [41420/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I recognise the need to improve capitation funding for schools. The Programme for Government commits to capitation increases in primary and post primary schools. My Department will increase capitation rates by 5% from September 2019, the full year cost of which is €10m. This increase is the beginning of the process for the restoration of capitation which is one of the actions included in the Action Plan for Education.

Restoring capitation funding as resources permit is one of the actions included in the Action Plan for Education and I remain committed to achieving this. However, I must be prudent in the context of ongoing budgetary pressures and prioritise where it is not possible to do everything that I would like to do in the education sector in any one year.

Minor Works Scheme Payments

72. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if provision will be made in budget 2019 to increase the annual minor works grant to primary schools. [41421/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): On 14 September 2018, the announcement of the major package of investment in education under Project Ireland 2040 provided confirmation that primary schools will receive the minor works grant in either December or early January of each school year.

The rates payable under the Minor Works Grant are €5,500 per school plus €18.50 per mainstream pupil and €74 per special needs pupil attending a special school or a special class. There are no plans to increase these rates.

School Transport Provision

73. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a taxi under the school transport scheme will be provided for a person (details supplied) to transport them to and from an ASD unit in a school. [41273/18]

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.

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

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

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

Bus Éireann has advised that they are continuing their efforts to establish a suitable transport service for the child in question and I have requested that they liaise directly with the family regarding progress.

In the meantime the family may avail of the Special Transport Grant towards the cost of making private transport arrangements.

School Transport Eligibility

74. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a solution will be provided for a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41298/18]

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.

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

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

Children 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 completed the application process on time have been issued with tickets for the services operating into the school in question for the 2018/19 school year.

Children who are not eligible for school transport can be facilitated where spare seats are available after eligible children have been accommodated.

Under the terms of the scheme, routes will not be extended or altered, additional vehicles will not be introduced, nor will larger vehicles or extra trips using existing vehicles be provided to cater for children who are not eligible as no additional State cost will be incurred in covering the cost of providing school transport for children who are not eligible.

A number of families were late in submitting their payment details and these families cannot be accommodated as services are currently operating to capacity.

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

National Educational Psychological Service

75. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of

the digitisation of files under the National Educational and Psychological Service; and if paper based files are still in use. [41322/18]

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

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

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

NEPS educational psychologists undertake some 8,000 such referrals for individual case-work annually to investigate concerns raised, in the main by schools, in relation to the educational, social or emotional development of those pupils.

Such interventions are undertaken with parental consent and are documented in a client record maintained within NEPS. This process is predominantly a paper based one and informs the ongoing and future intervention with the child throughout their school career. These files retain all the salient details of the concerns raised in the referral, the details of the nature of the NEPS psychologist's intervention and the report on his/her findings and recommendations which are produced and presented to the parents of the subject and the school authorities.

Short-hand soft detail of these referrals are maintained by NEPS on the Casetrack database which currently represents the only formal digitisation of the process. Additionally soft copies of assessment reports produced under the SCPA scheme, some 1,500 per annum, are captured by NEPS and retained in soft copy.

I can inform the Deputy that consideration is being given within my Department to the development of a new NEPS management information system which includes a redevelopment of the NEPS Casetrack database. This, in turn, does involve the prospect of maintaining a comprehensive 'soft record' of the referral rather than a hard-copy file. However the digitisation of the archive of NEPS past referral files is not currently being considered.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Schools Building Projects Applications

76. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding an application for an extension and associated building works by a school (details supplied) to the school capitals appraisal section, planning and building unit; if his attention has been drawn to the need for an efficient decision to be returned urgently in order that the school can apply for planning permission in advance of the next academic year when it will facilitate an extra class; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41325/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department is currently liaising with the school referred to by the Deputy in the context of the application for capital funding. A decision on the application will be conveyed to the school authority when the assessment process has been completed.

Teachers' Remuneration

77. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason new full-time primary school teachers have to wait six weeks to receive their first salary payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41329/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Primary school teachers are employed by the managerial authorities of schools. The documentation necessary for the placement of teachers on payrolls operated by my Department must be approved by the managerial authorities and submitted to the payroll division to enable the teachers to be paid. There are legislative matters such as vetting and registration of teachers which the managerial authorities must ensure are complied with. Teachers can only be placed on payroll when certification is received from the managerial authorities that these procedures have been complied with.

The school year commences on the 1st September and ends on the following 31st August. There are over 9,000 appointment and re-appointment applications to be processed in advance of the start of new school year. A commitment was given to schools and teachers that if fully completed appointment forms were received by my Department on or before 13th July 2018 then the first salary payment would begin on 6th September 2018. This commitment was met and surpassed in many cases. My Department continues to receive appointment forms for teachers for this current school year and will continue to process appointments for the payment of salary in a timely manner.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

78. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if students can lose their SUSI grant if they register as homeless. [41385/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The student grant scheme administered by SUSI, provides maintenance grants to students who meet the prescribed conditions of funding, including those relating to nationality, residency, previous academic attainment and means.

Prospective applicants who register as homeless will not lose their grant, provided they continue to meet the eligibility criteria regarding means, nationality etc.

Departmental Communications

79. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a school project (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41391/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that the schools in question furnished a proposal relating to a re-configuration arrangement directly to my Department. My Department has no record of receiving any communication from the Patron bodies relating to the proposal. My Department will contact the schools directly relating to the proposal.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

80. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a grant application for an ASD unit for a college (details supplied) will be expedited. [41394/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm to the Deputy that the school in question has submitted an application for capital funding to my Department.

The application is being considered and a decision will be conveyed to the school authority as soon as the assessment process has been completed.

Schools Building Projects

81. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of developments with regard to the provision of a new post primary school serving Citywest, Dublin 24. [41395/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy will be aware, I recently announced the opening of 42 new schools over the next 4 years. This announcement followed nationwide demographic exercises carried out by my Department into the current and future need for primary and post-primary school places across the country, and included provision for a new 1,000 pupil post-primary school to be established in September 2020 to serve Citywest/Saggart (Tallaght & Newcastle_Rathcoole school planning areas) as a regional solution. This announcement follows nationwide, demographic exercises carried out by my Department into the future need for primary and post-primary schools across the country.

A patronage process is run after it has been decided, based on demographic analysis, that a new school is required. This patronage process is open to all patron bodies and prospective patrons. Parental preferences for each patron, from parents of children who reside in the school planning areas concerned, together with the extent of diversity currently available in these areas, are key to decisions in relation to the outcome of this process.

The new Online Patronage Process System (OPPS) has been developed to provide objective information to all parents and guardians which will allow them to make an informed choice in expressing a preference for their preferred model of patronage for their child's education.

The patronage process for new schools is overseen by an external independent advisory group, the New Schools Establishment Group (NSEG). Following their consideration of my Department's assessment reports, the NSEG will submit a report with recommendations to me for consideration and final decision. The assessment reports and the NSEG recommendations for all such patronage processes will be made available on my Department's website.

The patronage process commenced in June 2018 for the four new post-primary schools to be

established in 2019. The patronage process for the remaining schools, including the new post-primary school referred to by the Deputy, will also be run at a later date, significantly ahead of their due opening. Updates in relation to further patronage processes will be announced on the OPPS website (<http://patronage.education.gov.ie/>) and my Department's website (www.education.ie).

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

In addition as part of my Department's ongoing engagement with Local Authorities in respect of statutory planning processes and under the MoU on school site acquisitions, my Department will be examining all potential suitable site options, including appropriately zoned sites, to serve the relevant areas.

Taking into account all of the above, decisions will then be made as part of the site acquisition process in relation to appropriate sites for all the schools announced including the new post primary school referred to by the Deputy, and will be confirmed at the earliest possible date. Once a site has been secured, the architectural planning process to provide permanent accommodation for the school can be initiated.

Schools Building Projects Status

82. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of school building projects for schools (details supplied) in Dublin 24. [41396/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The school building project for the schools referred to by the Deputy is currently at Tender Stage. The Letter of Intent issued to the preferred bidder on the 21st September 2018. The Letter of Acceptance to commence the contract will issue when the documentation sought in the Letter of Intent is provided by the successful tenderer.

Schools Building Projects Applications

83. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of developments with regard to a project at a school (details supplied). [41397/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The planning application for the school building project referred to by the Deputy is currently being finalised and is expected to be lodged in the coming weeks. Once planning permission has been secured, the project will proceed to tender.

Capitation Grants

84. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the primary school grants calendar will be issued; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41400/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Primary Schools Grant

Calendar for 2018/19 is available on my Department's website at the following link.

<https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/Grants-and-Additional-Support/>.

School Staff

85. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if provision will be made in budget 2019 to provide teaching principals with one day per week administrative relief substitution cover. [41414/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In Budget 2019, school leadership is again supported with an additional release day for teaching principals in primary schools and a further four additional release days for teaching principals in schools with special classes. These additional release days will be effective from 01 September 2019.

This builds on measures in previous budgets, including €0.4 million made available in Budget 2018 to fund almost 4600 additional release days for teaching principals in primary schools. This additional funding has provided an increase in the number of release days available to teaching principals in the 2018/19 school year to 17, 23 or 29 days depending on the size of the school.

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

School Staff

86. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on a matter in relation to a school (details supplied) in County Kerry. [41415/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In Budget 2019, school leadership is again supported with an additional release day for teaching principals in primary schools and a further four additional release days for teaching principals in schools with special classes. These additional release days will be effective from 01 September 2019.

This builds on measures in previous budgets, including €0.4 million made available in Budget 2018 to fund almost 4600 additional release days for teaching principals in primary schools. This funding has provided for an increase in the number of release days available to teaching principals in the 2018/19 school year to 17, 23 or 29 days depending on the size of the school.

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Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

87. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to review the criteria that must be met by students with regard to SUSI grants particularly in the case of students that miss out on a grant by very small amounts. [41426/18]

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

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

The student grant scheme contains a number of qualifying thresholds for various grant values. These gradations allow students just over a threshold margin, to remain in receipt of a grant, albeit at a reduced rate that reflects their relative income *vis-à-vis* other applicants.

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

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

Data Protection

88. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the interpretation by SUSI in respect of GDPR regulations when making representations on behalf of students and their families with respect to grants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41427/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As a centralised national service, SUSI implements a process through which student grant applicants and other parties to their application can consent to the sharing of their personal data with each other and with third parties, including public representatives, for the purpose of responding to queries submitted on behalf of applicants and parties to applications.

This process seeks to reasonably balance the efficient handling of applicant queries and third party representations with SUSI's parallel obligation to ensure that each individual's personal data is processed fairly and lawfully.

A grant awarding authority processes personal data for the purposes laid down in the *Student Support Act 2011* and annual Student Grant Schemes and regulations made thereunder. This data includes information submitted as part of a grant application and other relevant data required for the purpose of assessing and reviewing applications in order to make decisions

under the legislation.

In order to give a full response to a query from a public representative on behalf of a person who is a party to an application it may be necessary to release not only that person's data, but also data relating to other persons named or identified in the application form i.e. the student applicant, their parents, partners, spouse, siblings, etc.

As a data controller under the *Data Protection Acts* the awarding authority is obliged to ensure the protection of the personal data which it collects and must decide on appropriate means of safeguarding that data, including in line with the requirements of the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Therefore, for SUSI to respond effectively to a representation from a public representative on an individual application in a manner that is fully compliant with data protection law, SUSI must be satisfied that all individuals concerned have consented to the release of their personal data to a third party.

Reflecting the enhanced rights of data subjects to be able to access and exercise control of their data under GDPR, SUSI has implemented a more streamlined process for the management of applicant party consent. A fully online consent process has been developed whereby applicant parties can give, withdraw and update their data sharing consents at any time through the applicant's online SUSI account, both in respect of each other and in respect of third parties including public representatives.

School Curriculum

89. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the way in which the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, NCCA, developed curriculum for religious education serves to meet the religious instruction requirements of the Catholic Church with regard to circular 0013/2018; the reason this feature of the curriculum is necessary for multi-denominational and ETB schools; if students will be able to opt out of these classes; if not, the reason this is the case in view of the fact that they are designed to meet the religious instruction requirements of one particular faith; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41471/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Department has clarified the requirements set out in a circular 13/2018, which set out an approach to the arrangements that are made for religious instruction and worship in Education and Training Board (ETB) and Post Primary Community schools.

ETB and Post Primary Community schools are multi-denominational schools that provide for their local communities regardless of their composition. It may have been reasonable when these schools were originally established for a school to assume that its pupil population was predominately Catholic and to arrange religious instruction accordingly. However, this is no longer an appropriate approach. In a changing context the constitutional right not to attend religious instruction must be given effect through changed practices.

The Department has issued a further circular to schools clarifying the requirements set out previously. The first key clarification is that where a school intends to provide religious instruction/faith formation, parents must give consent before admission to the class. This means that opt out does not arise because the parent has requested a place in the religious instruction class. The other significant clarification is that classes following the NCCA Religious Education syllabus cannot have any element of religious instruction or worship, which also means that opt

out does not arise.

Religious Education is an examinable subject just like History or Geography for example. It aims to develop the students' ability to examine questions of meaning, purpose and relationships, to help students understand, respect and appreciate people's expression of their beliefs, and to facilitate dialogue and reflection on the diversity of beliefs and values that inform responsible decision-making and ways of living. Crucially, it is not delivered from any one religious perspective. Under no circumstances can religious instruction / faith formation be taught during this class in Education and Training Board (ETB) and Post Primary Community schools.

Commencement of Legislation

90. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to commence Part 9 of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41398/18]

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

Sections 92, 93, 95 and 99 of the 2015 Act provide for the registration and re-registration of the birth of a donor-conceived child. These sections cannot be commenced until Parts 2 and 3 of the 2015 Act are brought into operation by the Minister for Health, who has indicated that he intends to commence these Parts as soon as possible. Officials from my Department, the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, and the Department of Health are working to coordinate the scheduling of the commencement of these sections.

The commencement of other sections of Part 9 of the 2015 Act is dependent on provisions of the Civil Registration (Amendment) Act 2014 being commenced by the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

Citizenship Ceremonies

91. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a person (details supplied) will be included in the next conferring ceremony. [41307/18]

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 a certificate of naturalisation has been received on behalf of the person referred to by the Deputy. This application has entered the final stage of processing.

The prescribed fee and documentation have been received. However the GNIB card received indicates that the person's permission to reside in the State expired on 17 June 2018. All non-EEA nationals are required to keep their permission to remain in the State up to date at all times, and to have such permission registered. Failure to do so may adversely affect an application for a certificate of naturalisation.

A letter issued on 8 October 2018 requesting a GNIB card showing an up to date permission to remain. Once this is received the certificate of naturalisation will issue by registered post. As the person referred to by the Deputy is a minor there is no requirement to attend a citizenship ceremony.

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

Citizenship Applications

92. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to introduce a language test as part of the citizenship application; if so, the way in which such a test will operate; when it will commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41443/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, the Migrant Integration Strategy 2017-2020 provides the basis for a comprehensive framework for action by Government Departments and other Public Bodies to promote the successful integration of migrants and contains 76 specific commitments across a range of policy areas. These include:

- Access to citizenship;
- Public services and social inclusion;
- Education;
- Employment and pathways to work;
- Health;
- Community integration;
- Political participation;
- Promoting intercultural awareness and combating racism and xenophobia;
- Volunteering;
- and Sport.

Progress on the implementation of the Migrant Integration Strategy is overseen by a Cross-Departmental Monitoring and Oversight Committee chaired by my colleague David Stanton, Minister of State with special responsibility for Immigration, Equality and Integration. This Committee consists of representatives of all Government Departments and Agencies that hold lead responsibility for the implementation of one or more actions under the Strategy. Key voluntary sector organisations working in the field of migrant integration are also represented on the Committee.

Under action point 12 of the Integration Strategy, the introduction of civics and language tests for those seeking citizenship is being examined by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service. I can report that discussions on same within the Cross-Departmental Monitoring and Oversight Committee are at a very early stage of consideration and as such it would be premature to comment on possible outcomes.

93. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the engagement the Irish Embassy has to support exporters to the United Kingdom; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41320/18]

94. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the supports in place for Irish exporters to the UK in context of Brexit. [41326/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 93 and 94 together.

Brexit is undoubtedly the most significant challenge facing Irish enterprise in over 50 years. With less than 6 months to go, I was determined to deliver a budget with Brexit at its core, building on the many measures we have already introduced, and responding to the evolving needs of business.

The agencies under my remit have an extensive range of supports available to enable companies to both consolidate market share and continue to pursue new opportunities to grow their market presence within the UK. For 2019, I am allocating an extra €8m to the enterprise agencies and regulatory bodies under my Department, who work with firms at the coalface to develop their supports for business.

A major initiative that my Department is advancing is the €300 million Brexit Loan Scheme, under which accessible finance is made available to businesses at favourable terms.

Enterprise Ireland (EI) supports include:

- a new Online customs Training Programme to be launched shortly to demystify customs procedure. This will be available to all exporters and importers.

- Brexit Advisory Clinics: The purpose of these clinics is to encourage companies to examine their potential exposure to Brexit, to complete the Brexit SME Scorecard and use the Be Prepared Grant to plan their strategic response to Brexit.

- Brexit Scorecard: An interactive online platform to self-assess exposure to Brexit under six business pillars.

- Be Prepared Grant: This grant offers SME clients a grant of up to €5,000 to assist them in preparing an action plan for economic shocks such as Brexit.

- The Agile Innovation Fund: giving companies rapid fast-track access to innovation funding, and up to 50% in support for product, process or service development projects with a total cost of up to €300,000.

- Market Discovery Fund - supports Enterprise Ireland clients research new markets for products and services.

- "Prepare to Export Scorecard": The Scorecard helps Irish companies with global ambition to self-assess how prepared they are to start exporting.

- Brexit 'Act On' Programme: This funding is to support the engagement of a consultant to draw up a report with tailored recommendations to help clients address weaknesses and become more resilient.

- Strategic Consultancy Grant: This helps client companies to hire a strategic consultant for a set period to assist the company to develop and implement significant strategic initiatives.

- Operational Excellence Offer: Enables Irish companies trading internationally to develop or transform their wider business in order to compete more effectively.

- Irish Advantage Campaign: The aim of the #Irish Advantage export promotion campaign, is to stimulate awareness of Irish products and services and encourage buyers to source from Ireland.

In addition, EI is implementing extensive trade mission and event schedules focussed on further developing in-market expertise and networks, new sectoral opportunities and stimulating demand for Irish products and services through international marketing campaigns.

On 27 September, I led 56 Irish companies on a trade mission to Scotland to explore business opportunities. In April, I led 45 EI clients on the Northern Powerhouse Trade Mission to Manchester to help them maintain their exports and pursue new opportunities. Both of these Trade Missions were organised by staff of the Irish embassy in London.

The 31 Local Enterprise Offices play a pivotal role in supporting micro-enterprises, as they prepare for Brexit. I have allocated an additional €5m to enhance their programme of supports in 2019, up 22% on 2018.

I have also allocated an additional €1m in capital funding to InterTrade Ireland, an increase of 17.5%. This will allow them to step up their support for companies in the border region, North and South, who are particularly exposed to Brexit.

Government's commitment to preparing the business community for Brexit can also be seen in the series of four "Getting Ireland Brexit Ready" seminars, which are being held this month around the country.

The embassy network is under the remit of my colleague Simon Coveney TD, Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Professional Qualifications

95. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health if the Royal Life Saving Society, RLSS, first aid qualification will be recognised here. [41293/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Pre-Hospital Emergency Care Council (PHECC) is an independent statutory body with responsibility for professional regulation in the area of pre-hospital emergency care, including the recognition of professional qualifications.

Accordingly, the Deputy's query has been referred to PHECC for direct response.

Hospital Waiting Lists

96. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) can expect to have a hip operation at University Hospital Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41288/18]

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.

Orthodontic Services Provision

97. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) can expect to receive an orthodontic appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41289/18]

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

Services for People with Disabilities

98. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health when the transition of services from the school age disability team to the progressing children's disability services is likely to be complete. [41302/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Services for People with Disabilities

99. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the steps being taken to deal with the block in providing assessments by the school age disability team that are running at capacity while children with complex needs appointments are delayed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41303/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government,

which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Health Services Funding

100. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Health if funding for an additional community based diabetes podiatrist in County Limerick will be made available in budget 2019; the reason for the sudden increase of foot ulceration treatment and lower limb amputation in County Limerick (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41306/18]

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

Health Services Provision

101. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health his plans to establish a human milk bank here. [41311/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Primary Care Centres Provision

102. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the primary care centre projects announced on 17 July 2012, in tabular form; the status of each; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41314/18]

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.

Health Services

103. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health when a trust in care activated in May 2018 in relation to a person (details supplied) will be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41315/18]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

104. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied)

in County Cork is on a waiting list for a procedure; the number of persons on this waiting list; the expected waiting time; if this procedure is available in the public health system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41316/18]

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.

Services for People with Disabilities

105. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the provision of a suitable placement for a child (details supplied) in Dublin 16; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41317/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

HSE Staff Data

106. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Health the number of whole-time equivalent psychologist vacancies in primary care by community healthcare organisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41327/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly on this matter.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Data

107. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Health the number of whole-time equivalent psychologist vacancies in the child and adolescent mental health service by community

healthcare organisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41328/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly on this matter.

Haddington Road Agreement Implementation

108. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 160 of 20 September 2018, if persons (details supplied) can provide the evidence that they circulated the appeals circular to all staff in SSWHG as they do with all circulars. [41334/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly on this matter.

Haddington Road Agreement Implementation

109. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 586 of 7 September 2018, if the complainants referred to were subsequently regularised; and if not, if they were informed it was too late to go through the appeals process. [41335/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly on this matter.

HSE Staff

110. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if a review will be conducted and a process commenced such that those who are entitled to full regularised posts under circular 017/2013 but who have not yet been regularised are given an automatic entitlement to their posts and redress for withheld wages or if it is intended that redress must be sought on an individual basis via the court system. [41336/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly on this matter.

Hospital Services

111. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff and the grade at which they are employed in the radiography unit at Louth County Hospital; the number of persons on the waiting list for general x-ray, ultrasound, vascular ultrasound and CT scans; the length of time they have been waiting; and the number of staff vacancies that exists within the radiography department. [41339/18]

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 Services

112. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the hours per week which the CT

scanner in Louth County Hospital is operative. [41340/18]

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 Services

113. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the occupational therapy services currently provided at Louth County Hospital; the number of persons on the waiting list for this therapy; the length of time they have been waiting; the number of staff employed in occupational therapy; the grade in which they are employed; and the number of staff vacancies within the said department. [41341/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to you directly as soon as possible.

Hospital Beds Data

114. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of surgical beds open in Louth County Hospital day service unit; the number of staff employed in this unit; the grade in which they are employed; and the number of vacancies within the unit. [41342/18]

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 Services

115. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of days the geriatric service unit operates at Louth County Hospital; the number of persons on the waiting list for the service; the length of time they have been waiting; the number of staff employed in this unit; the grade at which they are employed; and the number of vacancies within the day service unit. [41343/18]

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 Services

116. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of days the venesection unit operates at Louth County Hospital; the number of persons on the waiting list for the unit; the length of time they have been waiting; the number of staff employed in this unit; the grade in which they are employed; and the number of vacancies within the day service unit. [41344/18]

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 Services

117. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff employed in the colposcopy unit at Louth County Hospital; the number of persons on the waiting list for this unit; the length of time they have been waiting; the number of staff employed in colposcopy; the grade in which they are employed; and the number of staff vacancies within the colposcopy department. [41345/18]

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 Services

118. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff and the grade at which they are employed in the smoking cessation unit at Louth County Hospital; the number of persons on the waiting list for this unit; the length of time they have been waiting; and the number of staff vacancies within the smoking cessation department. [41346/18]

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 Services

119. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons that have been treated in the minor injuries unit at Louth County Hospital in each month to date in 2018; and the number in the age bracket of 5 to 14 that have been treated since the expansion of the service to this age cohort. [41347/18]

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 Services

120. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the opening hours of the MIU at Louth County Hospital; and his plans to extend these opening hours. [41348/18]

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 Services

121. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff and the grade in which they are employed in the venesection unit at Louth County Hospital; the number of days per week it is operative; if there is a waiting list for this unit; and the number of staff vacancies within the department. [41349/18]

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 Services

122. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff and the grade at which they are employed in the direct access elderly assessment service at Louth County Hospital; the number of days per week it is operative; if there is a waiting list for this unit; and the number of staff vacancies within the department. [41350/18]

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 Services

123. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of beds open at the stroke rehabilitation unit at Louth County Hospital; the number of staff and the grade at which they are employed in the unit; and the number of staff vacancies within the department. [41351/18]

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 Services

124. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff and the grade in which they are employed in the genito urinary clinic at Louth County Hospital; the number of days per week it is operative; if there is a waiting list for this unit; and the number of staff vacancies within the department. [41352/18]

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 Services

125. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff and the grade in which they are employed in the cardiology service at Louth County Hospital; the number of days per week it is operative; if there is a waiting list for this unit; and the number of staff vacancies within the department. [41353/18]

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.

Respite Care Services Provision

126. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if respite care will be provided to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41359/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government,

which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Services

127. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff and the grade in which they are employed in general medicine at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda; if there is a waiting list for this unit; if so, the number of persons on the waiting list; the length of time they been waiting; and the number of staff vacancies within the department. [41360/18]

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 Services

128. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff and the grade in which they are employed in emergency medicine at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda; if there is a waiting list for this unit; if so, the number of persons on the waiting list; the length of time they been waiting; and the number of staff vacancies within the department. [41361/18]

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 Services

129. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff and the grade in which they are employed in cardiology at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda; if there is a waiting list for this unit; if so, the number of persons on the waiting list; the length of time they been waiting; and the number of staff vacancies within the department. [41362/18]

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 Services

130. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff and the grade in which they are employed in endocrinology at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda; if there is a waiting list for this unit; if so, the number of persons on the waiting list; the length of time they been waiting; and the number of staff vacancies within the department. [41363/18]

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.

Maternity Services Provision

131. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff and the grade in which they are employed in the early pregnancy unit at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda; and the number of staff vacancies within the department. [41364/18]

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 Services

132. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff and the grade in which they are employed in oncology at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda; if there is a waiting list for this unit; if so, the number of persons on the waiting list; the length of time they been waiting; and the number of staff vacancies within the department. [41365/18]

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 Services

133. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff and the grade in which they are employed in dermatology at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda; if there is a waiting list for this unit; if so, the number of persons on the waiting list; the length of time they been waiting; and the number of staff vacancies within the department. [41366/18]

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 Services

134. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff and the grade in which they are employed in geriatric medicine at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda; if there is a waiting list for this unit; if so, the number of persons on the waiting list; the length of time they been waiting; and the number of staff vacancies within the department. [41367/18]

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 Services

135. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff and the grade in which they are employed in gastroenterology at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda; if there is a waiting list for this unit; if so, the number of persons on the waiting list; the length of time they been waiting; and the number of staff vacancies within the department. [41368/18]

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 Services

136. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff and the grade in which they are employed in respiratory medicine at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda; if there is a waiting list for this unit; if so, the number of persons on the waiting list; the length of time they been waiting; and the number of staff vacancies within the department. [41369/18]

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 Services

137. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff and the grade in which they are employed in physical medicine at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda; if there is a waiting list for this unit; if so, the number of persons on the waiting list; the length of time they been waiting; and the number of staff vacancies within the department. [41370/18]

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 Services

138. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff and the grade at which they are employed in pathology services at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda; if there is a waiting list for this unit; if so, the number of persons on the waiting list; the length of time they been waiting; the number of staff vacancies within the department. [41371/18]

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 Services

139. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff and the grade in which they are employed in palliative care at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda; if there is a waiting list for this unit; if so, the number of persons on the waiting list; the length of time they been waiting; and the number of staff vacancies within the department. [41372/18]

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 Services

140. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff and the grade in which they are employed in general surgery at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda; if there is a waiting list for this unit; if so, the number of persons on the waiting list; the length of time they been waiting; and the number of staff vacancies within the department. [41373/18]

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 Services

141. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff and the grade in which they are employed in orthopaedics at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda; if there is a waiting list for this unit; if so, the number of persons on the waiting list; the length of time they been waiting; and the number of staff vacancies within the department [41374/18]

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 Services

142. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff and the grade in which they are employed in urology at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda; if there is a waiting list for this unit; if so, the number of persons on the waiting list; the length of time they been waiting; and the number of staff vacancies within the department. [41375/18]

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 Services

143. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff and the grade in which they are employed in intensive care at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda; if there is a waiting list for this unit; if so, the number of persons on the waiting list; the length of time they been waiting; and the number of staff vacancies within the department. [41376/18]

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 Services

144. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff and the grade in which they are employed in ENT at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda; if there is a waiting list for this unit; if so, the number of persons on the waiting list; the length of time they been waiting; and the number of staff vacancies within the department. [41377/18]

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 Services

145. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff and the grade in which they are employed in anaesthetics at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda; if there is a waiting list for this unit; if so, the number of persons on the waiting list; the length of time they been waiting; and the number of staff vacancies within the department. [41378/18]

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 Services

146. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff and the grade in which they are employed in radiology at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda; if there is a waiting list for this unit; if so, the number of persons on the waiting list; the length of time they been waiting; and the number of staff vacancies within the department. [41379/18]

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 Services

147. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the hours per week which the CT scanner in Louth County Hospital is operative. [41380/18]

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 Services

148. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff and the grade in which they are employed in the emergency department at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda; if there is a waiting list for this unit; if so, the number of persons on the waiting list; the length of time they been waiting; and the number of staff vacancies within the department. [41381/18]

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.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

149. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to introduce a free care system for persons over 21 years of age for the FreeStyle Libre flash glucose monitoring system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41388/18]

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

Mental Health Services Provision

150. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the roll-out of the employability programme in association with mental health organisations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41393/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): In order to support the employment of those with enduring mental illness, the Mental Health Services in the HSE intends to make individual placement support available in each CHO. The Individual Place-

ment and Support (IPS) approach ensures the development of opportunities for people with mental health difficulties to remain in, or to access, work in mainstream settings and to support employers in addressing attendant recruitment and retention issues. Individuals are also offered supports to access opportunities which are based on their skills and interests.

It is agreed that 23.5 IPS Employment Specialists will be recruited by employment agencies, with one additional post funded through Service Reform Fund general grant funding for a total of 24.5 positions. All posts will be in place by the end of quarter 4, 2018. There are an additional 5 Early Intervention in Psychosis posts which will also be in place by the end of quarter 4, 2018. The Early Intervention in Psychosis program will share a number of activities with the general IPS rollout including training, fidelity reviews and resources.

To facilitate the roll-out of the IPS Employment Specialists:

- An IPS steering group has been established.
- Meetings have been held with DEASP, Employment Agencies and the National Occupational Therapist Managers group and they have agreed to the implementation and management of IPS at local level.
- An SLA has been agreed to govern this. To underpin all of this, it is intended to seek the development of a memorandum of understanding between Department of Health and the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection to support government policy including a Vision for Change and The Employment Strategy for people with Disability.
- The signing of Service Level Agreements are underway. As of the 5th of October 2018, there are 12 Service Level Agreements (with 13 associated posts) signed. Negotiations are ongoing in a number of CHO areas but it is expected that each CHO area will have an IPS service in place once complete.

Drug and Alcohol Task Forces

151. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health the reason no additional budgets covering the alcohol remit has been granted to drugs and alcohol task forces in view of the fact that alcohol was added to the remit of drugs task forces some years ago; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41401/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): The national drugs strategy, *Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery*, adopts a population health approach to respond to the misuse of alcohol. The strategy aims to promote and protect health and wellbeing at a population level by delaying the use of alcohol and other drugs among young people, influencing behaviour and challenging social norms and minimising harm for those who have already started to use alcohol or other drugs.

The strategy puts the needs of people and communities at the centre of the response to substance misuse and empowers people to take charge of their own health. It aims to support people and communities in making more positive changes and to influence the wider environment to enable people to make a healthy choice. The strategy complements the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill which outlines measures to reduce alcohol consumption and to reduce the harms associated with alcohol.

Drug and Alcohol Task Forces play a key role in assessing the extent and nature of the drug problem and in initiating appropriate responses, so that there is a coordinated approach involv-

ing all sectors to the problem of substance misuse in local communities. In excess of €27.6m has been allocated to Task Forces by the HSE and the Department of Health for community-based drugs initiatives this year. This level of funding is consistent with the amounts provided for the last four years.

The remit of the Drugs Task Forces was extended to include the problem of alcohol misuse in 2014, in view of the central role they play in coordinating the response to substance misuse at local level. The 2014-2016 Dormant Accounts Action Plan provided a budget of approximately €1m to support the Task Forces in undertaking work at local and regional level to address the alcohol problem.

The Community Action on Alcohol Project (CAAP) was set up in 2014 to provide Task Forces with training on community mobilisation in order to develop coordinated strategies to change behaviour around alcohol and to raise awareness of alcohol related harm. CAAP training for Task Forces is funded by the HSE and is delivered by the Alcohol Forum. A Steering Group chaired by the Drugs Policy Unit in the Department of Health oversees the work of CAAP. By the end of 2017, 16 of the 24 Task Forces had participated on the Central Training Programme.

I recently announced a further €290,000 for Task Forces to support and enhance services addressing drug and alcohol misuse. This money will be allocated in quarter four of 2018. In addition, Task Forces will be consulted by the HSE on the provision of €710,000 for priority projects and services in CHO areas. These resources can be used to support initiatives and treatment services dealing with alcohol misuse.

Drug and Alcohol Task Forces

152. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health the budget allocation to the drugs and alcohol task forces that operate in County Dublin in each of the years 2011 to 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41402/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): The level of funding provided to each of the Drug and alcohol Task Forces operating in County Dublin for the years 2011 to 2018 is set out in the following table. A breakdown of the geographical area covered by each task force can be found at the following website: health.gov.ie/healthy-Ireland/drugs-policy/local-and-regional-task-forces/.

I strongly believe that resources should be directed towards interventions that are most effective in reducing problem substance use. Measuring the effectiveness of responses to the drug problem is therefore an important objective of public policy. Towards this end, my Department will develop a performance measurement system by 2020 which will improve accountability across all sectors, including the Task Forces.

Funding provided to Task Forces operating in Co. Dublin 2011 to 2018

LDATF	2011	2012	2013	2014 DOH	2014 HSE	2015 DOH	2015 HSE
Ballyfermot	€1,492,413	€1,569,489	€1,522,404	€461,150	€1,025,582	€255,446	€1,231,286
Ballymun	€1,209,976	€1,180,695	€1,145,274	€632,817	€488,098	€422,958	€697,957
Blanchardstown	€1,152,227	€1,124,343	€1,090,613	€179,305	€913,589	€179,305	€913,589
Canal Communities	€1,600,987	€1,562,243	€1,515,376	€338,605	€1,141,309	€338,605	€1,141,309

Questions - Written Answers

LDATE	2011	2012	2013	2014 DOH	2014 HSE	2015 DOH	2015 HSE
Clondalkin	€1,455,032	€1,421,577	€1,428,930	€388,114	€1,007,948	€388,114	€1,007,948
Dublin 12	€1,148,145	€1,120,360	€1,086,749	€74,013	€990,134	€70,997	€993,150
Dublin NE	€1,259,256	€1,228,782	€988,234	€422,251	€594,836	€422,251	€594,836
Dun Laoghaire	€949,137	€926,167	€898,382	€94,676	€786,755	€94,676	€786,755
Finglas Cabra	€959,818	€936,590	€908,492	€263,277	€627,960	€263,277	€627,960
NIC	€2,428,391	€2,369,624	€2,298,535	€576,956	€1,652,623	€494,856	€1,734,723
SIC	€2,215,434	€2,161,821	€2,096,966	€255,720	€1,788,337	€176,043	€1,868,014
Tallaght	€1,281,356	€1,250,347	€1,262,837	€452,712	€782,240	€341,438	€893,514
RDATE	2011	2012	2013	2014 DOH	2014 HSE	2015 DOH	2015 HSE
North Dublin City & Co.	€846,574	€826,087	€801,304	€456,080	€321,184	€309,778	€467,486
South West	€870,592	€849,524	€824,038	€102,820	€696,497	€102,820	€696,497
LDATE	2016 DOH	2016 HSE	2017 DOH	2017 HSE	2018 DOH	2018 HSE	
Ballyfermot	€255,446	€1,231,286	€255,446	€1,231,286	€255,446	€1,231,286	
Ballymun	€422,958	€697,957	€422,958	€697,957	€422,958	€697,957	
Blanchardstown	€179,305	€913,589	€179,305	€913,589	€179,305	€913,589	
Canal Communities	€338,605	€1,141,309	€338,605	€1,141,309	€338,605	€1,141,309	
Clondalkin	€388,114	€1,007,948	€388,114	€1,007,948	€388,114	€1,007,948	
Dublin 12	€70,397	€993,750	€70,397	€993,750	€70,397	€993,750	
Dublin NE	€239,971	€777,116	€239,971	€777,116	€239,971	€777,116	
Dun Laoghaire	€94,676	€786,755	€94,676	€786,755	€94,676	€786,755	
Finglas Cabra	€263,277	€627,960	€263,277	€627,960	€263,277	€627,960	
NIC	€394,856	€1,834,723	€394,856	€1,834,723	€394,856	€1,834,723	
SIC	€176,043	€1,868,014	€176,043	€1,868,014	€176,043	€1,868,014	
Tallaght	€336,022	€898,930	€336,022	€898,930	€336,022	€898,930	
RDATE	2016 DOH	2016 HSE	2017 DOH	2017 HSE	2018 DOH	2018 HSE	
North Dublin City & Co.	€266,245	€511,019	€266,245	€511,019	€266,245	€511,019	
South West	€102,820	€696,497	€102,820	€696,497	€102,820	€696,497	

Healthcare Infrastructure Provision

153. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health if he will report on the suspension of the two projects vital to future developments at Tallaght University Hospital; when these projects will commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41403/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The National Development Plan provides €10.9 billion to invest in infrastructure, equipment and additional service capacity for the public health sector. This represents an increase of 165% in capital funding over the previous decade. The additional capital funding is predominately in the second half of the plan.

With this unprecedented capital investment in the Health services we must ensure that we

carefully plan and select projects. This process will be guided by National health strategy and policy including the implementation of Sláintecare.

A key challenge to delivery of the plan concerns the profiling of the capital funding available, whereby the increased annual allocations are back-loaded towards the latter years of the NDP. There are also pressures arising from factors including inflation, increased construction costs due to changes in building regulations and very high level of claims currently being experienced on projects.

As the HSE is responsible for the delivery of health care infrastructure projects, I have asked the HSE to reply directly to you in relation to the current position on proposed developments at Tallaght University Hospital.

National Children's Hospital Status

154. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health the timeline for the opening of the new national children's hospital to be located at St. James's Hospital, Dublin 8. [41404/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The new children's hospital on the shared campus with St James's Hospital is scheduled for opening in 2022.

Hospital Facilities

155. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health the arrangements being made for parking at the new national children's hospital; the number of parking spaces that will be available on site; the number of these which will be allocated to patients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41405/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Access to the children's hospital at the St James's campus is well served by public transport, however the plans and design for the hospital recognise the need of most families to access the hospital by car.

The plans for the hospital provide for 1,000 car parking spaces, of which 675 will be dedicated for use by families, three times the number of spaces currently available at the three Dublin children's hospitals combined. The car park will be located in the basement of the new children's hospital. Parents will be able to reserve their space ahead of arriving at the hospital.

The 1000 spaces also include 31 drop-off emergency spaces at ground level outside of the Emergency Department.

Hospital Services

156. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health the building timeline for the national children's hospital satellite located at Tallaght University Hospital; the services to be provided there; and if helicopter transfer will be available for acute patients. [41406/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Paediatric Outpatients and Urgent Care Centre at Connolly is scheduled to open in 2019 followed by the Centre at Tallaght in 2020 in advance of the opening of the main hospital on the shared campus with St James's Hospital in 2022.

The Centres at Tallaght and Connolly Hospitals are being built with the aim of improving geographic access to urgent care for children in the Greater Dublin Area. The two centres will support primary and community care through the provision of general community and paediatric clinics, including developmental paediatrics, multidisciplinary care for children with chronic stable conditions and other outpatient services.

Each Paediatric Outpatient and Urgent Care Centre will provide consultant-led urgent care, with 4-6 hour observation beds, appropriate diagnostics and secondary outpatient services including rapid access general paediatric clinics as well as child sexual abuse unit examination, observation and therapy rooms. Each centre is projected to deal with 25,000 urgent care and 15,000 outpatient attendances every year.

The centres will provide services and environments of the same quality as those delivered in the new children's hospital, with staff rotating through the outpatient and urgent care centres and the main hospital.

There will be an elevated helipad at the new children's hospital, which will have direct and rapid access to the critical care, theatre and emergency departments within the hospital. This enhanced direct and rapid access will improve clinical outcomes for the sickest children and young people.

The Air Corps is the primary provider of paediatric helicopter services to the National Ambulance Service. Air Corps helicopters comprising Augusta Westland AW139 can land on a raised landing site or the roof of a building which is designed and certified for such operations. The Irish Coast Guard provides reserve support to the National Ambulance Service, when required, through its Sikorsky S92 search and rescue fleet primarily for search and rescue missions. The Sikorsky S92 helicopters are not licensed to land on helipads and, for access to the St. James's Campus, would land in the Royal Hospital Kilmainham from which patients would be transferred in an ambulance by road, which is current practice.

The majority of patient transfers to the three Dublin children's hospitals are completed by road. In any major emergency rescue in a rural area, a Sikorsky Helicopter will bring the patient to the nearest regional hospital for stabilisation resulting in an appropriately planned transfer to the new children's hospital.

In relation to your specific query regarding helicopter transfers at Tallaght Hospital, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to you directly, as soon as possible.

Primary Care Centres Data

157. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health the details of primary care centres in an area (details supplied). [41407/18]

162. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health the status of the proposed primary care centre to be located on a site (details supplied); the services to be provided; the anchor general practitioners that will take up residency; the areas to be serviced; the timeline for the construction and opening of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41412/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 157 and 162 together.

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 Maternity Hospital

158. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health the status of the ownership of the proposed new national maternity hospital. [41408/18]

159. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health the funding mechanism for the new national maternity hospital. [41409/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 158 and 159 together.

The new maternity hospital on the St Vincent's campus will be funded by the State and indeed has been included in Project Ireland 2040 - the National Development Plan 2018-2027. The development will represent the flagship project of the National Maternity Strategy and constitute the largest single investment ever made in maternity services in Ireland.

A draft legal framework is currently being finalised which will *inter alia* ensure that the State's significant investment in the new hospital will be protected.

General Practitioner Data

160. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health the number of general practitioners in private practice in an area (details supplied); the number due to retire in the near future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41410/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): General Practitioners are self-employed, private practitioners and are free to establish a practice wherever they wish. Many GPs have contracts with the HSE to provide services under various public health schemes, however GPs are under no obligation to enter into such contracts.

Neither my Department or the HSE have information relating to GPs who are engaged exclusively in private practice.

Home Care Packages Provision

161. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the large backlog of persons awaiting approval of homecare packages in the CHO7 region; his plans to increase the funds for homecare in that area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41411/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The Home Support Service is a core service for older people and is highly valued by service users, their families and by the HSE. It provides supports which assist older people to live independently in their own homes for longer and enables large numbers of people to return home following acute hospital admission who otherwise would remain in hospital or would be admitted to long stay residential care. Following today's Budget announcement, the HSE and officials from the Department of Health will immediately commence the process of developing and agreeing the HSE National Service Plan 2019, which will set out, in detail, the type and quantum of services

to be delivered in 2019 including in relation to services for older people.

Question No. 162 answered with Question No. 157.

Medicinal Products Availability

163. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health if the drug Cariban available on the GMS and DPS schemes for the treatment of hyperemesis gravidarum for pregnant women will be made available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41428/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has statutory responsibility for medicine pricing and reimbursement decisions, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013.

Cariban is not licensed as a medicine in Ireland, as it does not have a marketing authorisation from the Health Products Regulatory Authority or the European Medicines Agency.

For Cariban to be reimbursed through the community drug schemes, the supplier must first obtain a marketing authorisation and then apply to the HSE for reimbursement approval. In the absence of a marketing authorisation, the HSE is not in a position to consider whether it should reimburse this product.

However, the Deputy might note that some consultants prescribe Cariban and that some maternity hospitals dispense it to patients with severe nausea and vomiting in pregnancy.

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

164. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Health the status of joint operations at University Hospital Kerry; and the number of patients waiting for same at the hospital. [41451/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I acknowledge that waiting times are often unacceptably long and I am conscious of the burden that this places on patients and their families. However, the provision of a safe service for all of our patients is also paramount.

The HSE advise that the elective Arthroplasty (joint replacement) service at University Hospital Kerry (UHK) has been suspended to allow for a review of the infection control protocol. During this time significant structural and process improvements/upgrades have been made including the physical relocation of the ward. The elective arthroplasty service will recommence week beginning 15 October.

The HSE further note that no other aspect of the orthopaedic service has been affected by this closure and that emergency arthroplasty services have continued throughout this period. UHK Management are liaising with the orthopaedic surgeons regarding how best to address backlog, which will be performed internally.

Waiting list data compiled by the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) for the end of September indicates that 154 patients are awaiting orthopaedic inpatient or daycase procedures at UHK, of which 152 (98.7%) are waiting less than 9 months.

Hospital Services

165. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Health when the new operating theatre at University Hospital Kerry is expected to be in operation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41452/18]

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 Services

166. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health if a request from an association (details supplied) for additional investment in services will be considered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41472/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): With regard to the request for additional support for Neurology services referred to by the Deputy, the level of funding available for the Department of Health in 2019 was set out in the Estimates yesterday and the quantum of services to be provided by the HSE will now be considered as part of National Service Planning process.

Dental Services Provision

167. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health when full dental services will be provided in Carrick-on-Suir primary care centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41476/18]

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

Services for People with Disabilities

168. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the funding provided by the HSE to an organisation (details supplied) in County Sligo in 2016 and 2017, in tabular form. [41477/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

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

Services for People with Disabilities

169. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health if consideration will be given to an application by a group (details supplied) for funding; and if he will make a statement on the

matter. [41492/18]

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.

Healthcare Infrastructure Provision

170. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the details of each building project at each development stage including new builds, extensions and improvements; the cost of each project by county in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41493/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE is preparing its draft Capital Plan for 2019 and on completion it will be submitted to my Department for consideration. It requires my approval together with the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. When approved the HSE will publish the schedule of projects on its website.

As with all capital projects, the further development of the health care infrastructure must be considered within the context of the overall capital envelope available to the health service. Plans for capital investment are in the course of being finalised, and details will be made available once this process is complete. The HSE is concentrating on applying the funding available for infrastructure development in the most effective way possible to meet current and future needs.

Agriculture Industry

171. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if provision will be made in budget 2019 to provide low cost loans to farmers. [41473/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In his Budget speech my colleague the Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform, Paschal Donohoe TD, formally announced progress in relation to the development of the "Future Growth Loan Scheme" for SMEs, including the primary agriculture and seafood sectors. This is a key Government Brexit response for which I had provided €25million in funding in 2018.

The Food Wise 2025 strategy outlines the agri-food sector's unique and special position within the Irish economy and its potential for future growth. Brexit is obviously a significant challenge given our unique exposure to the UK market. Farmers, the seafood sector and food businesses will need to focus on competitiveness and innovation in order to continue the growth in Irish agri-food exports, which reached a record €13.6 billion in 2017. The Scheme forms an important part of the Government's Brexit response alongside the "Brexit Loan Scheme", the provision of additional resources to the agri-food and enterprise State Agencies and an intensification of Minister-led trade missions to access and develop new markets.

The Scheme, which will be administered by the SBCI and backed by a European Investment Fund counter-guarantee, will bring previously unavailable 8 to 10 year unsecured investment finance to the Irish market at competitive interest rates. I am working with colleagues the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, Heather Humphreys TD, and Minister Donohoe, to bring up to €300million of loans to the market.

This is a long-awaited source of finance for young and new entrant farmers, especially the cohort who do not have high levels of security. It will also serve smaller-scale farmers, who often do not have the leverage to negotiate for more favourable terms with their banking institution. Along with the likes of Milk Flex, this Scheme will form part of a comprehensive investment package for farmers. I am also delighted to be able to include the seafood sector in the Scheme

Food companies have identified long term investment finance of up to ten years as a critical need which is currently unavailable in Ireland. I am pleased that the Government have been able to deliver this product and its effects will be felt all along the food production chain.

My Department is providing 40% of the funding so an overall agri-food package of €120million will be available. However, unlike previous Schemes, this can be reviewed and adjusted according to demand.

Further details will be provided in the coming months. The Scheme is expected to be in place in early 2019 and will run for three years from its launch date.

Aquaculture Licence Applications

172. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when the Marine Institute of Ireland will complete assessments pursuant to the EU birds and habitats directive in respect of a person (details supplied) who has applied for a licence to harvest oysters. [41266/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The application for an aquaculture licence referred to by the Deputy is in respect of a site located in Carlingford Lough, which is designated as Carlingford Shore Special Area of Conservation (SAC) under the EU Habitats Directive and Carlingford Lough Special Protection Area (SPA) under the EU Birds Directive (Natura 2000 sites).

All aquaculture activities in Natura site areas require an Appropriate Assessment to be carried out before any aquaculture licensing determinations can be made. My Department is working with the Marine Institute and the National Parks and Wildlife Service to achieve full compliance with the EU Birds and Habitats Directives through a multi-annual work programme. This data collection programme, which is substantially complete, together with the setting of Conservation Objectives, will enable all new and renewal aquaculture applications to be assessed.

Conservation Objectives have been set for the Carlingford Shore SAC and the Carlingford Lough SPA. The next step in the process is the carrying out of an Appropriate Assessment by the Marine Institute. This is being progressed and my Department has been advised by the Marine Institute that the Appropriate Assessment Report should be available, at the latest, during Quarter 1, 2019. While the Appropriate Assessments are carried out on a bay by bay basis, each licence application within the bay must be assessed individually.

Addressing the issue of aquaculture licensing in Natura 2000 areas is a key priority for

my Department and the Deputy can be assured that every effort is being made to expedite the completion of the process in Carlingford Lough having regard to all the complexities involved.

Harbours and Piers Development

173. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the works proposed for Killybegs Harbour centre will proceed as planned in 2018 and 2019; if the next phase of the deep sea dredging works will be tendered for in the last quarter of 2018 as already committed to; if the funding for the project is ring-fenced and secure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41299/18]

174. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the €10 million required for the Killybegs Harbour centre is budgeted for in the 2019 estimates; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41300/18]

175. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the timeframe for the tendering and complete delivery of the next phase of the Killybegs Harbour centre extension specifically the deep sea dredging which will prepare for works including the construction of the extension to the harbour and provision of a harbour wall; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41301/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 173 to 175, inclusive, together.

Killybegs Fishery Harbour Centre is one of the six designated Fishery Harbour Centres which are owned, managed and maintained by my Department under Statute.

The Fishery Harbour Centre (FHC) has been attracting increasing levels of fishing, commercial cargo and cruise liner activity and the need for additional berthage has been recognised. The Smooth Point project, when complete, will provide an additional 120 metres of sheltered berthage to a depth of -9.0m Chart datum in Killbegs FHC. In addition to facilitating the increased activity, it would also enable relocating larger fishing from the Blackrock Pier to the new berthage area.

Because some of the material to be dredged was contaminated, the project was divided into two phases. Work on phase 1 of the project which entailed the dredging and removal of the contaminated commenced in 2017 and has been completed in 2018 at a cost of approximately €6.5m.

€3.5m was allocated for phase 1 in 2018 however as additional work was carried out as part these works an extra €0.7m had to be allocated in 2018 to complete it bringing the expected total spend in 2018 to €4.2m.

It is now proposed to issue tenders for phase 2 in 2019, with works commencing next year and a completion date in 2020. This phase involves the dredging of the remaining uncontaminated material and construction of the 120 metres of berthing space. The final costs of phase 2 will only be determined following the competitive tendering process, however it is estimated to be in the region of €9m.

The funding available for the Fishery Harbour Centre capital programme for 2019 has been increased by €6.284m to €27.284m. All developments in the six Fishery Harbour Centres are considered under annual capital programmes on the basis of available Exchequer funding. No decisions on the detailed capital programme for 2019 have been taken at this stage. That said,

I can assure the Deputy that I am committed to tendering for and commencing Phase 2 of the project at Smooth Point in 2019 and completing it in 2020.

Fisheries Protection

176. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority has made representations to the Department of Defence or the Naval Service in regard to the number of boardings carried out by the Naval Service in 2018. [41321/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I am not aware if the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority (SFPA) has made representations to the Department of Defence or the Naval Service in relation to the matter referred to by the Deputy.

As the Deputy may be aware, the monitoring and control of fishing vessels within Ireland's Exclusive Fisheries Zone are matters for the Irish control authorities. Under the Sea Fisheries and Maritime Jurisdiction Act, 2006, all operational issues of this nature concerning sea fisheries control are, as a matter of law, exclusively for the SFPA and the Naval Service. As Minister I am precluded from getting involved in operational matters including in relation to law enforcement and therefore I have requested SFPA to reply directly to the Deputy on the specific information requested.

GLAS Payments

177. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a GLAS payment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41337/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named was approved into GLAS 1 with a contract commencement date of 1 October 2015 and has received payments for scheme years 2015 and 2016.

An issue arose in relation to the 2017 Advance payment which has now been fully resolved. Payment will issue shortly.

Horse Racing Ireland

178. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the person or organisation that holds title to the lands comprising Dundalk racecourse. [41356/18]

179. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his sanction was sought and given prior to Horse Racing Ireland extending a loan to Dundalk stadium management to fund the redevelopment of Dundalk stadium; and if evidence of title over the lands involved was sought and received by Horse Racing Ireland prior to this loan being extended. [41357/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 178 and 179 together.

Horse Racing Ireland (HRI) is a commercial State Body responsible for the overall admin-

istration, promotion and development of the horse racing industry.

This matter dates back to 2006 when Horse Racing Ireland were under the aegis of the Department of Sport. It is an operational matter for HRI, and the sanction of the Minister is not required for normal capital investment grants.

I have made enquires and HRI has informed me that in relation to grant funding applications by Dundalk Racecourse, a Certificate of Title was previously provided to their solicitors confirming good and marketable title to the property held by Dundalk Race Company Limited. This is underpinned by a Deed dated 16th day of August 1920 and made in favour of Dundalk Race Company Limited.

A racecourse capital development grant was provided to Dundalk Racecourse in relation to the development of their facilities (with matching funding provided by other parties). As part of this grant, HRI sought and was provided a shareholding in Dundalk Racecourse which broadly matches the term of the grant. No loan was provided by HRI.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Payments

180. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if an ANC payment will issue to a person (details supplied). [41442/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named submitted a 2018 Basic Payment/Areas of Natural Constraint Schemes application on the 30th March 2018. EU Regulations governing the administration of these schemes require that full and comprehensive administrative checks, including in some cases remote sensing (i.e. satellite) inspections, be completed before any payments issue.

The application of the person named was selected for a Remote Sensing eligibility inspection. This inspection is currently being processed with the intention of issuing any payments due as soon as possible. In the event that any queries arise, officials in my Department will be in contact with the person named.

Poultry Industry

181. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to amend the scheme of grant aid towards the provision or upgrading of poultry units to include turkey grow houses, which are excluded at present from grant aid; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41490/18]

182. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if grant aid will be introduced towards the provision of new or upgraded poultry units for turkeys in view of the potential of growing this particular market and substitute for imports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41491/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 181 and 182 together.

The poultry sector plays a very important role within the Irish agri-food sector, supporting approximately 6,000 jobs, mainly in rural areas.

Irish production reached record levels in 2017, with 95.5 m birds slaughtered in export-

approved plants. This was an increase of 3.9% compared to 2016, with most of the increase evident in broiler and duck production. To the end of September 2018, Irish poultry production has continued to rise, increasing by 1.8m birds, or 2.6% compared to last year.

The value of Irish poultry exports in 2017 increased by 3% to an estimated €278 million (CSO trade data), with the United Kingdom accounting for some 80% of this figure in value terms. Other EU markets now account for almost 10% of Irish exports, with France leading the way. Growth has also been evident in trade with Scandinavia and Spain. Exports to third country markets now amount to 10% of export totals, with South Africa showing the biggest growth for Irish exporters.

The Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014 – 2020 provides key supports for the development and the competitiveness of the Irish poultry sector. The key areas for support in the RDP for the poultry sector include support for on-farm capital investment under the Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme II (TAMS II) and knowledge transfer and innovation measures, aimed at underpinning farm viability, sustainability and growth through the adoption of best practice and innovative solutions. These programmes will continue to be the main area of support for the poultry sector.

The investments for the Poultry Sector covered in the PPIS Scheme of TAMS II focus on energy efficient measures such as heat recovery units, solar panels, feed system upgrades, energy efficient upgrades for Poultry houses including insulation, ventilation fans and replacement concrete floors for temperature control. Fixed in water medicine dispensers and water meters are also included in the investment items allowable under the Scheme, as are disease reduction facilities for existing poultry houses.

The Scheme is open to farmers who (i) generate a minimum of 20 production units from farming and (ii) who have a Department identifier. The calculation of Production Units for Intensive Enterprises includes, for Turkeys (fattening), a rate of 3.0 units per 1000 bird places.

Greyhound Industry

183. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if action is being taken, including the withdrawal of an animal transportation licence in relation to a person (details supplied). [41513/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department has recently become aware of the report of the Disciplinary Committee of the Greyhound Board of Great Britain regarding the individual referred to. I have asked my Department to investigate the matter and the outcome will be communicated to the Deputy in due course.

Fur Farming

184. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a ban on fur farming will be introduced in 2018 in view of the growing level of support for an end to fur farming and the increasing list of countries banning it. [41514/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department has statutory responsibility for the welfare and protection of farmed animals under the European Communities (Welfare of Farmed Animals) Regulations, 2010(Statutory Instrument No 311/2010) and the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013. Irish fur farmers are, in this regard,

subject to the same animal welfare legislation as other livestock farmers.

A review of all aspects of fur farming in Ireland was commissioned in November 2011. The Terms of Reference of the Review Group were:

- (i) To review fur farming in Ireland taking into account existing legislative provisions for the licensing of mink farming;
- (ii) To comment on the economic benefits of the sector;
- (iii) To consider the effectiveness of existing welfare controls, and
- (iv) To make appropriate recommendations

The Review Group invited submissions from the public and interested parties and considered over four hundred submissions which were received.

The Group concluded that it did not find the arguments in favour of banning the farming of fur animals in Ireland compelling and recommended that instead, fur farming be allowed continue under licence and subject to official control. I accept the findings of the review group and its recommendations.

On foot of the Review Group's deliberations, my Department introduced more rigorous controls on licence holders in the areas of animal welfare, animal accommodation, security and nutrient management. Licensees are subject to regular inspections, including unannounced inspections by Department officials.

Notwithstanding the position in other countries, given the recommendations from the review group, there are no plans to introduce a ban on fur farming.

Greyhound Industry

185. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the subsidising of greyhound tracks with public funds will cease in view of falling attendances at greyhound tracks, the significant financial losses at tracks and the ongoing injuries and deaths suffered by greyhounds. [41515/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Bord na gCon (BnG) is a commercial State Body established in 1958 under the Greyhound Industry Act, 1958, chiefly to control greyhound racing and to improve and develop the greyhound industry.

A report by Economist Jim Power in November 2017 calculates there are 5,058 full and part-time jobs within the sector, with a further 7,313 greyhound owners deriving economic benefit from the industry. The impact of this employment creates €171 million in additional spending while the greyhound owners contribute €135 million in spending. The national industry therefore contributes €300 million in additional economic activity. For these reasons I have no plans to cease funding for the sector.

BnG has assured me that regulation and welfare are a high priority for the Board with €2 million being spent in these areas in 2017.

In September 2018 BnG announced that a comprehensive, strategic review into the future needs of its 16 licensed stadia to determine the industry footprint of the future is to take place. The review is an integral part of the BnG's Strategic Plan 2018-2022, which was published

earlier this year.

BnG's five year strategic plan also puts animal welfare at the centre of the industry.

BnG has informed me that so far in 2018, 42 welfare inspections and 302 Inspections of greyhound establishments - including trainers' kennels and schooling tracks – have been carried out nationwide.

The Government recently approved the Greyhound Industry Bill 2018, which will further improve governance and regulation in the greyhound industry. This legislative framework will allow Bord na gCon to maintain the very positive welfare initiatives that are already in place, as well as implement further progressive measures to allay any public concerns that may exist on welfare within the industry. This Bill, when enacted, will add to existing legislation making the greyhound the most regulated of all canine breeds.

Animal Culls

186. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a badger vaccination programme announced earlier in 2018 has commenced; and his plans to end the culling of badgers which has caused an estimated 120,000 deaths to date. [41516/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Field trials testing the effectiveness of badger vaccination as an alternative to removal were conducted from 2014 to 2017 in areas where the wildlife program had been running in excess of 5 years and where local densities of badgers were considered low enough to be suitable candidates for vaccination with BCG. The findings confirmed that vaccination of badgers can play a role in reducing the level of infection in cattle. From January 2018 the formal vaccination programme commenced in the areas which formed part of the field trials, i.e. in parts of counties Monaghan, Longford, Galway, Tipperary, Waterford, Kilkenny, Cork and in all of Louth. Badgers in a vaccination area will be captured/vaccinated/released instead of being captured/culled. The vaccination program will continue on an annual basis, so each year's births in vaccination areas will be vaccinated as they are captured. The vaccination area will be expanded incrementally to all parts of the country during the 2018-2022 period and it is anticipated that the rate of badger removal will reduce from the present c.6000 badgers per year to less than 1,000 in c.4-5 years' time.

National Broadband Plan

187. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the contingency plans in the event that the remaining bid for the national broadband plan is deemed untenable by the procurement team or otherwise becomes inoperable; the estimated costs of the NBP; the cost to date of the tendering process undertaking; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41487/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The final tender for the contract to roll out the National Broadband Plan State intervention was received by my Department on 18 September and this is the final stage in the procurement process. Evaluation of that tender submission is ongoing and will be allowed the time required. I do not propose to speculate on the outcome of that ongoing evaluation. On conclusion of the evaluation, my Department will make a recommendation to me on whether to appoint the bidder as preferred bidder and I will bring the matter to Government for decision.

The level of subsidy required to bring high speed broadband services to citizens and businesses in the NBP State intervention area will be determined through the procurement process.

The procurement process was launched in December 2015.

Expenditure on external advisors in support of the NBP procurement process from January 2016 to date is approximately €18.05 million. This expenditure includes the cost of corporate and economic advice, technical support and network design, the cost of legal advice, environmental advice and process auditor costs. These services were procured by way of competitive tender.

Broadband Service Provision

188. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when high-speed broadband will be installed in the Corrigeenroe, Boyle, County Roscommon; the timeline for same; if the work will involve running broadband boxes on poles from the exchange in Boyle; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41268/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): In April 2017 I published an updated High Speed Broadband Map which is available at www.broadband.gov.ie. This map shows the areas targeted by commercial operators to provide high speed broadband services and the areas that will be included in the State Intervention Area under the National Broadband Plan.

There are 65 premises in Aghacarra (Corrigeenroe). 14 (22%) fall within the AMBER area and therefore will be served under the State led Intervention, while 51 (78%) are LIGHT BLUE and fall to be served by eir's planned rural deployment.

Under a Commitment Agreement signed with me in April 2017, eir is in the process of passing 300,000 predominantly rural homes with high speed broadband. Approximately 175,000 of the committed premises have been passed as of Q2 2018.

According to my Department's map, eir's deployment has yet to reach Aghacarra (Corrigeenroe). Further details on eir's deployment are available at www.fibrerollout.ie. The manner of the deployment within the LIGHT BLUE area is a matter for eir.

My Department is in a formal procurement process to select a company who will roll out a new high speed broadband network in the State intervention area. The procurement process to appoint a bidder for the State intervention network is now at the final stage. Evaluation of the final tender submission is ongoing and will be allowed the time required. On conclusion of the evaluation, my Department will make a recommendation to me on whether to appoint the bidder as preferred bidder and I will bring the matter to Government for decision.

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>

Electricity Grid

189. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will make contact with ESB networks in order to identify a person within the company that Deputies can contact to highlight local issues with regard to upgrade works that need to be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41290/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Queries relating to ESB Networks local issues with regards to upgrade works that need to be completed are dealt with in the first instance by the Public Affairs Manager of ESB. I have arranged for the relevant contact details to be communicated to the Deputy.

Electricity Generation

190. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to increase the level of grant aid in budget 2019 for domestic solar energy systems; and his further plans to reduce the current average nine year wait time for a return on investment to a more attractive five year payback period. [41422/18]

191. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to introduce an incentive scheme in budget 2019 to subsidise the cost of connecting agriculture solar energy suppliers to the ESB Networks grid in order to incentivise producers to contribute non-storable surplus to the grid in the absence of export tariffs for the supply of solar energy for same. [41423/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 190 and 191 together.

In July 2018, I announced details of a new pilot scheme to support micro generation, initially targeting solar PV, homeowners, battery storage 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.

The payback period depends on several factors like the direction and accessibility of a dwelling's roof, the location in the country, and the amount currently paid by the occupier of the property for electricity. Using a typical system of 1.5kWp, each applicant would get a grant of €1,050 and save about €200 a year in electricity costs. On average this would give a payback of around 9 years.

The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) has structured this grant support based on detailed analysis of costs and willingness to pay research, and the grant level (30-35% overall installation costs) is in line with other grants offered by the SEAI. It is in the interest of each homeowner to increase self-consumption of the generated solar energy in the home, and by linking the additional grant scheme with battery storage, the scheme is tailored to encourage

this.

The scheme will be subject to a six month review which will examine the uptake and the level of the grant, assess the costs associated with the technology and explore opportunities for broadening the scheme as appropriate. My Department is continuing to work closely with the micro-generation sector and the SEAI to better understand how to validate and further develop these policies in a fair and cost effective manner.

Micro generation, was also appraised as part of the Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) economic assessment. The analysis identified a number of challenges that may need to be addressed before a financial support scheme (payment) for micro generation can be developed. These include a reform of network charges, an assessment of the distributional impact of such a policy decision on the PSO (cost burden sharing), and development of a fair tariff for exported electricity taking the benefits of self-consumption into account. This approach is in line with experience from other EU member states who have attempted to introduce supports for micro generation.

The Deputy will appreciate that in developing and expanding renewable energy support schemes that a careful balance must be struck between the subsidy to renewable generators and the additional costs to pay for these schemes that are transferred to electricity bill payers. Proposals for all such schemes are and must be subject to careful economic appraisal.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

192. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the monitoring undertaken of the roll-out of broadband in the DARK BLUE areas of the national broadband plan map; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41429/18]

193. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the deadline for the roll-out of broadband to the DARK BLUE areas of the national broadband plan map; if a previous deadline was in place; if this deadline was reviewed; the reason for the review; the changes to each deadline put in place since publication of the map; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41430/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 192 and 193 together.

My Department engaged in an extensive mapping exercise during 2013 and 2014 to determine the extent of existing and planned high speed broadband networks in Ireland. The aim was to identify premises which were not, or would not in the near future, be commercially served with high speed broadband. Based on this work, a High Speed Broadband Map was published in December 2015. The latest version of this map is available at www.broadband.gov.ie.

The AMBER Area of the Map represents the parts of the country where commercial operators had no plans to deliver high speed broadband services. This is the State intervention area, and delivery of high speed broadband will be achieved through the State Intervention. The procurement process to appoint a company to build, operate and maintain a network in the intervention area is now in its final stages.

The BLUE area of the Map represents the parts of the country where commercial operators are delivering or have indicated to my Department that they have plans to deliver high speed broadband services.

My Department also published a process document which set out that the Map may be subject to change if, for example, anticipated commercial deployment failed to materialise or if new plans were presented to the Department and satisfied the criteria as set out in that process document.

Since December 2015 my Department has continued to monitor the progress of the rollout of high speed broadband for all operators who were included in the BLUE Area on the Map.

Through direct engagement with operators and further investigation of specific issues, in April 2017 my Department identified 84,500 premises in the Blue Area that were not being served with high speed broadband and these premises were then included in the State intervention area.

My Department continues to actively monitor high speed broadband rollout by commercial operators. I have advised previously that people who are experiencing difficulty in receiving a high speed broadband service within BLUE areas should notify my Department in this regard. I continue to invite members of the public to highlight issues regarding broadband connection in BLUE areas by contacting the NBP customer service team at broadband@dcae.gov.ie, or on 01 678 2160.

North-South Interconnector

194. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the course of action he plans to take in respect of the North-South interconnector project having considered the two independent reports; and if he will support an over ground or an underground option of the pylon project. [41486/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I commissioned two independent reports dealing with the North-South Interconnector (NSIC) following engagement with members of the Oireachtas and community interests. These were considered by Government earlier this month and are available on my Department's website. One considers the technical feasibility and cost of undergrounding the NSIC, while the second addresses comparative international practice and approaches to compensation of property owners in proximity to high-voltage lines.

On the technical feasibility and cost of undergrounding, the report concludes that from a techno-economic point of view, an Alternating Current Overhead Line is the most beneficial way of meeting the need for enhanced power transfer capability between Ireland and Northern Ireland. An overhead line provides the opportunity for investment along the route of the line and offers a far more balanced electricity network across this country and across this island.

On the report into the comparative international practice in relation to compensation, that report indicates that Ireland has a comparatively generous compensation regime in place.

In addition to publishing the reports on my Department's website, I have forwarded copies of the two Reports to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Communications, Climate Action and Environment.

The development of the interconnector is an operational matter for EirGrid and ESB Networks.

Warmer Homes Scheme

195. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the grounds on which the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, SEAI, will provide free window replacements under the warmer homes scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41494/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Warmer Homes Scheme is funded by my Department and administered by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI). The scheme delivers a range of energy efficiency measures free of charge to low income households vulnerable to energy poverty, who meet the defined eligibility criteria. Typical measures available under the scheme include attic and cavity wall insulation, draught proofing, lagging jackets and low energy light bulbs. These measures were selected for inclusion in the scheme as they were deemed most likely to deliver significant energy savings to homeowners, at least relative cost, and would thereby optimise the use of Exchequer funds while at the same time maximising the opportunities for homeowner participation.

Earlier this year I expanded the measures available under this scheme to include dry lining and external wall insulation. These new measures will increase the number of households that can avail of the scheme. Subject to an SEAI survey, replacement windows may be offered in limited circumstances, most likely where external wall insulation is being carried out and the existing windows are very poor performing and need to be replaced to ensure the insulation performs effectively.

More information on this scheme is available on SEAI's website or by Freephone 1800 250 204.

<https://www.seai.ie/grants/home-grants/warmer-homes-scheme/>

Climate Change Policy

196. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the actions he has taken or plans to take to address priorities in regard to climate action; the extent to which such action taken or proposed is likely to impact positively in the context of climate change; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41496/18]

198. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the steps he is most likely to undertake to achieve maximum beneficial effect in the context of carbon reduction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41498/18]

199. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the extent to which dependency on fossil fuels has been reduced in the past three years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41499/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 196, 198 and 199 together.

Addressing climate change, whether through decarbonisation of our economy, or preparing to adapt to the impacts of climate change, is one of the most significant challenges facing this country.

The publication on Monday of the Special Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C confirms the absolute urgency of achieving deep cuts in our greenhouse gas emissions over the coming decades.

The Government has responded to this challenge by putting in place a strong policy framework underpinned by significant investment plans in climate action. The 2014 National Policy Position on Climate Action and Low Carbon Development sets out an ambitious long-term commitment to transition to a competitive, low carbon, climate resilient economy and to reduce carbon dioxide emissions in Ireland by at least 80% (compared to 1990 levels) by 2050 across the electricity generation, built environment and transport sectors. In parallel, the National Policy Position commits to pursuing an approach to carbon neutrality in the agriculture and land-use sector, including forestry, which does not compromise capacity for sustainable food production.

The enactment, in December 2015, of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act, provides the statutory basis for the national transition objective, for the development and submission to Government for approval of a series of National Mitigation Plans and National Adaptation Frameworks, and for independent advisory and Oireachtas accountability arrangements.

Ireland's first National Mitigation Plan was published in July 2017 and provides a framework to guide Government investment decisions in measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from four key sectors: Electricity Generation; Built Environment; Transport; and Agriculture, Forestry and Land Use.

The Plan set out 106 actions and 60 measures to reduce our emissions. It is a 'living document' which is being updated on an on-going basis as analysis, dialogue and technological innovation generate more and more cost-effective sectoral mitigation options.

I subsequently published Ireland's first statutory National Adaptation Framework in January 2018. Under the Framework, seven Government Departments and Agencies, with responsibility for the twelve priority sectors identified in the Framework, are required to submit sectoral adaptation plans to Government for approval by 30 September 2019.

Furthermore, recognising the significant obligation which has been placed on the Local Authority sector to develop and implement its own climate action measures, I provided funding to establish and develop four Local Authority Climate Action Regional Offices. These offices will ensure links between sectors and provide expertise and capacity at local and regional level to contribute effectively to the national transition to a low carbon and climate resilient economy.

The publication of the National Development Plan in February of this year represented a step-change in the Government's commitment to climate change, with €21.8 billion in funding directed to addressing the transition to a low-carbon society. This is in addition to major further investment of €8.6 billion in sustainable transport, including the DART expansion, Metro Link and the Bus Connects programme. This capital investment will enable us to deliver a significant reduction in our greenhouse gas emissions over the period to 2030. I am taking a number of immediate steps to achieve maximum emissions reduction to seek to address Ireland's targets for 2020 and to prepare us for the more challenging targets that Ireland will face for 2030.

In relation to biofuels, in May of this year, I signed an order increasing the obligation rate of fuel suppliers from the current level of 8% by volume to a level of 10% by volume which will come into effect from 1 January 2019. I intend to further increase this obligation to 11% by volume from 1 January 2020 and also carry out a public consultation next year in relation to further increases in the post-2020 period.

In order to promote further penetration of electric vehicles, I have secured Government support to expand the range of measures in place drive the electrification of transport, adding home charger support, Benefit in kind enhancement, toll reduction and support to the taxi/hackney sector.

I opened the first phase of the Support Scheme for Renewable Heat for applications on 12 September. This phase provides a grant of up to 30% of the installation cost of a heat pump system in non-domestic applications.

I launched the first call for applications for the Climate Action Fund on 9 July. This is one of four funds established under the National Development Plan 2018-2027 as part of Project Ireland 2040 and it will have an allocation of at least €500 million over the period to 2027.

I secured Government approval in July for the high level design of the new Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS). The new Scheme has been designed to deliver Ireland's contribution towards an EU-wide renewable energy target of 32% out to 2030, within a competitive auction-based, cost effective framework. The first RESS auction will deliver 'shovel ready' projects, reducing the gap to 2020 and assisting in the early delivery for our trajectory to 2030.

In relation to the reduction in Ireland's dependency on fossil fuels, the latest available data, published in the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland report, Energy in Ireland 2016, indicates that total displacement of fossil fuels by renewable energy resulted in approximately €342 million in fossil fuel imports being avoided in 2016, leading to a saving of 3.9 million tonnes of CO₂. The overall trend in the contribution of renewable energy to total energy use over the past three years, relative to Ireland's targets for 2020, is set out in the following table.

Sector/Sub-sector	2015 achieved %	2016 achieved %	2017 achieved %*	2020 target %
RES-E (Electricity)	25.3	27.2	30.1	40
RES-H (Heat)	6.6	6.8	6.8	12
RES-T (Transport)	5.7	5.0	7.1	10
RES Overall	9.1	9.5	10.6	16

*Percentages are provisional data from SEAI.

Alternative Energy Projects

197. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when it is expected that wind, hydro or solar alternative energy production methods are likely to reach the required level to ensure grid reliability; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41497/18]

207. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the degree to which his Department has evaluated the potential for alternative generating capacity to meet in full or as near as possible thereto to meet the requirements of the grid; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41507/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 197 and 207 together.

Ireland's statutory National Transmission System Operator (TSO), EirGrid, has a key role in planning for the development of the electricity transmission system to meet the future needs of society. This involves detailed analysis of electricity demand, electricity supply, electricity storage and interconnection, and locations of electricity demand and supply. A process is currently underway to consider a range of possible ways that energy usage may change in the future, and a series of scenarios are central to an extensive consultation that is being undertaken, covering four scenarios; Steady Evolution, Low Carbon Living, Slow Change, and Consumer Action. Details of this process, termed Tomorrow's Energy Scenarios are available at <http://www.eir-gridgroup.com/customer-and-industry/energy-future/>

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

The most recent annual data from the SEAI indicates that 30.1% of electricity, 6.9% of heat and 7.2% of transport energy requirements were met from renewable sources at end 2017. Overall, SEAI analysis shows that 10.6% of Ireland's energy requirements in 2017 were met from renewable sources, and that the projected 2020 outturn is in a potential range of up to 90% of the target.

Government has adopted a range of further policy measures and schemes to further incentivise the use of renewable energy including the new Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS), Support Scheme for Renewable Heat (SSRH), and increased biofuels obligation and supports for electric vehicles. In addition, ESB Networks has expanded capacity for delivery of grid connection and My Department has strengthened co-ordination with the Commission for Regulation of Utilities, EirGrid and ESB Networks.

Questions Nos. 198 and 199 answered with Question No. 196.

Energy Policy

200. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the extent to which an economic evaluation has been carried out of a shift away from dependency on fossil fuels here without reliance on imports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41500/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Timely and reliable energy statistics underpin evidence-based decision making. The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) work closely with my Department and present a comprehensive overview of energy supply and demand in Ireland to inform Government policy.

The SEAI has a lead role in developing and maintaining comprehensive national and sectoral statistics for energy production, transformation, and end-use. This data is a vital input in meeting international reporting obligations, for advising policymakers, and informing investment decisions.

The SEAI have a specialist statistics team, the Energy Policy Statistical Support Unit (EPSSU), whose core functions include the collection, processing, and publishing of energy statistics to support policy analysis and development in line with national needs and international obligations; conducting statistical and economic analysis of energy services sectors and sustainable energy options; and contributing to the development and promulgation of appropriate sustainability indicators.

As part of this work the SEAI publishes an annual "*Energy in Ireland*" Report which presents national energy statistics on energy production and consumption over a set period. The latest available Report is the 2017 Report which covers the period 1990-2016. The 2018 Report, covering 1990-2017, is expected to be published in December this year.

The Report shows that Ireland has a high import dependence on oil and gas and is essentially a price taker on these commodities. However in 2016 Ireland's energy import bill fell by €1.2 billion because of a reduction in fossil fuel imports. While most of this reduction in fossil fuel

imports was due to a reduction in natural gas imports, thanks to the Corrib gas field reaching full production, the contribution of renewables avoided 3.9 million tonnes of CO₂ emissions and saved €342 million in fossil fuel imports.

Climate Change Policy

201. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the measures he has taken or plans to take to address the issues identified by climatologists as being the most relevant and necessary to address in the short to medium term; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41501/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I understand from the Deputy's question that "the issues identified by climatologists" are those referring to the impacts of climate change. This week's publication of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's Special Report on the Impacts of Global Warming of 1.5°C confirms that impacts due to past and current emissions are inevitable and we must prepare for them. The report states that we are already seeing the consequences of 1°C of global warming through more extreme weather, rising sea levels and diminishing Arctic sea ice, among other changes.

The impacts for Ireland are in line with what we are seeing globally. In 2017 the EPA published its second "State of Knowledge" report on climate change impacts for Ireland. While uncertainties remain on the exact scale of the impacts, it is becoming apparent that trends in the temperature and precipitation records as well as those relating to sea level and ecosystems are a cause for concern and that these trends are set to continue.

In January of this year I published Ireland's first statutory National Adaptation Framework (NAF) which represents our national policy response to the challenges posed by the impacts of climate change. The Framework sets out the context to ensure local authorities, regions and sectors can assess the key risks and vulnerabilities of climate change, implement climate resilience actions, and ensure climate adaptation considerations are mainstreamed into all local, regional and national policy making.

Under the Framework, seven Government Departments with responsibility for twelve priority sectors are required to prepare sectoral adaptation plans in line with the requirements of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015. The deadline for the submission of sectoral adaptation plans to Government for approval is 30 September 2019.

Local understanding is also crucial to getting adaptation right and my Department has made a funding commitment of €10 million over five years to establish four local authority Climate Action Regional Offices (CAROs). These offices will underpin a risk-based approach to climate action at the local and regional level and will provide a coordinated response to climate change, both in terms of adaptation and mitigation. Local authorities are also required to have local authority adaptation strategies in place by 30 September next year. To assist these key sectors with their respective planning processes I published "Sectoral Planning Guidelines for Climate Change Adaptation" in May of this year and later this year I intend to publish revised climate adaptation planning guidance for local authorities.

Adaptation planning is an iterative process, with the National Adaptation Framework to be reviewed at least once every five years in line with the 2015 Climate Act. This will ensure that we adopt a dynamic approach to adaptation planning which is informed by the latest scientific evidence thus enabling Departments, Agencies and local authorities to modify or escalate adap-

tation actions as appropriate as climate projections are updated.

Broadband Service Provision

202. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he remains satisfied in regard to the programme to deliver high quality high-speed broadband on par with the best available internationally through all areas throughout the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41502/18]

203. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of households provided with adequate broadband facilities throughout the country; his plans to extend services to current or anticipated black spots; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41503/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 202 and 203 together.

The Government's National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to ensure high speed broadband access (minimum 30 megabits per second) to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location. The NBP is being achieved through a combination of commercial investment and a State intervention.

Over the past 5 years, the NBP has driven commercial investment in the upgrade and expansion of networks to the tune of some €2.75 billion. When this Government came into office in 2016 just over 5 out of 10 premises in Ireland had access to a high speed broadband service. Today over 7 out of 10 premises can access this service.

In Kildare 84% of premises now have access to a high speed broadband service in comparison with 75% in 2016. This number will rise in the coming months as an ongoing commercial deployment by eir continues.

For those premises that will not be served commercially, the State is in the process of engaging a company to build a high speed broadband network. The procurement process to appoint a bidder for the State intervention network is now at the final stage.

Evaluation of the final tender submission is ongoing and will be allowed the time required. On conclusion of the evaluation, my Department will make a recommendation to me on whether to appoint the bidder as preferred bidder and I will bring the matter to Government for decision.

The Intervention Strategy for the NBP sets out minimum required speeds in line with the Digital Agenda for Europe 2020. I understand from my Department that the NBP State intervention network is likely to be a predominantly fibre network, meaning most premises can expect a basic introductory offering of up to 150 megabits per second download, with higher speeds of up to 1 gigabit per second download also available.

The State intervention network, when complete, will push Ireland to the forefront of connectivity, both on an EU and an international level.

Mobile Telephony Services

204. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if directly or through the aegis of the regulator he can identify or audit

particular areas throughout the country that do not have adequate mobile telephone coverage or quality; his plans to address same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41504/18]

205. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the reason mobile telephone customers in all areas throughout the country cannot have a service on par to the quality service in Europe; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41505/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 204 and 205 together.

Providing telecommunications services, including mobile phone services, is a matter for the relevant service providers operating in a fully liberalised market regulated by the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg), as independent Regulator. I do not have statutory authority to require commercial companies to rollout services and make specific investments in particular locations. The ComReg consumer helpline is accessible at consumerline@comreg.ie and I would urge consumers who feel they have not received an appropriate response from service providers to make contact with the Regulator.

With respect to the quality of mobile telephony service in other countries, comparisons between Member States and within regions can be problematic for many reasons, including the fact that the technical characteristics of mobile phone networks that determine coverage and capacity will vary between operators and locations. Other factors would include the characteristics of individual markets, including topography, population density, frequencies used etc.

Notwithstanding ComReg's independence, I recognise the frustration felt by Irish consumers where telecommunications networks are not always delivering the services people expect. Accordingly, I specifically included in the Programme for Government a commitment to a Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce. The Taskforce worked with key stakeholders to produce a report in December 2016, available on my Department's website, which contained 40 actions to alleviate some of the deficits. The Implementation Group I co-chair with Minister Kyne is overseeing implementation of the actions and comprises all key stakeholders responsible for delivery. This includes ComReg, which attends as both an action owner, and in an observer capacity in its role as the independent Regulator.

Minister Kyne and I published the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce Implementation Review 2017 on 21 February 2018, which comprehensively outlines the progress made in 2017 on the actions identified by the Taskforce. Of the 40 actions, 29 have been completed, with work on the remaining 11 carrying into the 2018 Work Programme. Following close engagement with stakeholders at the National Stakeholder Forum, an additional 23 new measures have been identified for delivery in 2018, that will lead to improvements for consumers across Ireland.

With respect to identifying the areas across the country that do not have adequate coverage, both my Department and the Department of Rural and Community Development have worked with a pilot group of local authorities to identify the issues associated with mapping local blackspots. This pilot exercise has been completed, with all local authorities having been asked to map local blackspots and identify infrastructure that could potentially be used to provide additional coverage on an economic basis. This exercise is ongoing, and has been included in the 2018 Taskforce Work Programme.

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

- Both Departments have worked to achieve a greater consensus around site selection for

telecoms infrastructure and therefore improve mobile phone coverage.

- A focus group was established to provide guidance with respect to categories of location where high quality reliable mobile coverage should be made available as a priority. The report of the focus group was published on my Department's website on 31 August 2018. It is anticipated that the output of the focus group should influence the actions of the mobile network operators in their work to reduce mobile phone blackspots. It will also inform future policy in my Department with regards to priorities for mobile phone services.

- A working group has been established with the remit of investigating the feasibility of developing standardised policy for accessing and utilising State and publicly-owned assets for the deployment of telecommunications infrastructure.

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

- Following a consultation process ComReg has developed a licensing scheme which will enable households and businesses to use mobile phone repeaters to boost signals into their premises and bring immediate improvements in mobile coverage.

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

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

Electricity Generation

206. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the combined electricity generating capacity of solar energy farms for which planning permission has been granted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41506/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The question regarding planning permission is a matter for the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government and I have no function in this area. Planning applications for solar farms are generally made to the relevant local planning authority with a right of appeal to An Bord Pleanála.

However, from a grid connection application perspective, the most recent data indicates that at present, there are 682 solar applications at the distributional level (DSO) and 36 solar applications at the transmission level (TSO), at various stages in the grid connection application process. These applications amount to 4,770 Megawatts and 2,110 Megawatts respectively or 6,880 Megawatts in total. These would be at various stages of the planning application process.

Question No. 207 answered with Question No. 197.

Energy Policy

208. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to ensure security of electricity supply in a switch from fossil fuels to alternative energy without increased dependency on imports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41508/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Ireland's energy policy is fully aligned with the EU's climate and energy objectives on the transition to decarbonisation, which includes continuous and on-going review of policies to reduce harmful emissions, improve energy efficiency, incentivise efficient and sustainable infrastructure investment, integrate markets, and promote research and innovation while ensuring our energy security of supply is maintained and enhanced. As Ireland develops its indigenous renewable energy sources, our reliance on imports will decrease and this contributes to enhancing our energy security.

The 2015 Energy White Paper *Ireland's Transition to a Low Carbon Energy Future* sets out a road-map for Ireland to reduce its Greenhouse gas emissions by 80-95% by 2050. The strategy is clear that non-renewable energy sources will make a significant – though progressively smaller – contribution to our energy mix over the course of the energy transition. The National Mitigation Plan, which I published in July 2017, restates the Government's commitment to move from a fossil fuel-based electricity system to a low-carbon power system. Investment in further renewable generation will be incentivised.

During this transition, some fossil fuels such as natural gas will continue to play a role in terms of enhanced security of supply. Natural gas also has the potential to play an important role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the power generation, industrial and commercial, residential and transport sectors by replacing more CO₂-intensive fossil fuels. In Ireland gas powered generation provides an important back-up for intermittent renewable wind generation.

Electricity Generation

209. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the extent to which the economic benefits accruing to the economy from a switch to home based alternative electricity generation have been identified; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41509/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) work closely with my Department and present a comprehensive overview of energy supply and demand in Ireland to inform Government policy. As part of their work, the SEAI publishes an annual "*Energy in Ireland*" Report which presents national energy statistics on energy production and consumption over a set period. The latest available Report is the 2017 Report which covers the period 1990-2016. The 2018 Report, covering 1990-2017, is expected to be published in December this year.

The Report shows that Ireland has a high import dependence on oil and gas and is essentially a price taker on these commodities. However in 2016 Ireland's energy import bill fell by €1.2 billion because of a reduction in fossil fuel imports. While most of this reduction in fossil fuel imports was due to a reduction in natural gas imports thanks to the Corrib gas field reaching full production the contribution of renewables avoided 3.9 million tonnes of CO₂ emissions and saved €342 million in fossil fuel imports. The use of renewables in electricity generation in 2016 avoided €192 million in fossil fuel imports with the provisional saving for 2017 at €276 million.

THE SEAI have also modelled the impact that meeting our renewable electricity targets will have on the Irish economy. Their analysis presents the net new direct jobs (from technology installations), indirect jobs (created in supply chains), induced jobs (from increased consumption), and jobs linked to increased investment in capital stock in the year 2020. Their analysis identified that renewable electricity generation (primarily onshore wind) has a positive impact on the Irish economy and net employment by 2020 with a total of 4,400 net jobs created in 2020. These include over 2,000 direct jobs in construction related to onshore wind with over 500 ongoing direct jobs in operations and maintenance. The remaining jobs are in the supply chain and as a result of higher expenditure in the wider economy. The analysis further suggests that GDP could increase by between €305-€585 million as a result of building new wind farms and the expansion of the electricity grid, by 2020.

Environmental Policy

210. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if a means can be found to incentivise a reduction in the use of plastic wrappings and containers that are non-biodegradable; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41510/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Ireland uses the Extended Producer Responsibility model for dealing with waste packaging. Repak, the national producer responsibility scheme for packaging, is a not for profit organisation which charges fees to its members in accordance with the amount and type of packaging they place on the Irish market. These fees are used to subsidise the collection and recovery of waste packaging through registered recovery operators across Ireland. Because Repak members pay fees based on the amount of packaging they place on the market, this incentivises them to reduce packaging where possible and in so doing to reduce their fees. To assist members to optimise their packaging, Repak employ packaging technologists who work with their member companies.

In addition to the above, I am working closely with the EU Commission and other Member States to develop an EU wide legislative package for dealing with single-use plastic products. While we continue to work on the detail of the measures to be introduced, the following are the core elements:

- A ban on certain plastic products
- Targets for reducing the use of certain plastics and
- Obligations for producers to cover the costs of waste management and clean up.

I will be encouraging the Commission and other Member States to expedite the introduction of these measures so that we can introduce meaningful measures to tackle these difficult waste streams.

Waste Disposal

211. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the extent to which landfill sites are being replaced with alternative means of waste disposal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41511/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis

Naughten): European, national and regional waste policy are all predicated on the management of waste in line with the waste hierarchy, whereby the prevention, preparation for re-use, recycling and other recovery of waste are preferred (in that order) to the disposal of waste. For instance, collectors of waste must conduct their activities in accordance with the relevant legislation and the conditions of their waste collection permits which, *inter alia*, require that waste is managed in line with the waste hierarchy.

Waste management planning, including infrastructure provision, is the responsibility of local authorities under Part II of the Waste Management Act, 1996. The three Waste Management Planning Lead Authorities monitor on an on-going basis the generation and management nationally of municipal solid waste and other waste streams. Under section 60(3) of the Waste Management Act 1996, I am precluded from exercising any power or control in relation to the performance, in specific cases, by a local authority of their statutory functions under the Act.

The Government's policy of increasing the landfill levy to its current level of €75 per tonne has provided a real financial incentive for waste operators to divert as much material as possible from being disposed of at landfill. The success of the above and many other policy and legislative measures, including the National Waste Prevention Programme and the phasing-out of flat rate fees for household waste collection, which encourage waste prevention, preparation for re-use, recycling and other recovery, has meant that more waste can be put to environmentally sustainable and productive use as opposed to being buried in the ground.

Up until November 2017, different household waste collectors accepted different items for recycling, which lead to some confusion on which items go in which bin. Now, however, following co-operation between my Department, the regulatory authorities, the waste industry, Repak and environmental NGOs, we have a single, standard national list of items and materials that can be placed in the recycling bin. Removing confusion will play an important role in improving the quality of the waste presented for recycling. This will help to ensure that these items are actually recycled, as opposed to being contaminated accidentally by householders and sent to landfill. Supporting householders in terms of recycling is important. Householders are also being supported through a number of awareness and education initiatives such as the *Recycling Ambassadors Programme* and *recyclinglistireland.ie*.

Statistics compiled by the Environmental Protection Agency show that we have come a long way in a relatively short period of time in terms of improving our recycling and recovery rates and reducing our reliance on landfill. In this regard, National Waste Statistics are available to download at <https://www.epa.ie/nationalwastestatistics/>, including the State's progress in meeting targets under EU waste legislation including the Waste Framework Directive; the Landfill Directive; and the Producer Responsibility Directives (Packaging, End-of-Life Vehicles, Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment, Batteries and Accumulators).

Of particular note is the reduction in the disposal (landfill) rate of managed Municipal Solid Waste, which fell from 41% in 2012 to 21% in 2014. Furthermore, 79% of managed municipal waste was recovered in 2014 (compared to 59% in 2012). Recovery includes treatment processes such as recycling or use as a fuel (e.g. incineration which converts waste to energy or co-incineration, including the use of solid recovered fuel as part of the cement manufacturing process).

Cycling Policy

212. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the spending on cycling in each of the years 2015 to 2017 and to date in 2018 as a proportion of spending

on transport in general. [41399/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware, over the period 2018 to 2021, we will invest €110 million specifically for Cycling/Walking investment in our major cities, together with €135 million for Sustainable Urban Transport, a programme which encompasses a range of initiatives to improve urban transport including for cyclists and pedestrians. Alongside this, our considerable planned investment in the bus system through the new BusConnects programme - initially in Dublin and then followed by other cities - will also support the construction of, where possible, segregated cycle lanes along the improved bus corridors; the aim in Dublin is to deliver around 200 kilometres of quality cycling facilities as part of the bus upgrade. Beyond these urban initiatives, the Deputy will be aware that I have also allocated €53 million to support the development of new Greenways in line with the recently published Greenways Strategy.

The Deputy may be aware that investment in cycling infrastructure over the period 2015 to 2017 was actually delivered under a number of different programmes and schemes, namely the Smarter Travel Programme, Sustainable Transport Measures Grants (STMG) Programme and the Regional Cities Programme.

Projects funded under the Smarter Travel Programme involved integrated initiatives across a number of aspects of active/smarter travel and incorporated measures such as investment in cycle lanes, bike parking, footpaths, traffic calming measures, shared streets and other interventions that encourage and support modal shift to walking and cycling.

In addition since 2010 my Department has also provided funding to the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the Sustainable Transport Measures Grants (STMG) Programme and the Regional Cities Programme to implement sustainable transport projects, including providing cycling infrastructure, in the Greater Dublin Area and the regional cities of Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford.

Given the overarching scope of these programmes, it is not possible to isolate specific expenditure on cycling infrastructure over the period in question.

Public Transport

213. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if all of the new Luas trams which have been delivered are in use and on the line on which they are used. [41432/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue raised is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) in conjunction with Transport Infrastructure Ireland and Transdev and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Public Transport

214. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the six Luas trams which were transferred from the Red to the Green line have been replaced in view of the fact that commuters along the Red line report significant overcrowding at some Red line Luas stops. [41433/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue raised is a

matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) in conjunction with Transport Infrastructure Ireland and Transdev and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Public Transport

215. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the progress that has been made with regard to the initiation of dedicated transport police; and his views on whether such transport police ought to be a unit of An Garda Síochána or similar to the Airport Police. [41434/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The safety and security of passengers and staff, including arrangements to deal with anti-social behaviour, are matters first and foremost for the individual public transport companies in conjunction with, as appropriate, An Garda Síochána.

While the vast majority of public transport passenger journeys occur without incident, I am concerned to ensure that the necessary arrangements are in place to ensure the safety of all passengers and staff travelling and working on our rail network. Therefore, following representations from the National Bus and Rail Union who called for the establishment of a dedicated police force for public transport, I wrote to Irish Rail and the Railway Safety Advisory Council (RSAC) to seek their views on the issue of anti-social behaviour on the rail network.

In its response, Irish Rail outlined a number of measures that the company has taken in an effort to safeguard the security of passengers and staff. These measures have included the allocation of additional security and supervisory operatives, particularly at night and in certain areas, as well as more resources for centralised CCTV monitoring stations. The company also stated that it works closely with An Garda Síochána on anti-social behaviour in general and receives the full support of the Gardaí. The RSAC, in its response, recommended the establishment of a dedicated unit of An Garda Síochána to police our rail network on occasions when the possibility of anti-social behaviour is high.

Bus Éireann and Dublin Bus were also contacted for their views and both companies responded that the level of anti-social behaviour is relatively low and noted a declining trend which is very positive. Both companies also stressed the strong and close working relationships with An Garda Síochána.

Following engagement with the public transport companies and the RSAC, I wrote to the Minister for Justice to seek his views as to how we might best address the issue of anti-social behaviour on our transport system, in particular on the Irish Rail network. I have asked that the Minister consider this issue in conjunction with An Garda Síochána, given that the allocation of all Garda resources, including the manner in which Garda personnel are deployed, is solely a decision for the Garda Commissioner and his management team.

Public Transport

216. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the next BusConnects public consultation will commence; and the timeframe for the NTA to deal with the first phase of consultation. [41435/18]

217. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the spend

for Bus Rapid Transit; and the outcome of same. [41436/18]

219. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a consultant (details supplied) was the sole consultant considered for the BusConnects design project. [41438/18]

220. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the tender process in advance of the appointment of a person (details supplied) as a consultant on the BusConnects project. [41439/18]

221. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the role of Dublin Bus in terms of the design of the proposed BusConnects changes to bus services in Dublin city. [41440/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 216, 217 and 219 to 221, inclusive, together.

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 responsibility for ensuring the development and delivery of public transport infrastructure, including the BusConnects programme.

In light of the NTA's statutory responsibility in this area, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for a more detailed reply on the various issues raised. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Bus Éireann Fleet

218. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the net increase in the fleet of Dublin Bus since 2015. [41437/18]

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 responsibility for ensuring the development and delivery of public transport infrastructure, including the provision of bus fleet for Dublin Bus.

In light of the NTA's responsibility in this area, I have referred the Deputy's question to the Authority for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Questions Nos. 219 to 221, inclusive, answered with Question No. 216.

State Airports

222. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the action being taken by Shannon Airport DAC to fill the known equipment and service void and to avoid aisle chair transfer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41463/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Shannon Airport Authority holds statutory responsibility for the management, operation and development of Shannon Airport.

The use of a specific piece of equipment at airports in Ireland is an operational matter for the airports themselves. I understand that Shannon Airport Authority has previously been contacted on this matter and I can confirm that that remains the most appropriate channel through which to address queries regarding the use of specific equipment.

However, to be of assistance, enquiries have been made of Shannon Airport Authority on this issue and they have informed my Department that there is no existing equipment and service void, nor has there been at any time with its present PRM (Persons with Reduced Mobility) service, which is provided under contract. The PRM service also includes the provision of suitable lifting equipment including aisle seats. Shannon Airport Authority have confirmed that there have been no complaints from any PRM passengers to date in relation to aisle seat transfers.

Shannon Airport's current PRM contract expires on 31 December 2018. A combined service tender, including the PRM service, went to tender on 26th June 2018 and the contract is currently in the award phase. The provision of equipment under this contract will be the responsibility of the service provider appointed.

Data Protection

223. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if the new GDPR regulations will impact on the ability of an adopted person in tracing their birth parents; the measures she is taking to reduce the impediment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41292/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): As the Deputy will of course be aware, GDPR has provided for significant sanctions for data controllers where personal data is improperly processed. I understand that GDPR is impacting on a number of sectors and services and this includes on the provision of a tracing service for adopted people.

My priority is to proceed with the enactment of the Adoption (Information and Tracing) Bill 2016 as quickly as possible. The Bill will place the information and tracing service on a statutory footing, and will provide for the transfer and custody of relevant records. My officials are currently reviewing the Bill's provisions to ensure that it addresses data protection concerns while providing an effective tracing service.

Child Abuse

224. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 517 of 2 October 2018 (details supplied), if guidance has been provided to social workers in regard to the threshold for a risk assessment, home visits, monitoring or other protective measures that should be taken if suspicions of abuse remain, if a child makes subsequent disclosures of abuse following a finding of unfounded and if the finding of unfounded only just meets the threshold for same. [41297/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I have asked the Child and Family Agency, Tusla, to supply me with the information requested by the Deputy and will revert directly when this has been received.

Child Abuse

225. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 437 of 25 September 2018, if Tusla social workers will facilitate a parent or guardian in securing a second opinion following a finding of unfounded by an organisation (details supplied) in regard to an allegation of child sexual abuse. [41330/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla have advised me that when their social workers seek a second opinion in relation to the findings of an assessment completed by an organisation such as St Clare's Unit, it is general practice to seek a second opinion from a similar organisation, such as St Louise's Unit. This is done to ensure the second opinion is independent and that the assessment process follows the same format.

In general social workers support a parent and/or a guardian securing a second opinion of an unfounded outcome in a situation where there were concerns that the original assessment was flawed and/or unreliable. All decisions made in relation to requests for a second opinion are based on the best interests of the child.

Education Welfare Service Staff

226. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of whole-time equivalent education welfare officers employed by the education welfare officer; the location of each; the child population served in each case; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41358/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Educational Welfare Service of Tusla has advised my Department that it currently employs 88 Educational Welfare Officers (EWOs) throughout the country. The 88 EWOs are divided into 11 teams spread across 4 separate regions across the country, each of which is managed by a Senior Educational Welfare Officer (SEWO). These regions are the South, the West and Midlands, South Dublin and North Dublin. Referrals from schools, parents and other agencies are received by Educational Welfare Services.

The most recent school enrolment figures from September 2017 show 912,683 students enrolled in schools throughout the country. This equates to an average of 10,371 students per Educational Welfare Officer. Referrals are allocated to Educational Welfare Officers by the Senior Educational Welfare Officer on a team basis and areas where most referrals are received are given priority. Educational Welfare Officers can be assigned cases from regions outside their own on occasions where an increase in referrals means that the existing resource within the region is not sufficient to meet that demand.

Early Childhood Care and Education

227. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to the fact that some children are being denied a second ECCE year in the scheme that was expanded to two years from September 2018, and due to implemented changes in that extension of the scheme a full calendar year is assessed in the child's birth year as opposed to a quarterly assessment approach (details supplied); if there is discretion in the scheme to allow parents to avail of both years; the number of children in this cohort that are similarly affected; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41382/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Since September 2018, all children meeting the minimum age requirement of 2 years and 8 months are eli-

gible for a full two programme years on the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme. This measure refines the development introduced in 2016 and increases the duration of each registered child on ECCE from a previous average of 61 weeks, to a potential duration of 76 weeks (two programme years). This delivers fully on a commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government that is good for children, families and Early Years providers.

This new measure will address the previous situation with regard to multiple entry points whereby there was a broad fluctuation in the number of free preschool weeks a child could avail of (between 61 and 88 weeks depending on the date of birth of the child) and will ensure a programme that is equitable for all children. The situation where there was more than one entry point created a perception of inequality to some parents when they considered the variance in the number of weeks of ECCE provision, dependant on their entry point.

It must be noted that age limits have been used to determine eligibility since the inception of the ECCE programme in 2010. These rules are a necessary component of any Government scheme and ensure that Exchequer funding is used for its intended purpose.

The upper age limit for the ECCE programme was set in consultation with the Department of Education and Skills. It ensures that children transition into primary school with their peers and limits the age range of children beginning primary school. Limiting the diversity in age ranges in children beginning primary school education is considered generally to be in the best interest of children, in relation to peer interaction in junior infants, as well as other educational considerations.

My Department does its best to ensure, in so far as possible, the equitable treatment of all children and families who apply for childcare funding under the ECCE Programme. In order to ensure objectivity and fairness, it is essential that clear rules exist for the scheme and that they are applied evenly. An essential component of the ECCE programme rules is an eligibility start date to ensure that the programme can be administered and budgeted for in an appropriate manner.

Child Abuse

228. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 571 of 2 October 2018, the reason Tusla does not collect data on the number of child sexual abuse assessments that make findings of founded or unfounded, respectively; her views on whether a failure to collect such data precludes pattern analysis that might detect risks or anomalies in rates of findings across different service areas; and if she will convey to Tusla the importance of this data being collected and analysed. [41383/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I am informed by Tusla that currently data is not collected nationally on the number of child sexual abuse assessments that are ‘founded’ and ‘unfounded’. Historically Tusla has not collated founded/unfounded cases nationally within Key Performance Indicators as these terms refer to outcomes and are not useful as measurements of performance. This is something I will ask Tusla to consider in the context of the data collated and reported to my Department, which is reviewed regularly.

There are other mechanisms in place which can detect anomalies in the services provided by Tusla. The Quality Assurance Directorate of Tusla is charged with monitoring the quality of decision making across services, including analysing patterns of activity. This year has also seen the introduction of the National Child Care Information system to all Tusla areas. The

development of the NCCIS will facilitate the process of collecting information on outcomes (such as founded and unfounded decisions) and assist in national decision making capacity, in keeping with Tusla's Child Protection and Welfare Strategy.

Services for People with Disabilities

229. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development his plans to introduce legislation for dog trainers that train to assist persons with disabilities. [41269/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Seán Kyne): My Department has policy and legislative responsibility for matters relating to the control of dogs as set out in the Control of Dogs Acts and relevant Ministerial Regulations. As this responsibility does not extend to dog trainers, or to the provision or training of assistance/service dogs for persons with disabilities, I have no plans to introduce legislation in this regard.

The Deputy may wish to consider contacting the organisation Irish Dogs for the Disabled at www.dogsfordisabled.ie which may be able to provide additional information on the matter. If the deputy wishes to correspond with my office in regard to what specifically she wishes to see legislated for, I can advise her on same.

Local Improvement Scheme Funding

230. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development his plans in budget 2019 to continue the local improvement scheme; and his further plans to increase the level of funding available in the next round. [41416/18]

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

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

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

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

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

I anticipate that a new round of LIS will be announced in 2019.

Working Family Payment Data

231. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of members of the Defence Forces that are receiving working family payments; the overall annual cost of these payments to members of the Defence Forces; the largest sum paid to a member of the Defence Forces in the past year for which figures are available; and the average sum paid. [41384/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Working Family Payment (WFP) is a weekly tax-free payment which provides additional income support to employees on low earnings with children. WFP is designed to prevent in-work poverty for low paid workers with child dependents and to offer a financial incentive to take up employment.

The figures for Defence Force members in receipt of WFP are as follows:

Working Family Payments	-
Number of Defence Force members currently in receipt of WFP:	90
Overall annual expenditure on WFP paid to Defence Force Members:	€334,360.00
Largest sum paid to a Defence Force member during past year:	€217.00 (p/w)
Average WFP sum paid to Defence Force members:	€71.44 (p/w)

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy

Autism Support Services

232. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the steps she is taking to reduce costs for parents of children with autism spectrum disorders in view of the recent publication of a report which indicates a significant financial burden for parents; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41431/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Department offers a range of supports for children with disabilities, including those with autism. The principle payment provided for such children is domiciliary care allowance (DCA), which can be paid in respect of children who require substantial extra care and attention as a result of a severe disability. Over 40,000 children are currently in receipt of this allowance, which is paid at a rate of €309.50 per month. In this regard, over a third of all applications for DCA are in respect of children with a diagnosis on the autism spectrum. Eligibility for DCA is not based on the child's disability but on the resultant additional care and attention required.

In addition, an annual carer support grant (CSG) of €1,700 is also automatically paid in respect of each child in receipt of DCA.

Children for whom DCA is payable now also qualify for a medical card in their own right.

Carers allowance may also be payable in respect of children in receipt of DCA, subject to the carer fulfilling certain conditions. Currently some 55% of DCA recipients satisfy the means test for payment of carers allowance.

In addition to the supports offered by DEASP, supports are also provided by other departments, including the July Education Programme from the Department of Education and Science, which provides additional summertime schooling hours for qualified children. The Rev-

enue Commissioners allow an incapacitated child tax credit of €3,300 in respect of all qualified children, which can include those with autism.

I hope this clarifies matters for the Deputy.

JobPath Programme

233. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the date on which referrals to JobPath will cease in 2019. [41267/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): As the Deputy will be aware, JobPath is a service that supports people who are long-term unemployed to secure and sustain full time paid employment in the open labour market. Two companies, Seetec and Turas Nua, have been contracted by my Department to deliver the service.

The contracts are for six years, comprising two consecutive phases: phase one entails four years' of client referrals, while phase two entails a 'run off' period during which time no additional clients will be referred. Therefore client referrals will cease on 31st December 2019 and the contracts will terminate in 2021. It is important to note that services will be delivered to completion for those clients referred during phase one.

The contracts include options to extend phase one for further periods (up to a maximum of 24 months) at my Department's discretion. While proposals to extend the contracts are not currently under consideration, my Department will keep the situation under review.

I hope this clarifies matter fro the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Applications Data

234. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the percentage of new forms being received by the illness benefit section since their introduction; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41270/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): In August 2018, my Department introduced a new claim form and medical certificate to replace the previous forms used for certification of the Department's Illness and Injury Benefit schemes. This change is part of a programme of modernisation in the Department. Some GPs have continued to use the old forms after the change over date.

My Department has a contract with GP panellists and has written to each panellist regarding the recent changes. In addition, we are consulting with the IMO under our Framework Agreement on a range of issues including e-certification, closed certification and changes to forms. While these discussions are on-going, it would not be appropriate, at this time, to provide details regarding the usage of new forms. However, I understand that the majority of claims and medical certificates received in my Department are in the new format.

In order to facilitate the continued payment of Illness and Injury Benefits to our customers, the Department has, to date, continued to accept old forms where provided by GPs. It has also made additional resources available to help manually process claims and medical certificates received on these forms.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Applications Data

235. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons awaiting a decision on their illness benefit application; the average waiting time; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41271/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Department experienced some delays following the introduction of a new system for Illness benefit. The change is part of a programme of modernisation in the Department which took effect from Monday 6th August.

Some GPs have continued to use the old forms after this changeover date which the Department has, to date, continued to accept in the interest of paying our customers. While the continued use of the old forms has caused delays to our processing times, my Department is doing everything possible to make sure that customers are paid as quickly as possible.

The new process is working well and we are currently processing all applications and certs received on the new forms the day they are received. There is no backlog of new forms.

For new claims received on old forms, we are working off a 2 day backlog and practically all old certs are now being entered on the day they are received.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Jobseeker's Allowance Applications

236. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if an application by a person (details supplied) to be placed on the back to work scheme will be reviewed; and if an exception will be made to allow them access to the scheme. [41291/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned applied for Jobseekers Allowance in September this year, and a comprehensive review of their circumstances, including their income from self employment and rental income was completed as part of the decision making process.

As a result of this review a decision on this claim has been made by the deciding officer and communicated to the person concerned. They have been advised that their claim has been disallowed due to the fact that Jobseekers Allowance is not paid if a person's weekly means are more than the amount of Jobseekers Allowance that would be payable to them, based on their family circumstances.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance Scheme Payments

237. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason there were long delays with issuing the payment of the back to school clothing and footwear allowance in 2018; if provisions were put in place for families awaiting the payment; if she will consider putting mechanisms in place to ensure delays with issuing the payment do not occur in 2019; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41331/18]

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 costs of clothing and footwear when children start or return to school each autumn. The Government has provided €49.5 million for the scheme in 2018.

The payment rates for this year are €125 for eligible children aged 4 to 11 years and €250 for children aged over 12 years and attending secondary school.

Since 2010, in excess of 100,000 customers can be identified every year from the Department's computer system as having an automatic entitlement to the allowance. These customers are notified of their entitlement and there is no requirement for them to make an application. In addition, approximately 45,000 customers may have an entitlement but need to apply to have this entitlement assessed.

Similar to arrangements in previous years, the majority of this year's BSCFA payments for 104,461 families in respect of approximately 190,308 children were fully automated and parents were not required to make an application to the Department. The total amount paid to families with an automatic entitlement was €33.45m and these payments were made during the week commencing 9th July 2018.

In order to qualify for an automated payment the parent of the child must have been in receipt of a qualifying payment that included an increase in respect of a qualified child at the commencement of the scheme and the Department were satisfied that the household satisfied the means test for the scheme. The scheme commenced from the 1st June 2018 with the entitlement created based on the preceding week's entitlement.

The back to school clothing and footwear allowance is a mean-tested allowance. Qualifying for the allowance in a previous year does not in any way guarantee the customer will receive it in a current year and many customers, especially those who had a change in their means or circumstance, needed to make an application for the payment for this year in order to have their entitlement validated. Customers with children aged 18 years or over also needed to apply and provide confirmation that the children were in full-time second-level education.

Customers who may have received BSCFA in previous years and did not receive written confirmation of entitlement for this year by end June needed to make an application. The Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance scheme was open for new applications until 30 September 2018. The scheme is now closed.

To date (6 October 2018) 142,419 families have been awarded the allowance in respect of 263,239 children, 10,598 applications have been refused and 1,752 are awaiting a decision. Expenditure to date on the scheme is €46.7m.

All applications received up to 26 September 2018 have been processed. The delays in processing applications over the summer arose as a result of a combination of initial technical issues which arose due to the transfer of the scheme to a new IT platform and a very high volume of new applications received since the beginning of July. The technical issues were identified and resolved. The number of applications received usually peaks in July and August and tends to taper off after that. Some 1,200 - 1,400 applications per day were received during this period this year.

However, I can assure you that all outstanding claims are being dealt with expeditiously. As the new system for processing applications is now well established I am confident that improvements will be achieved in processing BSCFA applications for 2019.

Illness Benefit Applications

238. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when an illness benefit payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41338/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The claim from the person concerned has been processed and he has received his full entitlements under the Illness Benefit Scheme and any/all arrears owing to him have been paid. A final certificate of illness was received on 30th of September and the claim is now closed.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

239. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application for a carer's allowance by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41413/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): No application for carer's allowance was received from the person concerned. An application for carer's benefit was received on 3 May 2018.

Carer's benefit is a PRSI based payment, made to persons who are providing full-time care and attention to a person who has such a disability that they require that level of care.

The application was awarded to the person concerned from 7 September 2017 to 4 September 2019. The first payment issued to her nominated bank account on 4 October 2018.

Arrears of benefit due from 7 September 2017 to 3 October 2018 will issue to the person concerned shortly.

The person concerned was notified on 28 September 2018 of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Foster Care Supports

240. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the payments or supports available for a foster parent who fosters young children and that as a consequence is not available to seek full-time work and thus will not qualify for jobseeker's allowance. [41445/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The primary payment for foster parents is the foster care allowance which is administered by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

The foster care allowance is currently €325 per week per child under 12 and €352 per week per child aged twelve and over. When a young person between the ages of 18 and 21 is still in training or education, an Aftercare Allowance may be paid. More information is available on

the Tusla website regarding the Standardised Aftercare Allowance.

The foster care allowance is exempt from taxation under the Finance Act 2005 and is not taken into account in the means test for most social welfare payments.

Child Benefit at the rate of €140 per month per child will be paid to the foster parent after the child has been in foster care for 6 months and in some cases may be paid from an earlier date depending on the individual circumstances.

The Department provides a range of other payments to parents and families with different qualifying criteria. The foster parent may be entitled to a number of these payments depending on their circumstances. The foster parent should consult the Department website or contact their local Social Welfare Office in the first instance to establish entitlement.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Foster Care Expenditure

241. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the payment made by Tusla for fostering is not taken into account when means testing a foster parent's entitlement to social welfare payments; and the support available when the only payment entering such a household is the Tusla foster care allowance and child benefit allowance. [41446/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The primary payment for foster parents is the foster care allowance which is administered by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

The foster care allowance is currently €325 per week per child under 12 and €352 per week per child of twelve and over. When a young person between the ages of 18 and 21 is still in training or education, an Aftercare Allowance may be paid. More information is available on the Tusla website regarding the Standardised Aftercare Allowance.

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Social Welfare Appeals

242. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an appeal by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41453/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was referred on 20th August 2018 to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Planning Issues

243. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of solar energy farms for which planning permission has been granted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41506/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Planning statistics are compiled by each planning authority on an annual basis for collation and publication on my Department's website, at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/planning/statistics/planning-statistics-1>.

The statistics collected relate to the total numbers of:

- Invalid planning applications received,
- Applications received for outline permission and full permission,
- Decisions to grant/refuse permission,
- Decisions issued within the statutory eight-week period,
- Decisions deferred, and
- Percentages for grants/refusals, decisions made within eight weeks and decisions deferred.

The statistics collected relate to the total number of applications and decisions for all developments that require planning permission, broken down by year and planning authority but are not broken down by development type.

The specific information requested in relation to the number of planning permissions granted for a particular development type is not collated or available within my Department's statistics. Individual local authorities may, however, compile information in this regard.

Home Loan Scheme

244. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if some county councils require that applicants for Rebuilding Ireland home loans pay council legal fees as part of the process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41313/18]

245. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to an anomaly in the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme whereby some applicants are being forced to foot legal fees in local authority areas in which

there is no dedicated council law department; his views on whether this geographic lottery and the associated costs is an unfair burden on applicants; the steps he will take to address this anomaly; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41318/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 244 and 245 together.

The Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan was launched in February 2018. It replaced both the House Purchase Loan and the Home Choice Loan schemes in order to enable credit-worthy lower-income individuals and families, who cannot secure sufficient finance to purchase a suitable home from a commercial lender, to secure a mortgage. My Department, in conjunction with the Housing Agency and the Housing Finance Agency, is continuing to monitor the operation of the scheme, with a view to addressing any issues that arise, as required.

With regard to the Deputy's question concerning legal fees, under the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan, potential borrowers will incur legal fees as part of the normal house purchase process. However, possible issues concerning the application of certain legal fees have been brought to my Department's attention recently and these matters are currently under examination.

Student Accommodation

246. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the phenomenon of five night leasing affecting students in which a student must leave the property and take away all belongings on Friday to return on Sunday evening in order that the property can be used for rental (details supplied) over the weekend; and if this issue will be addressed in his review of legislation governing short-term rentals. [41386/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) was established as an independent statutory body under the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 to operate a national tenancy registration system and to resolve disputes between landlords and tenants. Further information on landlord and tenant obligations is available on the RTB website <https://onestopshop.rtb.ie/during-a-tenancy/maintenance-inspections-and-access/inspections-and-access>.

The Act provides that a landlord should allow a tenant of a rented dwelling to enjoy peaceful and exclusive occupation. A landlord is only allowed to enter the property with the tenant's permission or in an emergency.

Under Action 18 of the Strategy for the Rental Sector, my Department established a Working Group, involving representatives of all major public stakeholders with a policy interest in short-term lettings, to develop guidance in relation to planning applications, changes of use relating to short-term lettings and to examine the need for new regulatory arrangements.

The proposals under consideration by the Working Group have been aimed at facilitating short-term letting of accommodation within permanent residences, known as homesharing, while protecting the existing stock of residential property in areas of high demand, safeguarding neighbourhood amenity and consumer protection, and generating revenue to address any negative effects of short-term letting.

Having considered the Group's report as well as the recommendations in the Oireachtas Committee's report on short-term lettings, I am engaging with other relevant Ministers in rela-

tion to the appropriate next steps in taking the proposed regulatory regime forward.

Among the options under consideration are the development of a new licensing regime for short-term letting platforms and homeowners who rent out rooms or entire properties to tourists to facilitate a more managed approach to short-term tourist lettings, and protect the existing stock of residential property, in particular, long-term rental accommodation, in areas of high demand. Recognising that the introduction of such a regulatory regime will take time, I am also considering what other measures might, in the interim, support the recommendations and objectives set down in both the Working Group's report and the Oireachtas Committee.

Student Accommodation

247. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the requirements in relation to the maximum number of bed spaces per square metre in student accommodation. [41387/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): Section 50 of the Finance Act 1999 provided for a scheme of tax relief for rented residential accommodation for third level students - commonly referred to as section 23 relief. The associated legislation for the tax scheme provided that guidelines may be issued by the Minister for Education and Science, in consultation with the Minister for the Environment and Local Government, with the consent of the Minister for Finance.

These guidelines were subsequently produced as the '*Guidelines on Residential Developments for 3rd Level Students: Section 50 Finance Act 1999 - Relief for Rented Residential Accommodation for Third Level Students*' in 1999.

This document includes details on qualifying geographical locations for developments, leases, etc. In addition, the guidance provides certain minimum and maximum standards in relation to floor areas involved:

6. Total Floor Areas of Qualifying Premises

Accommodation under the scheme shall be provided by groupings of study bedrooms in "house" units.

Each unit shall consist of a minimum of 3 bed spaces and an overall minimum gross floor area of 55 sq. metres, up to a maximum of 8 bed spaces and a maximum of 160 sq. metres. Study bedrooms shall be arranged in units sharing a common entrance hall and kitchen/living room. Rooms shall have reasonable shapes and proportions and have adequate space for normal living purposes. Accurate adult sized furniture shall be indicated on layout plans. Units shall in turn share common entrances, access stairs and corridors, and ancillary facilities.

6.1 Kitchen/Living room

The provision of shared kitchen/dining/living room space shall be based on a minimum of 4 sq. m per bedspace in the unit. This shall be in addition to any shared circulation. At a minimum, basic kitchen units, with sink, cooker and fridge shall be installed.

6.2 Bedrooms

These will be used as study bedrooms requiring desk space, and storage. Therefore, one of the following minimum areas shall apply depending on provision of bathroom facilities:-

- Single study bedroom 8 sq. metres
- Single study bedroom with ensuite shower, toilet and basin 12 sq. metres
- Twin study bedroom 15 sq. metres
- Twin study bedroom with ensuite shower, toilet and basin 18 sq. metres
- Single Disabled study bedroom, with ensuite disabled shower, toilet and basin 15 sq. metres

This tax relief expired in 2008 and the student development projects constructed under the relief were eligible to receive this relief for a period of ten years following the date the property is first let to students.

Certain individual local authorities provide development policies and standards for the development of student accommodation in their statutory city or county development plans (e.g. Cork City Council, Kildare County Council). A number of local authorities feature standards/requirements for purpose built student accommodation similar to those included in the above DES 1999 document, such as in section 16.10.7 - '*Guidelines for Student Accommodation*' in the Dublin City Development Plan 2016-22 and Table 16.6a of the Cork City Development Plan 2015-21. These standards are used in the assessment of proposed development projects by the planning authority in their statutory development management process for planning applications.

Local Authority Assets

248. **Deputy Maria Bailey** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if it is a reserve power of the county manager to sell sites owned by the council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41488/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): Section 183 of the Local Government Act 2001 provides that the proposed disposal of any land which is held by a local authority shall be carried out by resolution of the elected members of the local authority.

Local Authority Expenditure

249. **Deputy Maria Bailey** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if it is a reserve power for county councillors to determine the county capital budget; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41489/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): Section 135 of the Local Government Act 2001 provides that before the start of each local financial year the chief executive shall prepare and submit to the elected council a report indicating the programme of capital projects proposed by the local authority for the forthcoming and the following two local financial years having regard to the availability of resources. This report may be considered at the local authority budget meeting or at such other meeting as the elected council may by resolution decide.

Other relevant provisions of the 2001 Act addressing the role of elected members in the area of capital budgeting include section 137, which provides that the elected council may by

resolution require the chief executive to prepare plans and specifications for particular works and an estimate of their cost; section 138, which provides that the chief executive shall inform the elected council before any works (other than maintenance or repair) of the local authority are undertaken or before committing the local authority concerned to any expenditure in connection with the proposed works; section 139, which provides that, once the elected council is informed in accordance with section 138 of any works, it may by resolution direct that those works shall not proceed; and section 140, which provides that the elected council may, by resolution and subject to the requirements of the section, direct that any specific act be done by the local authority.