

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 9, inclusive, answered orally.

Questions Nos. 10 to 62, inclusive, resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 63 to 75, inclusive, answered orally.

National Maternity Hospital

76. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of the commitment given by Dáil Éireann to ensure the national maternity hospital remains within public ownership and has legally guaranteed independence from all non-medical influence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43443/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Following extensive mediation discussions, agreement was reached between the St Vincent's Healthcare Group and the National Maternity Hospital (NMH) on the relocation of the NMH to the Elm Park campus. The terms of this agreement provides for the establishment of a new company which will have clinical and operational, as well as financial and budgetary independence in the provision of maternity, gynaecology and neonatal services. It is vitally important that the legal and governance arrangements associated with this project are robust. Considerable work has been undertaken to develop a legal framework to protect the State's significant investment in the new hospital and ensure the hospital building remains in State ownership; it is hoped to conclude this work shortly. This legal framework will underpin the operational and clinical independence of the new hospital, ensuring care in the new maternity hospital will be delivered without religious, ethnic or other distinction and any medical procedure which is in accordance with the laws of the land will be carried out there. Once finalised, proposals will be subject to consideration with the parties concerned. I can assure the Deputy that I remain committed to the development of the new maternity hospital on the St Vincent's campus. This is a vital project for women and babies in Ireland, representing the flagship project of the National Maternity Strategy and the largest single investment ever made in maternity services in Ireland. The model of stand-alone maternity hospitals is not the norm internationally. Government policy is therefore to co-locate all remaining maternity hospitals with adult acute services in order to provide optimal clinical outcomes. In that context, it is proposed to relocate not only the NMH, but also University Maternity Hospital Limerick to University Hospital Limerick, Dooradoyle, the Rotunda Hospital to the Connolly Hospital campus in Blanchardstown and the Coombe Women & Infants University Hospital, to St James's Hospital. More broadly, the Deputy will be aware that the Government has established an independent review group to examine the role of voluntary organisations in the operation of health and personal social services in Ireland. The terms of reference provide for:

- An examination of current arrangements across the health and social care sector;

- Consideration of issues currently arising, and those likely to arise in the future;
- Recommendations on how the relationship between the State and voluntary organisations should evolve in the future.

Community Care

77. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if he will discuss the HSE CHO networks and operating model proposal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43444/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The expansion of community-based care is at the heart of the Sláintecare vision. A key building block in this vision will be the 96 community healthcare networks and 433 Primary Care Teams that are already working across the country and delivering a wide range of health services to people in their local communities.

In recent years, the HSE has made concerted efforts to move many social care services, including mental health and disability services, into the community. Much progress has been made in developing services that are more integrated, less centralised and more focused on the patient. I do however believe we can be more ambitious in terms of developing primary and community-based care. The Sláintecare Implementation Strategy sets out a number of strategic actions and concrete sub-actions that I intend to progress over the coming months and years to bring care closer to home for the benefit of the patient.

The HSE has been working to progress and deepen the implementation of multidisciplinary team working. To this end nine learning sites (one per CHO) are being put in place. The experience gained through these learning sites will inform future decision making and proposals in relation to the best way forward.

I am aware that concerns were expressed by nurse representatives in relation to the potential effect of multidisciplinary working arrangements on existing reporting structures. In light of this, and in order to facilitate progress with the learning sites, it has been agreed that, for the present, reporting relationships for nursing staff will remain unchanged within the new structures.

I recognise that today many professionals working in front line services already work collaboratively. It is important that this collaborative working arrangement continues and indeed develops regardless of reporting structure.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

78. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health if Respreeza will continue to be provided to patients with Alpha-1 antitrypsin deficiency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43564/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE assessed the application for the pricing and reimbursement of Respreeza and in August 2017, the manufacturer, CSL Behring, was notified that the HSE did not recommend reimbursement.

A number of patients were on an access scheme for this product, operated by the manufacturer, for the treatment of Alpha-1 Antitrypsin Deficiency. That scheme was being run independently by the manufacturer without reference to the HSE.

The company notified the HSE that it had decided to terminate the access scheme from 30 September 2017. Following interventions by the HSE, the company modified its decision and agreed to continue to supply the medication free of charge for the patients on the access scheme. Due to the critical and exceptional circumstances, the HSE agreed to fund the provision of the necessary nursing service to ensure that patients could continue to receive the medicine

The HSE is continuing to liaise with the treating Consultant and the company and has drafted the terms of an agreement for the long term care of the 19 alpha one clinical trial patients. This proposal is being reviewed by CSL Behring and it is hoped that a final agreement can be reached shortly.

In so far as the provision of Respreeza to other patients is concerned, it is open to the company to submit a new reimbursement application which will be assessed by the HSE in line with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013. As the Deputy will appreciate, the Minister for Health has no statutory role in such matters.

Services for People with Disabilities

79. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Health the waiting time for intake assessment for the early intervention team for children in north County Dublin. [43615/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): As Deputies will be aware, there is a high demand for Early Intervention Services and unfortunately, waiting times for children to access these services have reached excessive levels in many parts of the country.

I understand that the current longest waiting time for children to access services from the Early Intervention Team in North County Dublin is 32 months.

I recognise that services for school-aged children with disabilities and early intervention services are paramount and need to be improved and organised more effectively and this process is well under way nationwide. A major reconfiguration of therapy resources for children with disabilities into multi-disciplinary geographically based teams, is underway as part of the HSE's National Programme on Progressing Disability Services for Children and Young People.

HSE Disability Services in Dublin North City and County are working proactively with the HSE's National Disability Office to address waiting times. However, there are a number of factors driving the demand for services, including an increase in the population of children overall and an increase in the number of children presenting with complex needs.

Addressing and improving services for children and adults with a disability remains a priority of the Government and for the Health Service Executive. I am pleased to inform the House that Dublin North City and County Disability Service has recently received approval of an increased allocation of resources which will provide five posts across a number of disciplines including: Psychology, Occupational Therapy, Speech and Language Therapy, Physiotherapy and Social Work.

The HSE has commenced the recruitment process for these posts which will assist in the reduction of waiting times for early intervention services across the area.

In addition, as part of the Government's commitment to children with disabilities, funding for an additional 100 therapy posts was secured as part of Budget 2019. This investment will have a significant positive impact on waiting times for assessment and therapy service delivery

over the course of the next year.

National Dementia Strategy

80. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if further investment will be made available to provide funding for community supports for persons with dementia to ensure they can remain active in their communities and continue to live in their own homes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43279/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The National Dementia Strategy was launched in December 2014 to meet the challenges faced by people living with dementia in Ireland and to provide services to meet growing demand in future years. The Strategy contains 35 priority and additional actions and its implementation is being led by the National Dementia Office in the HSE. The office has made substantial progress towards developing evidence-based care pathways for people with dementia and progress to date, as well as future plans, is recorded in the mid-term review of the Strategy's implementation, which was published in May this year. The Strategy emphasises the need for a "whole community response" to dementia, as the majority of people with dementia live in their own communities and wish to avail of services in their local area.

To support future development of services and supports for people with dementia, the National Dementia Office and the Alzheimer Society of Ireland undertook a joint project in 2016 and 2017 to map dementia-specific community-based services across the country. Information from the project is included in an on-line service finder on the Understand Together website so people can find out what services are available in each county.

It is acknowledged that there are gaps in access to services and a large variance in what services are provided across the country. The National Dementia Office has met with senior HSE officials in each Community Healthcare Organisation region to highlight gaps in each area and to develop local action plans to improve service provision.

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

In addition to these community supports, in 2014 the HSE introduced Dementia-Specific Intensive Homecare Packages to test the feasibility of providing a high level of support to people with dementia with complex needs to facilitate them to remain living at home. These were initially co-funded by the HSE and the Atlantic Philanthropies and now fully funded by the HSE, which has committed to continue to provide approximately 120 packages at any one time. In addition to the IHCPs, people with dementia are also able to avail of standard home care services on the basis of need and within the resources available.

The Department of Health has secured €6.26 million from the Dormant Accounts Fund for numerous projects to improve care and supports for people with dementia. Projects receiving funding include the delivery of post-diagnostic supports; a dementia diagnostic service for people with intellectual disability; a national network of memory technology resource rooms; the development of a national dementia registry; the national rollout of a dementia training programme for HSE homecare staff; the development of dementia resource centres; funding for a dementia community activation coordinator; and community support projects for people with dementia.

In July and September, I met with the Alzheimer Society of Ireland to discuss dementia issues. I have also met Senator Colette Kelleher, a former CEO and advocate of the ASI, to specifically discuss the needs of people with dementia. I am very aware of the need to address issues surrounding dementia, and am committed to maintaining the constructive relationships the Department has with advocacy groups as we continue to work towards the greater provision of services and care to people with dementia, their carers and families in the HSE's National Service Plan for 2019.

In terms of plans to expand support levels for people with dementia, the quantum of services to be provided by the HSE will be considered as part of the HSE's 2019 National Service Planning.

Hospital Waiting Lists Action Plans

81. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the action he will take to address the long outpatient waiting times in the children's hospital group in which 10,329 persons are waiting more than 18 months for an appointment. [43584/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In Budget 2019 the Government has prioritised improving access and reducing waiting times for patients, with funding to the National Treatment Purchase fund (NTPF) increasing from €55 million in 2018 to €75 million in 2019, of which, €6 million will be committed to outpatient activity. In addition, specific investments to improve paediatric services have been made including the establishment of the Outpatient and Urgent Care Centre at Connolly Hospital in 2019 and the development of sustainable and safe paediatric orthopaedic service, including scoliosis, for children and young people

To date in 2018, the NTPF has approved almost 12,700 additional first-time outpatient appointments and this is projected to increase to 40,000 appointments next year. I recently met with the CEO's of all hospital groups to discuss improving access for patients and requested that they work with the NTPF and HSE in 2019 develop innovative proposals to address the number of long waiters on outpatient lists in 2019.

This year, the NTPF has approved 504 Outpatient appointments for Temple Street as part of an initiative to support implementation of an extended working day in the hospital. The NTPF is also due to meet with the Children's Hospital Group (CHG) this month to review proposals for additional insourcing and outsourcing initiatives in cardiology, ENT, and other specialties.

In addition, the CHG advises that it has implemented a number of new and innovative initiatives to improve access to outpatient appointments for patients across a range of specialties including cardiology, dermatology, and orthopaedics. This includes:

- additional clinics in ENT and dermatology;
- the appointment of additional staff in general paediatrics, ophthalmology and orthopaedics; and
- the use of virtual assessment clinics for rheumatology.

The Outpatient and Urgent Care Centre at Connolly Hospital in 2019 will result in 6,350 outpatient appointments being issued for the new facility next year, with projected full year outpatient attendance of 15,240 in subsequent years.

The additional €9 million provided to the Children's Hospital Group (CHG) in 2018, to

support the development and implementation of a sustainable and safe paediatric orthopaedic service for children and young people, has also led to the improvement in waiting times for outpatient appointments for children.

Hospital Beds Data

82. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the status of the proposed 50 bed unit at Portiuncula Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43604/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): It is proposed to provide a 50 bed ward block to replace existing ward accommodation at Portiuncula University Hospital, Ballinasloe. Funding has already been made available to bring the project to the design and planning stage. The ward block has now received planning permission.

Following publication of the Budget and estimates last week, the HSE is preparing a Capital Plan for 2019, having regard to the level of commitments and the costs to completion already in place. On completion of the Capital Plan, 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.

The HSE is concentrating on applying the funding available for infrastructure development in the most effective way possible to meet current and future needs.

HSE Staff Recruitment

83. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the timeframe for recruiting the additional therapists announced in budget 2019. [43560/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): Deputies will be aware that funding was recently announced in Budget 2019 for an additional 100 therapy posts for Assessment of Need and therapeutic interventions for children. This will enable the HSE to reduce the waiting list for Assessment of Need under the Disability Act and to drive implementation of the *Progressing Disability Services for Children and Young People Programme* through new staff appointments to reconfigured multi-disciplinary, geographic-based teams.

The HSE is now in the process of developing its National Service Plan in accordance with the relevant legislative provisions and funding allocation. As planning for service provision for 2019 is currently underway it is not possible to provide detailed information on how the allocated funding will be spent in 2019. Decisions have yet to be made with regard to the types of therapy posts that will be created, the areas to which they will be allocated, and the time-frame for the recruitment of the additional posts.

However, as soon as these decisions are finalised, the HSE and agencies funded through Section 38 and Section 39 of the Health Act will make every effort to recruit these clinicians as quickly as possible, within the budget allocation provided. The additional funding for 100 therapy posts for children's disability services will have a significant positive impact on waiting times for assessment and services over the course of the next year.

Hospital Staff Recruitment

84. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health the status of progress to recruit additional staff to expand the existing cath lab activity at University Hospital Waterford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43545/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Deputy is aware, Dr Herity concluded that the needs of the effective catchment population of University Hospital Waterford could be accommodated from a single cath lab and recommended that the operating hours of the existing cath lab should be extended to provide 12 sessions of 4 hours each per week. Approval and funding has been provided for the additional staff required to facilitate this service expansion. Pending the completion of the recruitment process, a mobile cath lab has been in place since October 2017 which has improved access and reduced waiting times for patients. The recruitment of the additional staff, which is being progressed by local management and the HSE's National Recruitment Service, is now at an advanced stage.

Emergency Departments Waiting Times

85. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Health the reason 738 persons over 75 years of age had to wait more than 24 hours in the emergency department in St. Vincent's Hospital during January to August 2018. [43593/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I wish to acknowledge the distress overcrowded Emergency Departments (EDs) cause to patients, their families and frontline staff working in very challenging working conditions in hospitals throughout the country.

Reflecting the demographic pressures associated with the growth in our aging population, this year has been characterised by high demand for unscheduled care, particularly among the over-75 age group. Patients in this age group are the highest users of most health and social care services, have more complex needs and longer stays in our Acute Hospitals.

I recognise that hospitals are increasingly operating at or above capacity, with year-round demand pressures that are further challenged over the winter months. However, the National Service Plan 2018 includes an expected activity target that 100% of patients aged 75 and over are discharged or admitted within 24 hours of registration. Therefore, any breach of this target in respect of patients in this age cohort is unacceptable.

Ireland East Hospital Group, which includes St Vincent's Hospital, advise that the hospital did not meet the target because of an increased demand and activity for unscheduled care this year. Between January and August 2018, the total attendances in St Vincent's Hospital ED increased by 7.4%, while admissions rose by 13%, as compared with the same period in 2017. For those over 75, attendances increased by 10.8% and admissions by 18.6% to the end of August 2018.

As Minister for Health, I am committed to maintaining the focus on addressing overcrowding in our hospital emergency departments. My Department is working closely with the HSE to ensure that local and regional winter plans at hospital group and community health care organisation level are consolidated and supported through policies and plans at national level to ensure the most effective response to the winter challenges to unscheduled care provision.

In addition, as part of Budget 2019, €10m in funding has been allocated in 2018, to enable hospitals to de-escalate before the end of the year, with a focus on supporting patients in the over 75 age group.

Services for People with Disabilities

86. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Health the measures that will be put in place to boost respite facilities for persons with disabilities and their families in County Louth. [43607/18]

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.

The Programme for Partnership Government states that the Government wishes to provide more accessible respite care to facilitate full support for people with a disability.

The current adult respite provision in County Louth is - 3 beds in Moorehall Lodge, Ardee; 3 beds in Sruthan House. Since April 2018 service users also have access to 3 additional beds in Bower House in North Co Dublin.

Respite services in Co. Louth will be further enhanced by year end with the following planned developments - 4 additional beds in Moorehall and 4 additional beds to be provided by Praxis.

In addition children's respite services currently provided by Rehab Care at the Maria Goretti Foundation, Lordship, Co. Louth provides one respite bed since August 2018 with a further additional bed coming on stream in early 2019.

Additional day and residential are to be provided by Positive Futures.

This level of service will continue throughout 2019.

Health Services Reform

87. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if in the context of reorganisation of the health services, consideration will be given to the establishment of regional bodies consisting of public representatives, the professional stakeholders and patient representatives with a view to restoring a demographic structure nationally at which the specific issues relative to these particular regions can be discussed in detail, senior representatives of which might then be considered for a national body accountable to him; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43484/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In August, I published the Sláintecare Implementation Strategy which provides the framework within which a system-wide reform programme will be advanced. The Strategy contains specific commitments in relation to improving governance and accountability across the health service.

One of the key actions outlined in the Strategy is to establish an independent Board for the HSE and to reconfigure the HSE to improve accountability and support integrated care. Legislation to establish a Board for the HSE is currently before the Oireachtas. I intend to establish the Board once the legislation has been passed. I have already announced Mr Ciarán Devane as Chair designate of the Board.

More broadly, the task of identifying the optimal set of health structures including national and regional bodies, and the most appropriate governance, accountability and performance framework for the future health system will be an important stream of work under the Sláintecare programme of reforms. As set out in the Implementation Strategy, I am committed to the development of a new system of health structures comprising a leaner national centre with responsibility for national planning, strategy and standard setting, complemented by regional integrated care organisations with responsibility for the planning and delivery of services at a regional level.

As a first step, my Department has undertaken a public consultation regarding the geographical alignment of Hospital Groups and Community Healthcare Organisations. The submissions to the consultation are currently being analysed by my Department and I hope to publish the report of the analysis shortly. This work will inform the development of detailed proposals in this area, including the role and function of regional bodies.

Health Reports

88. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health if €3 billion will be provided for the Sláintecare implementation fund beginning with a €600 million commitment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31055/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): A key recommendation in the Sláintecare Report is to ‘Implement transitional and legacy funding arrangements to a total of €3 billion over six years, to boost reinvestment into one-off system changing measures, training capacity and capital expenditure’. The report proposed that this funding be used to provide ehealth infrastructure, develop primary care infrastructure including primary care centres and community diagnostics, expand training places, provide for system change and to renovate and increase hospital capacity.

The report suggested that €500 million per annum for the next 6 years will be required for this.

The National Development Plan (NDP), published earlier this year as part of Project Ireland 2040 provides €10.9 billion to invest in infrastructure, equipment and additional service capacity for the public health sector over the next 10 years. This represents an increase of 165% in capital funding over the previous decade. This capital provision will address all of the capital components of the proposals in the Sláintecare Report, albeit, over a ten year period as opposed to six years as recommended in the report.

The funding provided for in the NDP will deliver:

- 2,600 additional acute hospital beds, including elective-only hospitals in Cork, Dublin and Galway;

- 4,500 additional long and short-term community beds;

- A modern ehealth and ICT infrastructure;

- Additional Primary Care facilities with greater access to diagnostics; and

- Additional facilities for mental health services and for people with disabilities

The NDP provides for an unprecedented capital investment in the health service and represents one of the largest building programmes in its history. This won't be delivered overnight. It

is essential that new capacity and facilities are properly planned and designed. This process will be undertaken under the auspices of the Sláintecare Programme Office in line with the specific actions outlined in the Sláintecare Implementation Strategy.

In addition to this I am delighted that I have secured over €200m in budget 2019 which will directly support a range of additional services including initiatives proposed in the Sláintecare Report and committed to in the Sláintecare Implementation Strategy including:

- Ringfenced funding for the Sláintecare Programme Office;
- €20m for the establishment of a new ring-fenced Sláintecare Integration Fund to drive improvements in the way we deliver care across the system;
- Funding for a new GP contract which is critical to the Sláintecare vision of delivering more care in the community;
- Expansion of free GP care, by increasing the weekly income threshold for GP Visit card by €25 which could benefit up to 100,000 people. This supports the Sláintecare recommendation to move towards universal GP care over 5 years;
- Additional funding for 100 new therapy posts to address assessment of need waiting lists for children with disabilities and funding to ensure that the needs of all those leaving school in 2019 will be addressed;
- €55m in new development funding aimed at further enhancing community mental health teams for adults and children;
- Reducing user charges and out of pocket payments by further reductions in prescription charges - 50 cent reduction in prescription charges from €2.00 to €1.50 for all medical card holders over the age of 70. This is in line with a Sláintecare recommendation to reduce prescription charges;
- A €10 reduction in the monthly Drugs Payment Scheme threshold from €134 to €124 which is also in line with a key Sláintecare recommendation;
- Increased investment of €20m in the National Treatment Purchase Fund. €75m will be available to the NDPF IN 2019 which will be used to treat 70,000 patients on waiting lists in 2019; and
- Additional funding for care redesign and the National Children's Hospital.

Funding has also been provided to expand existing health services, in line with Sláintecare recommendations and full details of this will be contained in the National Service Plan to be published in December.

Hospitals Funding

89. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if the necessary funding will be allocated to upgrade the central sterile services department facilities at Roscommon University Hospital in order to meet the required HIQA decontamination standards and to allow for the expansion of surgical services at the hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43277/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): An upgraded Central Sterile Services De-

partment at Roscommon University Hospital has been included in the National Development Plan (NDP), announced earlier this year.

The HSE has advised that HSE Estates and the Saolta University Health Care Group have agreed on a proposal and the project brief will be submitted shortly for review by the HSE's National Capital and Property Steering Group in line with HSE protocols for capital developments.

A project brief has been prepared and will be progressed to design stage in 2019 and construction timelines will be determined.

Hospital Staff Recruitment

90. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health when all necessary consultant and staff posts will be filled in Our Lady's Hospital, Navan. [43504/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Our Lady's Hospital Navan (OLHN) is part of the Ireland East Hospital Group. Every hospital in that Group, large and small, including OLHN, has a vital role to play within the Group. In 2013 OLHN was included in the list of designated Model 2 Hospital under the Smaller Hospitals Framework which set out the role of smaller hospitals in managing routine, urgent or planned care locally while more complex care is managed in the larger hospitals.

I understand from the HSE, recruitment at Our Lady's Hospital Navan is an ongoing process to fill vacant posts. The hospital strives to ensure the timely filling of all staff grades. While awaiting the permanent filling of vacant posts every effort is made to have the role filled by agency or temporary staff.

Currently, the Hospital Group is engaged in a programme of re-design work to further integrate and enhance the role of OLHN within the Ireland East Hospital Group and to ensure that it will provide more services safely and appropriately.

The future staff requirements for OLHN will be considered in the context of the evolving role for the hospital and the need to further develop particular services there in the context of overall service reorganisation in the Ireland East Hospital Group. Such service include extended day surgery, selected acute medicine, local injuries, a large range of diagnostic services, specialist rehabilitation medicine and palliative care.

The Hospital Group is continuing to engage closely with all interested parties to ensure that the needs of patients, staff, the local and wider community are addressed.

Psychological Services

91. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health his plans to expand counselling in primary care service to children and adolescents under 18 years of age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43544/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Psychology services in primary care settings can play a key role in promoting good mental health and offer the opportunity to provide early and cost-effective interventions for children and adolescents.

In order to improve access to psychology services in primary care settings, additional fund-

ing of €5 million has been made available for the recruitment of 22 staff grade psychologists and 114 assistant psychologists. The vast majority of these posts have been filled and, already, a reduction can be seen in the numbers waiting to access these services.

As well as additional investment, the HSE is also examining the scope for improved ways of working through a Service Improvement Initiative for Counselling in Primary Care. These new ways of working include:

- standardised psychology protocols;
- a single point of contact for all non-crisis and non-complex emotional and behavioural referrals; and
- assistance for service users in stepping ‘up to’ and ‘down from’ more specialist health services.

Other options to improve access times for children and adolescents are also being pursued, including a computerised cognitive behavioural therapy programme. This programme utilises new technologies, delivering supports through weekly sessions based around a computer, with a healthcare professional as support.

Hospital Waiting Lists Action Plans

92. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to reduce waiting lists for gynaecological procedures at Cork University Maternity Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43542/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Reducing waiting time for patients for hospital operations and procedures is a key priority for the Government. This year has seen ongoing improvements with the number of patients waiting for inpatient and daycase procedures (IPDC), now at 72,700 from the peak of 86,100 in July 2017. This represents a 16% reduction in the overall number of patients waiting for an inpatient or day case procedure.

In Budget 2019 the Government has further increased investment in this area, with funding to the NTPF to increase from €55m in 2018 to €75m in 2019.

My Department is working closely with the National Treatment Purchase Fund and the HSE to finalise the 2019 Waiting List Initiatives before the end of this year. This approach is to ensure a seamless continuation of the considerable progress made this year into next year.

The HSE has advised that there are currently 3,379 patients on the Outpatient waiting list and 442 on the inpatient waiting list.

In early 2018 CUMH committed again to reduce the Gynaecology Inpatient/Daycase waiting lists and with the support of the South/South West HG and the NTPF rented theatre space in the Mater Private Hospital Cork. From April to October this year CUMH held 8 full day theatre sessions to operate on the long waiters treating 56 patients and a further full day planned for December (8 patients).

Initiatives to address the Gynaecology Outpatient waiting list have included the commencement of additional Gynaecology OP Clinics out of hours (368+ extra patients seen so far) at CUMG which has resulted in almost 370 additional patients been seen. In addition, CUMH started 6 new weekly Registrar clinics on Monday 30th July. In September, a new Friday OPD commenced which is seeing 25/30 new patients (long waiters). Later this year CUMH will also

be commencing a new weekly Outreach Clinic in Mallow Primary Health in conjunction with the GPs.

Mental Health Services Provision

93. **Deputy Fiona O’Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the status of plans to build a standalone mental health facility in Naas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43599/18]

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

Hospital Facilities

94. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health when the short stay ward will open in Letterkenny University Hospital; the preparations the HSE has underway to ensure it is opened promptly; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43298/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Arising from the recommendations in the Health Service Capacity Review, my Department engaged with the HSE this year to identify the location and mix of beds across the hospital system which could be frontloaded to address pressures being experienced in our hospital Emergency Departments.

This process culminated in the development by the HSE of a Capacity Plan, which identified over 600 acute beds and 290 residential care beds, to be phased in between 2018 and 2020, including a 20-bed short stay ward in Letterkenny University Hospital.

As a first step towards the implementation of the Capacity Plan, €10 million in funding is being made available in 2019 to prepare the ground for opening additional acute beds for winter 2019/2020. My Department is currently engaging with the HSE to finalise the details of this investment.

General Practitioner Services

95. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health the steps he will take to repair the general practitioner system nationally. [43505/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): General Practitioners play an important role in the primary care system. The number of GPs on the specialist register continues to increase – up from 2,270 in 2010 to 3,669 as at July 2018. The number of GPs holding GMS contracts has also risen from 2,098 in 2008 to 2,507 as at 1 September 2018.

The Government is aware of workforce issues facing general practice, including the influence of demographic factors, and has implemented a number of measures to improve recruitment and retention in general practice.

GP training places have been increased from 120 in 2009 to 193 places filled in 2018, an increase of around 60% over a nine year period. The Government’s objective is to continue to achieve annual increases in the number of training places available while ensuring that all of

the places are filled.

Entry provisions to the GMS scheme have been changed to accommodate more flexible GMS contracts and the retirement age for GPs has been extended to 72. An enhanced support package for rural practices has been introduced with improved qualifying criteria and an increased financial allowance of €20,000 per annum.

Officials from my Department and the HSE recently re-engaged with the Irish Medical Organisation to set out the State's position in relation to reform of the GMS contract. Agreement on the delivery of service improvements and contractual reform has the potential to facilitate a substantial increase in the resourcing of general practice on a multiannual basis.

Emergency Departments Waiting Times

96. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the significant increase in overcrowding in Naas hospital emergency department over the past two years. [43596/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I fully acknowledge the distress overcrowded Emergency Departments cause to patients, their families and frontline staff working in very challenging working conditions in hospitals throughout the country. I recognise that hospitals are increasingly operating at or above capacity, with year-round demand pressures that are further challenged over the winter months.

As Minister for Health, I am committed to maintaining the focus on addressing overcrowding in our hospital emergency departments. My Department is working closely with the HSE to ensure that local and regional winter plans at hospital group and community health care organisation level are consolidated and supported through policies and plans at national level to ensure the most effective response to the winter challenges to unscheduled care provision.

I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the specific query raised by the Deputy in relation to Naas Hospital.

Hospital Waiting Lists Action Plans

97. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the action he will take to address the long outpatient waiting times in the Midland Regional Hospital, Tullamore in which 3,691 persons are waiting more than 18 months for an appointment. [43567/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In Budget 2019 the Government has prioritised improving access and reducing waiting times for patients, with funding to the National Treatment Purchase fund (NTPF) increasing from €55 million in 2018 to €75 million in 2019, of which, €6 million will be committed to outpatient activity.

To date in 2018, the NTPF has approved almost 12,700 additional first-time outpatient appointments and this is projected to increase to 40,000 appointments next year. I recently met with the CEO's of all hospital groups to discuss improving access for patients and requested that they work with the NTPF and HSE in 2019 develop innovative proposals to address the number of long waiters on outpatient lists in 2019.

Outpatient waiting list figures for the end of September for Midlands Regional Hospital Tullamore show that there were more than 14,282 patients waiting for a first outpatient appoint-

ment, of which 74% are waiting less than 18 months.

More broadly, Dublin Midlands Hospital Group is working to introduce complete ‘episode of care’ clinics, as well as evaluating options for outsourcing appropriate specialties to reduce outpatient waiting lists.

In addition, the Central Waiting List Validation function, which was established in the NTPF last month, will deliver a standardised approach to validation across all hospitals in line with best patient-centred practices. This new function will have many benefits including the identification of patients on waiting lists who are ready and available to proceed with hospital care, the reduction in the Did Not Attend rate (DNA), and an improvement in information for managing waiting lists. The NTPF estimates that 30,000 patients who no longer require treatment will come off the outpatient waiting list in 2019 as a result of this activity.

Drug Treatment Programmes

98. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Health if there has been an assessment of the loss of drug treatment, counselling and other services in the Blanchardstown community since the closure of an organisation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38840/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Waiting Lists Action Plans

99. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which waiting lists for various procedures are likely to be improved in the course of 2019 having regard to the demographics and the improvements made or to be made in terms of improving staffing levels and facilities and the maximisation of the utilisation of theatre facilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43485/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Reducing waiting time for patients for hospital operations and procedures is a key priority for the Government. This year has seen ongoing improvements with the number of patients waiting for inpatient and daycase procedures (IPDC), now at 72,700 from the peak of 86,100 in July 2017. This represents a 16% reduction in the overall number of patients waiting for an inpatient or day case procedure.

In Budget 2019 the Government has further increased investment in this area, with funding to the NTPF to increase from €55m in 2018 to €75m in 2019. In 2019, the NTPF plans to deliver 25,000 Inpatient Day Case treatments, building on the 20,000 procedures delivered in 2018. In addition, 5,000 Gastro Intestinal Scopes will be carried out, bringing to 9,000 the additional scope activity provided by the NTPF since the start of 2018. Furthermore, 40,000 Outpatient appointments will be arranged as part of 2019 activity. It is expected that a further 34,000 patients who no longer need treatment will be removed from the waiting lists by the NTPF Central Validation Unit.

As a result, the NTPF projects by year end to reduce the overall number of patients on the IPDC waiting list from just over 86,000 in July 2017, to 70,000 at the end of 2018 and to under 59,000 by the end of 2019.

My Department is working closely with the NTPF and the HSE to finalise the 2019 Waiting List Initiatives before the end of this year. This will include the continuing engagement of the NTPF with the HSE and public hospitals, inviting proposals for waiting list initiatives either through the private sector or through public sector insourcing. The NTPF will provide funding to the solutions proposed if appropriate.

More broadly, the recent Budget provided an increase of €1.05 billion in Health funding. This brings the health budget for 2019 to €17 billion. This is the highest level of Health investment in the history of the State. This will allow the health service to meet additional demands caused by the demographic pressure of a growing and ageing population. The additional funding provided as part of Budget 2019 will directly support a range of additional services including initiatives proposed in the Sláintecare Report and committed to in the Sláintecare Implementation Strategy. Sláintecare will focus on meeting the demand for health care that our population currently has, and which will continue to grow in future years.

The Health Service Executive is currently in the process of finalising its National Service Plan for 2019, in consultation with officials from my Department. This will inform the activity to be provided by the HSE next year as well as informing the number of new staffing positions that will need to be created in 2019.

Health Services Provision

100. **Deputy Seán Barrett** asked the Minister for Health if there has been progress in respect of services for venesection patients with haemochromatosis; if the issue of the €80 fee that these persons must pay when they have to attend outpatient departments is being considered in the context of the overall general practitioner contract review process (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43276/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The issue of the provision of therapeutic phlebotomy services for hereditary haemochromatosis patients, including the issue of charges, is currently under consideration by my Department and the HSE. It is agreed that such services should be provided at the lowest level of complexity that is clinically and operationally feasible. In time it is envisaged that the majority of this work will be done in a primary care setting.

Also, my Department and the HSE recently re-engaged with the Irish Medical Organisation to set out the State's position in relation to reform of the GMS contract. The provision of therapeutic venesection services for medical and GP visit card holders is being considered as part of the consultations.

HSE Agency Staff

101. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Health if he will report on the work in investigating and identifying a resolution to the funding of pay restoration in section 39 organisations in which the staff took pay cuts in line with their counterparts in the public service at the onset of the fiscal crisis but did not receive pay restoration in line with their public service counterparts; the work done to date; his plans to resolve the funding problem; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28993/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Deputy will be aware that in February 2018, an agreement was reached at the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) between my Department, the HSE and health sector Trade Unions in relation to a process aimed at resolving

the pay restoration issue for staff employed by section 39 bodies in 50 pilot organisations. The 50 organisations included were agreed at the WRC by all parties. I asked the HSE to engage with the Section 39 organisations to establish the facts around what cuts were applied and how and when they were implemented. The HSE has completed the first phase of their work in relation to the agencies identified as part of the WRC process. This exercise has shown that of the agencies who returned data, a majority did apply pay reductions of some form. It also showed that some agencies made some form of pay restoration between 2016 and 2018. Following constructive engagement with the assistance of the Workplace Relations Commission, an agreement was reached on 2 October between the parties. Pay restoration will commence with an annual pay increase of up to €1,000 in April 2019 for those employed by the 50 organisations involved in the pilot. Any outstanding balance will be paid in two equal amounts in 2020 and 2021.

It is recognised that some of the remaining organisations will have pay restoration issues also. A process of engagement to address this will commence in 2019.

Rare Diseases Strategy

102. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health his plans to address issues in relation to myalgic encephalomyelitis which is a rare disease. [43459/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS) / myalgic encephalomyelitis (or encephalopathy) (ME) is a not uncommon, complex debilitating disorder which is characterised by severe fatigue accompanied by a range of other symptoms.

There is currently no known, specific, medical diagnostic test to determine or confirm a correct diagnosis of ME and no specific treatment which works for all sufferers is currently available. Assessment and interventions need to be tailored to the individual. There are assessments/ tests which can be carried out in primary care settings by a General Practitioner. Specialised tests may be required when considering differential diagnoses.

Treatment for ME is tailored to address the varying symptoms presented by those affected by ME. In general, these treatments are delivered within the context of primary care, with referrals into secondary care for specialist interventions in the areas of Neurology, Rheumatology, Pain Specialists, Endocrinology, Immunology, Cardiology, etc. The challenge in relation to ME is that it does not sit within one specialty, but crosses a number of specialties, with patients attending different Consultants for management of symptoms as they arise.

Waiting times for access to these services can be lengthy. However, there is currently work under way as part of the implementation of the Strategy for the Design of Integrated Outpatient Services 2016-2020, specifically as regards addressing how and where the patient is treated and the classification of referrals with corresponding clinically recommended time-frames. Consideration is also being given to condition specific referral forms. This work should see significant improvements with respect to access to appropriate services.

Services for People with Disabilities

103. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health the respite care services available for parents and guardians of children with intellectual disabilities in CHO area 6; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43451/18]

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.

The Programme for Partnership Government states that the Government wishes to provide more accessible respite care to facilitate full support for people with a disability.

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

Hospital Consultant Recruitment

104. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health when provision will be made for additional consultant rheumatologists to bring the complement of same in Crumlin Children's Hospital in line with international best practice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43440/18]

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.

Occupational Therapy Waiting Lists

105. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the action being taken to address the long waiting times for paediatric occupational therapy appointments in County Cork. [43582/18]

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

Protected Disclosures

106. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to a protected disclosure by staff at Harold's Cross Hospice; his role in such cases; and if the governance and management of the hospice in relation to public funding and industrial relations with staff will be examined. [43624/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Protected Disclosures Act, 2014 does not impose any legal obligation on any person who receives a protected disclosure, including a Minister, to investigate any of the matters raised in the disclosure, if the matter is being appropriately dealt with by another agency. However, it is my duty to treat any disclosure as confidential and to protect the identity of the discloser, where possible.

As the question refers to a Section 38 Agency which is governed by the Health Service Executive, this is a matter for the HSE.

This question has been referred to the Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

HSE National Service Plan

107. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health if the 2019 HSE service plan will enhance supports for carers in 2019. [43563/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The cross-departmental National Carers' Strategy was launched by the Government in 2012. Containing 42 actions across four national goals, it sets the strategic direction for future policies, services and supports provided by Government departments and agencies to carers. I am pleased to say that significant progress has been made on a large number of actions, and the Department of Health is determined to offer as much support as possible to family carers throughout the country.

Following the enactment of the necessary legislation, free GP care has been extended to those in receipt of the Carer's Allowance or Carer's Benefit since 1 September this year. Furthermore, in December 2017, the Government announced the provision of an additional €10 million specifically to enhance respite care in the disability sector, which has had a positive impact to date. €8 million of this provides for the equivalent of 12 new houses, one in each CHO, with an additional three in the Greater Dublin area. The remaining €2 million is for innovative respite solutions, such as Home Sharing and extended day services, to provide assistance where people need it most.

The Department of Health has also secured funding through the Dormant Accounts fund to enable the HSE to pilot a Carer's Needs Assessment in one Community Healthcare Organisation. The HSE developed this tool with significant input from the Family Carer Reference Group, which represents a national network of over 200 carer groups across Ireland. The assessment will assist in identifying the needs of carers across all care groups and will track health and wellbeing outcomes for carers over time.

The Department of Health and the HSE are committed to ensuring that family carers receive as much support as possible to allow them to continue caring for their loved ones. Both the Department and the HSE will continue to engage with family carer organisations to address the needs of carers.

The Department of Health is working with the HSE to prepare the 2019 National Service Plan. Pending agreement of the National Service Plan, I am not in a position to comment either on the funding that will be made available for carers or the specific services that will be provided.

Cancer Screening Programmes

108. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health the location of the laboratories that conducted the tests on the 221 women identified to date (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43623/18]

124. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health if the laboratories in which the 221 cases of women given false negative results conducted by CervicalCheck are known to him, the HSE and CervicalCheck management; and if so, the reason this information has not been provided to this Deputy in view of numerous requests for same. [43627/18]

379. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of the 221 women

that were diagnosed with cervical cancer that have had a change to the categorisation of their smear tests upon a subsequent review that was initiated by CervicalCheck after the women were diagnosed; and the number of these women from County Louth. [43283/18]

380. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if he has requested that the HSE provide a breakdown of the locations in which the cytology slides of the 221 women affected by the CervicalCheck cancer scandal were examined; and if not, his plans to do so. [43284/18]

381. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of the 221 women affected by the CervicalCheck cancer scandal that consented to participate in the review by an organisation (details supplied) instigated by him; the number of the women that consented from County Louth; and the number of women that were contacted regarding the review process. [43285/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 108, 124, 379 to 381, inclusive, together.

Since the inception of the cervical screening programme, CervicalCheck has been notified of a total of 1,482 cases of cervical cancer. The 221 figure is the number of women within the 1,482 for whom the clinical audit conducted by CervicalCheck showed a differing cytology recommendation to their original test. I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy in relation to the number of women among the 221 who come from Co. Louth.

In light of the particular sensitivities surrounding this issue it was decided that written, informed consent will be sought from women or the next-of-kin of women who have passed away, before they are included in the review which will be carried out by the Royal College of Obstetrics and Gynaecology. This consent process is nearing completion. To date, 1,591 letters have issued to individuals requesting consent to participate in RCOG Review. Consent forms have been returned by 813 individuals (51%), of whom 786 have consented to participate. Within this group, 65 women are among the 221 affected women and families.

In regard to laboratories, it can be noted that each of the laboratories which provides services for CervicalCheck serves a discrete population of women. Individual GP practices, clinics and colposcopy services are assigned to one designated programme laboratory. The samples of all tests taken in those locations are processed in the assigned laboratory. As has previously been stated, it can be assumed that false negatives have arisen in all contracted laboratories due to the limitations of screening and the fact that false negatives are inherent in screening. However, variations arise in relation to the socioeconomic status of populations assigned to each lab, urban-rural breakdown, overall volume of tests performed by the lab, the percentage of tests which are received from colposcopy clinics (this would result in the lab receiving a disproportionate number of high grade lesions) and other factors.

Emergency Departments Waiting Times

109. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Health the reason more than a thousand persons over 75 years of age had to wait more than 24 hours in the emergency department in University Hospital Limerick during January to August 2018. [43588/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I fully acknowledge the distress overcrowded Emergency Departments (EDs) cause to patients, their families and frontline staff working in very challenging working conditions in hospitals throughout the country.

Reflecting the demographic pressures associated with the growth in our aging population,

this year has been characterised by high demand for unscheduled care, particularly among the over-75 age group. Patients in this age group are the highest users of most health and social care services, have more complex needs and longer stays in our Acute Hospitals.

I recognise that hospitals are increasingly operating at or above capacity, with year-round demand pressures that are further challenged over the winter months. However, the National Service Plan 2018 includes an expected activity target that 100% of patients aged 75 and over are discharged or admitted within 24 hours of registration. Therefore, any breach of this target in respect of patients in this age cohort is unacceptable.

I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the specific query raised by the Deputy in relation to University Hospital Limerick.

Emergency Departments Waiting Times

110. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health the reason 417 persons over 75 years of age had to wait more than 24 hours in the emergency department in South Tipperary General Hospital during January to August 2018. [43587/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I fully acknowledge the distress overcrowded Emergency Departments (EDs) cause to patients, their families and frontline staff working in very challenging working conditions in hospitals throughout the country.

Reflecting the demographic pressures associated with the growth in our aging population, this year has been characterised by high demand for unscheduled care, particularly among the over-75 age group. Patients in this age group are the highest users of most health and social care services, have more complex needs and longer stays in our Acute Hospitals.

I recognise that hospitals are increasingly operating at or above capacity, with year-round demand pressures that are further challenged over the winter months. However, the National Service Plan 2018 includes an expected activity target that 100% of patients aged 75 and over are discharged or admitted within 24 hours of registration. Therefore, any breach of this target in respect of patients in this age cohort is unacceptable.

I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the specific query raised by the Deputy in relation to South Tipperary General Hospital.

Organ Donation

111. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of the scheme to provide compensation for living donors that are not working outside the home; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43441/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Policy on the Reimbursement of the Expenses of Living Kidney Donors provides for the reimbursement of accommodation and travel expenses incurred by living donors up to a maximum of €6,000. In addition the scheme reimburses loss of earnings incurred by salaried/waged donors and self-employed donors for up to 12 weeks after the donation, up to a maximum of €10,000. This maximum figure for loss of earnings was increased from €6,000 in 2016.

My Department is currently reviewing the policy and a meeting with a number of stakeholders will be held later this month. Some reimbursement of the childcare expenses incurred by

stay at home parents will be considered as part of the review.

Ambulance Service

112. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Health when the review of ambulance services in Arklow and west County Wicklow will take place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43595/18]

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

Hospital Facilities

113. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 88 of 29 May 2018, if the modular theatre at Merlin Park Hospital has opened; if not, when it will open; the status of the second orthopaedic theatre which closed in September 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43526/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Cancer Screening Programmes

114. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health the status of the audit that was suspended as a temporary measure into the findings of cervical smear tests; the date on which it was suspended; the date on which the audit will recommence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43528/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Following the emergence of issues relating to CervicalCheck earlier this year, the audit process was paused pending the outcome of the two reviews established by Government.

The first of these was the report of the Scoping Inquiry into issues surrounding Cervical-Check. Dr Scally's report was published on my Department's website on 12 September and includes 50 recommendations, all of which have been accepted by Government. These include two recommendations relating specifically to auditing cervical screening.

Dr Scally recommends that common, robust and externally validated approaches to all aspects of audit should be developed across the screening services. He also advises that there should be two patient advocates involved in the oversight of clinical audit for the screening services. Both of these recommendations will be implemented.

I am committed to returning to Government within three months, as recommended by Dr Scally, with a full plan for the implementation of all 50 of his recommendations. Development of this plan is underway, overseen by the CervicalCheck Steering Committee, which I established in June.

I want to see audit of cervical screening recommence as soon as possible, but it must be done in the right way and in the robust way that Dr Scally recommends, and there is obviously some work required to ensure that happens.

Services for People with Disabilities

115. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health his plans for ensuring access to respite for parents of children and adults with intellectual disabilities attached to a service (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43450/18]

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.

The Programme for Partnership Government states that the Government wishes to provide more accessible respite care to facilitate full support for people with a disability.

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

116. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health if Cappagh Hospital is operating at full capacity; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43606/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Cappagh Hospital currently has three theatres fully operational and a fourth operational for 80% of the time. With the recent appointment of one additional surgeon and a locum surgeon, activity is set to increase further and it is anticipated that the fourth theatre will be fully operational by year end.

There have been improvements in waiting times for access to services at Cappagh Hospital. In 2018, in-patient waiting times have fallen to approximately 12 months. It is expected that waiting times will reduce further by year-end, when it is anticipated that no patient will wait for a hip or a knee replacement beyond 9 months.

Cappagh Hospital increased its paediatric scoliosis activity in recent years and this trend has continued into 2018 with the hospital now projecting that it will complete 50 spinal fusion surgeries this year - ahead of its target of 39 surgeries. In addition to the scoliosis work, the hospital has completed 17 additional complex spinal procedures year to date again ahead of its target of 12 procedures for 2018.

Furthermore, the hospital is also undertaking day case activity for long waiting paediatric patients from Temple Street Children's University Hospital.

I understand from the HSE that the hospital has completed a business case for the opening of the fifth theatre. That theatre would require significant upgrading, equipping and staffing in order to undertake additional procedures. Any decision on whether to provide the additional capital and revenue funding will be taken in consultation with the Ireland East Hospital Group and in the context of competing demands for available resources.

Emergency Departments Waiting Times

117. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health the reason 937 persons over 75 years of age had to wait more than 24 hours in the emergency department in hospitals in County Cork during January to August 2018. [43591/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I fully acknowledge the distress overcrowded Emergency Departments (EDs) cause to patients, their families and frontline staff working in very challenging working conditions in hospitals throughout the country.

Reflecting the demographic pressures associated with the growth in our aging population, this year has been characterised by high demand for unscheduled care, particularly among the over-75 age group. Patients in this age group are the highest users of most health and social care services, have more complex needs and longer stays in our Acute Hospitals.

I recognise that hospitals are increasingly operating at or above capacity, with year-round demand pressures that are further challenged over the winter months. However, the National Service Plan 2018 includes an expected activity target that 100% of patients aged 75 and over are discharged or admitted within 24 hours of registration. Therefore, any breach of this target in respect of patients in this age cohort is unacceptable.

I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the specific query raised by the Deputy in relation to hospitals in County Cork.

Primary Care Services Provision

118. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Health his plans to reduce the long waiting times for primary care ophthalmology appointments in north County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43613/18]

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.

Hospital Waiting Lists Action Plans

119. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the action that will be taken to address the long outpatient waiting times in Galway University Hospital in which 5,772 persons are waiting more than 18 months for an appointment. [43579/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In Budget 2019 the Government has prioritised improving access and reducing waiting times for patients, with funding to the National Treatment Purchase fund (NTPF) increasing from €55 million in 2018 to €75 million in 2019, of which, €6 million will be committed to outpatient activity.

To date in 2018, the NTPF has approved almost 12,700 additional first-time outpatient appointments and this is projected to increase to 40,000 appointments next year. I recently met with the CEO's of all hospital groups to discuss improving access for patients and requested that they work with the NTPF and HSE in 2019 develop innovative proposals to address the number of long waiters on outpatient lists in 2019.

Outpatient waiting list figures for the end of September for Galway University Hospital show that there were more than 39,000 patients waiting for a first appointment. Of these over 85% of patients are waiting 18 months or less.

More broadly, Saolta Hospital Group has engaged in a number of initiatives to address long waiting lists throughout the wider hospital group. Saolta advises that at Galway University Hospital it is currently engaging in innovative outpatient initiatives, including the use of virtual clinics to address outpatient waiting lists within the specialties of ENT and vascular services.

In addition, the Central Waiting List Validation function, which was established in the NTPF last month, will deliver a standardised approach to validation across all hospitals in line with best patient-centred practices. This new function will have many benefits including the identification of patients on waiting lists who are ready and available to proceed with hospital care, the reduction in the Did Not Attend rate (DNA), and an improvement in information for managing waiting lists. The NTPF estimate that 30,000 patients who no longer require treatment will come off the outpatient waiting list in 2019 as a result of this activity.

Orthodontic Services Waiting Lists

120. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health the waiting time targets in place for children needing orthodontic treatment in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43603/18]

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.

Abortion Legislation

121. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health his plans to ensure that parental consent and parental notification will be sought for children under 18 years of age that wish to obtain a termination of pregnancy under forthcoming legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43423/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The issue of consent is addressed in section 22, which clearly states that the provisions of the Bill will operate within the existing legal provisions in regard to consent for medical procedures.

The *Guide to Professional Conduct and Ethics for Registered Medical Practitioners* of the Medical Council provides thorough information on the appropriate process to be followed to obtain valid informed consent for medical procedures.

The HSE has also published a *National Consent Policy* which includes detailed information on what constitutes valid and genuine consent and on how to obtain it.

Brexit Issues

122. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the steps that have been taken to prepare for Brexit and its impact on programmes such as the EU Cross Border Healthcare Directive, the EU treatment scheme, cross-Border health services generally and all the issues in relation to freedom of movement for medical and allied personnel; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43273/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Co-ordination of the whole-of-Government response to Brexit is being taken forward through the cross-Departmental coordination struc-

tures chaired by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Contingency planning for a no-deal or worst-case outcome, bringing together the detailed work being undertaken by individual Ministers and their Departments on issues within their policy remit, was identified as an early priority and is now well advanced. Its focus is on the immediate economic, regulatory and operational challenges which would result from such an outcome. It assumes a trading relationship based on the default WTO rules, but also examines the possible effects on many other areas of concern. This work has provided baseline scenarios for the impact of Brexit across all sectors, which can then be adapted as appropriate in light of developments in the EU-UK negotiations. This is enabling the modelling of potential responses under different scenarios, such as one where a withdrawal agreement, including a transitional arrangement, is concluded and where a Free Trade Agreement is the basis for the future relationship between the EU and the UK. My Department and its agencies have been conducting detailed analysis on the impacts of Brexit in the area of health. A number of issues are being examined and contingency planning for a range of eventualities is underway. A key issue will be to ensure that there is minimum disruption to health services and that essential services are maintained on a cross-Border, all-island and Ireland-UK basis. This analysis will inform resource requirements and ensure that the response to Brexit is adaptable to what is a changing process.

Home Help Service Provision

123. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Health the increase in home support hours planned for County Meath in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43611/18]

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 the recent Budget announcement, the HSE and officials from the Department of Health have commenced 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. The Service Plan will be developed over, approximately, the next month.

Question No. 124 answered with Question No. 108.

Vaccination Programme

125. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health when the National Immunisation Advisory Committee will examine the possibility of extending the HPV vaccine to men and women up to 45 years of age. [43581/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Deputy is aware, the immunisation programme in Ireland is based on the advice of the National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC). NIAC is a committee of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland which is comprised of experts from a number of specialties including infectious diseases, paediatrics and public health. The committee's recommendations are informed by public health advice and international best practice. All relevant and appropriate information is taken into account when

deciding to make changes to the State's immunisation programmes. NIAC submits its recommendations to my Department for consideration.

As outlined in my response to the Deputy's previous parliamentary question regarding this issue (asked on Thursday 11 October), no recommendation has been received by my Department in relation to extending age ranges for the HPV vaccine. However, as per my previous response, I can confirm that officials from my Department are scheduled to bring the Deputy's query to the attention of NIAC at a meeting which is arranged to take place next week. On the basis of the foregoing, I am not currently in a position to advise as to when any potential recommendation will be made.

Hospital Waiting Lists Action Plans

126. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the action he will take to address the long outpatient waiting times in Cork city hospitals in which 8,601 persons are waiting more than 18 months for an appointment. [43571/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In Budget 2019 the Government has prioritised improving access and reducing waiting times for patients, with funding to the National Treatment Purchase fund (NTPF) increasing from €55 million in 2018 to €75 million in 2019, of which, €6 million will be committed to outpatient activity.

To date in 2018, the NTPF has approved almost 12,700 additional first-time outpatient appointments and this is projected to increase to 40,000 appointments next year. I recently met with the CEOs of all hospital groups to discuss improving access for patients and requested that they work with the NTPF and HSE in 2019 develop innovative proposals to address the number of long waiters on outpatient lists in 2019.

Outpatient waiting list figures for the end of September for hospitals in Cork City (Mercy University Hospital; Cork University Hospital; Cork University Maternity Hospital; South Infirmity Victoria University Hospital) show that combined between them there were more than 53,000 patients waiting for a first appointment. Of these over 71% of patients are waiting 12 months or less.

More broadly, South-South West Hospital Group has engaged in a number of initiatives to address long waiting lists throughout the wider hospital group. For example South-South West advises that South Infirmity has engaged with the NTPF to provide additional sessions within the specialties of dermatology and ENT. It has also recruited an additional audiologist in July to reduce waiting times. NTPF-funded weekend clinics in ophthalmology have also commenced at Cork University Hospital with a target of seeing an additional 200 patients, while plastic surgery patients will also be treated through an innovative 'see and treat' clinic commencing on 20th October 2018.

In addition, the Central Waiting List Validation function, which was established in the NTPF last month, will deliver a standardised approach to validation across all hospitals in line with best patient-centred practices. This new function will have many benefits including the identification of patients on waiting lists who are ready and available to proceed with hospital care, the reduction in the Did Not Attend rate (DNA), and an improvement in information for managing waiting lists. The NTPF estimates that 30,000 patients who no longer require treatment will come off the outpatient waiting list in 2019 as a result of this activity.

Hospitals Data

127. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health the number and cost of all external reviews and-or investigations of patient care at Galway University Hospital in each of the past ten years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43525/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Hospital Waiting Lists Action Plans

128. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to reduce waiting lists in hospitals in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43543/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Reducing waiting time for patients for hospital operations and procedures is a key priority for the Government. This year has seen ongoing improvements with the number of patients waiting for inpatient and daycase procedures (IPDC), now at 72,700 from the peak of 86,100 in July 2017. This represents a 16% reduction in the overall number of patients waiting for an inpatient or day case procedure.

In Budget 2019 the Government has further increased investment in this area, with funding to the NTPF to increase from €55m in 2018 to €75m in 2019. My Department is working closely with the National Treatment Purchase Fund and the HSE to finalise the 2019 Waiting List Initiatives before the end of this year. This will include the continuing engagement of the NTPF with the HSE and public hospitals inviting proposals for waiting list initiatives either through the private sector or through public sector insourcing. The NTPF will provide funding to the solutions proposed if appropriate.

I also recently met with the CEO's of all hospital groups to discuss improving access for patients and requested that they work with the NTPF and HSE to develop innovative proposals to address the number of long waiters on outpatient lists in 2019.

More broadly, the HSE advises that construction was completed on Phase I of the expansion of Paediatric Department Cork University Hospital (CUH), which became operational in March 2017. This has started the process of centralisation of Paediatric Services at CUH for the city. In addition, the construction of the new Radiation Oncology facility that commenced in May 2017 is expected to be operational by 2020.

In South Infirmity Victoria University Hospital (SIVUH), the Ophthalmology Outpatient build has gone to tender with construction scheduled for April 2018. There is also further development planned in relation to the expansion of regional Pain, Dermatology Services and Ophthalmic surgery.

In Mercy University Hospital (MUH), there are plans for developments in relation to Radiology services, Gastroenterology services and theatre upgrades.

General Practitioner Services

129. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health his views on whether the general practitioner sector is facing a recruitment and retention crisis; his further views on whether the refusal to reverse FEMPI measures for general practitioners is a major driver of the

crisis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43553/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): General Practitioners play an important role in the primary care system. The number of GPs on the specialist register continues to increase – up from 2,270 in 2010 to 3,669 as at July 2018. The number of GPs holding GMS contracts has also risen from 2,098 in 2008 to 2,507 as at 1 September 2018.

The Government is aware of workforce issues facing general practice, including the influence of demographic factors, and has implemented a number of measures to improve recruitment and retention in general practice.

GP training places have been increased from 120 in 2009 to 193 places filled in 2018, an increase of around 60% over a nine year period. The Government's objective is to continue to achieve annual increases in the number of training places available while ensuring that all of the places are filled.

Entry provisions to the GMS scheme have been changed to accommodate more flexible GMS contracts and the retirement age for GPs has been extended to 72. An enhanced support package for rural practices has been introduced with improved qualifying criteria and an increased financial allowance of €20,000 per annum.

Officials from my Department and the HSE recently re-engaged with the Irish Medical Organisation to set out the State's position in relation to reform of the GMS contract. Agreement on the delivery of service improvements and contractual reform has the potential to facilitate a substantial increase in the resourcing of general practice on a multiannual basis.

Under the General Medical Services (GMS) contract, GPs are reimbursed for a range of services they provide to medical card and GP visit card holders. GPs are remunerated for these services primarily on a capitation basis, with a range of additional support payments and fees for specific items of service. GPs are also remunerated for services they provide on behalf of the HSE under other public health schemes, such as the Maternity and Infant Care Scheme, Primary Childhood Immunisation Scheme, etc.

Despite reductions to the payment rates of health contractors made under FEMPI legislation, the total fees paid to GPs under the GMS scheme have increased from just over €472 million in 2009 to approximately €525 million in 2017. This increase in fees is largely due to significant developments and investment in GP services introduced in recent years, with more services being made available to our citizens and additional financial support provided by the HSE.

The Public Service Pay and Pensions Act 2017 now allows the setting and varying of contractor payments on a non-emergency statutory basis. It is my intention to put in place a new multiannual approach to fees in return for service improvements and contractual reforms based upon health policy considerations and engagement with representative bodies.

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

130. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting for urology tests in each region; the average waiting time in each region; the steps he will take to ensure the HSE has the resources to deal with this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43271/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The information requested by the Deputy

has been provided by the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) at Hospital Group level and can be found on the attached spread sheet.

Reducing waiting time for patients for hospital operations and procedures is a key priority for the Government. This year has seen ongoing improvements with the number of patients waiting for inpatient and day case procedures (IPDC) now at 72,700 from the peak of 86,100 in July 2017. This represents a 16% reduction in the overall number of patients waiting for an inpatient or day case procedure.

In Budget 2019 the Government has further increased investment in this area, with funding to the NTPF to increase from €55m in 2018 to €75m in 2019.

My Department is working closely with the HSE and the National Treatment Purchase Fund to finalise the 2019 Waiting List Initiatives before the end of this year. The Plan will outline the combined impact of HSE and NTPF activity in 2019 to reduce the number of patients waiting for treatment.

The NTPF activity will cover approximately 50 high to medium volume procedures. The NTPF will also take a targeted approach in 2019 and further procedures will be tendered for, depending on waiting list times and suitability of patients for treatment at outsourced facilities.

While the NTPF will provide many of the procedures through outsourcing, it will build on the progress made in 2018 and the engagements with individual Hospitals to further support public system initiatives through HSE insourcing. NTPF authorisations are made in respect of the longest waiting patients first.

IPDC Waiters for Urology Testing by Group by TimeBand as at 18/10/2018

Average Wait Time: 144 Days

Sum of Total	Column Labels							
Row Labels	0-3 Months	3-6 Months	6-9 Months	9-12 Months	12-15 Months	15-18 Months	18+ Months	Grand Total
Children's Hospital Group	4	5	2	7	2	3	5	28
Dublin Midlands Hospital Group	96	61	41	50	35	32	29	344
Ireland East Hospital Group	442	176	138	29	19	15	17	836
RCSI Hospitals Group	507	234	72	43	19	1	1	877
Saolta University Health Care Group	406	253	88	54	22	21	29	873
South/South West Hospital Group	443	245	161	54	26	9	48	986

University of Limerick Hospital Group	448	405	284	46	6	3	4	1196
Grand Total	2346	1379	786	283	129	84	133	5140

tables contd.

Date	HospitalGroup	HospitalName	Wait Time Bands	Total
18/10/2018	Children's Hospital Group	Childrens University Hospital Temple Street	0-3 Months	1
18/10/2018	Children's Hospital Group	Childrens University Hospital Temple Street	3-6 Months	4
18/10/2018	Children's Hospital Group	Childrens University Hospital Temple Street	6-9 Months	1
18/10/2018	Children's Hospital Group	Childrens University Hospital Temple Street	9-12 Months	6
18/10/2018	Children's Hospital Group	Childrens University Hospital Temple Street	12-15 Months	2
18/10/2018	Children's Hospital Group	Childrens University Hospital Temple Street	15-18 Months	1
18/10/2018	Children's Hospital Group	Our Lady's Children's Hospital Crumlin	0-3 Months	3
18/10/2018	Children's Hospital Group	Our Lady's Children's Hospital Crumlin	3-6 Months	1
18/10/2018	Children's Hospital Group	Our Lady's Children's Hospital Crumlin	6-9 Months	1
18/10/2018	Children's Hospital Group	Our Lady's Children's Hospital Crumlin	9-12 Months	1
18/10/2018	Children's Hospital Group	Our Lady's Children's Hospital Crumlin	15-18 Months	2
18/10/2018	Children's Hospital Group	Our Lady's Children's Hospital Crumlin	18+ Months	5
18/10/2018	Dublin Midlands Hospital Group	Midland Regional Hospital Portlaoise	0-3 Months	46
18/10/2018	Dublin Midlands Hospital Group	Midland Regional Hospital Portlaoise	3-6 Months	37
18/10/2018	Dublin Midlands Hospital Group	Midland Regional Hospital Portlaoise	6-9 Months	24
18/10/2018	Dublin Midlands Hospital Group	Midland Regional Hospital Portlaoise	9-12 Months	30
18/10/2018	Dublin Midlands Hospital Group	Midland Regional Hospital Portlaoise	12-15 Months	17
18/10/2018	Dublin Midlands Hospital Group	Midland Regional Hospital Portlaoise	15-18 Months	19
18/10/2018	Dublin Midlands Hospital Group	Midland Regional Hospital Portlaoise	18+ Months	4
18/10/2018	Dublin Midlands Hospital Group	St. James's Hospital	0-3 Months	13

Questions - Written Answers

Date	HospitalGroup	HospitalName	Wait Time Bands	Total
18/10/2018	Dublin Midlands Hospital Group	St. James's Hospital	3-6 Months	11
18/10/2018	Dublin Midlands Hospital Group	St. James's Hospital	6-9 Months	5
18/10/2018	Dublin Midlands Hospital Group	St. James's Hospital	9-12 Months	9
18/10/2018	Dublin Midlands Hospital Group	St. James's Hospital	12-15 Months	5
18/10/2018	Dublin Midlands Hospital Group	St. James's Hospital	18+ Months	7
18/10/2018	Dublin Midlands Hospital Group	Tallaght University Hospital	0-3 Months	37
18/10/2018	Dublin Midlands Hospital Group	Tallaght University Hospital	3-6 Months	13
18/10/2018	Dublin Midlands Hospital Group	Tallaght University Hospital	6-9 Months	12
18/10/2018	Dublin Midlands Hospital Group	Tallaght University Hospital	9-12 Months	11
18/10/2018	Dublin Midlands Hospital Group	Tallaght University Hospital	12-15 Months	13
18/10/2018	Dublin Midlands Hospital Group	Tallaght University Hospital	15-18 Months	13
18/10/2018	Dublin Midlands Hospital Group	Tallaght University Hospital	18+ Months	18
18/10/2018	Ireland East Hospital Group	Mater Misericordiae University Hospital	0-3 Months	172
18/10/2018	Ireland East Hospital Group	Mater Misericordiae University Hospital	3-6 Months	135
18/10/2018	Ireland East Hospital Group	Mater Misericordiae University Hospital	6-9 Months	119
18/10/2018	Ireland East Hospital Group	Mater Misericordiae University Hospital	9-12 Months	17
18/10/2018	Ireland East Hospital Group	Mater Misericordiae University Hospital	12-15 Months	11
18/10/2018	Ireland East Hospital Group	Mater Misericordiae University Hospital	15-18 Months	13
18/10/2018	Ireland East Hospital Group	Mater Misericordiae University Hospital	18+ Months	15
18/10/2018	Ireland East Hospital Group	St. Columcille's Hospital	0-3 Months	71
18/10/2018	Ireland East Hospital Group	St. Columcille's Hospital	3-6 Months	5
18/10/2018	Ireland East Hospital Group	St. Columcille's Hospital	6-9 Months	2
18/10/2018	Ireland East Hospital Group	St. Columcille's Hospital	9-12 Months	6

Date	HospitalGroup	HospitalName	Wait Time Bands	Total
18/10/2018	Ireland East Hospital Group	St. Columcille's Hospital	12-15 Months	6
18/10/2018	Ireland East Hospital Group	St. Columcille's Hospital	18+ Months	1
18/10/2018	Ireland East Hospital Group	St. Luke's General Hospital Kilkenny	0-3 Months	1
18/10/2018	Ireland East Hospital Group	St. Luke's General Hospital Kilkenny	3-6 Months	2
18/10/2018	Ireland East Hospital Group	St. Luke's General Hospital Kilkenny	15-18 Months	1
18/10/2018	Ireland East Hospital Group	St. Michael's Hospital Dun Laoghaire	0-3 Months	13
18/10/2018	Ireland East Hospital Group	St. Michael's Hospital Dun Laoghaire	3-6 Months	2
18/10/2018	Ireland East Hospital Group	St. Michael's Hospital Dun Laoghaire	6-9 Months	1
18/10/2018	Ireland East Hospital Group	St. Michael's Hospital Dun Laoghaire	9-12 Months	1
18/10/2018	Ireland East Hospital Group	St. Michael's Hospital Dun Laoghaire	15-18 Months	1
18/10/2018	Ireland East Hospital Group	St. Michael's Hospital Dun Laoghaire	18+ Months	1
18/10/2018	Ireland East Hospital Group	St. Vincent's University Hospital	0-3 Months	185
18/10/2018	Ireland East Hospital Group	St. Vincent's University Hospital	3-6 Months	32
18/10/2018	Ireland East Hospital Group	St. Vincent's University Hospital	6-9 Months	16
18/10/2018	Ireland East Hospital Group	St. Vincent's University Hospital	9-12 Months	5
18/10/2018	Ireland East Hospital Group	St. Vincent's University Hospital	12-15 Months	2
18/10/2018	RCSI Hospitals Group	Beaumont Hospital	0-3 Months	262
18/10/2018	RCSI Hospitals Group	Beaumont Hospital	3-6 Months	134
18/10/2018	RCSI Hospitals Group	Beaumont Hospital	6-9 Months	33
18/10/2018	RCSI Hospitals Group	Beaumont Hospital	9-12 Months	20
18/10/2018	RCSI Hospitals Group	Beaumont Hospital	12-15 Months	6
18/10/2018	RCSI Hospitals Group	Beaumont Hospital	15-18 Months	1
18/10/2018	RCSI Hospitals Group	Cavan General Hospital	0-3 Months	42
18/10/2018	RCSI Hospitals Group	Cavan General Hospital	9-12 Months	13
18/10/2018	RCSI Hospitals Group	Cavan General Hospital	12-15 Months	7
18/10/2018	RCSI Hospitals Group	Cavan General Hospital	18+ Months	1
18/10/2018	RCSI Hospitals Group	Connolly Hospital	0-3 Months	65
18/10/2018	RCSI Hospitals Group	Connolly Hospital	3-6 Months	42
18/10/2018	RCSI Hospitals Group	Connolly Hospital	6-9 Months	17

Questions - Written Answers

Date	HospitalGroup	HospitalName	Wait Time Bands	Total
18/10/2018	RCSI Hospitals Group	Connolly Hospital	9-12 Months	5
18/10/2018	RCSI Hospitals Group	Connolly Hospital	12-15 Months	5
18/10/2018	RCSI Hospitals Group	Louth County Hospital	0-3 Months	46
18/10/2018	RCSI Hospitals Group	Louth County Hospital	3-6 Months	11
18/10/2018	RCSI Hospitals Group	Louth County Hospital	6-9 Months	3
18/10/2018	RCSI Hospitals Group	Louth County Hospital	9-12 Months	2
18/10/2018	RCSI Hospitals Group	Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital Drogheda	0-3 Months	92
18/10/2018	RCSI Hospitals Group	Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital Drogheda	3-6 Months	47
18/10/2018	RCSI Hospitals Group	Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital Drogheda	6-9 Months	19
18/10/2018	RCSI Hospitals Group	Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital Drogheda	9-12 Months	3
18/10/2018	RCSI Hospitals Group	Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital Drogheda	12-15 Months	1
18/10/2018	Saolta University Health Care Group	Galway University Hospital	0-3 Months	216
18/10/2018	Saolta University Health Care Group	Galway University Hospital	3-6 Months	141
18/10/2018	Saolta University Health Care Group	Galway University Hospital	6-9 Months	32
18/10/2018	Saolta University Health Care Group	Galway University Hospital	9-12 Months	28
18/10/2018	Saolta University Health Care Group	Galway University Hospital	12-15 Months	5
18/10/2018	Saolta University Health Care Group	Galway University Hospital	15-18 Months	6
18/10/2018	Saolta University Health Care Group	Galway University Hospital	18+ Months	16
18/10/2018	Saolta University Health Care Group	Letterkenny University Hospital	0-3 Months	91
18/10/2018	Saolta University Health Care Group	Letterkenny University Hospital	3-6 Months	48
18/10/2018	Saolta University Health Care Group	Letterkenny University Hospital	6-9 Months	19
18/10/2018	Saolta University Health Care Group	Letterkenny University Hospital	9-12 Months	11
18/10/2018	Saolta University Health Care Group	Letterkenny University Hospital	12-15 Months	5
18/10/2018	Saolta University Health Care Group	Letterkenny University Hospital	15-18 Months	9
18/10/2018	Saolta University Health Care Group	Letterkenny University Hospital	18+ Months	1

Date	HospitalGroup	HospitalName	Wait Time Bands	Total
18/10/2018	Saolta University Health Care Group	Mayo General Hospital	0-3 Months	1
18/10/2018	Saolta University Health Care Group	Mayo General Hospital	3-6 Months	1
18/10/2018	Saolta University Health Care Group	Mayo General Hospital	6-9 Months	1
18/10/2018	Saolta University Health Care Group	Portiuncula Hospital	0-3 Months	45
18/10/2018	Saolta University Health Care Group	Portiuncula Hospital	3-6 Months	7
18/10/2018	Saolta University Health Care Group	Portiuncula Hospital	9-12 Months	3
18/10/2018	Saolta University Health Care Group	Portiuncula Hospital	12-15 Months	5
18/10/2018	Saolta University Health Care Group	Portiuncula Hospital	15-18 Months	1
18/10/2018	Saolta University Health Care Group	Roscommon Hospital	0-3 Months	35
18/10/2018	Saolta University Health Care Group	Roscommon Hospital	3-6 Months	19
18/10/2018	Saolta University Health Care Group	Roscommon Hospital	6-9 Months	6
18/10/2018	Saolta University Health Care Group	Roscommon Hospital	12-15 Months	1
18/10/2018	Saolta University Health Care Group	Roscommon Hospital	15-18 Months	1
18/10/2018	Saolta University Health Care Group	Roscommon Hospital	18+ Months	6
18/10/2018	Saolta University Health Care Group	Sligo Regional Hospital	0-3 Months	18
18/10/2018	Saolta University Health Care Group	Sligo Regional Hospital	3-6 Months	37
18/10/2018	Saolta University Health Care Group	Sligo Regional Hospital	6-9 Months	30
18/10/2018	Saolta University Health Care Group	Sligo Regional Hospital	9-12 Months	12
18/10/2018	Saolta University Health Care Group	Sligo Regional Hospital	12-15 Months	6
18/10/2018	Saolta University Health Care Group	Sligo Regional Hospital	15-18 Months	4
18/10/2018	Saolta University Health Care Group	Sligo Regional Hospital	18+ Months	6
18/10/2018	South/South West Hospital Group	Cork University Hospital	0-3 Months	88
18/10/2018	South/South West Hospital Group	Cork University Hospital	3-6 Months	43

Questions - Written Answers

Date	HospitalGroup	HospitalName	Wait Time Bands	Total
18/10/2018	South/South West Hospital Group	Cork University Hospital	6-9 Months	15
18/10/2018	South/South West Hospital Group	Cork University Hospital	9-12 Months	12
18/10/2018	South/South West Hospital Group	Cork University Hospital	12-15 Months	1
18/10/2018	South/South West Hospital Group	Cork University Hospital	15-18 Months	2
18/10/2018	South/South West Hospital Group	Cork University Hospital	18+ Months	4
18/10/2018	South/South West Hospital Group	Cork University Maternity Hospital	0-3 Months	17
18/10/2018	South/South West Hospital Group	Cork University Maternity Hospital	3-6 Months	20
18/10/2018	South/South West Hospital Group	Cork University Maternity Hospital	6-9 Months	13
18/10/2018	South/South West Hospital Group	Kerry General Hospital	0-3 Months	31
18/10/2018	South/South West Hospital Group	Mallow General Hospital	0-3 Months	1
18/10/2018	South/South West Hospital Group	Mercy University Hospital	0-3 Months	34
18/10/2018	South/South West Hospital Group	Mercy University Hospital	3-6 Months	5
18/10/2018	South/South West Hospital Group	Mercy University Hospital	6-9 Months	1
18/10/2018	South/South West Hospital Group	Mercy University Hospital	9-12 Months	2
18/10/2018	South/South West Hospital Group	University Hospital Waterford	0-3 Months	272
18/10/2018	South/South West Hospital Group	University Hospital Waterford	3-6 Months	177
18/10/2018	South/South West Hospital Group	University Hospital Waterford	6-9 Months	132
18/10/2018	South/South West Hospital Group	University Hospital Waterford	9-12 Months	40
18/10/2018	South/South West Hospital Group	University Hospital Waterford	12-15 Months	25
18/10/2018	South/South West Hospital Group	University Hospital Waterford	15-18 Months	7
18/10/2018	South/South West Hospital Group	University Hospital Waterford	18+ Months	44
18/10/2018	University of Limerick Hospital Group	Ennis Hospital	0-3 Months	190
18/10/2018	University of Limerick Hospital Group	Ennis Hospital	3-6 Months	168

Date	HospitalGroup	HospitalName	Wait Time Bands	Total
18/10/2018	University of Limerick Hospital Group	Ennis Hospital	6-9 Months	126
18/10/2018	University of Limerick Hospital Group	Ennis Hospital	9-12 Months	27
18/10/2018	University of Limerick Hospital Group	Ennis Hospital	15-18 Months	1
18/10/2018	University of Limerick Hospital Group	Nenagh Hospital	0-3 Months	221
18/10/2018	University of Limerick Hospital Group	Nenagh Hospital	3-6 Months	210
18/10/2018	University of Limerick Hospital Group	Nenagh Hospital	6-9 Months	149
18/10/2018	University of Limerick Hospital Group	Nenagh Hospital	9-12 Months	12
18/10/2018	University of Limerick Hospital Group	Nenagh Hospital	12-15 Months	3
18/10/2018	University of Limerick Hospital Group	Nenagh Hospital	15-18 Months	2
18/10/2018	University of Limerick Hospital Group	Nenagh Hospital	18+ Months	1
18/10/2018	University of Limerick Hospital Group	St. John's Hospital Limerick	0-3 Months	30
18/10/2018	University of Limerick Hospital Group	St. John's Hospital Limerick	3-6 Months	17
18/10/2018	University of Limerick Hospital Group	St. John's Hospital Limerick	6-9 Months	6
18/10/2018	University of Limerick Hospital Group	St. John's Hospital Limerick	9-12 Months	4
18/10/2018	University of Limerick Hospital Group	St. John's Hospital Limerick	12-15 Months	3
18/10/2018	University of Limerick Hospital Group	University Hospital Limerick	0-3 Months	7
18/10/2018	University of Limerick Hospital Group	University Hospital Limerick	3-6 Months	10
18/10/2018	University of Limerick Hospital Group	University Hospital Limerick	6-9 Months	3
18/10/2018	University of Limerick Hospital Group	University Hospital Limerick	9-12 Months	3
18/10/2018	University of Limerick Hospital Group	University Hospital Limerick	18+ Months	3

Hospital Beds Data

131. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health when 37 additional beds will be provided in Kerry University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43565/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Arising from the recommendations in the Health Service Capacity Review, my Department engaged with the HSE this year to identify the location and mix of beds across the hospital system which could be frontloaded to address pressures being experienced in our hospital Emergency Departments.

This process culminated in the development by the HSE of a Capacity Plan, which identified over 600 acute beds and 290 residential care beds, to be phased in between 2018 and 2020, including 33 additional beds in Kerry University Hospital.

As a first step towards the implementation of the Capacity Plan, €10 million in funding is being made available in 2019 to prepare the ground for opening additional acute beds for winter 2019/2020. My Department is currently engaging with the HSE to finalise the details of this investment.

Budget 2019

132. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the items of new expenditure in budget 2019 which would not be there without the existence of Sláintecare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43554/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I would like to assure the Deputy that Sláintecare was my main priority in terms of the allocation of new funding in Budget 2019. The 2019 Budget features over €200m which will directly support a range of additional services including initiatives proposed in the Sláintecare Report and committed to in the Sláintecare Implementation Strategy including:

- Ringfenced funding for the Sláintecare Programme Office;
- €20m for the establishment of a new ring-fenced Sláintecare Integration Fund to drive improvements in the way we deliver care across the system;
- Funding for a new GP contract which is critical to the Sláintecare vision of delivering more care in the community;
- Expansion of free GP care, by increasing the weekly income threshold for GP Visit card by €25 which could benefit up to 100,000 people. This supports the Sláintecare recommendation to move towards universal GP care over 5 years;
- Additional funding for 100 new therapy posts to address assessment of need waiting lists for children with disabilities and funding to ensure that the needs of all those leaving school in 2019 will be addressed;
- €55m in new development funding aimed at further enhancing community mental health teams for adults and children;
- Reducing user charges and out of pocket payments by further reductions in prescription charges - 50 cent reduction in prescription charges from €2.00 to €1.50 for all medical card holders over the age of 70. This is in line with a Sláintecare recommendation to reduce prescription charges;
- A €10 reduction in the monthly Drugs Payment Scheme threshold from €134 to €124 which is also in line with a key Sláintecare recommendation;
- Increased investment of €20m in the National Treatment Purchase Fund. €75m will be

available to the NDPF IN 2019 which will be used to treat 70,000 patients on waiting lists in 2019; and

- Additional funding for care redesign and the National Children's Hospital.

Funding has also been provided to expand existing health services, in line with Sláintecare recommendations and full details of this will be contained in the National Service Plan to be published in December.

Cancer Screening Programmes

133. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the steps being taken on foot of the Scally report into the CervicalCheck scandal to address the important matters raised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43272/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): On 12 September 2018, the Final Report of the Scoping Inquiry into the CervicalCheck Screening Programme, led by Dr Gabriel Scally, was published following a Government decision. Government has accepted all 50 recommendations set out in the Report.

These recommendations address issues identified through Dr Scally's extensive programme of work. I am committed to returning to Government within three months, as recommended by Dr Scally, with a full plan for the implementation of these recommendations. Development of this plan is underway, overseen by the CervicalCheck Steering Committee, which I established in June.

My first priorities for implementation include establishment of a National Screening Committee by early 2019, the establishment of an Independent Patient Safety Council, and the recruitment of a new leadership team for the Screening Service. Funding to implement recommendations of Dr Scally's inquiry into the CervicalCheck Screening Programme has been allocated in Budget 2019.

Last week, I met with Dr Scally and I have asked him to provide the independent review of the implementation plan recommended in his report which I am pleased to say he has agreed to do. Dr Scally has also undertaken to do some further work in relation to the laboratories.

Dr Scally presented two reports containing his first findings to me in early June. These were published following the Government meeting on Tuesday, the 12th of June. I accepted all six recommendation from these reports and implementation of these is well underway; in his final report, Dr Scally has stated that he is impressed by how my Department is carrying forward these recommendations.

Health Services Reports

134. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health when the report commissioned in 2015 on the provision of health services on the islands will be published; when it was completed; if a copy of the report will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43529/18]

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

Hospitals Building Programme

135. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Health the status of the proposed expansion plans at Naas General Hospital under the health priorities of the National Development Plan 2018-2027; if timelines or individual investment amounts are available for the new endoscopy unit to serve persons in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43621/18]

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.

Services for People with Disabilities

136. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 440 of 2 October 2018, the details of the significant increase in resources needed to meet the needs of the children waiting on the Dublin south west school age team waiting list; his plans to resolve same; the number of children on the list; and the number waiting over six months. [43299/18]

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 Consultant Recruitment

137. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health his views on whether there is a recruitment and retention crisis in relation to hospital consultants; his further views on whether the wide disparity in new entrant pay is a major driver of this crisis; his plans in relation to same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43556/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Government remains committed to increasing the consultant workforce. Notwithstanding recruitment and retention challenges, the number of consultants employed in the public health service has increased by 118 in the 12 months to end August 2018 and by 479 in the past five years to 3,032 (whole time equivalents).

The Public Sector Pay Commission in its Report published on 4 September 2018 identified difficulties in attracting consultant applications for advertised posts at present and acknowledged that the pay rates for new entrants had been highlighted as a factor in this. The Commission also recognised that the implementation of the settlement of the 2008 Consultant Contract claim, while necessary of itself, would serve to highlight further the differential in pay between the pre-existing cadre of consultants and new entrants. The Commission stated that policy responses that may be proposed for new entrants across the public services generally may not address the degree of pay differential which currently applies to new entrant consultants. Not-

withstanding this, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform has since published pay proposals regarding new entrants across the public service, including consultants under Section 4 of the Public Service Stability Agreement.

Given its analysis, the Pay Commission proposed that the Parties to the Public Service Stability Agreement jointly consider what further measures could be taken, over time, to address the pay differential between pre-existing consultants and new entrant consultants. The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and my Department have noted the Commission's views and consideration will need to be given to potential solutions which are in line with public sector pay policy and available budgets. This will be a significant challenge given the amounts involved.

Hospitals Policy

138. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health the timeframe for the consultation on Portlaoise Hospital; the persons or bodies that will be engaged with in relation to same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43503/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I am committed to securing and further developing the role of the Midland Regional Hospital Portlaoise as a constituent hospital within the Dublin Midlands Hospital Group. Since 2014, the focus has been on supporting the hospital to develop and enhance management capability, implementing changes required to address clinical service deficiencies, and incorporating the hospital into the governance structures within the Dublin Midlands Hospital Group.

Significant work has been undertaken to strengthen and stabilise current arrangements for services at the hospital to ensure that services that are not sustainable are discontinued and those that are, are safety assured and adequately resourced. Funding has increased by 35% relative to the 2012 budget and staffing levels have risen by 29% from the 2014 base. Governance and management arrangements in Portlaoise Hospital have been strengthened, additional clinical staff has been appointed and staff training, hospital culture and communications have improved.

As I have outlined previously, no decision has been made yet on the draft Action Plan for Portlaoise Hospital and my Department is currently finalising the process for wider consultation. I intend to appoint an independent, external facilitator in the coming weeks who will be charged with executing the consultation.

Medical Card Administration

139. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health if he has had discussions with the HSE regarding the level of bureaucracy involved, particularly for older persons, in dealing with the medical card section of the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43270/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE strives to have an application process for medical cards which is as streamlined and straightforward as possible for all applicants. Assistance is offered to persons completing application forms through the National Medical Card Unit and Local Health Offices. The application process for medical cards for persons over the age of 70 years is now more straightforward as a gross income threshold is applied. The Health (Alteration of Eligibility) (No. 2) Act of 2013, set the medical card income limits for persons over 70 years of age at €500 gross per week for a single person and €900

gross per week for a couple.

The HSE is required to check and verify the details of any application made for a medical and GP visit card and therefore during the assessment process individuals may be required to provide supplementary material. Whilst such requests may place an additional administrative burden on persons it is noted that this material is often required by the HSE to carry out its due diligence in order to make a complete assessment.

Hospital Facilities

140. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the measures being introduced to ensure that the planned modular unit at South Tipperary General Hospital will be fully staffed before it becomes operational; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43424/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Improving access to health care services is a key priority in 2019. I understand that the works in relation to the planned modular build at South Tipperary General Hospital are progressing and that recruitment processes are currently in train, with the objective of opening the new 40-bed ward block in the first quarter of 2019.

Paediatric Services

141. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the status of plans to tackle the waiting times for assessment and treatment for children with scoliosis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43557/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The development of a sustainable scoliosis service has been prioritised by my Department and the HSE in 2018. An additional €9 million was provided to the Children's Hospital Group in 2018, to support the development and implementation of a sustainable and safe paediatric orthopaedic service for children and young people.

The increased investment in scoliosis has brought stability to the service and the current capacity for services has expanded. The Children's Hospital Group advises that 446 procedures will be delivered this year, compared to 371 in 2017, and 224 in 2016. This represents a doubling of activity since 2016.

Waiting list figures for 12 October show 130 patients waiting; this includes patients who have been asked to come in for a procedure, those who have been given a date for a procedure in the near future, and those who are waiting for a date for a procedure. This represents a reduction of 61, or 32%, in comparison to the same week last year, when the list stood at 191 patients.

The Children's Hospital Group advises that the clinical criteria for determining a care plan for scoliosis related surgeries and other spinal procedures is complex and is based on established clinical guidelines and best practice both nationally and internationally.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

142. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health if the situation at Linn Dara CAMHS in Cherry Orchard in relation to the operation of the service, reported staff shortages and reductions in bed capacity will be clarified. [43625/18]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists Action Plans

143. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Health the action he will take to address the tripling in the number of outpatients waiting a year plus since September 2016 for an appointment in Navan Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43609/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In Budget 2019 the Government has prioritised improving access and reducing waiting times for patients, with funding to the National Treatment Purchase fund (NTPF) increasing from €55 million in 2018 to €75 million in 2019, of which, €6 million will be committed to outpatient activity.

To date in 2018, the NTPF has approved almost 12,700 additional first-time outpatient appointments and this is projected to increase to 40,000 appointments next year. I recently met with the CEO's of all hospital groups to discuss improving access for patients and requested that they work with the NTPF and HSE in 2019 to develop innovative proposals to address the number of long waiters on outpatient lists in 2019.

Outpatient waiting list figures for the end of September show that there were just over 6,000 patients waiting for a first appointment in Navan Hospital and of these, over 72% are waiting 12 months or less.

More broadly, Ireland East Hospital Group (IEHG) has engaged in a number of initiatives to address long waiting lists throughout the wider hospital group. IEHG advises that at present 73% of all patients are offered an outpatient appointment within one year of referral.

In addition, the Central Waiting List Validation function, which was established in the NTPF last month, will deliver a standardised approach to validation across all hospitals in line with best patient-centred practices. This new function will have many benefits including the identification of patients on waiting lists who are ready and available to proceed with hospital care, the reduction in the Did Not Attend rate (DNA), and an improvement in information for managing waiting lists. The NTPF estimates that 30,000 patients who no longer require treatment will come off the outpatient waiting list in 2019 as a result of this activity.

Hospital Services

144. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health if an external facilitator has been appointed for the consultation on the future of Portlaoise hospital. [43502/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I am committed to securing and further developing the role of the Midland Regional Hospital Portlaoise as a constituent hospital within the Dublin Midlands Hospital Group. Since 2014, the focus has been on supporting the hospital to develop and enhance management capability, implementing changes required to address clinical service deficiencies, and incorporating the hospital into the governance structures within the Dublin Midlands Hospital Group.

Significant work has been undertaken to strengthen and stabilise current arrangements for services at the hospital to ensure that services that are not sustainable are discontinued and those that are, are safety assured and adequately resourced. Funding has increased by 35% relative

to the 2012 budget and staffing levels have risen by 29% from the 2014 base. Governance and management arrangements in Portlaoise Hospital have been strengthened, additional clinical staff has been appointed and staff training, hospital culture and communications have improved.

As I have outlined previously, no decision has been made yet on the draft Action Plan for Portlaoise Hospital. I intend to appoint an independent, external facilitator for the consultation process in the coming weeks.

Cannabis for Medicinal Use

145. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Health the proposed timeframe for the establishment of the medical cannabis access programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43453/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Considerable progress is being made in relation to the introduction of the Cannabis for Medical Use Access Programme, the lack of availability of cannabis products in Ireland remains the most critical barrier to full implementation of the Medical Cannabis Access Programme. Full establishment is dependent on the commercial operators making these products available in Ireland.

Whilst medical cannabis products are not medicines, ensuring that such products meet appropriate quality standards when they are made available to the Irish market is a critical aspect of facilitating safe access to medical cannabis for Irish-based patients. Department of Health officials are working intensively on this issue to ensure a supply of appropriate medical cannabis products from other EU Member States and further afield to meet the needs of Irish patients. However, the Department of Health has no control in relation to business decisions taken by commercial product manufacturers and has no powers to compel such companies to supply their products to Irish market.

Until these products are made available in Ireland it remains a matter for the prescriber, who has successfully applied for a Ministerial Licence under the Misuse of Drugs Acts 1977 to 2016, and their patient, to source the prescribed medical cannabis-based product. It is understood that patients who have been prescribed such products under Ministerial Licence have sourced them from a pharmacy in the Netherlands.

Psychological Services Waiting Lists

146. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health if the number of referrals of children and young persons to psychological services that are not accepted and the number of those not offered a place on waiting lists will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37993/18]

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

Hospital Staff Recruitment

147. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health if recruitment has commenced to staff the short stay ward at Letterkenny University Hospital; the number of staff and

relevant grades which have been advertised for the ward; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43297/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Arising from the recommendations in the Health Service Capacity Review, my Department engaged with the HSE this year to identify the location and mix of beds across the hospital system which could be frontloaded to address pressures being experienced in our hospital Emergency Departments.

This process culminated in the development by the HSE of a Capacity Plan, which identified over 600 acute beds and 290 residential care beds, to be phased in between 2018 and 2020, including a 20-bed short stay ward in Letterkenny University Hospital.

As a first step towards the implementation of the Capacity Plan, €10 million in funding is being made available in 2019 to prepare the ground for opening additional acute beds for winter 2019/2020. My Department is currently engaging with the HSE to finalise the details of this investment.

Disease Management

148. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health his plans to make blood tests for Lyme disease available here. [43617/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Lyme disease (also known as Lyme borreliosis) is an infection caused by a spiral-shaped bacterium called *Borrelia burgdorferi*. It is transmitted to humans by bites from ticks infected with the bacteria. The infection is generally mild affecting only the skin but can occasionally be more severe and highly debilitating.

Testing and treatment for Lyme borreliosis is widely available in Ireland in all major hospitals. Lyme disease is diagnosed by medical history and physical examination. The infection is confirmed by blood tests which look for antibodies produced by an infected person's body in response to the infection. These normally take several weeks to develop and may not be present in the early stages of the disease. The standard laboratory approach to Lyme diagnostics is a two-stage approach and has been agreed by experts from the Scientific Advisory Committee of the Health Protection Surveillance Centre and other Irish and international experts.

Laboratories in Ireland generally follow the laboratory testing recommendations of the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, the Infectious Disease Society of America, the European Federation of Neurological Societies, and the British Infection Association. Irish laboratories have their own quality assurance methods to make sure the tests are working correctly as well as being accredited by the Irish National Accreditation Body to perform the test correctly. In undertaking Lyme testing, it is essential that the results are interpreted in the light of the clinical condition of the patient. If the result of this initial screen is equivocal, the patient's samples are referred to the U.K.'s Rare and Imported Pathogens Laboratory. This laboratory uses a two-tier system recommended by American and European authorities which involves a screening test followed by a confirmatory test.

Eating Disorders

149. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health his plans to tackle the rising incidence of body dysmorphia and eating disorders among men and young men in particular; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43442/18]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists Action Plans

150. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Health the action he will take to address the long outpatient waiting times in University Hospital Limerick in which 5,360 persons are waiting more than 18 months for an appointment. [43568/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In Budget 2019 the Government has prioritised improving access and reducing waiting times for patients, with funding to the National Treatment Purchase fund (NTPF) increasing from €55 million in 2018 to €75 million in 2019, of which, €6 million will be committed to outpatient activity.

To date in 2018, the NTPF has approved almost 12,700 additional first-time outpatient appointments and this is projected to increase to 40,000 appointments next year. I recently met with the CEOs of all hospital groups to discuss improving access for patients and requested that they work with the NTPF and HSE in 2019 to develop innovative proposals to address the number of long waiters on outpatient lists in 2019.

Outpatient waiting list figures for the end of September for University Hospital Limerick show that there were more than 29,000 patients waiting for a first outpatient appointment, of which 69% are waiting less than 12 months.

More broadly, the HSE advises that the University of Limerick Hospital Group is working to provide a range of insourced outpatient clinics across a wide range of specialties including dermatology, endocrinology, gynaecology, ENT, and many more. These clinics will actively work to reduce the longest waiting patients across those specialties with the largest waiting lists.

In addition, the Central Waiting List Validation function, which was established in the NTPF last month, will deliver a standardised approach to validation across all hospitals in line with best patient-centred practices. This new function will have many benefits including the identification of patients on waiting lists who are ready and available to proceed with hospital care, the reduction in the Did Not Attend rate (DNA), and an improvement in information for managing waiting lists. The NTPF estimates that 30,000 patients who no longer require treatment will come off the outpatient waiting list in 2019 as a result of this activity.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

151. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health when Respreeza will be sanctioned fully for persons that took part in the clinical trial; when it will be more widely available to alpha 1 antitripan patients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43274/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE assessed the application for the pricing and reimbursement of Respreeza and in August 2017, the manufacturer, CSL Behring, was notified that the HSE did not recommend reimbursement.

A number of patients were on an access scheme for this product, operated by the manufacturer, for the treatment of Alpha-1 Antitrypsin Deficiency. That scheme was being run independently by the manufacturer without reference to the HSE.

The company notified the HSE that it had decided to terminate the access scheme from 30 September 2017. Following interventions by the HSE, the company modified its decision and agreed to continue to supply the medication free of charge for the patients on the access scheme. Due to the critical and exceptional circumstances, the HSE agreed to fund the provision of the necessary nursing service to ensure that patients could continue to receive the medicine

The HSE is continuing to liaise with the treating Consultant and the company and has drafted the terms of an agreement for the long term care of the 19 alpha one clinical trial patients. This proposal is being reviewed by CSL Behring and it is hoped that a final agreement can be reached shortly.

In so far as the provision of Respreeza to other patients is concerned, it is open to the company to submit a new reimbursement application which will be assessed by the HSE in line with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013. As the Deputy will appreciate, the Minister for Health has no statutory role in such matters.

Home Help Service Provision

152. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the provision he will make for home support services for the elderly in 2019 in view of the significant difficulty many persons experienced in securing home support services in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43169/18]

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 the recent Budget announcement, the HSE and officials from the Department of Health have commenced 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. The Service Plan will be developed over, approximately, the next month.

Oireachtas Joint Committee Reports

153. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health if he has considered the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Health's report on orphan drugs from February 2018; the changes he is considering on foot of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43278/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013 gives full statutory powers to the HSE to assess and make decisions on the reimbursement of all medicines, including orphan medicines.

The Joint Committee on Health's Report on Evaluating Orphan Drugs made a number of significant recommendations in relation to the reimbursement of such medicines in Ireland.

My Department is examining the Report at present.

Questions - Written Answers
National Dementia Strategy

154. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health if the 2019 HSE service plan will provide for new and expanded services for persons with dementia. [43562/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): In order to meet the challenges faced by people with dementia, the Irish National Dementia Strategy was launched in December 2014. The Strategy aims to improve dementia care to allow people with dementia to live well for as long as possible and to deliver improved services and supports. The Strategy contains 35 priority and additional actions and its implementation is being led by the National Dementia Office in the HSE. The office has made substantial progress towards developing evidence-based care pathways for people with dementia and progress to date, as well as future plans, is recorded in the mid-term review of the Strategy's implementation, which was published in May this year. Plans are progressing to further implement the Dementia Strategy through the National Dementia Office, including in the area of diagnosis, post-diagnostic supports and care pathways.

In 2016 and 2017, the National Dementia Office partnered with the Alzheimer Society of Ireland on a project to map dementia-specific community-based services and supports. It provides a useful snapshot and baseline study into what, where and when dementia services are being offered. The study has also been used to inform a service finder hosted on the National Dementia Office's website. This allows people to search for dementia-specific community services in their area.

There are gaps in access to services and a large variance in what services are provided across the country. The National Dementia Office has met with senior HSE officials in each Community Healthcare Organisation region to highlight gaps in each area and to develop local action plans to improve service provision.

The Department of Health secured €6.26 million through the 2016, 2017 and 2018 Dormant Accounts Fund Action Plans to develop a number of projects which are designed to expand public awareness of dementia and to improve care for people with dementia. Projects receiving funding include the delivery of post-diagnostic supports; a dementia diagnostic service for people with intellectual disability; a national network of memory technology resource rooms; the development of a national dementia registry; the national rollout of a Dementia Training Programme for HSE homecare staff; the development of Dementia Resource Centres; funding for a dementia community activation coordinator; an evaluation of services for people with early onset dementia; and community support projects for people with dementia.

The Department of Health is working with the HSE to prepare the 2019 National Service Plan. Pending agreement of the National Service Plan, I am not in a position to comment either on the funding that will be made available for dementia care or the specific services that will be provided.

National Treatment Purchase Fund Eligibility

155. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health his views on whether the NTPF should be extended to cover children with special needs that are waiting for treatment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43555/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Reducing waiting time for patients for hospital operations and procedures is a key priority for the Government. In Budget 2019 we have

further increased investment in this area, with funding to the National Treatment Purchase Fund to increase from €55 m in 2018 to €75 m in 2019, an overall increase of 150 % since this government came into office.

In 2019, the NTPF plans to deliver 25,000 Inpatient Day Case treatments, an increase of 5,000 from the 20,000 procedures committed to in the Waiting List Action Plan 2018. Furthermore, 40,000 first outpatient appointments will be arranged as part of the 2019 activity.

NTPF activity next year will cover approximately 50 high to medium volume procedures and will be through a combination of treating patients in outsourced facilities and supporting the public system initiatives. In addition, the NTPF will take a targeted approach in 2019 for procedures not included in the high to medium volume bracket.

My Department is working closely with the NTPF and the HSE to finalise a coherent Waiting List Action Plan for 2019 before the end of the year. The priority of my Department is to maintain a seamless continuation of the considerable progress made this year into next year. This will include the continuing engagement of the NTPF with the HSE and public hospitals, inviting proposals for waiting list initiatives either through the private sector or through public sector insourcing. The NTPF will provide funding to the solutions proposed if appropriate.

In terms of treatment offers, the NTPF authorises public hospitals to offer outsourced treatment to clinically suitable long waiting patients who are on an inpatient/day case waiting list for surgery, having been referred on to such a list following clinical assessment by a consultant/specialist at an outpatient clinic. NTPF authorisations are made in respect of the longest waiting patients first.

Mental Health Services Provision

156. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Health the progress of plans for the development of a new mental health unit at Naas General Hospital included as part of the health priorities of the National Development Plan 2018-2027; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43622/18]

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

HSE Agency Staff Data

157. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health the cost and number of agency staff employed at the acute mental health unit, department of psychiatry, University Hospital Galway, by month to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43527/18]

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

Disability Services Funding

158. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the significant funding and resources difficulties being faced by a group (details supplied). [43530/18]

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.

Hospitals Building Programme

159. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the timeframe for capital works at MRH Mullingar to accommodate the CT scanner; and the capital works planned at this location. [43458/18]

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.

Taoiseach’s Meetings and Engagements

160. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he met with Mr. Donald Tusk when he attended the October 2018 EU Council meeting. [43491/18]

The Taoiseach: I meet and speak regularly with my EU counterparts, bilaterally, and at formal and informal meetings of the European Council.

I had a bilateral meeting with the President of the European Council, Donald Tusk, in Brussels on 4 October. We discussed progress in the Brexit negotiations and other issues on the EU agenda in advance of the October European Council.

President Tusk re-iterated his ongoing solidarity for Ireland in ensuring that a robust and legally watertight version of the backstop is agreed as part of the Withdrawal Agreement with the UK.

I had further engagement with him in the margins of the October European Council, although I did not have a formal meeting with him on that occasion.

Ongoing political engagement with our partners remains crucial, regarding to Brexit and other important EU issues. I will continue to engage closely with our EU partners, including the EU institutions, in the period ahead and to use every opportunity to defend Ireland’s interests.

Legislative Reviews

161. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Taoiseach if recent suggestions from a person

(details supplied) that proposed Government legislation should be assessed for its likely impact on litigation have been given consideration; and his plans for a legislation impact assessment for all Government and Private Members' legislation. [43170/18]

The Taoiseach: A significant amount of work is done on Government Bills before publication of the scheme of a Bill is approved by Government. This would include such measures as consultation with stakeholders, investigation of unintended consequences, examining financial implications for proposals, checking compatibility with the Constitution, EU law and international obligations. Where necessary and appropriate it would also include consideration of the impact a piece of legislation might have on the work of the courts.

Following approval by Government, the scheme is then sent for pre legislative scrutiny by the relevant Joint Oireachtas Committee before being drafted by the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel to the Government and then published.

Following discussions between a liaison group of officials from all Departments and the Courts Service the need for consideration of the possible impact of draft legislation on the courts has been reaffirmed. The Courts Service has offered to provide advice and assistance on understanding any technical issues or operational impacts on the courts.

Arrangements to facilitate liaison between Departments and the Courts Service during the early stages of drafting are in train.

Private Members' Bills are not the responsibility of Government and are not subject to the same detailed scrutiny process as Government Bills. Under Dáil Standing Order 141(2) scrutiny of Private Members' Bills is a matter for the relevant Select Committee.

In an effort to improve the quality of Private Members' Bills, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Dáil and the Government on the procedure for consideration of PMBs has been agreed by Government and the Dáil Reform Committee. The Standing Orders to underpin the MOU are being developed by the Oireachtas for final agreement by the Sub Committee on Dáil Reform before being scheduled for agreement by the Dáil.

The MoU, when agreed, confirms a new procedure whereby PMBs will undergo detailed scrutiny in advance of Committee Stage in exchange for a response from Government on whether a money message will issue or not.

Community Development Initiatives

162. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach his plans to include East Wall in the North East Inner City Taskforce area. [43258/18]

The Taoiseach: At the outset of the North East Inner City (NEIC) Initiative, care was taken to ensure that area would be the right size to allow the work to be focused, while encompassing areas identified as disadvantaged.

Sheriff Street, Seán McDermott Street, Ballybough and Summerhill - all areas identified as very disadvantaged - have been included under the Initiative.

That said, a pragmatic approach is being taken by the Programme Implementation Board to the inclusion of projects from the surrounding area, including East Wall, where there is clear overlap and/or a value in working collaboratively, for the benefit of the NEIC community.

While there are no plans to extend the boundary as such, all services used by the NEIC com-

munity are welcome to apply for funding or other assistance - through the NEIC Programme Implementation Board - if it can be demonstrated that the proposed purpose is in line with the recommendations of the Mulvey Report.

Taoiseach's Meetings and Engagements

163. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Taoiseach the details of engagements, meetings or correspondence that he has had with a person (details supplied) in the past three years. [43400/18]

The Taoiseach: As I stated in the House on the 11th October 2018, I was invited by Science Foundation Ireland to present Mr. David McCourt with the Science Foundation Ireland St. Patrick's Day Medal at a public event held in Washington DC in March 2018 at which the media were present and which was reported at the time. I had no other meeting or discussion with Mr McCourt. We did not discuss the national broadband programme.

Mr McCourt wrote to me on two occasions, in June 2017 congratulating me on my appointment and seeking a meeting to discuss his portfolio of companies, and in 2018 to invite me to launch his book. The 2017 correspondence was acknowledged by my office, and an email declining the invitation to launch his book was issued to the 2018 correspondence.

Programme for Government Implementation

164. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Taoiseach the progress made to date in implementing the commitment in A Programme for a Partnership Government (details supplied) regarding the provision of external experts for Oireachtas committees; the name of the officials or the section in his Department taking the lead on the implementation of this commitment; the number of meetings held to discuss this commitment; if engagement or consultation has taken place with committee chairpersons or officials in the Houses of the Oireachtas regarding the way in which this commitment will be delivered and the level of expertise that will be required; if funds or a budget has been allocated for the implementation of the commitment; and if a tender process has been considered or undertaken regarding this issue. [43537/18]

The Taoiseach: The Programme for a Partnership Government was agreed in May 2016 during the formation of the Government. This is a five year programme of work being undertaken for the duration of the present Dáil.

The relevant commitment in the Programme which focuses on the Oireachtas Committee Structure, Resources and Responsibilities, sets out a number of commitments in this area, including Panels of outside experts being made available to assist committees in their work.

Since 2016 significant progress has been made in reforming how business is done in the Oireachtas. While my Department is playing its part, the Houses of the Oireachtas and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform have also been key players in driving the reform agenda. However, the engagement of experts by a committee is, in the first instance, a matter for the committees and similarly the allocation of resources is a matter for the Houses of the Oireachtas Service.

Local Authority Funding

165. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Taoiseach the categories of funding available to local authorities through his Department; and the amount of funding provided for each scheme in 2016 and 2017. [43737/18]

The Taoiseach: In 2016 the Department of the Taoiseach supported the Minister for the Diaspora in overseeing implementation of a national diaspora strategy. Funding was provided to Local Authorities for the development of strong diaspora links at local and community level in order to benefit local and regional development.

The Local Diaspora Strategy Development Fund was open to all Local Authorities to invest in developing strategies for diaspora engagement at local and community level. A maximum of €10,000 was available for each of the 31 local authorities. 24 local authorities availed of funding under this scheme at a cost of €240,000.

In 2017 the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade took over responsibility for local diaspora initiatives.

Work Placement Programmes

166. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of University of Limerick students who had been sent to Baldonnel for work experience. [43321/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): My Department facilitated work experience under the University of Limerick student Placement Programme for 3 students per year commencing in 1992 and ending with the 2008/2009 academic year.

Curragh Plains Representative Forum

167. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the engagement between his Department and Kildare County Council regarding ongoing land management and maintenance of the Curragh plains. [43213/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Both the Department of Defence and Kildare County Council are members of the Curragh Forum which was established in March 2016 and provides “stakeholders with an opportunity for the consideration / progress of a wide range of issues regarding the use, management and long term development of the Curragh Plains”.

My Department met with Kildare County Council on 18 September 2018 to discuss the vision paper commissioned by the Council reflecting on the potential of the Curragh Plains and to highlight some of the challenges currently faced in the management of the Plains.

The Department and Kildare County Council are currently exploring the potential for collaboration on addressing issues and identifying opportunities for the improved management and presentation of the Plains. These plans will take account of necessary military requirements of the Defence Forces.

To this end, the Department has confirmed its support of Kildare County Council's recent application for funding from the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund administered by the Department of Rural and Community Development, to appoint a multidisciplinary consultancy team in order to examine the current and future challenges arising for the Curragh Plains

in the context of the conservation and management of the Curragh Plains and the scope for branding and the development potential as a high value visitor and cultural amenity attraction.

Defence Forces Remuneration

168. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his views on the Defence Forces veterans and families' march over pay and conditions. [43217/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I am aware of the views expressed and the issues raised in relation to the Parade which took place on 19 September 2018. I note in particular the call for the restoration of pay.

Similar to other areas of the public service, the pay of Permanent Defence Force personnel was reduced as one of the measures necessary to stabilise national finances during the financial crisis.

The economic recovery and a resumption of economic growth has provided the fiscal resources to provide for a sustainable and fair recovery in public service payscales.

Defence Forces pay and that of other public servants is increasing in accordance with public sector pay agreements. The focus of these increases is weighted in favour of those on lower pay. The Permanent Defence Force Representative Associations balloted their members, who voted to accept the terms of these pay agreements.

Members of the Permanent Defence Force have received the pay increases due under the Lansdowne Road Agreement. In addition in 2017, following negotiations with PDFORRA improved pay scales for general service recruits and privates, who joined the Permanent Defence Force post 1 January 2013, were implemented.

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

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

The recently announced proposal by the Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and reform in respect of new entrant payscales will also benefit those who joined the Defence Forces since January 2011.

Measures such as the implementation of the Working Time Directive for members of the Permanent Defence Force and a review of contracts for enlisted personnel are under active consideration. The Department of Defence is engaging with the Permanent Defence Force Representative Associations on these matters through the Conciliation and Arbitration scheme.

Defence Forces Remuneration

169. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if a review

will be carried out into the pay and conditions of Defence Forces veterans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43218/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I recognise the valued public service given by former servicemen and women of the Defence Forces to the State. As such, officials from my Department and I hold regular meetings with recognised Veterans' Associations at which issues of concern to their members are discussed.

My Department has Service Level Agreements with the Organisation of National Ex-Service Personnel (O.N.E.) and the Irish United Nations Veterans Association (IUNVA) which set out the services the Department provides to these Associations. Under the terms of these SLAs my Department provides financial support by way of an annual subvention to O.N.E. and IUNVA to encourage their valuable efforts and the range of services they offer to ex-service personnel. In further recognition of this work, last week I announced that I was increasing my Department's annual grant to O.N.E. from €44,000 to €100,000. This significant increase in the grant will make a substantial contribution to the work of O.N.E.

I was honoured to recently officially open a new Veteran Support Centre located in Custume Barracks Athlone I am strongly supportive of O.N.E.'s plans to establish further Veteran Support Centres around the country. Fitting out new Centres with equipment, training volunteers and the increased administration and insurance liability will increase O.N.E.'s overheads. The increase in the grant will defray some of these costs and allow O.N.E. to press ahead and bring to fruition their plans for a network of Veteran Support Centres nationwide.

I am also supportive of the annual Veterans' Day and the launch of O.N.E.'s annual Fuchsia fundraising appeal and I am committed to continued engagement with Veterans' Associations into the future.

Defence Forces Recruitment

170. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence further to Parliamentary Question No. 108 of 26 September 2018, the reason for the delay by the military authorities in the release of information sought; if this information will be released; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43294/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I am informed by the military authorities that, in order to verify that no applicant has progressed in any competition since 2012 despite not meeting the set down criteria, a thorough review of records since that time would be required.

In this context, the information is not readily available and, I regret, cannot be provided to the Deputy.

Ministerial Meetings

171. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the details of engagements, meetings or correspondence that he has had with a person (details supplied) in the past three years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43390/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I can confirm that in the past three years I have not met or had any engagements or correspondence with the person referred to by the Deputy.

Health and Safety

172. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the changes in health and safety policies that have been implemented following the publication of the report of the independent reviewer, protected disclosures, Air Corps; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43404/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I have sought the information from the military authorities and will revert to the Deputy when it is to hand.

Health and Safety

173. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if a programme that monitors actual exposure of Defence Forces members to hazardous substances either via personal air monitoring or biological monitoring as outlined in the report of the independent reviewer, protected disclosures, Air Corps is in place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43405/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I have sought the information from the military authorities and I will revert to the Deputy when it is available.

Defence Forces Medical Services

174. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if a mechanism is in place to ensure there are regular medical checkups for Defence Forces members who are using or are in contact with products containing toxic substances to identify changes in health or fitness; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43406/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I have been advised by the military authorities that Defence Force Regulations require all members of the Defence Forces to undergo an annual occupational medical examination.

Local Authority Funding

175. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the categories of funding available to local authorities through his Department; the amount of funding provided for each scheme in 2016 and 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43727/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): My Department provides funding to local authorities to assist them in the provision of Civil Defence services. This funding is intended to meet a proportion (70%) of the annual operating costs of Civil Defence in the local authorities – plus grants for equipment, training exercises and other miscellaneous related costs.

The amount provided in 2016 was €3.81m and in 2017 was €3.48m.

National Development Plan Funding

176. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the specific

projects that will receive the €106 million in capital funding allocated in 2019; the amount each project will receive of the €106 million, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43763/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The National Development Plan provides for an overall capital allocation of €541m for Defence for the period 2018 to 2022, including an allocation of €106m for 2019, as confirmed in the recent Budget. This capital funding will allow the Defence Organisation to undertake a programme of sustained equipment replacement and infrastructure development as identified in the White Paper, over the lifetime of the Plan.

The following major projects are being progressed during 2019 :-

- Mid-life upgrade of the Mowag Armoured Personnel Carriers (APCs) fleet;
- Procurement of Fixed Wing Utility aircraft (Pilatus) as replacement for Cessna aircraft;
- Procurement of replacements for the two CASA 235 Maritime Patrol aircraft;
- Mid-life refit of the Naval Service vessels LÉ Niamh and LÉ Roisín and ongoing planning for the acquisition of a multi-role vessel;
- Virtual Desktop Architecture (VDA) project for Defence Forces IT infrastructure;
- Investment in the Defence Forces built infrastructure, including the following specific projects -
 - Secure storage facilities in the Defence Forces Training Centre, Curragh Camp;
 - Target range facilities in the Defence Forces Training Centre;
 - Training facilities in Sarsfield Barracks, Limerick and Stephens Barracks, Kilkenny;
 - Accommodation facilities in the Defence Forces Training Centre and Cathal Brugha Barracks, Dublin;
 - Accommodation upgrade in Casement Aerodrome, Baldonnell;
 - Catering facilities in Custume Barracks, Athlone;
 - Fuel storage safety system upgrade in the Naval Base, Haulbowline.

These projects are multi annual and precise expenditure timeframes are not finalised. Accordingly, the Department is not in a position to provide a more detailed breakdown of the 2019 allocation. However, I am satisfied that the capital allocation for Defence for 2019 and for the period to 2022 will allow the Defence Organisation to undertake a programme of sustained equipment replacement and infrastructural development as identified and prioritised in the White Paper.

Defence Forces Public Relations

177. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his views on whether there is merit in conducting an advertising campaign promoting the positive work that the members of the Defence Forces undertake on an ongoing basis. [43821/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The work of the

Defence Forces is extremely important in contributing to the State and its well-being. This work is frequently promoted in media coverage and in promotional campaigns run by the Defence Forces' Public Relations Branch which are focused on recruitment. Such campaigns make use of traditional and social media platforms, and have proven very successful with multiple awards, including a Cannes Silver Lion award.

As Minister, on all public occasions, I avail of the opportunity to promote and draw attention to the roles of the Defence Forces and the importance of these. Other opportunities to promote the work of the Defence Forces are also availed of, including the recent commemoration of the 60th anniversary of Ireland's contribution to UN Peacekeeping. The level and nature of the promotion of the work of the Defence Forces is regularly reviewed to ensure the best use of resources having regard to its roles in the service and support of the State.

Northern Ireland

178. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has discussed the reconvening of the Northern Ireland Executive in the near future with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. [43486/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Since the Northern Ireland Assembly elections of March 2017, the Irish and British Governments, as co-guarantors of the Agreement, have worked tirelessly to support and facilitate the parties in their efforts to form a new power-sharing Executive.

Unfortunately, to date, it has not proved possible to reach an agreement on the formation of an Executive, despite intensive engagement. The absence of the Executive also means that North South Ministerial Council cannot meet.

I am currently engaging with Secretary of State Bradley on how both Governments can most effectively secure the effective operation of all of the institutions of the Good Friday Agreement. I met with Secretary of State Bradley in Dublin on 17 September and again in Belfast on 8 October.

Both Governments are continuing to engage with all of the political parties to seek a way forward to get the Institutions up and running again. All parties have re-affirmed their commitment to operating the devolved institutions and have provided views on their key concerns and issues.

In the period ahead, I believe a new political process is required to get beyond the current impasse and secure the necessary agreement between the parties on operating the devolved institutions again.

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

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

Election Monitoring Missions

179. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has given consideration to entering into co-operation agreements with election observer NGOs (details supplied) in order that Ireland can deploy election observers to more locations outside of the OSCE member states and to countries of priority to the EU; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43247/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): I refer the Deputy to related parliamentary questions on this matter, Question 164 of 25 October 2017 and Question 214 of 3 October 2018.

International election monitoring missions play an important role in the promotion of democracy and human rights. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade maintains a roster of election observers for such missions.

Observers from the Department's roster are deployed to election observation missions organised either by the European Union (EU) or the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe Office (OSCE). This is the only means by which my Department provides a structure to support Irish election observers. The EU and OSCE each have an acknowledged international role in election observation activities, and are recognised for their solid engagement in the consolidation of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Missions deployed by the EU and OSCE apply the highest standards of professional integrity, impartiality and independence.

Furthermore, the EU and OSCE have extensive processes, principles, codes of conduct, and practical measures to ensure safety and security. These are factors on which my Department relies not just to ensure the protection of observers in the field but also to ensure that appropriate standards of conduct are maintained by those deployed.

Both the EU and OSCE have endorsed the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation. All endorsing organisations pledge to cooperate with each other in conducting such missions. EU and OSCE missions frequently cooperate closely with NGOs such as that referred to in the question.

In addition, while drawing their own assessments and conclusions, EU and OSCE election observation missions liaise closely on the ground with local election observer groups.

As noted, a number of independent organisations also deploy monitors to observe elections throughout the world. There are Irish nationals who have deployed on such missions. However, there are no plans for my Department to deploy observers other than through the EU and OSCE.

Human Rights

180. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the position regarding the situation in Venezuela; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43310/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am gravely concerned at the ongoing political, economic, social and humanitarian crisis in Venezuela.

I am particularly alarmed by the humanitarian needs affecting the country, including severe shortages of food and medicine. Shortages of medicine alone are putting at risk the lives of 3m people with chronic diseases, and the growing number of malaria cases, expected to reach 2m by the end of the year, will make it the highest incidence of malaria anywhere in the world.

Ireland believes that the government of Venezuela must acknowledge the humanitarian crisis and allow humanitarian actors to operate without interference. I urge the Venezuelan government to allow the entry of humanitarian assistance into the country. Last month, Ireland co-sponsored the resolution on Venezuela adopted at the 39th session of the Human Rights Council on this subject.

The crisis has caused one of the biggest population displacements in the world, and Ireland believes that countries hosting Venezuelan migrants must be supported.

Ireland has supported the deployment of a Rapid Responder to assist UNHCR in supporting the Colombian Government's efforts to enhance its asylum system and respond to the humanitarian and protection needs of Venezuelans in Colombia, as well as fully supporting the €35 million EU humanitarian package announced in August.

I also welcome the recent appointment of Mr. Eduardo Stein as UNHCR and IOM Joint Special Representative for Venezuelan refugees and migrants in the region, to ensure a coordinated approach to dealing with the crisis.

The situation in Venezuela continues to be raised at the highest levels within the EU and was discussed by Foreign Ministers at our meeting on Monday 15 October. I welcome the high priority given to the issue by the EU, and I believe that it is important for us to work in step with our like-minded regional partners.

I am deeply concerned by the reports of human rights violations, and I condemn any attempt to infringe on the fundamental rights to freedom of expression and the right to peaceful assembly. Ireland fully supports the EU sanctions introduced in June of this year. These sanctions are aimed at materials that can be used by the Government for internal repression, and create a legal framework for a travel ban and asset freeze against those who have shown blatant disregard for the rule of law and disrespect for democratic principles, including a number of Government officials.

I have repeatedly called for the Venezuelan government to engage in dialogue with the opposition, to respect the electoral calendar and to fully restore the country's democratic institutions.

Our Embassy in Mexico is responsible for our diplomatic relations with Venezuela and is monitoring the situation closely, engaging with partner organisations on the ground and with EU Missions in Caracas. Ireland will continue to engage regularly with our EU partners on this issue, as well as with affected countries in the region. I can assure the Deputy that Ireland is committed to seeking a peaceful and democratic solution to this crisis.

Undocumented Irish in the USA

181. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on the progress regarding the undocumented Irish in the United States of America; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43311/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I refer the Deputy to my response to PQ40303 on this issue earlier this month. Then, as now, the Government continues to pursue two key objectives with regard to Irish immigration to the United States; firstly, increased pathways for legal migration by Irish citizens to the US; and secondly, seeking some form of relief for undocumented Irish citizens living in the US.

The Taoiseach discussed the issue with President Trump in the Oval Office last March and also in his meetings on Capitol Hill during this year's St. Patrick's Day visit. I have also prioritised this issue in my own engagements with the US Administration and Congress, and discussed it most recently with Congressman Richie Neal last week in Dublin.

The Government's Special Envoy to the United States Congress on the Undocumented, Deputy John Deasy, has also been active on the issue and has, since his appointment, travelled to Washington, D.C., on ten separate occasions for meetings with key contacts.

In addition, our Embassy in Washington, D.C., continues to engage on an ongoing basis with the Administration and with a wide range of contacts on Capitol Hill.

Through these many high-level contacts and discussions, the Government continues to explore a number of different options. This remains a very challenging issue, however. Immigration reform has been a sensitive and divisive issue within the US political system for decades, with pronounced disagreement, even within the same political parties, on the best way to deal with an issue which directly affects over 11 million people, from many different countries of origin.

On the welfare of the undocumented Irish, the Embassy, as well as our six Consulates across the United States, work closely with Irish Immigration Centers, which support the needs of Irish citizens in the United States, including those who are undocumented. These Centers all receive annual funding from the Government's Emigrant Support Programme to support their important work.

I can assure the Deputy that both the Taoiseach and I, together with our Government colleagues, Special Envoy Deputy Deasy, and our Embassy in Washington, D.C., will continue to give full priority to these issues.

EU Issues

182. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of the action the EU is taking in view of breaches of fundamental European principles by Poland and Hungary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43312/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Dialogue has been ongoing between the European Commission and Poland regarding the rule of law since January 2016, when the Commission initiated its rule of law process following changes introduced by the Polish Government to the functioning and composition of Poland's Constitutional Tribunal.

On 20 December 2017, the Commission proposed to the Council to initiate proceedings under Article 7(1) of the Treaty on European Union, and adopted recommendations of actions for the Polish Government to take. Since then, there have been ongoing exchanges between the Commission and the Polish authorities and two hearings have taken place at the General Affairs Council on 26 June and again on 18 September.

On 24 September, the European Commission gave notice of its intention to initiate infringement procedures with regard to the law on the Polish Supreme Court. This is separate to the ongoing procedure under Article 7 (1). On Friday, 19 October, the European Court of Justice, in the context of interim proceedings before final judgment on the substance of the case is made, ordered that Poland adopt a number of measures that would have the effect of suspending the application of the provisions of this legislation.

At the most recent General Affairs Council meeting on 16 October, as part of the Article 7(1) TEU procedure, the Commission provided the Council with an update on recent developments. Ministers reiterated the importance of upholding the rule of law in all EU Member States and stressed the need to achieve tangible progress.

Ireland has consistently stressed the importance of the rule of law, including at the hearings that have taken place to date at the General Affairs Council, and urged an early solution on this matter.

On 12 September 2018, the European Parliament, under Article 7 of the Treaty on European Union, adopted a reasoned proposal to the Council, inviting the Council to determine whether there is a clear risk of a serious breach by Hungary of the values on which the European Union is founded.

The President of the European Parliament formally communicated this proposal to the President of the Council of the European Union, the Austrian Chancellor Mr Sebastian Kurz, on 18 September.

At the General Affairs Council on 16 October the Presidency informed Ministers about the next procedural steps following the triggering of the Article 7(1) TEU procedure for Hungary. The Commission will provide the Council with an update on the relevant infringement procedures at its next meeting.

The Government's concerns about issues relating to the rule of law and the importance it attaches to the values on which the European Union is founded are well known and stressed, as appropriate, in Council meetings and in bilateral engagements.

Middle East Issues

183. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if financial support to assist the Yazidi, including support to assist with therapy and treatment, has been considered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43341/18]

184. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the steps he has taken at European level to assist the Yazidi; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43342/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 183 and 184 together.

The Government attaches great importance to combatting all forms of discrimination or persecution based on religion or belief, as well as incitement to religious hatred, irrespective of where it occurs or who the victims are. We firmly believe in tolerance, non-discrimination, freedom of expression, freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief. Many minority religious and ethnic communities across the Middle East are vulnerable to violence by state and non-state actors, including terrorist attacks. Ireland has consistently called for inclusive, democratic solutions to the conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa region.

I participated in the Third International Conference on the victims of ethnic and religious violence in the Middle East, which took place in Brussels in May this year. The Conference brought together 67 countries and 13 international organisations, to find ways to further support the members of the communities targeted by Da'esh and other extremist organisations for ethnic or religious reasons, particularly in Iraq and Syria.

I unreservedly condemn the brutal atrocities which terrorist groups, including Da'esh, have inflicted in Iraq and Syria, including against religious minorities, notably the Yazidis. I am appalled by the suffering of the innocent people caught up in these events, especially women and girls who were targeted by sexual and gender-based violence. While the situation has improved, with a successful fight back against Da'esh in Iraq and Syria, challenges remain in terms of healing the trauma these groups have endured, ensuring humanitarian aid reaches them, and ensuring displaced populations can return to their homelands once it is safe to do so.

In the Iraqi context, Ireland has always emphasised that the security effort must be accompanied by national reconciliation to ensure an inclusive state, allowing for political, economic and social opportunities for all. The January 2018 EU Foreign Affairs Council conclusions on Iraq reiterated the EU's firm and active commitment to the preservation of the multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and multi-confessional nature of Iraqi society, including the protection of its minority groups, building on the bond of a common national identity and inclusive citizenship. The EU stands ready to support Iraqi and international efforts to hold members of Da'esh to account, and ensure accountability for human rights violations and abuses, including war crimes and crimes against humanity, as well as acts against persons belonging to minority groups. Ireland fully supports these conclusions.

Since 2012, Ireland has provided just over €9.5 million in humanitarian assistance to Iraq including €2 million to the UN Iraq Humanitarian Fund (IHF) in 2018 alone. The IHF ensures funding is allocated to the best-placed organisations, and that these funds are targeted towards those in greatest need.

Ireland also contributes to the EU's humanitarian response in Iraq which has provided over €40 million this year. This funding goes to the most vulnerable people, for a range of services. This includes a grant in recent months of €5 million towards emergency reproductive and mental health care for victims of violence.

Human Rights

185. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the reason the public consultation paper on Ireland's international development policy makes no reference to LGBT issues; if he will review this in view of the ongoing discriminatory and violent treatment of the LGBT community in particular countries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43343/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): The promotion and protection of human rights is at the heart of Irish foreign policy. The 2015 foreign policy review, *Global Island Ireland's foreign policy for a changing world*, recognises that human rights violations undermine development. *Global Island* commits the Department to promote and protect those who face persecution for defending human rights, with an explicit commitment to the promotion of the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) individuals. This is a recognition that LGBTI people frequently suffer disproportionately from violence and, in many countries, face systemic discrimination.

Global Island provides the overall foreign policy frame for the recent public consultation paper on international development, part of the process towards a new policy on international development. That public consultation paper reiterated Ireland's commitment to upholding human rights, within the foreign policy context provided by *Global Island* and Ireland's international development actions.

As part of the contextual analysis underpinning the new development policy, threats to civil society space and the role of human rights activists are identified, as is the importance of respect for human rights: this includes LGBTI community rights. The public consultation paper also highlights that our new international development policy will be informed by recent Irish experience in bringing greater equality for minorities in society.

The rights of all minorities, including those of the LGBTI community, and shrinking civil society space were raised at recent public meetings held to discuss the consultation paper, and in written submissions. These issues will be taken into consideration in the final drafting of the new policy which will aim to ensure coherence in our approach at international and country levels.

Brexit Supports

186. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 93 and 94 of 10 October 2018, the engagement the embassy in London has to support exporters to the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43378/18]

187. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 93 and 94 of 10 October 2018, the engagement the Irish Embassy has to support exporters to the United Kingdom. [43384/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 186 and 187 together.

In addition to the range of supports outlined by the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, Heather Humphries, T.D., in Parliamentary Questions Nos. 93 and 94 on 10 October 2018, our Embassy in London also arranges and facilitates a range of export-related business events and has done so for many years. These events, which involve extensive collaboration with business networks, companies and development agencies across all sectors and regions, can take the form of networking receptions, lunches, dinner etc., all hosted on the Embassy premises. The events focus on business development opportunities in the UK and are highly regarded. So far this year the Embassy has hosted 12 such events and this programme will continue into 2019.

In addition, the Economic and Commercial Counsellor and the Agriculture Attachés deal with direct approaches from agencies, sectoral groups, companies, and individuals on an ongoing basis. The Embassy is also actively engaged with the Irish business networks operating in the UK and provide ongoing support to them.

When requested, and if possible, an Embassy presence at business events is also facilitated.

Ministerial Meetings

188. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the details of engagements, meetings or correspondence he has had with a person (details supplied) in the past three years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43394/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): In the past three years, I have not met nor had correspondence with the named individual.

In the course of the work of my Department, there is regular interaction with prominent Irish citizens, including for example at Irish community or other official functions and correspondence can arise in relation to such events. For example, an invitation issued to the named individual from my predecessor as Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Mr. Charlie Flanagan, TD, to attend the Global Irish Economic Forum in 2015 but the individual did not attend.

Good Friday Agreement

189. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the meaning of concurrent referendums as set out in the provisions of the Good Friday Agreement dealing with the question of Irish unity; his further views on whether these referendums will be held on the same day and whether citizens in the North and South of the island will be voting on the same question; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43496/18]

190. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the preparations he is making for the holding of a referendum on the question of Irish unity; the discussions he has had with the British Government on the planning and preparations for such a vote; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43497/18]

191. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the preparations he is making for the outworkings of a potential Yes vote further to a referendum on the question of Irish unity; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43498/18]

192. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will consider the adoption of a preparation and contingency framework to ensure effective and efficient planning for the outworkings of a potential vote further to the holding of a referendum on the question of Irish unity. [43499/18]

193. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will consider the creation of an all-island civic dialogue on the question of Irish unity as one part of putting in place preparations that include voices from civic society; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43500/18]

194. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will request more clarity and certainty from the British Government on the circumstances that will trigger a vote on the question of Irish unity in Northern Ireland; and its plans and preparations for such a vote when the required threshold is reached. [43501/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 189 to 194, inclusive, together.

The full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement and subsequent agreements is a priority for my Department and indeed the Government as a whole. The Government fully endorses the legitimate aspiration to unity expressed in Article 3 of the Constitution, as amended by the people in 1998.

The principle of consent and the possibility of change in the constitutional status of Northern Ireland are fundamental elements of the Good Friday Agreement, endorsed by the people of this island North and South. The Agreement states clearly that “it is for the people of the island of Ireland alone, by agreement between the two parts respectively and without external impediment, to exercise their right to self-determination on the basis of consent, freely and concurrently given, North and South, to bring about a united Ireland, if that is their wish, accepting

that this right must be achieved and exercised with and subject to the agreement and consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland”.

Furthermore, under the Agreement, the two Governments “recognise the legitimacy of whatever choice is freely exercised by a majority of the people of Northern Ireland with regard to its status, whether they prefer to continue to support the Union with Britain or a sovereign united Ireland”. And should such a choice be made in the future, it will be a binding obligation on both Governments to introduce and support in their respective Parliaments legislation to give effect to that wish.

The trigger for a referendum in this jurisdiction is connected with the calling of a border poll, under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement, in Northern Ireland. This would occur when the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland considers it likely that a majority of those voting would express a wish that Northern Ireland should cease to be part of the United Kingdom and form part of a united Ireland.

At present, the Government does not believe it likely that such a border poll in the near future would result in a decision on the part of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland in favour of constitutional change. In these circumstances, it is the Government’s clear view that such a poll would only increase uncertainty and division at an already difficult and sensitive time.

In the absence of the prospect of a referendum in the near future, the Government has no immediate plans for specific preparations on this issue. My immediate priorities are to secure the functioning of the devolved power-sharing institutions and the North South Ministerial Council, which are at the heart of the Good Friday Agreement, and to ensure the protection of the Agreement in all its parts and the gains and benefits of the Peace Process, through the ongoing Article 50 negotiation between the European Union and the UK, which are at a critical point.

In the event of a future referendum within the consent provisions of the Good Friday Agreement, the Government would make all necessary preparations in accordance with the terms of the Constitution and the principles and procedures of the Agreement.

There are of course aspects of this constitutional issue which relate to my Department’s ongoing work. In the context of Brexit, the Government has made clear its determination to ensure respect for all aspects of the Good Friday Agreement, including those provisions relating to a possible change in the constitutional status of Northern Ireland, regardless of the UK’s status within the EU. As a result of intensive political and diplomatic engagement by the Government, we have secured the solidarity and support of all our EU partners on ensuring the protection of the Agreement in all its parts and of the gains and benefits of the Peace Process, through the process of the UK’s withdrawal from the European Union.

On 29 April 2017, the European Council adopted Guidelines for the EU-UK negotiations which included a strong acknowledgment of the unique circumstances of the island of Ireland and the importance of preserving the achievements, benefits, and commitments of the Good Friday Agreement. These Guidelines remain the basis of the Union’s approach to the negotiations with the UK, including on the Ireland-specific issues. Also on 29 April last year, the European Council agreed a statement acknowledging that the Good Friday Agreement provides for an agreed mechanism whereby a united Ireland may be brought about and that, in accordance with international law, the entire territory of such a united Ireland would thus be part of the European Union.

The Government has been very clear that we do not see the UK exit from the European Union as a pretext or an opportunity for the holding of a border poll in Northern Ireland, under

the terms of the Good Friday Agreement.

Local Authority Funding

195. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the categories of funding available to local authorities through his Department; the amount of funding provided for each scheme in 2016 and 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43731/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department administers a number of funding programmes, including Ireland's official overseas development programme, Irish Aid, and the Emigrant Support Programme which supports Irish communities overseas. There is no funding designated specifically for local authorities under any of these programmes.

Other funding programmes include the Reconciliation Fund through which my Department awards funding to organisations and projects aimed at advancing peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland, on a cross-border basis and between Ireland and Britain. Information on Reconciliation Fund grants awarded to 2017 is available at www.dfa.ie/reconciliation. The funding awarded to local authorities in 2016 and 2017 through the Reconciliation Fund is set out in the table below.

As part of annual Africa Day events coordinated by the Communications Unit of my Department, city and county councils can apply for funding through a small grants scheme for the organisation of regional events nationwide. €48,000 annually was made available to local authorities through this scheme in 2016 and 2017. In 2016, Cork City Council, Galway City Council, Waterford City and County Council and Limerick City and County Council availed of funding under this scheme. In 2017, Cork City Council, Galway City Council, Kildare County Council, Kilkenny County Council and Limerick City and County Council were granted funding. In 2017, an additional €500 was made available to each local authority to support the marketing and promotion of the events organised through the scheme, amounting to a total of €2500.

In addition, since 2017, my Department has also been administering funding for strategic projects that will have a long term positive impact on diaspora engagement and that support the work of the Interdepartmental Committee on the Irish Abroad and existing government strategies. No funding was awarded to a local authority under this heading in 2017.

Table of Funding to Local Authorities under the Reconciliation Fund

Local Authority	Project and Location	Funding Approved 2016	Funding Approved 2017
Dublin City Council	Dublin City Council Libraries: Cross-Border Commemorative Visit Cross Border	€3,500	Nil
Louth County Council	Comhairle na nÓg: Youth Councils for Peace Dundalk	€18,000	€25,000

Human Rights Investigations

196. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he is reviewing Ireland's diplomatic relationship and plans to deepen the country's relationship with Saudi Arabia in view of the recent revelations regarding a person (details supplied); his plans in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43904/18]

197. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the circumstances and reports of the disappearance of a journalist (details supplied) in Turkey were discussed at the EU Council; and if he contributed to same. [43488/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 196 and 197 together.

The case referred to by the Deputy was discussed at the EU Foreign Affairs Council in Brussels on 15 October. All were in agreement that an investigation into the case is the priority now. In the meantime, following confirmation that Mr Khashoggi was killed in the Saudi Arabian Consulate in Istanbul, High Representative Mogherini has issued a statement on behalf of the European Union insisting on the need for continued thorough, credible and transparent investigation, shedding proper clarity on the circumstances of the killing and ensuring full accountability of all those responsible for it. I join her also in expressing our deepest condolences to Mr Khashoggi's family.

I met with the Saudi Ambassador on 18 October, stressed the widespread shock caused by the case and the necessity for a credible and open investigation. He informed me that the King has ordered an investigation which is in the hands of the Public Prosecutor and conveyed assurances that the investigation will be competent, thorough and transparent and will hold those responsible to account. The Saudi authorities intend to work with Turkey in their enquiries. While there are clearly very serious questions to answer, we must allow the investigation to proceed now, and await its outcome.

Ireland is committed to promoting and protecting freedom of expression, freedom of the media, and civil society space. The right to freedom of expression, as enshrined in international human rights law, constitutes a basic building block for an open and free society. A free and independent media is indispensable, and journalists, together with civil society, play a vital role in holding governments to account. At the 39th session of the Human Rights Council in September 2018, Ireland co-sponsored a resolution on "Safety of Journalists" which was adopted without the need for a vote. This resolution condemned all attacks and violence against journalists and media workers and urged all states to ensure accountability for such attacks.

Ireland has consistently raised issues of human rights in Saudi Arabia, at bilateral, EU and international level. Ireland makes its position known through Ireland's Embassy in Riyadh, through the Saudi Embassy in Dublin, and in cooperation with the EU delegation in Riyadh and other EU Member States. We will continue to raise our concerns about human rights issues directly with the Saudi authorities, and at EU and international levels, whenever appropriate opportunities arise.

Ministerial Meetings

198. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he met Mr. Michel Barnier when he attended the EU Council meeting in October 2018. [43490/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I met with Michel Barnier on 16 October, ahead of the October General Affairs Council meeting that

same day. We discussed developments in the ongoing negotiations between the EU and UK on the Withdrawal Agreement and the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland.

We also had a constructive exchange on the issue of fundamental rights and EU citizens' rights in Northern Ireland, following from what was agreed in the Joint report from the negotiators of the European Union and the United Kingdom Government of 8 December 2017.

Mr Barnier later briefed EU27 Member States at the GAC Article 50, and EU leaders at the European Council Summit (Art. 50) on 17 October, on the negotiations.

Mr Barnier reported that, despite the intensive efforts of both sets of negotiators, it was not possible to make decisive progress ahead of the October European Council. There remains substantial work to be done, in particular in relation to the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland. However, he felt overall that a deal could be done in the coming weeks.

Regarding the backstop, Mr Barnier is well aware, and has been strongly supportive, of our position that a hard border between Ireland and Northern Ireland must be avoided under any circumstances. As the Taoiseach made clear at Council, *the backstop is about peace in Ireland* and the EU has a shared responsibility to protect this. Mr Barnier has been flexible and imaginative in seeking to find ways to address and de-dramatise this issue, and Ireland strongly supports his approach.

A legally operable 'backstop' which avoids a hard border, and protects the integrity of the single market, is essential for agreeing the Withdrawal Agreement, so as to provide the certainty that no matter what the outcome of the negotiations on the future relationship, there will be no hard border on the island of Ireland. As agreed last March, it must be in place unless and until another solution is found. This was clearly reaffirmed by all colleagues at the GAC, and subsequently at the European Council meeting on 17 October.

We are now in the end game of these negotiations, and time is short. We need to engage intensively over the coming weeks to make sure that we can successfully complete negotiations and agree a deal.

Departmental Bodies

199. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the involvement of State bodies under his aegis or the details of representatives of State-backed banks that are attending Saudi Arabia's Future Investment Initiative; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43221/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am informed that none of the bodies under the aegis of my Department have an involvement in or have representatives attending Saudi Arabia's Future Investment Initiative.

Regarding State-backed banks, my Department does not hold the information that the Deputy is requesting. However, officials from my Department have contacted the banks in question and have received the following responses:

AIB Investor Relations: "As far as we can ascertain, no one from AIB is attending the Saudi Arabia Future Investment Initiative in Riyadh on 23-25 October."

PTSB Investor Relations: "We have no representation at the event mentioned below".

VAT Rate Application

200. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the type of sports facilities that will remain at the 9% VAT rate for visitor fees; if the 9% VAT rate will be applicable to sports facility memberships in view of changes made in budget 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43253/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As indicated in my budget speech, there has been no change to the application of the 9% VAT rate in respect of the provision of facilities for taking part in sporting activities including golf or physical education activities. Therefore, the VAT treatment of visitor fees and membership fees has not changed.

Electric Vehicles

201. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the reason it is planned to place a cap of €50,000 on the original market value for the extension of benefit-in-kind on electric vehicles; the number of electric cars purchased under benefit-in-kind in 2018; the number of those purchases greater than €50,000; the number of electric vehicles on sale here for €50,000 or less; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43292/18]

204. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated cost in addition to the €3 million provided for in budget 2019 documents if the €50,000 cap is removed for the extension of the 0% benefit-in-kind rate for electric vehicles; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43340/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 201 and 204 together.

Vehicle benefit in kind (BIK) is chargeable where, by reason of employment, a vehicle is made available (without a transfer of ownership) to an employee, and is available either for that individual's private use or to his/her family or household.

Comprehensive data regarding BIK on company cars does not currently exist and it is not possible to provide precise information in relation to the take-up of the 0% benefit-in-kind rate for electric vehicles or the removal of the €50,000 cap. I have asked my officials to further discuss this matter with Revenue with a view to improving the data quality in this area .

I extended the benefit-in-kind exemption for electric vehicles until 31 December 2021 to support policies to reduce carbon emissions in the transport sector. This forms part of a broader series of measures to support the uptake of electric vehicles, including VRT relief of up to €5,000, an SEAI grant of up to €5,000, very low motor tax of €120 per annum, 50% discount off tolls fees and 0% BIK on electric charging.

Having regard to value for money and tax equity considerations, a cap of €50,000 on this exemption is applied such that an electric vehicle with an original market value exceeding €50,000 will be subject to BIK on the amount in excess of €50,000. The cap will take effect from the 2019 tax year.

In examining value for money and tax equity considerations, the quantum of tax expenditure provided annually to qualifying taxpayers in relation to the use of high end cars must be taken in account. To take the example of an electric vehicle with an original market value of, say, €150,000 that has been purchased by the employer for the use of a Director, where the employer has already benefitted from VRT relief and an SEAI grant. Without the imposition of

a €50,000 cap, the tax expenditure on such a vehicle is the equivalent of an annual grant from the taxpayer to the employee or Director of up to €23,400, for a single tax year (i.e. the tax liability of the taxpayer would be reduced by up to this amount in a single tax year). This amount is equivalent to 7 or 8 home insulation grants to low income households under the SEAI Better Energy Warmer Homes Scheme, where the benefit of these grants will last for many years. Or, that the same amount, under the National Fuel Allowance Scheme, is equivalent to an allowance for about 37 low income households for one year.

I am encouraged by the fact that registrations of new electric vehicles has doubled in the year to September and am satisfied that the cap has been set at a reasonable level which maintains a strong incentive for the take-up of electric vehicles while having due regard for value for money and tax equity.

Prize Bonds

202. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Finance the reason the quantity of Ireland State Savings prize bonds prizes in a fiscal year has decreased while income for same has increased. [43322/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am answering this question on the basis of fiscal year 2017. Under Prize Bonds the number of prizes is determined by a variable percentage rate applied to the value of Prize Bonds outstanding. The variable percentage rate set to calculate the Prize Bond Fund was adjusted from 0.85% to 0.50% in August 2017. The interest rate reduction reflected changes across the retail savings market and the fall in the cost of borrowing by the State. All changes in rates seek to maintain the balance of remaining competitive, providing good value for the holders of Prize Bonds while also remaining conscious of the cost to the taxpayer.

Notwithstanding the decline in the variable percentage rate, the balance of savings in Prize Bonds increased by approximately €0.3 billion to €3.2 billion in 2017, which was an increase of 10%.

Revenue Commissioners Reports

203. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if the Revenue Commissioners' tender for a report was completed (details supplied); if so, when the report was compiled and published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43324/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that, following a submission by the Irish Health Trade Association (IHTA) concerning the distinction between food supplements that the Revenue Commissioners was prepared to accept as liable to VAT at the zero rate and those that are liable at the 23% rate, they undertook an in-depth review of the issue. As part of this review, an expert in the field of food science was engaged to produce a report on the definition of food and the relationship of food supplements to food. I understand that as part of this review a submission was made by the IHTA. The expert report was finalised in October 2017 and formed the basis for further consultation with the IHTA.

The Revenue Commissioners has also advised me that to date they have not amended their guidance in relation to the VAT treatment of food supplement type products and has not published the report. Currently, the report is part of a deliberative process and the Revenue Com-

missioners will publish the report after this process has concluded.

Question No. 204 answered with Question No. 201.

Home Renovation Incentive Scheme Eligibility

205. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Finance the reason an electricity upgrade in relation to a new line and meter box is not covered by the HRI in view of the fact it is part of home renovations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43376/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Home Renovation Incentive (HRI) provides a tax relief by way of an income tax credit on repair, renovation or improvement works on principal private residences or rental properties carried out by tax compliant contractors.

However, the Deputy's question does not give sufficient information to enable me give a comprehensive reply. Revenue advise me that the individual concerned may provide the full information to it via MyEnquiries, which is an online service that allows customers to securely send correspondence to Revenue. MyEnquiries can be accessed from the Revenue website www.revenue.ie either through myAccount or through ROS (Revenue's Online Service), depending on whether the claimant is a PAYE taxpayer or a self-employed taxpayer.

I am further advised by Revenue that full details on the operation of the HRI scheme are available on its website at: <http://www.revenue.ie/en/tax/it/reliefs/hri/index.html>.

Ministerial Meetings

206. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the details of engagements, meetings or correspondence that he has had with a person (details supplied) in the past three years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43393/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I would refer the Deputy to my response to PQ 42821 of 18th October 2018, which details my predecessor as Minister for Finance's meeting with representatives from Enet in the Department of Finance on Wednesday 14 December 2016 with officials in attendance.

Although not a request on behalf of Mr David McCourt and outside the three year period stipulated in the question a meeting request on behalf of Mr Conal Henry, CEO of Enet was received and declined by my predecessor on June 12th 2015. The meeting was declined due to the Minister's heavy schedule at that point in time.

VAT Rate Application

207. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 82 and 83 of 10 May 2018, his plans to reduce the rate of VAT on defibrillators in 2022 when the new amended VAT directive is expected to take effect; if preparatory work will be undertaken before then to ensure this can take effect immediately; if so, the details of the work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43402/18]

208. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 82 and 83 of 10 May 2018, if there is facility for a similar measure to be applied here

in terms of VAT reduction on defibrillators in the interim as has happened in Belgium (details supplied) in view of the fact that the new amended VAT directive is expected to take effect in 2022; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43403/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 207 and 208 together.

Defibrillators, other than implantable defibrillators, are liable to VAT at the at the standard rate, currently 23%, and, in the absence of a change in the VAT Directive, there is no legal basis for reducing this rate.

In my response to Parliamentary Questions Numbers 82 and 83 of 10 May 2018, I referred to the Commission's plans to introduce legislation that would allow Member States more flexibility in how they apply VAT rates while also seeking to ensure that the VAT base is protected. That proposal has been presented to the EU Council but detailed discussions have not yet commenced. The outcome of these discussions and eventual adoption of the proposed legislation will clarify and establish the full scope available to Member States to alter the VAT rating of goods and services.

As the Deputy is aware, the proposal must be agreed unanimously by all Member States before being adopted. As previously stated, it is expected that fundamental changes such as those proposed will be the subject of intense discussion and negotiation before legislative changes are adopted and it is not possible at this stage to predict the degree of discretion that will be available to Member States in relation to the setting of rates of VAT on any category of goods. Accordingly, I have no plans to undertake a review of VAT rate changes that might be possible until the proposed legislative changes are fully agreed upon and adopted.

Carbon Tax Yield

209. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Finance the anticipated yield for each of the years 2020 to 2024 if the carbon tax was increased by amounts (details supplied). [43434/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that an increase in Carbon Tax from €20 per tonne to €45 per tonne over the years 2020 to 2024 would give the estimated yield for each year as shown in the table. These estimates are based on the current volumes for each commodity and include both Carbon Tax and VAT.

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Carbon Tax Rate	€25	€30	€35	€40	€45
	€m	€m	€m	€m	€m
Estimated Carbon Tax Total Yield (inclusive of VAT)	533	639	746	852	959

Home Renovation Incentive Scheme

210. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Finance the recourse an applicant for the home renovation initiative has if one of the contractors they have used refuses to register online even though they charged 13.5% VAT. [43436/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Home Renovation Incentive (HRI) is provided for in section 477B of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997. As the Deputy will be aware, HRI provides a tax relief by way of an income tax credit on repair, renovation or improvement works on principal private residences or rental properties carried out by tax com-

pliant contractors. A key element of obtaining relief is that the contractor must be a qualifying contractor for the purposes of the Incentive. Revenue have advised me that where the contractor does not register as a qualifying contractor, then no relief is due to an individual under the Incentive.

I am also advised by Revenue that their guidance for homeowners includes material on ‘Choosing a HRI contractor’. I understand that the guidance emphasises that it is important for a homeowner to check the Revenue system online to see that the details of works have been entered before the work commences. The guidance states that if a contractor is not a qualifying contractor, he/she will not be able to enter the details on the Revenue online system and that the homeowner will not be able to claim the HRI tax credit. However, if the Deputy knows of a contractor who is not co-operating with an individual to allow them make a claim under HRI, he should provide the relevant details to Revenue.

Details on the operation of the HRI scheme are available on the Revenue website at www.revenue.ie/en/tax/it/reliefs/hri/index.html.

Structural Budget Balance

211. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the projected structural balance each year from 2019 to 2023 inclusive, both in money terms and as a percentage of GDP; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43511/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I can advise the Deputy that the projected structural balance for each year 2019 to 2023 is detailed in percentage terms in table 1 of the Economic and Fiscal Outlook published as part of Budget 2019.

Estimates of the approximate equivalent levels in nominal terms are presented in tabular form below.

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Structural balance, per cent of GDP	-0.7	0.0	0.2	1.0	1.4
Structural balance, €m	-2,390	0.0	750	3,920	5,735
Nominal GDP, €m	341,475	359,975	375,775	392,225	409,725

Fiscal Policy

212. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the available fiscal stance after annual contributions to the rainy day fund each year to 2023 (details supplied); the projected general Government balance and the structural Government balance in each of the years based on the projections announced on budget day, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43512/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The projected general government balance and structural balance were published in table 1 of Budget 2019 Economic and Fiscal Outlook. This is reproduced below for the Deputy’s convenience.

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
per cent of GDP						
general government balance	-0.1	0.0	0.3	0.4	1.1	1.4
structural balance	-1.0	-0.7	0.0	0.2	1.0	1.4

I addressed the matter of fiscal stance in responding to the Deputy's questions on 16 October (Dáil No. 169, 170, 171 and 172), which I have reproduced below for the Deputy's convenience.

At present, the fiscal rules - both the structural balance rule and, especially, the expenditure benchmark rule - are not well-suited to guide budgetary policy, given our position in the economic cycle. I highlighted this in the Summer Economic Statement and I note that the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council, in its pre-Budget statement, also highlighted this issue.

Essentially, the problem boils down to the fact that full allocation of 'fiscal space' would lead to a repeat of pro-cyclical budgetary policies that would threaten the living standards of Irish people. Pro-cyclical budgetary policies should be avoided; this is especially true when we are facing serious issues such as the exit of the UK from the European Union (and a non-negligible possibility of a 'disorderly' exit).

With this in mind, the more important framework for guiding fiscal policy is 'fiscal stance' - what is right for the economy at a particular point in time, so as to support sustainable, incremental improvements in public services and living standards.

The correct 'fiscal stance' can only be ascertained once account is taken of the position in the economic cycle. If the economy is operating at full capacity, then it would be incorrect to adopt an expansionary budgetary policy. On the other hand, if there is spare capacity in the economy, then it may be appropriate to use tax and expenditure policy to help absorb the spare capacity.

Given the many issues facing the economy and the heightened level of uncertainty (such as what form the UK's exit from the EU will take), it is only possible to assess the appropriate fiscal stance on a year-to-year basis at present.

VAT Rate Application

213. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if under existing domestic and EU VAT law it is possible to apply different rates to different transactions under the same class of activity depending on the value of the business turnover or the value of the individual transaction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43517/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that existing EU or national VAT law does not provide for VAT registered traders to apply different VAT rates to the same taxable supply based on business turnover or the value of an individual transaction.

I would point out, however, that businesses with a low turnover have the option of remaining unregistered for VAT which means they can be exempt from VAT on any goods and services that they supply. In this circumstances exempt businesses who supply goods valued under €75,000 or services valued under €37,500 in a 12 month period, do not charge VAT on those supplies.

Tax Code

214. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance if he will apportion out the cost to the Exchequer of budget 2018 changes to the standard rate threshold and reduction in the USC rate between income tax cases below €70,000 and above €70,000; and if he will make a

statement on the matter. [43524/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): It is assumed that the Deputy is referring to the changes made in the recent Budget.

I am advised by Revenue that the table below sets out the estimated cost to the Exchequer of the Budget 2019 changes, on a full year basis, in the manner requested by the Deputy.

Gross Income	Income Tax €m	USC €m
<€70,000	76	62
>€70,000	84	60
Total	161	123

The estimates are based on tax units. The Deputy will be aware that jointly assessed couples/partners are considered a single tax unit, which includes the combined income of both individuals. The calculations have been generated by reference to 2019 incomes on the basis of actual data for the year 2016, the latest year for which returns are available, and adjusted for income, self-employment and employment trends in the interim. They are however provisional and may be revised.

VAT Rate Application

215. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he will address a matter raised in correspondence (details supplied) regarding VAT; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43634/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The VAT rating of goods and services is subject to the requirements of EU VAT law, with which Irish VAT law must comply. Under Irish legislation, professional medical care services, recognised as such by the Department of Health and Children, are exempt from VAT.

Professional medical care services recognised by the Department of Health and Children are generally those medical care services supplied by health professionals who are enrolled, registered, regulated, or designated on the appropriate statutory register provided for under the relevant legislation in force in the State or equivalent legislation applicable in other countries. This includes health professionals registered under the Medical Practitioners Act 2007, the Nurses Act 1985 and those engaged in a regulated profession designated under Section 4 of the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005.

Psychotherapy and counselling services are not recognised as a regulated profession under the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005 and are therefore precluded from coming within the scope of the exemption. Psychotherapy and counselling services are, however, applied at the reduced rate of VAT.

Brexit Staff

216. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the steps he has taken to date to recruit extra staff for the Revenue Commissioners to deal with Brexit; when the first recruits will join; the length of training that will be required for these new staff; the number that will be in place as at 29 March 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43672/18]

217. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of extra staff the Revenue Commissioners requires by 29 March 2019 in the event of a no-deal Brexit with no transition period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43673/18]

218. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 166, 168, 169 and 173 of 2 October 2018, the breakdown of the functions to which these 600 staff will be assigned; when the Revenue Commissioners require to have these staff in place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43674/18]

219. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 166, 168, 169 and 173 of 2 October 2018, if this includes veterinary inspectors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43675/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 216 to 219, inclusive, together.

I am advised by Revenue that they have a detailed framework in place to recruit additional resources for Brexit in line with the Government decision of September 2018. Revenue have determined that they will require an additional 600 staff as a result of Brexit. This is based on the central case scenario of an orderly withdrawal, to include a transition period to the end of 2020, followed by a comprehensive future trading relationship between the EU and the UK. The work to be undertaken by these staff will include support for trade facilitation measures and the operation of customs checks and controls where this is necessary.

Internal, interdepartmental and open recruitment campaigns are underway. An open recruitment campaign undertaken by the Public Appointments Service commenced on 11 September 2018 and attracted in excess of 3,000 applications. Interviews for this campaign commenced on 20 October 2018. Those considered suitable will proceed directly into an initial five week training and mentoring programme.

I am advised by Revenue that they are confident that plans are fully on track for the first 200 additional trade facilitation staff to be trained and in place by 29 March 2019.

The remaining 400 customs officials will be recruited during the transitional period to the end of 2020. Revenue are continuing to consider various measures that could be employed should additional staff be required for March 2019, including the acceleration of interdepartmental and open recruitment and the redeployment of existing Revenue staff.

Revenue's preparations are focused on facilitating trade on an East-West basis and I am advised that staff will be assigned, and redeployed as necessary, to best service this requirement.

I wish to confirm that the information previously provided pertains only to the recruitment of customs officers. Recruitment of veterinary inspectors is a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

Employment Data

220. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if the Revenue Commissioners hold data on the number of workers paid weekly, fortnightly, monthly and so on; and if so, if it will provide same. [43676/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that information in respect of employee payment frequencies is not a mandatory requirement for employers

when completing their annual (P35) return. As a consequence, it is not currently possible to provide the Deputy with the information requested. However, Revenue has confirmed that it will be possible to provide this information from 1 January 2019 following the move to real time reporting of employees pay and deductions under the PAYE Modernisation project.

Imports Data

221. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the quantity in tonnes and value of imports from outside the European Union, EU, that were physically checked, that is, red, by the Revenue Commissioners upon entry in 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018; the quantity and value of imports from outside the EU that underwent documentary checks, that is, orange, by the Revenue Commissioner in these years; the quantity and value of imports from outside the EU that were not checked, that is, green in these years, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43684/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the details requested by the Deputy on the quantity and value of imports from outside the EU and the risk ranging associated with those imports are as set out in the table.

Year	Risk Rank	(Tonnes)	Value
2016	Green	4,556,790	€24,945,333,394.28
2016	Orange	7,424,937	€4,797,397,899.97
2016	Red	1,705,704	€1,048,000,539.36
2017	Green	5,964,396	€29,230,882,753.56
2017	Orange	6,012,864	€11,014,787,056.92
2017	Red	2,085,287	€1,672,873,507.04
2018 to date	Green	6,361,449	€21,206,923,379.02
2018 to date	Orange	2,298,748	€5,443,180,660.62
2018 to date	Red	2,433,424	€1,499,044,246.83

Revenue Commissioners

222. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if all goods imported from the European Union, EU, require no checks by the Revenue Commissioners, that is, green; if not, the quantity in tonnes and value of imports from within the EU that were physically checked, that is, red, by the Revenue Commissioners upon entry in 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018; the quantity and value of imports from within the EU that underwent documentary checks, that is, orange, by the Revenue Commissioners in these years; the quantity and value of imports from within the EU that were not checked, that is, green, in these years, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43685/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the red, orange and green classifications referred to by the Deputy are features of the trade facilitation framework and associated customs control regime associated with goods arriving from third countries. In keeping with the rules of the Single Market, EU goods do not require customs declarations upon arrival in the State and are not subject to systematic controls.

Disabled Drivers and Passengers Scheme

223. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of applications made to the Revenue Commissioners under the disabled drivers and disabled passengers tax concession scheme in each of the years 2014 to 2017; the number approved and rejected, respectively in tabular form; his plans to review the terms of the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43711/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the table below includes the number of applications received, approved and rejected under the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers scheme for the years 2014 to 2017.

Year	Total Applications	Approved	Rejected
2014	5,060	4,997	63
2015	5,494	5,440	54
2016	6,506	6,490	16
2017	6,080	6,052	28

I can confirm to the Deputy that I have no plans to review the scheme at this time.

Local Authority Funding

224. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Finance the categories of funding available to local authorities through his Department; the amount of funding provided for each scheme in 2016 and 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43730/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): My Department does not have a direct role in funding local authorities.

EU Directives

225. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the steps he has taken to ensure that all the relevant institutions are in compliance with SI No. 482 of 2016 in Part 4 Article 15(3)(b)(i) (details supplied); the way in which this is assessed and reported; the number of bank accounts operating here under this SI; if he is satisfied that all institutions are delivering on this requirement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43793/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Payment Accounts Directive, transposed in September 2016 by the European Union (Payment Accounts) Regulations 2016 (S.I. No. 482 of 2016), contains a right to open a payment account with basic features with a credit institution. This right extends to any person who is legally resident in the European Union, regardless of whether he or she has a fixed address.

A payment account with basic features is similar to a regular payment account in many respects. It allows a person to place money in the account, withdraw cash from the account, and to make payments using direct debits, debit cards, or credit transfers. An important difference is that a payment account with basic features does not offer credit facilities, such as an overdraft.

In Ireland, a payment account with basic features is free of charge for the first year for regu-

lar payment transactions in euro within the European Union. Where less than the equivalent of the national minimum wage is lodged to the account in a year, the account stays free of charge on a year-by-year basis for up to five years. After that, an account holder may be charged reasonable fees.

Regulation 16 of the European Union (Payment Accounts) Regulations 2016 permits a credit institution to refuse to open an account on one of two grounds. Those grounds are set out in the legislation, but essentially are that the applicant already holds a payment account or that refusal is necessary to comply with money laundering and terrorist financing legislation.

If an applicant is refused an account he or she can submit a complaint against that decision to the credit institution. A consumer who has a complaint that is not resolved by the credit institution's internal complaints mechanism may make a complaint to the independent Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman.

The Central Bank is the designated competent authority for the purposes of the European Union (Payment Accounts) Regulations 2016. It informs me that, in the period from September 2016 to the end of June 2018, 69,182 accounts that met the criteria of a payment account with basic features were opened across all six Irish credit institutions.

The Central Bank collects this data from firms for the purposes of evaluation of the Payment Accounts Directive, and I do not have a further breakdown of the number of payment accounts by institution.

Help-To-Buy Scheme Administration

226. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance when he plans to make and announce a decision on the future of the help-to-buy scheme; if he has received or is expecting to receive a cost-benefit analysis or other report on the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43852/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Section 477C of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (Help-to-Buy Incentive) includes a sunset clause for the incentive, coming into effect on 31 December 2019. Any decisions regarding the future of Help to Buy will be made next year in the context of Budget 2020.

As the Deputy may be aware, earlier this year I commissioned an independent Cost benefit Analysis (CBA) of the Help to Buy incentive. Following a competitive tender process, Indecon International Economic Consultants were appointed to carry out this analysis. The report of the CBA was published on the day of Budget 2019, in the Department of Finance Report on Tax Expenditures, and is available at the following link:

www.budget.gov.ie/Budgets/2019/Documents/Tax%20Expenditures%20Report%20Budget%202019.pdf.

The main findings of the CBA were as follows:

- **Prices:** While there may have been a very small increase in prices attributable to the introduction of the HTB incentive, the primary driver of house prices remains the continued misalignment between demand and supply.

- **Supply:** The evidence suggests that following the introduction of the Help to Buy incentive there was an increase in supply which can be attributed, in part, to HTB.

- **Affordability:** The analysis also finds that the availability of HTB has reduced the time to needed to save for a deposit and improved the overall affordability of housing for HTB claimants.

- **Benefit/Cost Ratio:** The analysis finds a benefit-cost ratio of 1.28, indicating a moderate positive effect for the incentive. However, the study also notes that if the price of new HTB units was to increase due to the incentive, the net benefit would be reduced.

Banking Sector Regulation

227. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if consultation or consent is required of the Minister only on material matters under paragraphs 10 to 12 of the relationship framework for a bank (details supplied); the number of times the Minister's consent or consultation was required by him in relation to the bank under paragraph 10 of the relationship framework; the dates this consent and a consultation was given by him; the material matters which each consent or consultation was related to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43960/18]

228. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if consultation or consent is required of the Minister only on material matters under paragraphs 10 to 12 of the relationship framework for a bank (details supplied); the number of times the Minister's consent or consultation was required by him in relation to the bank under paragraph 10 of the relationship framework; the dates this consent and or consultation was given by him; the material matters which each consent or consultation was related to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43961/18]

229. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the grounds for requiring his consent or consultation for a bank (details supplied) under paragraph 9 of the relationship arrangement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43962/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 227 to 229, inclusive, together.

The requirements for AIB and PTSB to seek the consent of/consult with the Minister for Finance are set out in the banks' respective Relationship Frameworks.

A list of matters which require consultation are included in Appendix 2 of each Relationship Framework. Where "material" is referred to in Appendix 2, Paragraph 12 provides a definition in this regard.

In addition to the list of matters included in Appendix 2, each bank is required to consult with The Minister on certain matters relating to the Chairman, the Chief Executive Officer, and Board appointments (see Paragraphs 17&18); and matters of Material Litigation (see Paragraph 29).

Each bank is also required to seek the Minister's consent on certain remuneration related matters and this is referred to in Paragraph 32 of the Framework.

The banks have sought the Minister's consent, or consulted with the Minister, on a number of occasions since the Relationship Frameworks came into force covering a range of topics. It should be noted that consent/consult matters typically include information that is commercially sensitive. The Deputy will be aware that both AIB and PTSB are independent listed companies on the Irish and London stock exchanges and rules and best practice in relation to commercially

sensitive matters must be complied with. Accordingly, it would not be appropriate for me to disclose any further information in this regard.

In the case of Bank of Ireland, the requirement to seek the Minister's consent on certain remuneration related matters is in line with that of AIB and PTSB which is referred to above.

VAT Rate Application

230. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to alter the VAT regime on health supplements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43963/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Issues of clarity relating to the VAT rating of health food supplements arise from the fact that a small selection of food supplements have historically been applied at the zero rate of VAT by concession of the Revenue Commissioners since the introduction of VAT in 1972. The majority of food supplements, however, are charged at the 23% standard VAT rate.

The expansion and diversification of the food supplement market since 1972, has led to a significant growth in the number and variety of food supplement products which do not qualify for the Revenue concession. Revenue have received a large volume of requests for confirmation of the VAT treatment on a broad range of food supplements in recent years, leading to compliance concerns and calls for fiscal neutrality.

Officials from my Department have engaged with Revenue, the Department of Health and industry representatives on the matter, however, investigations are ongoing.

Ministerial Meetings

231. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the details of engagements, meetings or correspondence that he has had with a person (details supplied) in the past three years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43398/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I wish to advise the Deputy that, having carried out a search of records of engagements, meetings and correspondence over the course of the past three years, I can confirm that neither I, nor my predecessor, met with Mr David McCourt, Chairman of Granahan McCourt.

Budget 2019

232. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number and locations of regional budget briefings taking place throughout the country; the Ministers attending each briefing; the cost of holding each briefing; the cost of transporting Ministers to each briefing; if these costs are incurred by the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43422/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I wish to inform the Deputy that two regional budget briefings took place on Wednesday, 17th October 2018. The first session took place in the Athlone Civic Centre, Church Street, Athlone, Co Westmeath and was attended by both myself and Minister of State for the Office of Public Works and Flood Relief, Kevin Boxer Moran. The second briefing session took place in the

Parade Tower, Kilkenny Castle, Co Kilkenny and was attended by Minister for Employment and Social Protection, Regina Doherty, Minister of State for Local Government and Electoral Reform, John Paul Phelan and myself. Departmental officials liaised with Local Authorities who provided the venues and assisted with the issuing of the invitations.

The purpose of the briefing sessions was to provide people in regional areas with an opportunity to discuss the budget. The sessions involved a short video piece on the budget, an address by each of the Ministers in attendance and a questions and answers session.

It is not possible at this time to provide a figure for the cost of each briefing session until all payments have been processed. While each of the Ministers used their personal cars to transport them to these events, any other costs associated with travel in respect of additional departmental attendees will be forwarded to the Deputy as part of the overall cost of the briefings when the information is readily available.

There are no further regional budget briefings planned.

Flood Relief Schemes Status

233. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when funding will be provided for flooding relief works at a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43465/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Local flooding issues are a matter, in the first instance, for each Local Authority to investigate and address, and Laois County Council may carry out flood mitigation works using its own resources. The Office of Public Works ‘Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme’, however, also makes funds available to Local Authorities to undertake minor flood mitigation works or studies to address localised flooding problems within their administrative areas. The eligibility criteria of this scheme, including a requirement that any measures are cost beneficial, are published on the OPW website, www.opw.ie. It is open to the Council to submit a funding application for flood mitigation works under the Scheme. Any application received will be considered in accordance with the scheme’s eligibility criteria and the overall availability of resources for flood risk management.

No application has been received from Laois County Council under the Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection scheme for the area mentioned in the Deputy’s question.

Public Service Pay Commission Reports

234. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when he expects the Public Service Pay Commission to produce an outcome for Defence. [43466/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Public Service Pay Commission has adopted a modular approach to its work programme. Module 1 reported in August 2018 on issues relating to the areas of Nursing and Midwifery, Non-Consultant Hospital Doctors and Hospital Consultants. The Commission has not yet indicated a timeline for completion of Module 2 of its work programme.

Programme for Government Implementation

235. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the progress made to date in implementing the commitment in the programme for Partnership Government (details supplied) regarding the provision of external experts for Oireachtas committees; the name of the officials or the section in his Department taking the lead on the implementation of this commitment; the number of meetings held to discuss this commitment; if engagement or consultation has taken place with committee chairpersons or officials in the Houses of the Oireachtas on the way in which this commitment will be delivered and the level of expertise that will be required; if funds or a budget has been allocated for the implementation of the commitment; if a tender process has been considered or undertaken regarding this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43538/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Programme for a Partnership Government was agreed in May 2016 during the formation of the Government. This is a five year programme of work being undertaken for the duration of the present Dáil. The relevant commitment in the Programme which focuses on the Oireachtas Committee Structure, Resources and Responsibilities, sets out a number of commitments in this area, including Panels of outside experts being made available to assist committees in their work.

Since 2016 significant progress has been made in reforming how business is done in the Oireachtas. The Houses of the Oireachtas and the Department of the Taoiseach have been key players in driving the reform agenda. However, the engagement of experts by a committee is, in the first instance, a matter for the committees and similarly the allocation of resources is a matter for the Houses of the Oireachtas Service.

Local Authority Funding

236. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the categories of funding available to local authorities through his Department; the amount of funding provided for each scheme in 2016 and 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43735/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): My Department generally does not provide any direct funding to local authorities from its Vote.

The Deputy may wish to note that Dublin City Council received a total of €11,400 over the last two years from my Department's Open Data Engagement Fund. This is an annual competitive fund to promote the open data initiative and reuse of the data on the national Open Data portal (data.gov.ie). It is open to anyone to apply to the fund e.g. individuals, businesses or public service bodies. Further details on this fund are available on the Open Data portal.

In addition, the Reform and Delivery Office in my Department provided funding (on a co-funding basis) for a process automation pilot project in Limerick City and County Council in 2017. This was a once-off payment of €22,500 and there are no ongoing or future commitments associated with this project.

Flood Risk Management

237. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if Ireland has submitted its flood management plans in line with the EU Floods Directive, that is, Directive 2007/60/EC; and the details of same with a specific emphasis on whether Ire-

land has reported on the flood relief management plans as required by the directive. [43747/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The national catchment-based Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) Programme, compiled by the OPW in conjunction with the Local Authorities and other partners delivered twenty-nine Flood Risk Management Plans; one for each of the river basins covering the territory of the country.

The Plans set out a series of proposed measures to address flood risk and were developed in line with the requirements of the EU 'Floods' Directive (2007/60/EC).

The 'Floods' Directive was transposed into Irish law by the European Communities (Assessment and Management of Flood Risk) regulations 2010 (Statutory Instrument No. 122 of 2010). The Plans were approved by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform in April 2018 and were subsequently reported to the European Commission in May 2018. The Plans are published and available to the public to view through the OPW flood information web-portal; www.floodinfo.ie.

Public Parks

238. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he is satisfied that the Phoenix Park has been fully reinstated following the Papal visit; his views on whether the reinstatement occurred quickly enough; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43751/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am satisfied that the Phoenix Park is being fully reinstated following the Papal Visit and that the remedial works were initiated immediately after the event. The works will be completed by the end of October.

Public Parks Access

239. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the conclusions derived from the post-event meeting that took place between the agencies involved in overseeing the Papal visit; if specific recommendations for future events involving the Phoenix Park were outlined, particularly regarding road closure impacts on surrounding areas in Ashtown, the Navan Road and Castleknock; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43752/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Dublin City Council (DCC) chaired a post-event review meeting on 11 October 2018 which was attended by representatives of the Office of Public Works and all the other agencies involved in overseeing the recent Papal Visit.

DCC is the statutory agency responsible for the licensing of such large-scale events and is responsible for the implementation of all road closures deemed necessary for such events. One of the key recommendations, noted by all agencies attending the meeting, was the need for greater advance notice to residents in areas surrounding the Phoenix Park in respect of required road closures for large events.

National Monuments

240. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to upgrade and develop a national monument at a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43810/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Casino at Marino is a designated National Monument. The Office of Public Works is currently undertaking remedial works at the monument in order to address electrical deficiencies and other conservation issues with the fabric of the building. OPW is also engaging with Failte Ireland and the Department of Culture Heritage and the Gaeltacht to explore ways to better present this unique and important Monument nationally and internationally.

EU Programmes

241. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the projects that will be funded under the INTERREG and PEACE programmes in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43862/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The 2014-2020 EU-funded PEACE and INTERREG programmes will invest over half a billion euros in the border region of Ireland and Northern Ireland over the course of the programming period. The programmes are managed by the Special EU Programmes Body, one of the North South implementation bodies established under the Good Friday Agreement.

The PEACE IV programme has a total value of €270 million and aims to promote peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland. The INTERREG VA programme totals €282 million, with the aim of promoting economic, social and territorial cohesion.

Both programmes are progressing well, with the bulk of funding now allocated to successful applicants who will be delivering a range of projects during 2019 and beyond.

The PEACE programme supports projects under four Specific Objectives. These are Shared Education, Children and Young People, Shared Spaces and Services, and Building Positive Relations. To date a total of 39 projects of varying sizes, with a total value of €118 million, have been granted funding under these objectives. In addition to this, €73 million has been allocated to Local Authorities, North and South, for their Local Action Plans, to deliver PEACE IV programme activities across a range of the Specific Objectives.

The INTERREG programme funds projects in four thematic areas. These are Research & Innovation, Environment, Sustainable Transport, and Health. A total of €217 million has been allocated to 28 projects to date.

The remaining funding under both programmes will be allocated to projects over the coming months.

The Government is committed to the successful implementation of the current PEACE and INTERREG programmes and a successor programme post-2020. It welcomes the proposal from the European Commission for a special new PEACE PLUS programme that will build on and continue the work of the PEACE and INTERREG programmes in the 2021-2027 programming period.

Third Level Fees

242. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the relief in place for a medical student in relation to fees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43212/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): It is estimated that the average cost per annum to the State of a medical student is c. €11,000. This takes into account State grant and tuition fee funding paid by the State (where appropriate). It excludes the Student Contribution of €3,000 which is paid by the student, or paid by the exchequer on behalf of the student in cases where the student qualifies for assistance under my Department's Student Grant Scheme.

In the case of students who qualify for entry to the Graduate Entry Medicine (GEM) programme and who are liable for the cost of their tuition fees as they already hold an undergraduate qualification, the State pays a grant per student of €9,500 with the balance payable by the student.

Students pursuing GEM programmes do so as second degree courses and consequently are not eligible for free fees funding or for student grants. However, in order to widen access to GEM programmes, and give assistance towards the financial burden on each student pursuing these programmes, the fees of participating EU students are partly subsidised by the State via the Higher Education Authority (HEA). Currently, the subsidy is €9,500 per student with the balance of fees payable by the student.

There is no Department supported loan scheme in place for GEM students. However as you may be aware there are various loans available for GEM students but these are private arrangements between the relevant lenders and the students. My Department has no role in such arrangements.

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. Details of this fund are available from the Access Office in the third level institution attended. Also, tax relief at the standard rate of tax may be claimed in respect of tuition fees paid for approved courses at approved colleges of higher education.

Budget 2019

243. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the specific provisions within budget 2019 which will phase out the lower salaries of post-2011 teachers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43174/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The public service agreements have allowed a programme of pay restoration for public servants to start. As a result, the starting salary of a teacher is now €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 24 September 2018, an agreement was reached between the Government 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.

Teachers' Remuneration

244. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of teachers in County Donegal on a lower salary as a result of the 2011 reduction in incomes; when the two tier salary system for teachers in primary and secondary education schools will cease; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43175/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The public service agreements have allowed a programme of pay restoration for public servants to start. The Government negotiated a 15-22% pay increase for new teachers.

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, the Government welcomed 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.

The information requested by the Deputy in relation to school staff numbers on the different salary scales are not maintained on a county basis by my Department.

Capitation Grants

245. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason budget 2019 did not prioritise the restoration of the capitation grant in view of the fact that austerity measures reduced the grant by €30; the way in which schools are expected to make up for the continued shortfall in funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43176/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The Deputy will be aware of the many pressing demands within Education which my Department has had to consider in recent years. Important changes have been made resourcing and reforming provision for children with Special Educational Needs, rolling out Junior Cycle Reform, strengthening school leadership, reducing Primary Class Size, restoring Guidance Teachers, providing for extra students at all levels, providing for new skill needs in Apprenticeships and Traineeships and in Higher Education.

I fully recognise the need to improve capitation funding for schools.

I am pleased that my Department has been able to provide for a 5% increase in capitation funding for primary and post primary schools that will apply from the start of the 2019/20 school year. Over the course of the school year 2019/20, an additional €10 million will be allocated to primary and post primary schools, of which €4 million will be allocated in 2019.

My Department must be prudent in the context of ongoing budgetary pressures and have to prioritise where it is not possible to do everything that it would like to do in the Education Sector in any one year especially in the light of increasing enrolments.

It is my intention to seek funding for further capitation increases in future budgets.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

246. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a veterinary course studied here has level 8 status and a similar course in Poland is classed as a level 9 integrated masters and is not eligible for a SUSI grant after year four. [43186/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) is the state agency with statutory responsibility for the quality assurance of further and higher education and training in Ireland. QQI is responsible for maintaining the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). The NFQ is a system of ten levels which aims to make the qualifications system in Ireland easier to understand, thus facilitating the recognition of Irish qualifications both at home and abroad.

QQI also hosts the Irish centre of the European Network of Information Centres / National Academic Recognition Information Centre (ENIC-NARIC). This service comprises a network of centres that facilitates the recognition of academic qualifications throughout Europe and further afield including Australia. Further details are available at: www.qualrec.ie.

A course placed at Level 8 (or equivalent) on the NFQ is undergraduate level. A course placed at Level 9 (or equivalent) on the NFQ is postgraduate level.

SUSI grant funding is available for approved undergraduate courses in approved higher education institutions within the EU. No maintenance funding is available for postgraduate courses outside of Ireland.

Some high end courses abroad have an integrated undergraduate and postgraduate element. For these courses, SUSI may issue maintenance grants during the undergraduate element of the course but will not provide any support for the postgraduate element. Third level institutions are autonomous bodies and as such have responsibility for their own academic affairs, including issues relating to the composition and content of courses.

Further details of the funding available for integrated masters' courses within the EU, is available on the SUSI website at: <https://susi.ie/eligibility/student-studying-outside-the-state/>

approved-institutionscourses-for-students-studying-outside-the-state/.

Schools Building Projects

247. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there are updates from the meeting held recently in relation to a school (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43193/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The major building project referred to by the Deputy is currently at Stage 1 of the Architectural Planning Process. Stage 1 is the Preliminary Design Stage where the Design Team, in conjunction with the school authority, analyse all the constraints of the site, develop a preferred design option and ensure that the preferred option is most appropriate for the delivery of the brief.

The design proposals were presented to my Department and a number of comments were issued back to the Design Team for action.

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

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

Budget 2019

248. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the school staffing measures announced in his Department's budget for 2019 (details supplied). [43204/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Budget 2019 will see numbers employed in our schools reach the highest ever level. Over 1,300 additional posts in schools will be funded, including more than 370 teaching posts and 950 additional SNA posts to cater for growth in student population and additional special classes. This builds on the Budget 2018 measure which provided a one point improvement in the staffing schedule in primary schools which brings the position to the most favourable ever seen at primary level.

The 2018/19 school year saw an increase of over 6000 teaching posts in our schools compared to the 2015/16 school year.

The latest figures in relation to pupil teacher ratios show an improved ratio of teachers to students from 16:1 to 15.3:1 at primary level when comparing the 2015/16 school year to the 2017/18 school year. Average class sizes at primary level improved from 24.9 to 24.5 in the same period.

Budget 2019 marks the third year of a major reinvestment in the education sector, as we continue to implement the Action Plan for Education, our plan to make Ireland's education and training service the best in Europe by 2026. In 2019, the budget for the Department of Education and Skills will increase by €674 million, a 6.7% increase on last year. This will bring Government expenditure on education and skills to its highest ever level of nearly €10.8 billion.

Over the three Budgets encompassed by the Action Plan for Education 2016-2019, annual investment in education will have risen by €1.7 billion, an increase of over 18% on 2016 levels. This reflects the government's commitment to delivering on our plan to have the best education and training service in Europe.

The Statistics Section of my Department's website contains extensive data in relation to our schools including pupil teacher ratio's and teacher numbers. The most recent published information relates to the 2017/2018 school year.

Any additional increase in the teacher numbers has to be considered as part of future budgetary processes, alongside the many other demands from the education sector.

School Management

249. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason no provision was made in budget 2019 for further restoration of promoted posts at assistant principal level in primary and post-primary schools; the number of posts at the equivalent of AP1 and AP2 level, respectively which were suppressed through the emergency era moratorium; the current shortfall in restoring these posts; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that there is now no provision to restore further middle management posts before September 2020; if this is a policy to limit schools' middle management capacity; and if his attention has been further drawn to the concerns expressed by the schools' inspectorate regarding the effect of the protracted delay in restoring AP1 and AP2 posts in schools. [43205/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Assistant Principal I and Assistant Principal II (formerly Special Duties posts), along with the Principal and Deputy Principal make up the middle management structure in schools.

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

€2.75m was allocated in Budget 2017 to restore middle management positions i.e. the equivalent of approximately 1,300 middle management posts at both Primary and Post-Primary. It should also be noted that in recent Budget announcements over 400 additional Deputy Principal posts were provided for in our Post Primary schools to focus on Leadership and Management in these schools. This brought the number of Deputy Principal positions at Post-Primary from 393 in the 2015/16 school year to 866 in the current school year.

In total over 3,000 leadership posts have been invested in our primary and post primary schools in the past year which has led to 1 in 3 (34.5%) teachers now holding promoted positions in our schools.

Circular 63/2017 was issued by the Department in September 2017 which deals and sets out a leadership and management framework for posts in recognised primary schools.

Circular 3/2018 is the corresponding circular for the Post-Primary Sector and it issued in early January. Both circulars are available on my Department's website.

Figures for the breakdown of teachers in promoted positions and for the number of APIs and APIIs which were in our schools prior to the moratorium are outlined in the attached tables.

The estimated cost of restoring the number of middle-management posts in our schools to pre-moratorium levels would be approximately €50m and any further restoration would have to be considered in the context of future Budgets. However, there are needs across the system which have to be balanced in the decisions made in each budget.

Budget 2019 marks the third year of a major reinvestment in the education sector, as we continue to implement the Action Plan for Education, our plan to make Ireland's education and training service the best in Europe by 2026. In 2019, the budget for the Department of Education and Skills will increase by €674 million, a 6.7% increase on last year. In total, the Education budget will have increased by €1.7 billion compared to 2016.

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.

Further funding has also been 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.

Number of APIs and APIIs which were removed from primary and post primary schools during the moratorium

	Primary		Post-Primary	
Year	2008/09	2017/18*	2008/09	2017/18*
APIs	1,605	958	5,600	3,178
APIIs	8,575	5,982	8,240	5,422

*2017/18 figures include the following posts of responsibility which were restored.

APIs - 268 at primary level and 378 at post primary level

APIIs – 1,032 at primary level and 922 at post primary level

Breakdown of teachers in promoted positions for the 2017/18 school year

	Primary	Post Primary
APIs	958	3,178
APIIs	5,982	5,422
Deputy Principals	2,686	856
Principals	3,324	741
Total in management positions	12,950	10,197

	Primary	Post Primary
Total teachers	36,904	29,550
% teachers holding management positions	35%	34.5%

Teacher Supply

250. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which his attention has been drawn to the problems in filling substitute teacher positions in order to cover long-term absences in primary schools; and his plans to address this issue. [43206/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): My Department is aware of reports that some schools are experiencing difficulties in finding substitute teachers. In order to ease the situation, in the last school year the limits that teachers on career break can work as substitutes was suspended. Schools were also reminded that, in considering career break applications, the needs of pupils should take precedence and they must take account of the availability of appropriate qualified replacement teachers.

As the Deputy is aware, earlier this year the Teacher Supply Steering Group, which is chaired by the Secretary General of the Department, was established. The Group is considering the issues that relate to teacher supply, including: initial teacher education policy, provision, funding and support; data/research requirements; policies and arrangements for schools and teachers that impact on teacher mobility/supply; and promotion of the teaching profession.

The Steering Group is supported by a number of working groups which are looking in more detail at the issues under these broad headings. The establishment of supply panels for substitute teachers at primary level is part of that consideration. A key concern will be to ensure value-for-money and optimum provision of teaching by teachers on any such panel.

Schools Building Projects Status

251. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the major building project for a school (details supplied); if consideration has been given to an earlier profile for commencement of construction than Q3 2019 in view of the urgent need for the school building; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43214/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The major building project referred to by the Deputy is currently at an advanced stage of architectural planning, Stage 2(b) – Detailed Design.

The outcome of the pre-qualification process for the main contract has been notified to contractors who expressed interest in tendering for this project. Feedback and issues arising from same is currently being dealt with by the Design Team. When this process has concluded the project will then be progressed to tender stage.

The project is currently profiled to commence construction in Q3 2019. However, the Department has advised the school that if the project is in a position to commence construction earlier in 2019, the Department can facilitate this.

Schools Building Projects Status

252. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans for the proposed extension of a school (details supplied); the status of the project; the timeline for completion of the works; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43215/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The Deputy will be aware that a building project for the school in question is included on my Department's 6-Year Construction Programme.

I wish to advise the Deputy that the project is progressing to the architectural planning stage and is expected to be delivered by an external agency to my Department. Arrangements are currently being made in this regard and my Department will be in further contact with the school when these arrangements have been finalised.

Schools Building Projects Status

253. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans for the proposed extension of a school (details supplied); the status of the project; the timeline for completion of the works; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43216/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): This project is currently at Stage 2B of Architectural Planning. Statutory Approvals comprising Planning Permission, Disability Access Certificate and Fire Safety Certificate have been granted.

My Department has authorised the project to proceed to carry out the pre-qualification of contractors which normally takes between 8 and 12 weeks to complete. The pre-qualification ensures that there are a number of appropriate and suitable candidates who can undertake the works successfully. The advertisement for the pre-qualification of the main contractor for this school project has been published on e-tenders and the Official Journal of the European Union.

When the pre-qualification process has been completed the project will then progress to Stage 3 which is tender and appointment of contractors. The building project for this school is included in my Department's 6-year Capital Building Programme, 2016-2021.

School Enrolments Data

254. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of infant boys schools catering for pupils from junior infants to first class by county; the schools which have DEIS status; and if such schools have amalgamated in recent years. [43223/18]

287. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of infant boys schools here, that are, catering for pupils from junior infants to first class; the breakdown by county; the number of these that have DEIS status; if such schools have amalgamated in recent years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43714/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I propose to take Questions Nos. 254 and 287 together.

The information requested by the Deputy is available in the following table. The information given is for the 2017/2018 academic year, which is the latest available.

Roll Number	Official Name	County Description	DEIS (Y/N)	Enrolments in Ordinary Classes	Enrolments in Special Classes
01285A	TIPPERARY JNR BNS	Tipperary	N	101	0
11776C	ST LAURENCE O TOOLE JUNIOR BOYS*	Dublin	Y	48	0
15816I	ST VINCENTS INF BOYS	Dublin	Y	117	0
16344V	ST MARYS JNR BNS	Tipperary	N	142	18
18424G	SCOIL NAIS IOSEF NAOFA	Carlow	N	162	12
18632N	S N EOIN BOSCO NAI BUAC	Dublin	N	224	6

*Amalgamated with St Laurence O'Toole Girls School in September 2018 to form St Laurence O Toole National School (20507W)

Roll Number	Official Name	County Description	DEIS (Y/N)	Status	Notes
12372G	MICHAEL ST N S	Wexford	N	Amalgamated September 2016	Amalgamated with the junior pupils from Scoil na mBraithre (16741I) and St Josephs NS (17457Q) to form Bunscoil Nic Amhlaidh (20481H)
15383D	ST PETERS INF TS	Wicklow	N	Amalgamated September 2015	Amalgamated with the junior pupils from St Michaels Girls National School (13932A) to form St Michaels and St Peters Junior School (20470C)
16901E	S N PADRAIG NAOFA N B	Cork	N	Amalgamated September 2015	Amalgamated with St Patrick Boys Senior School (16900C) to form St Patricks Boys National School (20477Q)
18171D	OUR LADY ASSUMPTION BNS	Dublin	N	Amalgamated September 2014	Amalgamated with our Lady of Assumption (18455R) to form Assumption Junior School (20450T)

School Accommodation Provision

255. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the funding for the development of a school (details supplied) in County Dublin; the point at which the application is at; and the timeline for the release of funding for the project. [43259/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I can confirm an application for additional school accommodation for the school in question has been received by my Department. As soon as the application is assessed a decision will be conveyed to the school authorities.

I can also confirm my Department is presently finalising the acquisition of addition land for this school, the acquisition of which will serve to enhance the facilities currently available to the school while also supporting any potential options for the future development of the school going forward.

School Staff

256. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 268 of 7 September 2018, if a response to the appeal now lodged will be expedited in view of the circumstances (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43263/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The criteria used for the allocation of teaching posts for the 2018/2019 school year is set out in Circular 0010/2018, which is available on the Department website. The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the 30 September 2017.

The school referred to by the Deputy had an enrolment of 167 pupils on 30 September 2017, which allows for an allocation of 6 classroom teachers in the current school year. The school also has 2 Special Education teachers, one which is full-time and another that is shared with neighbouring schools.

The staffing arrangements include an appeals mechanism for schools to submit an appeal under certain criteria to an independent Appeals Board.

The school referred to by the Deputy submitted an application for consideration at the October meeting of the Primary Staffing Appeals Board. The appeal was refused by the Appeals Board on the basis that the grounds of the appeal did not warrant the allocation of an additional post under Circular 0010/2018.

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

DEIS Eligibility

257. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an application by a school (details supplied) will be expedited; if the review committee is scheduled to meet to deal with pending appeals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43264/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): As the Deputy will be aware, my Department has introduced an objective, statistics based model for assessing which schools merit inclusion in the DEIS Programme, so that all stakeholders can have confidence that we are targeting extra resources at those schools with the highest levels of concentrated disadvantage.

There is no application process for DEIS and therefore no appeals process. The key data sources used in the DEIS identification process are the DES Primary Online Database (POD) and Post-Primary Online (PPOD) Databases, and CSO data from the National Census of Population as represented in the Pobal HP Index for Small Areas which is a method of measuring the relative affluence or disadvantage of a particular geographical area. Variables used in the compilation of the HP Index include not only single parent rate, but those related to demographic growth, dependency ratios, education levels, overcrowding, social class, occupation and unemployment rates. This data is combined with pupil data, anonymised and aggregated to small area, to provide information on the relative level of concentrated disadvantage present in the pupil cohort of individual schools. This data is applied uniformly to all schools in the country in a fair and objective way, to identify the relative level of concentrated disadvantage present in each school.

DEIS Plan 2017 provides for a verification process with which schools can engage to ensure

the accuracy of the data being used. It is envisaged that this process will involve a re-examination of the school data used and of the application of the data by the Department, to ensure that no administrative errors occurred.

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

DEIS Plan 2017 states that the improved data on the socio-demographic of schools resulting from the new identification model will have an impact not only on the assessment of schools for inclusion in the programme but also on the scaling of resources to allow for more graduated levels of support. This in turn allows for the ultimate objective of allocating resources to best meet the identified need of individual schools.

In order to achieve this, the current identification model needs to be as accurate as possible and this will be facilitated by the use of Eircode to ensure correct inputting of addresses. Further analysis is also required to examine other variables known to be strong predictors of educational disadvantage in the context of resource allocation.

Therefore, in order to ensure the quality of the address data and conduct further analysis, it has been decided to conduct further quality assurance on the model before extending these envisaged uses of the model. Consequently, it is not intended to extend the DEIS programme to any further schools until this work is complete.

Teacher Supply

258. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the actions taken to make it easier for retired teachers to act as substitutes in the short-term but ensure this in no way interferes with the normal teaching labour market; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43287/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): It is schools that employ teachers and not my Department. The policy of my Department is to ensure, as far as possible, that the Managerial Authorities of Primary and Post Primary schools give priority to unemployed registered teachers who are fully qualified when filling vacant teaching posts.

Therefore and in accordance with Department Circular 31/2011 issued by my Department, schools are required to employ appropriately qualified and registered teachers. In the event that an appropriately qualified and registered teacher is not available the circular outlines that schools must give priority to retired teachers over the employment of people who are not registered as teachers by the Teaching Council.

In addition the Teaching Council draws to the attention of teachers who indicate they are not continuing their registration that if they wish to continue to work as a teacher following retirement in a substitute or other capacity they should maintain their registration with the Teaching Council.

Teaching Qualifications

259. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the actions taken to reconsider the need for a second year in Professional Masters of Education, PME, programmes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43288/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Changes to the duration and content of all initial teacher education programmes were made in response to recommendations in the National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020 and were incorporated into the Teaching Council's Policy Paper on the Continuum of Teacher Education and Criteria and Guidelines for Programme Providers. Both were published in 2011.

Improvements which were made to initial teacher education courses include the reconfiguration of the content and duration of courses, with the duration of concurrent (undergraduate) ITE programmes set at a minimum of four years while the consecutive (postgraduate) programmes of teacher education are set at two years, thereby facilitating an innovative reconceptualisation of programmes.

The lengthened and reconfigured programmes include substantial periods of school placement as central to student teacher development and a number of mandatory elements including literacy and numeracy, teaching, learning and assessment including school and classroom planning, differentiation, behaviour management, inclusive education (special education, multiculturalism, disadvantage, etc) and ICT in teaching and learning. These reforms are focused on improving the quality of teaching in our schools, which is central to the educational outcomes of our children.

The Teaching Council is currently undertaking a review of the impact of the reconfigured ITE programmes and of the Criteria and Guidelines for accreditation, which will feed into an update of the procedures and criteria documentation.

The Deputy may wish to note that, recognising the concerns that have been raised around teacher supply in recent times, a new Teacher Supply Steering Group was convened by Minister Bruton in March 2018. The Steering Group is leading on the identification of the issues, the development of a programme of actions on teacher supply and overseeing its implementation. In undertaking its task, the Steering Group is cognisant of the requirement that all persons wishing to teach in recognised schools must meet the professional registration standards and criteria set by the Teaching Council, which is the professional regulatory body for the teaching profession.

Teaching Council of Ireland

260. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the actions taken to ensure that teachers based in Northern Ireland can register to teach here in an efficient, economic and fair way; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43289/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The Teaching Council is the body with statutory authority to register teachers in this State, including those with qualifications gained in other jurisdictions.

The Teaching Council registers teachers from Northern Ireland under the EU Directive 2005/36/EC, as amended, which is transposed into Irish law by Statutory Instrument (SI) 8 of 2017.

In line with this legislation, applicants for registration are required to submit a completed application form including a character reference and qualification documentation (i.e. transcripts and module descriptors). In addition applicants are required to complete the National Vetting Bureau vetting process and may be required to supply police clearance if they have lived outside the State. Teachers holding qualifications gained outside the State are required to complete the qualification assessment process. This process determines the equivalence and

appropriateness of their qualifications as set out in the Directive. The registration process cannot be completed until all the required documentation has been received and both the qualification assessment process and the vetting disclosure /clearances have been completed.

Teacher Supply

261. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the actions taken to establish a body within his Department working with education partners tasked with co-ordinating policy matters concerning teacher supply; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43290/18]

272. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of times the teacher supply steering group has met since it was established; the decisions made by the group; if it plans to publish reports; and if so, the nature of the report and estimated date of publication. [43414/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I propose to take Questions Nos. 261 and 272 together.

The Steering Group on Teacher Supply was established in March 2018. The Steering Group is chaired by the Secretary General of the Department of Education and Skills and it includes nominees of the Department, HEIs providing primary and post primary initial teacher education, the Teaching Council, the HEA, primary and post primary school management bodies, as well as an independent expert. The Steering Group has met on four occasions, most recently on September 10th.

The Group is considering the issues that impact on teacher supply, including: initial teacher education policy, provision, funding and support; data-research requirements; policies and arrangements for schools and teachers that impact on teacher mobility-supply; and promotion of the teaching profession. In undertaking its task, the Group is cognisant of the requirement that all persons wishing to teach in recognised schools must meet the professional registration standards and criteria set by the Teaching Council, which is the professional regulatory body for the teaching profession.

I am in the process of meeting officials across my Department and intend to meet shortly with the officials with responsibility in this area to review developments to date and plans for next steps.

Broadband Service Provision

262. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a contract to supply broadband to a school (details supplied) in County Galway; when the tenders will be released to allow progress to be made on the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43305/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Through the Schools Broadband Access Programme the Department provides for the supply of internet connectivity for all recognised primary and post primary schools, and some 98% of schools are included in this scheme. All post-primary schools and some special schools are now included in the 100Mbps programme.

The policy of my Department is to offer the best quality connectivity to all schools in line

with the technical solutions available in the market and financial constraints. Broadband capacity can vary due to geographical location and local infrastructure, and thus impact on the service that can be provided.

Under the current primary schools programme the Department continually reviews the availability of services and upgrades schools where the opportunity arises, in line with contractual and budgetary requirements. A recent drawdown from the Framework of Providers of Broadband Services saw some 1,100 primary schools awarded download speeds of 30Mbps or greater (the baseline download speed required under the National Broadband Plan). Those schools have now been upgraded to that connectivity. This represents more than one third of all primary schools. This is a significant improvement over recent years, given that less than 100 primary schools were on those speeds in 2012. Further schools are likely to be upgraded to those speeds in 2018, through EIR's 300K Rural Deployment commitment.

The need to improve broadband connectivity to primary schools is recognised in the Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020, and as noted access to high speed broadband is one of the indicators identified in the Digital Strategy Action Plan. An interdepartmental working group has been established to determine how best to address broadband connectivity to primary schools in collaboration with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment, in the context of the National Broadband Plan and the Intervention Strategy, and proposed industry provision.

The school referred to by the Deputy was recently included in mini competition run by my Department and the service to that school has been awarded to a provider of high speed broadband. The provider, is currently working to provide this service to the school. The school will be contacted by the provider in due course to arrange the installation.

Minor Works Scheme

263. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the minor works grant will issue to schools for the 2018-2019 school year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43313/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): On 14 September 2018, the announcement of the major package of investment in education under Project Ireland 2040 confirmed that, starting this year, all primary schools will receive the €29 million minor works grant in either December or early January of each school year.

I expect to make an announcement shortly with regard to the timing of the payment of the Minor Works Grant for the current school year.

School Management

264. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there is a barrier to a member of a board of a community requesting the attendance records of staff; if so, the nature of the barriers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43330/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The Education Act, 1998 sets out the key roles and functions that are discharged by Patrons and Boards of Management in the running of schools. The Board of Management is the body of persons appointed by the Patron to manage the school on behalf of the patron and the functions of the Board are set out in Sec-

tion 15 of the Act.

Depending on the type of school it is either the Board of Management or the appropriate Education and Training board that is the employer of school staff. Therefore, any queries in relation to staff should be taken up with the Board of Management or the relevant Education and Training Board of the school in question.

School Funding

265. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if funding is available to install solar panels in schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43331/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): My Department and the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland are currently involved in an energy efficient retrofit pilot scheme for schools. The introduction of solar panels is being considered as part of this scheme, the longer-term outcome of which will be to create an accurate and scalable model for energy efficient retrofits of schools across the country.

Schools Building Projects Status

266. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of plans for the proposed extension and special education unit for a school (details supplied); the time-frame from construction to completion for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43334/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I wish to advise the Deputy that a building project for the school in question is included in my Department's 6-Year Construction Programme. The project will include accommodation for special needs purposes. In the context of progressing the building project, officials from my Department have undertaken a site visit to the school.

The building project for this school will be devolved to Kildare Wicklow Education and Training Board (KWETB) for delivery and my Department is currently engaging with KWETB in this regard.

Junior Cycle Reform

267. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the timeline for the completion of junior certificate reforms; the arrangements for provision of training to teachers in the implementation of the new junior certificate curriculum for the school year 2018-2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43364/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The Junior Cycle Framework encompasses learning in all subjects or in a number of subjects and short courses. The new curriculum and assessment arrangements are being phased in to accommodate the development of new specifications for subjects as well as the provision of professional development for teachers and school planning. The first phase commenced with the introduction of the new specification for English for students entering 1st year in September 2014. New subject specifications have been introduced in each of the past 3 years with the final phase due to be introduced in

September 2019 with all subjects under the framework examinable in June 2022.

Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT) is a dedicated support service of the Department of Education and Skills and was established to support schools in implementing the Framework for Junior Cycle (2015). JCT has worked with schools, including school leaders and teachers annually since the 2014-2015 school year, and continues to do so.

In the 2018-2019 school year the following are the main continuing professional development supports being provided by JCT:

- Dedicated subject specific continuing professional development (CPD) workshops are being provided for teachers in local education centres nationwide between September and November 2018. These workshops are repeats of the subject workshops provided during the 2017-2018 school year and are aimed at those teachers who were unable to attend the 2017-2018 workshops due to their attendance at their other teaching subject workshop during that year, or if they simply missed the opportunity to attend the workshop during that year.

A new wave of subject CPD workshops for the 2018-2019 school year for all subject teachers will commence nationwide in November 2018 and will run until April 2019. These workshops are provided on a school clustering basis whereby between 6-10 post-primary schools in a geographical region will close on the same day to students while all of the teachers come together in their subject groupings for dedicated CPD.

- This arrangement is catered for in DES circular 0015/2017 and will take place on a continuing basis nationwide throughout the school year.

- Two separate workshops are being provided for school leaders by JCT during 2018-2019. The first of these workshops is set to be rolled out nationwide during November and December 2018. The focus of this workshop will be the reforms taking place in the context of reporting on students' progress to students themselves, and to their parents/guardians. The second workshop will be facilitated nationwide in March and April 2019 and the focus of this workshop will be determined by the needs of school leaders, Principals and Deputy Principals.

- JCT provides a wide range of elective CPD opportunities for teachers which take place in the evening times and at weekends, generally in education centres nationwide. These workshops focus on a range of topics including Subject Learning and Assessment Review meetings, utilisation of management resource hours by schools in supporting the embedding of junior cycle, STE(A)M, Arts in Junior Cycle, DesignSKILLS and much more. These elective workshops are proving very popular with teachers.

- JCT provides online supports for schools. The service provides a wide range of live and interactive webinars for teachers across all of the different subject areas, while all of their teaching and learning resources and materials are provided on their website for download by teachers, www.jct.ie.

JCT also works closely with various teacher associations and groupings and will regularly attend national conferences and other events to facilitate dedicated CPD workshops.

School Curriculum

268. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to make history a compulsory subject for the junior certificate curriculum; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43365/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): One of the key aims of Junior Cycle Reform was to move from a large number of subjects with heavy curricula examined in a traditional memory based way. After a very detailed consultation process the NCCA recommended a new approach:

- limited compulsory subjects around basic literacy and numeracy
- 24 statements of learning

It is important to say that the 24 statements of learning include important elements which cultivate a historical perspective.

The new Junior Cycle Programme has also greatly enlivened subjects with a new emphasis on projects and self directed learning. This new approach is particularly evidence in history which will encourage take up of this lively and attractive subject.

The new approach gives students more choice and options which will be very valuable in their personal development. There will be 21 subjects and numerous short courses when all subjects are rolled out.

When it comes to compulsion it should be said that history prior to the introduction of the Framework for Junior Cycle was only a core subject in voluntary secondary schools (52% of schools). However, it is important to note that currently some 90% of students across all school types choose to study History at Junior Cycle.

Education Welfare Service

269. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills whether the case of a child (details supplied) who has received no supports to date will be examined. [43369/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): My Department understands that the Educational Welfare Service (EWS) of the Child and Family Agency (Tusla) has been liaising with the mother of the child referred to by the Deputy with the aim of ensuring that the child returns to school as soon as possible.

The EWS is the statutory body that can provide assistance to parents of children seeking to secure a school place. As an interim measure, the EWS is also supporting the parent to make an application for home tuition support. The home tuition scheme operated by my Department provides funding for tuition support to children who are temporarily without a school place.

In addition, under Section 29 of the Education Act, 1998 a parent of a student can make an appeal to the Secretary General of my Department where a school board of management has decided to permanently exclude a student or decided to refuse to enrol a student.

Ministerial Meetings

270. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the details of engagements, meetings or correspondence that he has had with a person (details supplied) in the past three years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43391/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I have not met with or had any

correspondence with the individual named.

Student Grant Scheme Appeals

271. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an appeal in relation to a SUSI grant will be initiated in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43410/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I understand that the student to whom the Deputy refers, has made appeals to both the appeals officer in SUSI and to the statutory independent Student Grants Appeals Board. She has therefore exhausted the statutory based appeals process.

With regard to the general issue of assessment of income under the Student Grants Scheme, the rates of grant and the income thresholds for the Student Grant Scheme are published annually.

Student grant applications are means tested on gross income from all sources earned inside and outside the State within a specified reference period. The means test arrangements of the Student Grant Scheme are applied nationally.

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 Office in the third level institution attended. This fund is administered on a confidential, discretionary basis.

Also, tax relief at the standard rate of tax may be claimed in respect of tuition fees paid for approved courses at approved colleges of higher education. Further information on this tax relief is available from the Revenue Commissioners at www.revenue.ie.

Question No. 272 answered with Question No. 261.

School Management

273. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if school insurance can be included in the central procurement process to negotiate more affordable premia en masse and ensure that schools can manage insurance costs within their finite resources; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43416/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Responsibility for insurance rests with Boards of Management and the Education and Training Boards (ETBs) for schools operated by them. Funding is provided by my Department in respect of general running costs, including insurance.

It is Government policy that public bodies, where possible, should make use of all central public procurement frameworks. The benefits arising from these frameworks include: cash savings; administrative savings from reduced duplication of tendering; greater purchasing expertise; improved consistency; enhanced service levels and legal certainty.

A wide range of public Procurement Contracts/Frameworks are available to schools for pro-

curement of goods and services. Among them is Multi Supplier Framework Agreement for the Provision of Insurance Brokerage and Placement Services to the Public Sector. Clients of the Framework can include primary, post-primary, special and secondary schools as well as ETBs acting on behalf of schools.

This Framework allows schools and ETBs to seek the provision of the most appropriate and cost effective insurance brokerage solutions to meet their needs; and to get advice and guidance in respect of handling insurance related issues.

As to a possible public procurement mechanism for schools to obtain competitively priced insurance cover, I understand that the Office of Government Procurement has been leading consultations involving my Department and school patrons and trustees concerning the conduct of a value for money study of school insurance premia. As part of this process, a value for money review of IPB has been conducted and it concluded that the ETBs and County Councils, the effective “owners” of this mutual insurance body, are receiving value for money services from IPB for their insurance needs. I understand that given the complexity of the issues involved, ongoing work is progressing slowly.

Schools Building Projects Status

274. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to set out the status of a school project (details supplied); if it will be progressed from band 2 to assist in the development of the school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43449/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I wish to advise the Deputy that the school in question submitted an application for major capital funding to my Department to undertake significant improvement works at the school.

The National Development Plan (NDP) provides for an €8.4 billion investment in school buildings over the period 2018 to 2027 to deliver on NDP and National Planning Framework objectives through addressing the twin priorities of catering for demographics and ensuring a strengthened focus on refurbishment of existing school stock. This investment will result in an almost doubling of the capital budget for school buildings - €540 m in 2018 rising to an annual average of circa €1 billion in the second half of the NDP period.

The strengthened focus on refurbishment of existing school stock will have different strands including prefab replacement, PE hall and school laboratory build and modernisation programmes as well as the commencement and progression of a deep energy retrofit of primary and post-primary schools built prior to 2008.

The application from the school referred to by the Deputy remains available to be considered in this context.

Schools Establishment

275. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if start-up interim accommodation has been sourced in respect of new primary and post-primary schools (details supplied); the details of the accommodation; the locations of same; if patronage has been agreed for these schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43467/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): As the Deputy may be aware, the current focus for my Department is to prioritise the 17 schools due to be established in 2019

so that patrons can be appointed and accommodation solutions put in place as soon as possible. My Department has appointed a Project Manager to assist with this work and potential interim accommodation options have been identified for the majority of the 17 schools which includes the four schools referred to by the Deputy. Work is still on-going in this regard and due to commercial sensitivities attaching to property matters generally my Department is unfortunately not in a position to provide further information on site locations etc. at this time.

A patronage process is ongoing in respect of the four post primary schools due to be established in 2019 and it is anticipated that the successful patrons will be announced before the end of October 2018. A patronage process for the primary schools due to be established in 2019 will commence shortly thereafter.

Schools Building Projects Status

276. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to outline the timeframe involved to date in the stage 2(b) process for a school (details supplied); when the process commenced; when it will cease; the reason for the delays that have occurred; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43469/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The major building project referred to by the Deputy is at an advanced stage of architectural planning, Stage 2(b) Detailed Design which includes the application for Planning Permission, Fire Cert and Disability Access Cert and the preparation of tender documents. All statutory approvals have been secured.

This project was authorised to proceed to Stage 2(b) on 12th November 2015. The Design Team submitted the Stage 2(b) report for this project on 10th April 2018, additional documentation was requested which was received on 27th April 2018. Subsequently the Stage 2(b) submission was reviewed by the Department and comments issued on 30th April 2018.

The Design Team was authorised to commence the pre-qualification of contractors process to select shortlists of contractors for the main and reserved specialist contracts on 22nd May 2018.

The outcome of the pre-qualification process for the main contract has been notified to contractors who expressed interest in tendering for this project. Feedback and issues arising from same is currently being dealt with by the Design Team. When this process has concluded the project will then be progressed to tender stage.

The Design Team is currently in the process of completing the Pre-Qualification process for the Reserved Specialist contracts.

The project is currently profiled to commence construction in Q3 2019. However, the Department has advised the school that if the project is in a position to commence construction earlier in 2019, the Department can facilitate this.

Apprenticeship Data

277. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to set down in tabular form the number of new apprenticeship registrations in each employment sector and subsector in each of the years 2014 to 2017 and to 30 October 2018 for all craft based and consortia led apprenticeships; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43470/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):
The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the table. Please note that the most recent data available in respect of 2018 is to 30 September.

Apprentice Registrations

-	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
-	-	-	-	-	Sep-30
AUCTIONEERING					
Auctioneering & Property Services	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	44
Total					44
BIOPHARMACHEM					
Laboratory Analyst	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	0
Laboratory Technician	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	2
Total					2
CONSTRUCTION					
Brick & Stonelaying	20	26	52	60	57
Carpentry & Joinery	185	291	399	443	403
Painting & Decorating	11	19	27	44	18
Plastering	9	7	18	34	24
Plumbing	318	289	345	532	460
Stonecutting & Stonemasonry	16	13	2	8	5
Wood Manufacturing & Finishing	23	48	71	59	69
Total	582	693	914	1,180	1,036
ELECTRICAL					
Aircraft Mechanics	33	34	39	53	72
Electrical	845	956	1,343	1,705	1,236
Electrical Instrumentation	85	83	106	120	71
Electronic Security Systems	16	28	28	72	43
Industrial Electrical Engineering	n/a	n/a	12	19	20
Instrumentation	10	8	10	20	6
Refrigeration & Air Conditioning	62	75	79	106	80
Total	1,051	1,184	1,617	2,095	1,528
ENGINEERING					
Mechanical Automation & Maintenance Fitting	174	153	163	183	125
Farriery	4	7	5	6	7
Industrial Insulation	10	13	10	21	11
Manufacturing Engineering (Level 6)	n/a	n/a	n/a	40	7
Manufacturing Engineering (Level 7)	n/a	n/a	n/a	36	8
Metal Fabrication	176	198	186	224	166
Pipefitting	0	37	33	25	37
Polymer Processing Technology	n/a	n/a	n/a	25	11
Sheet Metalworking	23	38	40	53	48
Toolmaking	66	62	66	65	43
Total	453	508	503	678	463
FINANCE					
Accounting Technician	n/a	n/a	n/a	86	67
Insurance Practice	n/a	n/a	67	71	76
International Financial Services Associate	n/a	n/a	n/a	15	3
International Financial Services Specialist	n/a	n/a	n/a	18	2

Questions - Written Answers

-	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
-	-	-	-	-	Sep-30
AUCTIONEERING					
Total			67	190	148
HOSPITALITY					
Commis Chef	n/a	n/a	n/a	25	90
Chef de Partie	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	24
Total				25	114
ICT					
ICT Associate Professional Network Technician	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	13
ICT Associate Professional Software Developer	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	19
Total					32
LOGISTICS					
Logistics Associate	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	24
Total					24
MOTOR					
Agricultural Mechanics	38	59	43	45	29
Construction Plant Fitting	56	77	59	86	54
Heavy Vehicle Mechanics	145	154	136	143	142
Motor Mechanics	325	423	420	353	275
Vehicle Body Repairs	40	47	58	46	23
Total	604	760	716	673	523
PRINTING					
Print Media	8	8	4	2	0
Total	8	8	4	2	0
Total Craft Apprenticeships	2,698	3,153	3,742	4,508	3,504
Total New Consortia Total (in red)	n/a	n/a	79	335	410
Grand Total	2,698	3,153	3,821	4,843	3,914

Special Educational Needs Staff Remuneration

278. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to indicate if the possible entitlement of a person (details supplied) to special needs assistant incremental credit for work in a community preschool for 11 years prior to becoming a SNA will be investigated. [43472/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Circular letter 0139/2006 issued by my Department sets out the agreed scheme of incremental credit for Special Needs Assistants. As the service did not meet the terms of the scheme the application was refused by my Department on May 18 last.

Schools Building Projects

279. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to outline his plans for a new school building (details supplied) in County Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43479/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): As the Deputy may be aware,

a new school building for the school to which he refers is included in my Department's six year construction Programme. Officials in my Department are working in relation to the acquisition of a suitable site for the new school. A potential site option has been identified and discussions are ongoing with the owner with a view to acquiring this site.

Due to the sensitive nature of site acquisitions generally, it is not possible to comment further at this stage.

School Accommodation

280. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to outline the steps he will take to address an over-capacity issue at a college (details supplied) in which up to 30 students from feeder schools have not been allocated a place for September 2019. [43481/18]

281. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if three prefabs for a college (details supplied) will be allocated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43482/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I propose to take Questions Nos. 280 and 281 together.

I can confirm to the Deputy that the patron of the school in question has submitted an application for additional accommodation to my Department.

The application was considered and approval in principle was given to provide additional permanent accommodation to the school. In this regard, my Department will shortly be undertaking a technical site visit to the school in the context of determining the project brief.

As an interim arrangement, my Department has approved temporary accommodation to the school and my officials are continuing to engage with the school's patron relating to the school's immediate and long term accommodation needs.

Schools Building Projects Applications

282. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to outline his plans to provide a new school building for a school (details supplied) in Donegal town; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the school is at maximum capacity and requires consideration for a new construction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43494/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I wish to advise the Deputy that the school in question submitted an application for major capital funding to my Department.

The Deputy will be aware that the National Development Plan (NDP) provides for an €8.4 billion investment in school buildings over the period 2018 to 2027 to deliver on NDP and National Planning Framework objectives through addressing the twin priorities of catering for demographics and ensuring a strengthened focus on refurbishment of existing school stock. This investment will result in an almost doubling of the capital budget for school buildings from €540 m in 2018 rising to an annual average of circa. €1 billion in the second half of the NDP period.

The strengthened focus on refurbishment of existing school stock will have different strands

including prefab replacement, PE hall and school laboratory build and modernisation programmes as well as the commencement and progression of a deep energy retrofit of primary and post-primary schools built prior to 2008.

The application from the school referred to by the Deputy remains available to be considered in this context.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

283. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when support will be made available to a person (details supplied) whose application has been sanctioned; and if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the school has been unable to make contact with his Department. [43635/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible for allocating a quantum of Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support for each school annually taking into account the assessed care needs of children qualifying for SNA support enrolled in the school.

The NCSE allocates SNA support to schools in accordance with the criteria set out in Department Circular 0030/2014, which is available on my Department’s website at www.education.ie in order that students who have care needs can access SNA support as and when it is needed.

In considering applications for SNA support for individual pupils, the NCSE take account of the pupils’ needs and consider the resources available to the school to identify whether additionality is needed or whether the school might reasonably be expected to meet the needs of the pupils from its current level of resources.

SNAs are not allocated to individual children but to schools as a school based resource.

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

My Department’s policy is to ensure that every child who is assessed as needing SNA support will receive access to such support.

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

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

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

Where a school has received its allocation of SNA support for 2018/19, but wishes new enrolments or assessments to be considered, which were not taken into account when the initial allocation was made, they may make a further application to the NCSE.

Once allocated, the recruitment and deployment of SNAs within schools are then matters

for the individual Principal/Board of Management. SNAs should be deployed by the school in a manner which best meets the care support requirements of the children enrolled in the school for whom SNA support has been allocated. It is a matter for schools to allocate support as required, and on the basis of individual need, which allows schools flexibility in how the SNA support is utilised.

School Accommodation

284. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to outline the position regarding an application by a school (details supplied) for an extension; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43667/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): As the Deputy may be aware, delivery of additional temporary accommodation for the school to which the Deputy refers, is devolved to the school's patron body. In this regard, I understand that the patron body has appointed a consultant and is working on the delivery of the additional interim accommodation as quickly as possible.

School Accommodation

285. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to outline the status of a project (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43680/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): As the Deputy will be aware, the school to which she refers operates under the patronage of the local Education and Training Board (ETB). The ETB has informed my Department that the long term accommodation needs of the school are being reviewed and that it will revert to my Department when this process has been completed.

Apprenticeship Data

286. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department has data on the uptake of apprenticeships and traineeships from young Travellers in the context of a commitment given by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection to the effect that Travellers under 25 years of age would receive good quality offers of continuing education, apprenticeships, traineeships or employment in the context of the youth guarantee; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43713/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): I am informed by SOLAS that there is no nationally collected data on participation by ethnic groups, including travellers for either apprenticeship or traineeship. The Action Plan to Expand Apprenticeship and Traineeship in Ireland 2016-2020 sets out a series of detailed actions and annual targets on how the expansion commitments in the area set out in the Action Plan for Education will be met. Over the lifetime of the plan we will see 50,000 learners register on apprenticeship and traineeship programmes. This represents a more than doubling of activity by 2020.

This Government is committed to doubling the number of people on an apprenticeship programme by 2020 and expanding the apprenticeship model into new sectors of the economy. Arising from our two calls for apprenticeship proposals in 2015 and 2017 sixteen new apprenticeships have now been developed in a range of new occupations, including financial services,

engineering, ICT, hospitality, logistics and accounting. Further new apprenticeships will get underway later this year and throughout 2019 in a variety of sectors including construction, engineering, horticulture and agriculture.

As well as developments in new apprenticeships, as the employment and economic situation continues to improve, we have seen strong growth in registrations across the craft trades nationally also with 4,508 new registrations in 2017, which represents a 20% increase on 2016. The upward trend continues this year with 3,504 new registrations recorded at the end of September, 7% ahead of the same period last year.

The Government is also prioritising the expansion of traineeship offerings. To date over twenty additional new traineeships have been developed in areas such as hospitality, engineering, logistics and animation. These new programmes will complement the existing programmes on offer. The programmes have been designed by ETBs working in collaboration with employers to meet identified skill needs. Further new traineeships will get underway later this year and throughout 2019 in a variety of sectors including financial services, media and engineering. We have also broadened the eligibility criteria on participation to include school leavers, older learners and people in employment.

As set out in the Action Plan to Expand Apprenticeship and Traineeship in Ireland, SOLAS is currently reviewing pathways to participation in apprenticeship in a range of underrepresented groups, including ethnic groups such as travellers. The review will identify any barriers that may exist to participation in an apprenticeship programme. The purpose of the review is to ensure that our national apprenticeship system is more reflective of the range and diversity of our population, more inclusive of diverse backgrounds and abilities and that apprenticeship opportunities are more readily accessible to all. The review will result in the publication of actions in this area in the coming weeks, along with the background research.

Question No. 287 answered with Question No. 254.

Traveller Education

288. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to set out the response from third-level institutions to the bursary scheme to increase the number of Travellers participating in third-level education; the number who were offered places through the scheme in 2016 and 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43715/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The National Access Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-2019 (NAP) was launched in December 2015, and aims to ensure that the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels reflects the diversity and social mix of Ireland's population. Irish Travellers are identified as a target group within the Plan.

To support the implementation of the National Access Plan, the Department of Education and Skills (DES) established the Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH) fund in 2016. Through PATH a total investment of €16.2 million will be made over the next three years and will see many new initiatives emerge that will support greater levels of access and participation by the target groups in higher education, including Irish Travellers.

The 1916 Bursary Fund supported under PATH 2 provides financial support to students identified by regional clusters of higher education institutions as being most economically disadvantaged from the target groups identified in the National Access Plan 2015-2019, including Irish Travellers.

The first year of implementation of the bursary scheme was 2017/18. The HEA are currently collating data on the number of Irish Traveller students supported under the 1916 Bursary Fund in 2017/18. Regional clusters are in the process of implementing the Fund for 2018/19.

Traveller Education

289. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when he will conduct a full audit of the transition and retention outcomes of Traveller children in post-primary education; his plans in place to improve retention; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43717/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): This Government recognises the importance of inclusive education for all and is supportive of actions that will ensure that the school setting is a more welcoming environment for all, including Travellers.

The commitment to improve traveller retention and progression is reflected in a number of key policies and initiatives, including the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (NTRIS), launched by the Department of Justice and Equality in June 2017, and my Department’s DEIS Plan for educational inclusion, also launched last year.

My Department’s DEIS Plan 2017 also has specific actions in relation to promoting improvements in school attendance and completion in order to improve educational outcomes and overall life chances for Traveller and Roma children and young people.

As part of the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy, officials from my Department, the Department of Justice and Equality and TUSLA have been engaging with Traveller representative groups to specifically identify and agree an approach to improving educational outcomes for Travellers and Roma. TUSLA is leading this cross-departmental initiative which will be piloted for a two year period to try to address the gaps outlined. My Department has committed to the allocation of additional Home School Community Liaison Resources to support this project. This pilot will inform the development of a sustainable programme to address the gap in educational outcomes for children and young people from the Travelling and Roma communities.

Local Authority Funding

290. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the categories of funding available to local authorities through his Department; the amount of funding provided for each scheme in 2016 and 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43728/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Funding paid directly from my Department to local authorities in 2016 and 2017 (as recorded on the Department’s Financial Management System) is set out in the table.

The figures in the table do not include any other payments to local authorities made by third parties in receipt of grants directly from the Department.

Direct Payment by DES to Local Authorities	2016	2017
Public Service Reform - Current & Capital		€100.00
Student Support (SUSI Pay and Related Activities)	€1,958,879.10	€442,538.38
International EU	€10,000.00	€4200,000.00

Direct Payment by DES to Local Authorities	2016	2017
Primary Capital Major	€1,281,090.47	€946,316.92
Primary Capital Minor		€1,200,502.60
Post Primary Capital Major	€1,458,875.80	€483,847.10
Post Primary Capital Minor		€8,053,723.03
Public Private Partnership Primary & Post Primary Capital	€527,139.40	
Training	€980.00	
Miscellaneous	€315.00	
Office Premises Expenses	€156.00	
National Educational Psychological Service	€7,857.69	€4,230.66
Shared Offices costs	€23,992.85	
Grand Total	€5,269,286.31	€11,331,258.69

School Accommodation Provision

291. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the capacity issues in a school (details supplied) and the fact that it was unable to accept all applications from children in the feeder primary schools in the town in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43745/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I can confirm to the Deputy that the patron of the school in question has submitted an application for additional accommodation to my Department.

The application was considered and approval in principle was given to provide additional permanent accommodation to the school. In this regard, my Department will shortly be undertaking a technical site visit to the school in the context of determining the project brief.

As an interim arrangement, my Department has approved temporary accommodation to the school and my officials are continuing to engage with the school's patron relating to the school's immediate and long term accommodation needs.

Schools Establishment

292. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to carry out a formal assessment of the need for a new secondary school in Skerries; and the timeline for this assessment. [43746/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): In order to plan for school provision and analyse the relevant demographic data, my Department divides the country into 314 school planning areas and uses a Geographical Information System, using data from a range of sources, to identify where the pressure for school places across the country will arise. With this information, my Department carries out nationwide demographic exercises to determine where additional school accommodation is needed at primary and post-primary level.

Where demographic data indicates that additional provision is required, the delivery of such additional provision is dependent on the particular circumstances of each case and may, depending on the circumstances, be provided through either one, or a combination of, the following:

- Utilising existing unused capacity within a school or schools,
- Extending the capacity of a school or schools,
- Provision of a new school or schools.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Government recently announced plans for the establishment of 42 new schools over the next four years (2019 to 2022). This announcement follows nationwide demographic exercises carried out by my Department into the future need for primary and post-primary schools across the country and the 4-year horizon will enable increased lead-in times for planning and delivery of the necessary infrastructure.

In addition to the new schools announced, there will be a need for further school accommodation in other areas in the future. Based on the current analysis, this need can be addressed through either planned capacity increases in existing schools or additional accommodation or extensions to existing schools.

While the announcement did not include a new post-primary school for the Skerries school planning area, the requirement for new schools will be kept under on-going review and in particular would have regard for the increased rollout of housing provision as outlined in Project Ireland 2040.

School Patronage

293. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps necessary for an organisation to become recognised as a patron body for providing school patronage; if this process would be different if the organisation wished to provide patronage to special schools for children on the autism spectrum; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43748/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): A patronage process is run after it has been decided, based on demographic analysis, that a new primary or post-primary school is required. This patronage process is open to all patron bodies and prospective patrons. Parental preferences for patronage and language of instruction, 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 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 submits a report with recommendations to me for consideration and final decision. The assessment reports and the NSEG recommendations for all such patronage processes are made available on my Department's website.

An Online Patronage Process System (OPPS) has been developed by my Department to provide objective information to all parents. Parental preferences were previously collected based on direct engagement with patron bodies. Under the new OPPS system, patron bodies complete an application form at the beginning of the process. Information in relation to applicant patrons is provided to parents on the OPPS website which allows them to make an informed choice about their preferred model of patronage for their child's education.

In general, my Department's policy is to integrate children with special educational needs into the mainstream primary school system wherever possible. Many of our new schools have special education units included within them. However, special schools are also necessary to

meet the educational needs of pupils whose needs cannot be adequately catered for in a mainstream primary school. The need to establish a new special school would be identified by the National Council for Special Education in conjunction with the Department. The necessity would arise where there is a specific and quantified need that could not reasonably be met through existing provision. Any process to establish a new special school would have to take account of the views of parents who are the key stakeholders with regard to their child.

Traveller Education

294. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will publish the review that took place in 2017 of the remaining recommendations of the Traveller education strategy 2006 in addition to the education recommendations in the national Traveller and Roma inclusion strategy, NTRIS; the actions proposed following the review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43754/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Before the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (NTRIS) was published in 2017 my Department’s policy in relation to Traveller Education was informed by the Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy (2006). The principle of inclusion was at the core of this report and as a result of this strategy provision for Travellers has been mainstreamed with previously segregated provision now funded as part of the mainstream system.

In keeping with this principle, additional resources provided in the education system for all children, including Travellers, are allocated on the basis of identified individual educational need. To support the transition to mainstream education of Traveller pupils, my Department continues to provide additional resources to schools. This funding currently involves an allocation of approx €10m.

A commitment was given in the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy to review the Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy and to publish this review in 2017. This review has not been completed but it is intended to complete and publish this review.

Home Tuition Scheme

295. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason support for home tuition has been withdrawn in the case of a person (details supplied); his plans ensure the restoration of support for home tuition in this case in which specialist assistance is available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43775/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): My Department’s policy is focused on ensuring that all children, including those with autism, can have access to an education appropriate to their needs, preferably in school settings through the primary and post-primary network.

Children in ASD special classes benefit from a reduced pupil-teacher ratio of 6:1. Class teachers are fully qualified and have access, through the Special Education Support Service, to training in a range of autism-specific interventions. Each class has a minimum of 2 Special Needs Assistants.

As each child with autism is unique they should have access to a range of different ap-

proaches to meet their individual needs. This facilitates access to individualised education programmes which can be supported by Special Needs Assistants and fully qualified professional teachers who may draw from a range of autism-specific interventions, including Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA), Treatment and Education of Autistic Communication Handicapped Children (TEACCH) and Picture Exchange Communications System (PECS) as well as the appropriate school curriculum with the option, where possible, of full or partial integration and interaction with other pupils.

The purpose of the Special Education Home Tuition Grant Scheme is to provide a compensatory educational service for children with special educational needs seeking an educational placement.

Accordingly, Home Tuition is provided as an interim measure only for children for whom a placement in a recognised school is not available and only until a placement becomes available. Home Tuition should not be regarded as an optional alternative to a school placement.

No application has been received for 2018/19 school year under the Home Tuition Grant Scheme in respect of the child referred to by the Deputy.

Research Funding

296. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the school in an institute (details supplied); his plans to appoint an independent chair of the institute; if the terms of section 5(1)(c) of the Institute For Advanced Studies Act 1940 will be adhered to in respect of its obligation to provide funding for fieldwork in order to record spoken Irish; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43785/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The institute referred to by the Deputy was established under the Institute for Advanced Studies Act, 1940. The functions of the Institute referred to are to provide facilities for the furtherance of advanced study and the conduct of research in specialised branches of knowledge and for the publication of the results of advanced study and research.

The institute has three constituent schools and each constituent school is under the control and management of an independent Governing Board. The Chairman and appointed members of the Governing Board of each Constituent School are appointed by the President on the advice of the Government. Appointments are normally made every five years. The Department has been notified of the requirement to appoint a Chair to the Governing Body of one of the constituent schools and is progressing this matter.

One of the statutory functions of the institute referred to by the Deputy is the ‘phonetic investigation of existing Irish dialects and the recording of the living Irish speech’. In that context, the institution provides facilities for the furtherance of such advanced study and research and for the publication of the results of such study and research, which is facilitated, in part, by the funding allocated to it by my Department. My Department allocates recurrent funding directly this institute. However, as an autonomous body, the institute is responsible for the allocation of all of its funding (both public and private) and the internal disbursement of that funding.

School Services Staff

297. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an appli-

cation for an ancillary grant to replace a school secretary at a school (details supplied) which is spread between two fully separate campuses will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43796/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Funding for all primary schools in the free education scheme is dealt with on a per capita basis.

The two main grants are the capitation grant to cater for day to day running costs such as heating, lighting, cleaning, insurance, general up-keep etc., and the ancillary services grant to cater for the cost of employing ancillary services staff.

The school referred to by the Deputy received €110,416 in respect of capitation funding in 2018, €74,770 for Capitation and €35,646 for Ancillary Services. In addition to these grants the salaries in respect of two Secretaries have been paid directly by my Department under the 1978/79 scheme, one of which will continue for 2019.

Schools are permitted to regard the capitation and ancillary services grants as a combined grant and Boards of Management have autonomy on how they use and prioritise this funding to meet their day to day running costs, including for the provision of secretarial and caretaker services.

There is no provision for additional payments outside of those outlined above.

Education and Training Boards

298. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 134 of 9 October 2018, his views on a matter (details supplied). [43808/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The response to the previous Parliamentary Question referred to by the Deputy outlines the position with regard to membership of a Public Sector Pension Scheme and how it is a matter for each Education and Training Board (ETB) to determine eligibility of applicant members in accordance with the relevant rules and regulations of the scheme.

I am aware that my officials are actively engaged with the ETBs, through the Pension Task Group facilitated by my Department, to provide clarity on the issue of superannuation for certain staff in outdoor education centres to which the ETBs provide some funding.

Schools Building Projects Status

299. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a permanent school site has been acquired for a school (details supplied); when the school will be built and open; and if arrangements have been made in the interim to provide the necessary prefabs for the school at its location. [43946/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that contracts have been signed in respect of the acquisition of the permanent school site.

In relation to the permanent accommodation for the school, the plans are being developed at the moment with a view to lodging an application for planning permission. Prior to lodging the

application, officials of my Department will arrange a meeting with the school/Patron representatives to review the plans. When planning permission is secured, the project will then proceed to tender and construction. Suitable interim accommodation will continue to be provided for the school in the meantime.

State Examinations

300. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when teachers and students will be provided with the materials technology wood coursework design brief for 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43952/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The State Examinations Commission has statutory responsibility for operational matters relating to the certificate examinations.

In view of this I have forwarded your query to the State Examinations Commission for direct reply to you.

School Accommodation Provision

301. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the recent written request to the schools capital appraisal section of his Department by the principal and the board of management of a school (details supplied) to have its application for the replacement of the dilapidated prefab at the school with a permanent classroom, toilet block, storeroom and support room will be reviewed and facilitated in view of the dilapidated condition of the existing prefab and temporary classroom. [43958/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I can confirm that the school referred to by the Deputy has submitted an application to my Department for additional accommodation.

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

Visa Applications

302. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of visa applications for family members of EU, EEA and Swiss citizens since the second quarter of 2015. [43822/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the table sets out the position in relation to the number of visa applications received for family members of EU, EEA and Swiss citizens, by nationality (top ten countries) and a combined figure for all other nationalities for each of the years in the period in question.

As the Deputy may be aware, there was an exponential increase from the second quarter of 2015 in the number of such applications. That gave rise to a particular caseload of around 10,500 applications which had to be assessed very carefully to ensure that any fraudulent applications or potential abuses of the Directive are detected and considered appropriately. The

majority of these have now been processed.

Most of the sponsors in these particular cases were United Kingdom nationals who came here claiming to be exercising EU Treaty Rights. INIS had serious concerns about many of these cases, particularly as they appeared to be using the Common Travel Area to circumvent national UK immigration rules for family reunification. However, under the Directive genuine movement must be taking place by the EU national, such as taking up employment, etc. A series of measures were taken by INIS including defending cases in the Courts, working with the Garda National Immigration Bureau to address abuses, and working in close cooperation with UK counterparts who subsequently made changes to their laws. Since these measures were taken, the numbers of such new applicants dropped off dramatically in 2017 and this year to date.

Legal proceedings in relation to a number of such applications have been before the courts, and a referral was made by the Court of the Appeal to the European Court of Justice.

More generally, the central concern, as with all visa services worldwide, in deciding on visa applications is to strike an appropriate balance between protecting the country's vital national interests by maintaining an effective immigration regime while at the same time facilitating travel for those who meet the criteria. Each visa application is therefore decided on its own merits taking all factors into account.

Applications received from 1 July, 2015 to end of September, 2018

Nationality	July-Dec 2015	2016	2017	Jan-Sept 2018	Total
Pakistan	1922	3561	524	983	6990
Afghanistan	2001	790	44	391	3226
Iraq	1054	373	23	26	1476
Nigeria	110	305	314	256	985
India	146	266	200	226	838
Russian Federation	88	154	190	142	574
Bangladesh	170	236	47	119	572
Philippines	65	109	114	113	401
People's Republic of China	75	103	134	81	393
Ukraine	55	100	105	87	347
Rest of the World	706	1130	1109	1107	4052
Total	6392	7127	2804	3531	19854

Legislative Measures

303. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the non-transferability of carer's leave between spouses with the same employer will be examined as part of the process of bringing forward new family leave legislation; and the reason spouses with the same employer are allowed transfer some of their leave to each other under current parental leave legislation but no such transfer is allowed under current arrangements for carer's leave. [43177/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): As the Deputy has highlighted, section 6A of the Parental Leave Act 1998 allows parents working for the same employer to transfer up to 14 weeks of their unpaid parental leave entitlement from one parent to another. Similarly, section 6 of the Carers Leave Act 2001 provides that employees with at least one year's continuous service are entitled to take up to 104 weeks of

carers leave.

The focus of the new family leave legislation is expected to be on parental leave rather than on carer's leave. Given that an employee can get up to 104 weeks of carer's leave, it is difficult to see why transferability is necessary. Furthermore, such a proposal may be to the detriment of women in the labour market, as traditionally it is women who take the majority of carers' leave. Such a proposal, unless carefully considered, could create labour market disadvantage for women. My preference instead is to encourage men as well as women to share caring responsibilities.

Garda Recruitment

304. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the extent to which the strength of An Garda Síochána continues to be increased; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43195/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be appreciate, the Garda Commissioner has responsibility to manage and control generally the administration and business of An Garda Síochána, including by arranging for the recruitment, training and appointment of its members and civilian staff.

This Government is committed to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country in order to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and to deter crime. The Deputy will be aware An Garda Síochána is currently undertaking a programme of accelerated recruitment, as part of the Government's commitment to a strengthened service through the Five Year High Level Reform and Workforce Plan to achieve an overall workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021, including 15,000 Garda members, 2,000 Garda Reserve Members and 4,000 civilians. We are making real, tangible progress on achieving this goal.

Since the re-opening of Templemore College in September 2014, we have been rebuilding the Garda organisation and I am pleased that, since then, approximately 2,200 new Garda members have attested and assigned to duties in communities throughout the country. Garda numbers, taking account of retirements, increased to 13,551 at the end of 2017 – a net increase of over 600 since the end of 2016. With another attestation of approximately 200 Garda recruits due to take place on 30 November, Garda numbers will increase to approximately 14,000 by the end of this year for the first time since 2011.

I am pleased that funding is in place to maintain this high level of investment in the Garda workforce to ensure that the vision of an overall workforce of 21,000 by 2021 remains on track. By year end, a further 800 new Garda Recruits will have entered the Garda College in 2018. To support the Commissioner in this recruitment, I have also secured funding in Budget 2019 which facilitates the recruitment of up to 800 more Gardaí next year. The Budget also provides for the necessary civilian Garda staff to fill critical skills gaps and enable the further redeployment of Gardaí to front line duties.

As I said on Budget day, the Commissioner will need to consider all aspects of the funding requirement in the Garda Vote and how all resources at his disposal can be best deployed including in relation to the composition of the Service. I expect to receive his proposals in this regard shortly.

In addition to the vision of 15,000 Garda members by 2021, plans are also in place for 4,000 civilians and 2,000 Reserves. I am informed by the Commissioner that as of 31 August 2018

there were 2,330 civilians undertaking administrative and technical duties within An Garda Síochána. I am encouraged that the number of civilians working in An Garda Síochána continues to increase, albeit more slowly than anticipated. It is clear, however, that progress is being made with close to 300 new civilian staff posts sanctioned to fill critical skills gaps across the organisation. This will allow more Gardaí to focus on operational policing duties where their training and specialist expertise can be put to best use. Already approximately 150 Gardaí have been redeployed to operational policing duties and I expect these numbers to accelerate in the coming months and throughout 2019. Work is also continuing on a strategic review of the Garda Reserve which I expect to be concluded shortly.

As the Deputy will also be aware the Commission on the Future of Policing published its report on 18 September. This innovative report sets out a number of recommendations across the policing sector and in particular on the work of An Garda Síochána, including the Garda Reserve. I am currently consulting widely on the issues raised including with the Garda Commissioner in advance of returning to Government in December with my substantive response and a High Level Implementation Plan.

Garda Recruitment

305. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons who applied for the current competition for An Garda Síochána; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43196/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): In accordance with the Garda Síochána (Admissions and Appointments) Regulations 2013 the Public Appointments Service, on behalf of the Garda Commissioner, manages the initial recruitment stages for the selection of Garda trainees. The final stages of the recruitment process in which candidates are vetted, and complete a physical competency test and a medical examination, are managed by the Commissioner and I, as Minister, have no direct involvement in the matter.

I am informed that the most recent recruitment campaign which closed for applications on the 7 June 2018 again received a strong response with approximately 6,300 applications received. This compares favourably to the 2017 competition which received approximately 5,400 applications and indicates that a career in An Garda Síochána continues to be regarded as an attractive and rewarding profession.

This Government is committed to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country in order to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and deter crime. To make this a reality for all, the Government has in place a plan to achieve an overall Garda workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021 comprising 15,000 Garda members, 2,000 Reserve members and 4,000 civilians.

Since the re-opening of Templemore College in September 2014, the Government has been committed to rebuilding the Garda organisation and I am pleased that, since then, approximately 2,200 new Garda members have attested and been assigned to duties in communities throughout the country. Garda numbers, taking account of retirements, increased to approximately 13,500 at the end of 2017 – a net increase of over 600 since the end of 2016. With another attestation of approximately 200 Garda recruits due to take place in November, Garda numbers will increase to approximately 14,000 by the end of this year for the first time since 2011.

By year end, a further 800 new Garda Recruits will have entered the Garda College in 2018 and I am pleased that funding is in place to maintain this high level of investment in the Garda

workforce to ensure that the vision of an overall workforce of 21,000 by 2021 remains on track. In that regard to support the Commissioner in this recruitment, I have also secured funding in Budget 2019 which will facilitate the recruitment of up to 800 more Gardaí next year.

This is an ambitious programme of recruitment and will require a continuous pipeline of suitable candidates. Any candidate for a position as a Garda trainee should contact the Public Appointments Service or the Garda Appointments Office if they have any queries in relation to their application.

Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service Administration

306. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to address reports that Internet bot programmes are being used to block-book appointments with the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43234/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that since early September, some customers have experienced difficulties in booking registration appointments. Some of these difficulties have arisen because third party agents had been able to secure multiple appointments through the use of automatic software.

A set of software fixes was introduced in mid-September to prevent this abuse of the system. As far as can be determined, this software update has been successful in preventing the block booking of appointments by third party agents.

The period September to November is the busiest time for registrations with many student registrations in addition to the usual workload of the office.

A number of measures have been taken to increase the capacity of the office, including the assignment of additional staff to the Registration Office and opening on most Saturdays and some Sundays. These measures are aimed at increasing supply to meet demand by ensuring that as many appointments as possible are made available each day. INIS plans to continue this regime at least until December and to ensure that demand is met.

The situation with the appointments system is being kept under review to address any abuses with the system.

Over 6,200 people have registered with INIS in Dublin this month up to 18th of October and over 8,500 are expected to register in the month overall. This is an increase of 12% on the number registered in Dublin in September 2018. INIS expects to register over 85,000 people in Dublin this year.

Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service Administration

307. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his attention has been drawn to issues in respect of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service's new online appointment system whereby immigrants who apply for re-entry and renewal visas are being blocked from making appointments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43237/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that there are currently

two online appointments systems in operation for non-EEA nationals. These systems are for registration of permission to reside in the State, and for applications for an emergency re-entry visa appointment.

With regard to the on-line system used by customers to apply for appointments with INIS to register or renew a permission to reside in the State, I am advised that some customers have experienced difficulty in booking appointments. This arose because third party agents had been securing multiple appointments through the use of automatic software.

A set of software fixes was introduced in mid-September to prevent this abuse of the system. As far as can be determined, this software update has been successful in preventing the block booking of appointments by third party agents. The appointments system is being kept under review to identify attempts to abuse the system.

More than 8,500 non-EEA nationals are expected to be registered in Dublin in October. This is an increase of 12% on the number registered in September 2018. INIS expects to register over 85,000 people in Dublin this year - a figure considerably up on last year.

With regard to the on-line appointment system for re-entry visas, this is available for appointments for emergency re-entry visa requests only - the vast majority of customers use the postal system. Customers with urgent travel needs can use the on-line system to make an emergency appointment for a re-entry visa and their application will be dealt with within 24 hours. There have been no problems with this system.

Garda Industrial Relations

308. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when An Garda Síochána will be allowed to access the offices of the WRC; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43252/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, last year the Government accepted the recommendations of the Working Group on Industrial Relations in An Garda Síochána which included the introduction of legislation to allow Garda members have access to the industrial relations machinery of the State.

The second phase of the Working Group is currently underway and the members of the Group are focussed on the introduction of the legislative changes necessary to allow Garda members and the Garda associations have access to the WRC and the Labour Court. All the Garda representative bodies - the Garda Representative Association, the Association of Garda Sergeants and Inspectors, the Association of Garda Superintendents and the Association of Garda Chief Superintendents - are fully engaged in this phase of the working group.

The primary legislation supporting access for the Garda members to the WRC is currently being brought forward by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, by way of amendment to the Industrial Relations Act 1990. The second stage of the legislative process was completed on Thursday the 18 October 2018, when the Oireachtas passed the Bill through to Committee Stage. All the parties involved are anxious to see this legislation passed with as little delay as possible.

To enable the operation of the legislation, and support access to the WRC and Labour Court, it is important now for the necessary internal dispute resolution mechanisms to be put in place in An Garda Síochána. The WRC, which has a long and honourable track record of service provision in the area of industrial relations, has engaged in a comprehensive consultation pro-

cess with the Garda associations and Garda management. Significant progress has been made towards identifying and implementing an effective internal dispute resolution mechanism for An Garda Síochána.

Before the end of the year I expect to see significant further progress towards providing Garda members with processes for resolving individual and collective issues. I am confident that these will match what is available to all other workers in the State, while at the same time reflecting the particular status and requirements of An Garda Síochána as an organisation.

Drug and Alcohol Testing

309. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of drivers that tested positive for drug driving at new mandatory checkpoints in 2018, by month in tabular form. [43260/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will be aware that section 10 of the Road Traffic Act, 2010 provides for Mandatory Intoxicant Testing checkpoints (MIT). The powers of An Garda Síochána under the 2010 Act were extended under the Road Traffic Act 2016 to allow preliminary, oral, fluid-testing for drugs to be undertaken at these checkpoints, in addition to the current, preliminary, breath testing for alcohol. These provisions came into force on 13 April 2017.

I am informed by An Garda Síochána that it has conducted a total of 101,965 MIT checkpoints nationally since April 2017.

I regret that it is not currently possible to provide the number of drivers that tested positive for drug driving at mandatory checkpoints in 2018 broken down by month, as I am advised by the Garda authorities that the compilation of these statistics would require a disproportionate expenditure of Garda time and resources.

However, the Deputy may wish to note the table below, provided by the Garda authorities, which details the number of MIT checkpoints conducted by Division; the number of Breath Test and Oral Fluid Tests conducted; the number of persons who have tested positive for alcohol or drugs at these checkpoints; and the number who Failed/Refused to provide a specimen. These figures correspond to the period from 13 April 2017 to 12 October 2018.

Garda Division	Number of MIT Check-points conducted 2017- year to date 2018	Roadside Breath Tested Conducted	No. of positive Roadside Breath Tests
Cavan/Monaghan	3202	12510	105
Clare	5897	25162	88
Cork City	8855	23959	119
Cork North	9681	21023	95
Cork West	8647	21118	118
D.M.R. Eastern	891	12522	83
D.M.R. North Central	714	8693	39
D.M.R. Northern	712	11056	67
D.M.R. South Central	704	17176	53
D.M.R. Southern	779	13866	61
D.M.R. Western	1463	13228	98
Donegal	3044	14640	73
Galway	7047	28434	191

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Garda Division	Number of MIT Check-points conducted 2017- year to date 2018	Roadside Breath Tested Conducted	No. of positive Roadside Breath Tests
Kerry	4651	14717	82
Kildare	3985	44364	272
Kilkenny/Carlow	1936	9561	108
Laois/Offaly	3332	29355	111
Limerick	7217	21256	136
Louth	2470	9758	53
Mayo	3329	13764	87
Meath	1946	9559	87
Roscommon/Longford	3065	16203	87
Sligo/Leitrim	2231	8196	31
Tipperary	6742	17822	103
Waterford	2400	14544	79
Westmeath	1938	9692	82
Wexford	2988	17445	136
Wicklow	2099	12542	55

table contd.

Garda Division	Roadside Oral Fluid Tested Conducted	No. of positive Oral Fluid Tests	Fail/Refusal breath Test	Fail/Refusal Oral Fluid Test
Cavan/Monaghan	56	13	3	0
Clare	177	22	2	0
Cork City	4	1	0	0
Cork North	55	8	1	1
Cork West	124	13	0	0
D.M.R. Eastern	152	9	4	0
D.M.R. North Central	71	15	2	0
D.M.R. Northern	91	6	1	0
D.M.R. South Central	97	6	0	0
D.M.R. Southern	95	14	0	0
D.M.R. Western	154	13	0	0
Donegal	11	0	1	0
Galway	22	5	0	0
Kerry	43	11	0	1
Kildare	268	32	2	0
Kilkenny/Carlow	44	5	0	0
Laois/Offaly	120	16	0	0
Limerick	42	7	1	0
Louth	3	2	0	0
Mayo	12	3	2	0
Meath	17	4	2	0
Roscommon/Longford	42	10	0	0
Sligo/Leitrim	59	9	0	0
Tipperary	21	5	2	0

Garda Division	Roadside Oral Fluid Tested Conducted	No. of positive Oral Fluid Tests	Fail/Refusal breath Test	Fail/Refusal Oral Fluid Test
Waterford	31	5	1	0
Westmeath	14	5	1	0
Wexford	105	19	1	0
Wicklow	9	1	1	0

* The statistics provided are provisional, operational and liable to change and are valid for the period 13th April 2017- 12th October 2018.

Garda Equipment

310. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí that have been trained to use devices (details supplied) to date; and the number of device mouthpieces that have been used by gardaí in 2018. [43261/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Garda authorities that the number of Gardaí that have been trained to use the specified devices is given in the table below, broken down by Garda division.

Region	Division	No. of personnel trained
Eastern Region	Meath	117
	Wicklow	57
	Kildare	55
	Laois/Offaly	55
	Westmeath	101
DMR	DMR North	14
	DMR South	58
	DMR East	52
	DMR West	25
	DMR North-Central	33
	DMR South-Central	330
	DMR Traffic	58
South-Eastern	Kilkenny/Carlow	228
	Tipperary	83
	Waterford	142
	Wexford	112
Western Region	Clare	186
	Galway	202
	Mayo	153
	Roscommon/Longford	157
Southern Region	Cork City	108
	Cork North	92
	Cork West	228
	Kerry	99
	Limerick	168
Northern Region	Donegal	170

Region	Division	No. of personnel trained
	Sligo/Leitrim	32
	Cavan/Monaghan	118
	Louth	94

***Figures provided are as of the 24th August 2018. All data provided is provisional, operational, and subject to change.**

Regarding the number of mouthpieces that have been used by Gardaí in 2018, I have requested a report from An Garda Síochána in relation to these statistics and I will be in contact with the Deputy directly on receipt of this report.

Visa Applications

311. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in the determination of an appeal for a long stay visa in the case of a person (details supplied); when the appeal will be concluded; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43262/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I refer the Deputy to my reply to Parliamentary Question No. 507 of 7 September 2018 (copied below for reference). Unfortunately, it is not possible at this time to give a definitive date as to when this particular appeal will be finalised. The Deputy can be assured that the applicant will be advised of the outcome in due course.

Reply to Parliamentary Question No. 507 of 7 September 2018.

I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person referred to does not currently have permission to reside in the State, and their most recent permission to remain in the State, on the basis of marriage to an Irish national, expired on 25 August 2016.

I am further advised that the person, having left Ireland, was refused a long-stay Join Family Visa on 16 July 2018, and an appeal was received in the Visa Office in Dublin on 18 August 2018.

Appeals are processed in the order in which they are received in order to be fair to all applicants. While every effort is made to do so as soon as possible, processing times will vary having regard to the volume of appeals received, the resources available to process them and the complexity of the application and subsequent appeal. Processing times may also vary where a detailed assessment of family rights under the Constitution and the European Convention on Human Rights is required. In the circumstances, therefore, I cannot at this time give a definitive date as to when this particular appeal will be finalised.

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.

Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund

312. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the spend on the asylum migration and integration fund for each year since its inception by project and location. [43295/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): Ireland's National Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) Programme was approved by the European Commission on 21 March 2016. The EU Funds Unit in the Department of Justice and Equality has been designated as Ireland's Responsible Authority for the AMIF. The funding available to Ireland under the AMIF will be used over the lifetime of the Programme – the eligibility period extends to 2022 – to support actions that will help the National Objectives set out in the National Programme. (Further details of the National Programme, including details of the National Objectives and specific actions set by Ireland can be found at: http://www.integration.ie/en/isec/pages/eu_funds)

The total AMIF spend managed by the EU Funds Unit is as follows:

Spend Levels	€
Total spend 2015	€132,190.68
Total Spend 2016	€873,301.00
Total Spend 2017	€3,144,728.82
Total Spend 2018 (to-date)	€1,995,291.50
	€6,145,512.00

The funds are distributed using three mechanisms: Open Calls for Proposals, Direct Awards and by Delegated Authority. AMIF Funding is also used for Technical Assistance activities of the EU Funds Unit.

Below is an explanation of each of these mechanisms along with details of the spend which has occurred.

Open Call:

In 2016, an Open Call for Proposals was issued and 20 projects were selected from 45 applicants following an appraisal process. Over €4.5 million was committed under this call for the 2017-2020 period.

The projects selected for funding will receive 75% of the eligible project costs. The applicant organisations are required to provide the 25% matching funding.

Project/beneficiary	Grant Award Total	Location	Amount paid 2017	Amount paid 2018 (to-date)
Clare Immigrant Support Centre Ltd	€180,000	Co Clare	€54,000.00	€54,000.00
Crosscare	€248,981	Dublin & surrounding areas	€74,694.15	€74,694.15
Doras Luimní	€234,245	Limerick & Mid West Region	€70,273.50	
Edmund Rice	€150,000	Waterford/Wexford/Kilkenny/Carlow	€45,000.00	

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Project/beneficiary	Grant Award Total	Location	Amount paid 2017	Amount paid 2018 (to-date)
Football Association of Ireland	€150,073	National	€45,021.83	
Galway City Partnership	€201,000	Galway City and County	€60,300.00	
Immigrant Council of Ireland	€150,000	National	€45,000.00	
Irish Refugee Council	€300,000	National focus on areas with low/no information provision	€90,000.00	
Irish Traveller Movement	€150,410	National	€45,122.85	€45,122.85
Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) Ltd.	€179,954	Dublin	€53,986.09	€53,986.09
KASI	€180,000	Killarney & Tralee	€54,000.00	€54,000.00
Kilmallock Performing Centre	€168,750	Limerick City, Co Cork, Co Clare	€50,625.00	
Laois Partnership Company	€150,000	Co Laois	€45,000.00	
Mary Immaculate College	€300,000	Limerick City	€90,000.00	
Migrant Rights Centre of Ireland	€250,000	11 sites nationwide	€75,000.00	€75,000.00
NASC	€200,000	Cork	€60,000.00	
National College of Ireland	€150,000	Dublin North & South Inner City	€45,000.00	
South Dublin County Partnership	€150,000	South Dublin County	€45,000.00	
South West Mayo Development Company	€265,814	Mayo	€79,744.20	€79,744.20
Spirasi	€750,000	National	€225,000.00	€178,071.00
Totals	€4,509,227		€1,352,767.62	€614,618.29

Direct Awards:

In addition, under the AMIF Commission Delegated Regulation Article 7 – (EU) No. 1042/2014 - The Responsible Authority (EU Funds Unit) may award grants directly.

To date 4 Direct Award Grants have been made, 3 to the Irish Refugee Protection Programme (to fund local authorities' resettlement programmes for refugees) and 1 to the Reception and Integration Agency. The details and spend are listed below. The Irish Refugee Protection Programme and the Reception and Integration Agency receive 75% of the eligible project costs (represented below) and are required to provide the 25% matching funding/remainder of

the project costs.

Beneficiary	Grant Award Total	Location	Amount paid 2016	Amount paid 2017	Amount paid 2018 (to-date)
Irish Refugee Protection Programme: Direct Award 1	€1,522,020.00	National/International	€452,578.00	€224,139.00	€23,110.00
Irish Refugee Protection Programme: Direct Award 2	€2,000,000.00	National/International	n/a	€998,771.00	€257,001.00
Irish Refugee Protection Programme: Direct Award 3	€1,500,000.00	National/International	n/a	n/a	€0.00
Reception and Integration Agency: Direct Award 4	€77,675.00	Co Clare	n/a	n/a	€0.00
Totals:	€5,099,695.00		€452,578.00	€1,222,910.00	€280,111.00

Delegated Authority:

The Repatriation Unit of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service has received a delegated authority to manage the portion of the AMIF that relates to the Special Objective on Returns. AMIF funding represents 75% of the Delegated Authority's spend and the Delegated Authority is required to provide the balance of 25%.

	Spend 2017	Spend 2018 (to-date)
Delegated Authority	€460,938.83	€852,452.67

Technical Assistance:

Under the basic acts and regulations governing AMIF 2014-2020, the EU Funds Unit can use AMIF funding to support the preparatory, monitoring, administrative, evaluation, audit and control measures and activities required for it to implement the AMIF regulations successfully.

	2015	2016	2017	2018
Technical Assistance	€132,190.68	€420,723.00	€108,112.37	€248,109.54

Further AMIF funding:

It is intended that a further Open Call for Proposals will be announced in early 2019. Approximately €4 million will be available to fund projects, mainly to be delivered by NGOs, for the period 2019 - 2022.

Anti-Social Behaviour

313. Deputy Catherine Murphy asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he has

considered increased liaison with the business community, Maynooth University, an organisation (details supplied) and the wider community following issues in respect of night time anti-social behaviour in Maynooth, County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43325/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, the allocation of all Garda resources, including personnel, is solely a matter for the Garda Commissioner and his management team and I have no direct role in this regard. However, I can assure the Deputy that An Garda Síochána continue to regard all forms of anti-social behaviour very seriously.

Working with communities to tackle public disorder and reduce anti-social behaviour is a key priority for An Garda Síochána. This approach includes a strong focus on quality of life issues and collaboration with local authorities to help address the causes of anti-social behaviour. I might add that there is a range of strong legislative provisions available to An Garda Síochána to combat anti-social behaviour, including provisions under the Criminal Justice (Public Order) Acts, the Criminal Damage Act and the Intoxicating Liquor Acts. There are also the incremental provisions contained in the Criminal Justice Act 2006 which provide, in Part 11, for warnings and civil proceedings in relation to anti-social behaviour by adults and, in Part 13 of the Act, for warnings, good behaviour contracts and civil proceedings in relation to anti-social behaviour by children.

I can inform the Deputy that officials from my Department are currently liaising and meeting with a number of Garda Business Forums around the country, to support local crime prevention initiatives and to assist with the development of policy to tackle issues such as vandalism and night time anti-social behaviour. This process will continue into next year, and in that regard I have requested that contact is made by my officials with the local crime prevention officer in Maynooth.

If the organisations in question have any specific proposals they would like to make in relation to combatting anti-social behaviour, I would be happy to make arrangements for the proposals to be brought to the attention of An Garda Síochána.

Ministerial Meetings

314. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the details of engagements, meetings or correspondence that he has had with a person (details supplied) in the past three years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43397/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have not had meetings or correspondence with the individual in question in the past 3 years.

Immigration Policy

315. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if steps will be taken to provide certainty to undocumented persons resident here that wish to return home for a family funeral that they will gain re-entry on their return; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43412/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the legal representative

of the person concerned has not been in contact with INIS in relation to the change in the person's circumstances. I am further advised that it is open to the person's legal representatives to write to Unit 1, Domestic Residence and Permissions Division, INIS, 13/14 Burgh Quay, Dublin 2 and the matter will be given detailed consideration.

Ministerial Correspondence

316. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when a reply will issue to correspondence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43420/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have the received the correspondence to which the Deputy's question refers. A response will issue to the Deputy shortly.

Visa Applications

317. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of an appointment that has been sought by a person (details supplied) to attend an appointment at the Irish Natural Immigration Service in order that they can discuss their visa in view of the fact they have been unable to receive the information online; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43437/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that appointments are not available to individuals to discuss their visa status and that such queries should be dealt with by email to the relevant section. A list of contact emails can be found on the website www.inis.gov.ie.

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

Garda Recruitment

318. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the next recruitment campaign for An Garda Síochána will commence for new entrants; the number of stages in the recruitment process; if candidates can appeal decisions made against them during this process (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43457/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for carrying on and managing and controlling generally the administration and business of An Garda Síochána, including by arranging for the recruitment, training and appointment of its members. I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. I have been informed by the Garda Commissioner that there is currently no date for the commencement of a new recruitment campaign for Garda Trainees.

As the Deputy will be aware this Government is committed to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country in order to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and deter crime. To make this a reality for all, the Government has in place a plan to achieve an overall Garda workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021 comprising 15,000 Garda members, 2,000 Reserve members and 4,000 civilians.

I am informed that the most recent recruitment campaign which closed for applications on the 7 June 2018 again received a strong response with approximately 6,300 applications received. This compares favourably to the 2017 competition which received approximately 5,400 applications and indicates that a career in An Garda Síochána continues to be regarded as an attractive and rewarding profession.

The Deputy will be aware that since the re-opening of Templemore College in September 2014, we have been rebuilding the Garda organisation and I am pleased that, since then, approximately 2,200 new Garda members have attested and been assigned to duties in communities throughout the country. Garda numbers, taking account of retirements, increased to approximately 13,500 at the end of 2017 – a net increase of over 600 since the end of 2016. With another attestation of approximately 200 Garda recruits due to take place in November, Garda numbers will increase to approximately 14,000 by the end of this year for the first time since 2011.

By year end, a further 800 new Garda Recruits will have entered the Garda College in 2018 and I am pleased that funding is in place to maintain this high level of investment in the Garda workforce to ensure that the vision of an overall workforce of 21,000 by 2021 remains on track. In that regard to support the Commissioner in this recruitment, I have secured funding in Budget 2019 which will facilitate the recruitment of up to 800 more Gardaí next year.

This is an ambitious programme of recruitment and will require a continuous pipeline of suitable candidates.

Regarding the stages of the recruitment process, in accordance with the Garda Síochána (Admissions and Appointments) Regulations 2013 the Public Appointments Service (PAS), on behalf of the Garda Commissioner, manages the initial recruitment stages for the selection of Garda trainees. Currently, the first three stages of the process which are conducted by the Public Appointments Service (PAS) are as follows;

Stage 1: Online Assessment – Unsupervised

Stage 2: Assessment Test & Exercises – Supervised

Stage 3: Interview & Other Assessments

Appeals for the first three stages of the process are dealt with by PAS, and I as Minister have no function or direct involvement in this process. Following these three stages, successful candidates from the PAS process are forwarded to An Garda Síochána.

The final stages of the recruitment process in which candidates are vetted, and complete a physical competency test and a medical examination, are managed by the Commissioner and I, as Minister, have no direct involvement in the matter.

I would advise any candidate for a position as a Garda trainee to contact the PAS or the Garda Appointments Office, depending on the relevant stage of the application process, if they have any queries in relation to their application.

Potential candidates should also continue to monitor publicjobs.ie for details of any upcom-

ing competitions.

Vacant Properties

319. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason a property (details supplied) is vacant; his plans for its use; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43461/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): My Department does not own or lease this property and is not aware of any plans for its use. The majority of properties occupied by my Department are owned or leased on its behalf by the Office of Public Works (OPW), including the premises occupied by the Office of the State Pathologist.

Garda Deployment

320. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí allocated to Nobber Garda station in each of the years 2012 to 2017 and to date in 2018; the opening hours of the station in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43493/18]

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

For the Deputy’s information, I have provided below in tabular form the opening hours of Nobber Garda Station as provided by the Commissioner which are subject to operational demands and available personnel. I understand that telephone calls outside of opening times are diverted directly to the Divisional Office at Navan.

Year	Mon to Friday	Saturday	Sunday
2018	10am to 1pm Personnel Permitting	11pm to 1pm Personnel Permitting	10am to 1pm Personnel Permitting
2017	10am to 11am.6pm to 8pm Personnel Permitting	11am to 1pm Personnel Permitting	12pm to 1pm Personnel Permitting
2016	10am to 1pm Personnel Permitting	11pm to 1pm Personnel Permitting	
2015	10am to 1pm Personnel Permitting	11pm to 1pm Personnel Permitting	
2013	9am - 11am	9am - 11am	10am - 12 noon
2012	10am - 1pm & 6pm - 9pm	10am - 1pm	12am - 1pm

*Please note that records for 2014 are not available at this time.

The information requested by the Deputy in relation to Garda personnel as provided by the Garda Commissioner is available on my Department’s website through the link below.

Garda Nos. 2009-2018

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

http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/An_Garda_Siochana_facts_and_figures.

Garda-PSNI Transfers

321. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the promotion opportunities in An Garda Síochána will be extended or open to officers in the PSNI in 2019 to interview in the context of the recent Budget 2019 statement in which it was indicated that promotions will be provided for an additional 110 sergeants and 81 inspectors in 2019 in An Garda Síochána; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43509/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am pleased that the recent Budget provides resources to increase the number of sergeants in An Garda Síochána by 110 and the number of Inspectors by 81. As the number of members of An Garda Síochána continue to increase towards the target of 15,000 by 2021, it is critical that sufficient numbers of supervisors are in place.

At the moment, promotions to the ranks of Sergeant and Inspector are governed by the Garda Síochána (Promotion) Regulations 2006 (as amended). These Regulations restrict the pool of applicants to serving members of An Garda Síochána at the ranks of Garda and Sergeant respectively.

It is to be noted that appointment to the ranks of Superintendent, Chief Superintendent, and Assistant Commissioner is open to both members of An Garda Síochána and members of the Police Service of Northern Ireland. Appointments to these ranks are made by the Policing Authority on foot of competitions run by the Authority. Appointment to the equivalent ranks in the PSNI is open to members of An Garda Síochána.

Insofar as the filling of current and future vacancies at the ranks of Sergeant and Inspector in An Garda Síochána is concerned, I am advised by the Commissioner that a competition recently concluded for promotion to the rank of Sergeant and a competition for promotion to the rank of Inspector is expected to conclude next month. The panels formed from these competitions will be drawn upon as needed by the Commissioner until they are exhausted.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Garda Síochána Inspectorate's Review of Entry-Routes into An Garda Síochána, which was published in July 2018, proposes extending the existing reciprocal arrangements with the PSNI to allow access to the Sergeant and Inspector promotion processes in both jurisdictions (An Garda Síochána and the PSNI). The recently published Report of the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland endorses this recommendation and the related recommendation that reciprocal arrangements with other police services should also be explored.

I will be returning to Government in December with a High Level Plan to implement the recommendations in the Commission report. As part of that, I will be addressing how the recommendations in relation to entry to An Garda Síochána are to be progressed.

Garda Operations

322. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his attention has been drawn to statutory declarations on the back of summonses being stamped by An Garda Síochána in the place of a peace commissioner in circumstances in which summonses have been sent by registered post; the statutory basis for this activity; his views on whether it is factually undermining both prosecutions and citizens rights; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43513/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have requested a report from An Garda Síochána in relation to the matters raised in the Deputy's question and I will be in contact with the Deputy directly on receipt of this report.

Commission on the Future of Policing Reports

323. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the timeframe for the implementation of all of the recommendations contained in the Future of Policing in Ireland report by the Commission for Policing Reform; if he has been advised on the need for amendments to legislation or the need for new legislation in order to fully implement the report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43516/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware the Commission on the Future of Policing published its report on 18 September. The report contains a wide range of recommendations which comprehensively address all the themes set out in the Commission's terms of reference.

The Report makes many innovative proposals aimed at strengthening our national security arrangements; empowering the Garda Commissioner to ensure more effective management of the Garda organisation; supporting the internal governance of the Garda organisation through the introduction of a Board and reforming the method of recruitment and training of Gardaí. It also makes a number of recommendations on external oversight arrangements as well as on the Commissioner's engagement with the Oireachtas.

This is a major report on one of the key functions of the State and it is now receiving appropriate consideration. My Department is undertaking a detailed consultation process with the new Commissioner and other agencies as well as with other Government departments which are potentially impacted by the report's recommendations. As part of this process, I have asked the Garda Commissioner to respond to the recommendations in the report insofar as they directly concern An Garda Síochána. I have requested that this response will include an implementation plan of how he intends to take matters forward.

I have also written to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice and Equality and I look forward to hearing their direct response to the Report in the coming weeks. I also understand that Kathleen O'Toole, the Chair of the Commission, has been invited to address the Committee next month. I am very grateful to Ms. O'Toole and the other members of the Commission for their comprehensive report and I believe this will be a very useful engagement which will allow members to hear directly from the Commission as to how it approached its task and reached its detailed findings.

Once these engagements are completed, I intend to seek the Government's approval for a High-level Implementation Plan to take forward the agreed recommendations in the Report.

The Commission recommends significant legislative change and my plans to progress this important aspect of the Report will form part of my proposals to Government in December.

My Department, in consultation with the Department of the Taoiseach, is moving quickly to establish the Implementation Group for Policing Reform and the Implementation Programme Office as recommended by the Commission. We expect to be in a position to appoint the independent Chair of Implementation Group shortly. Given the whole-of-Government reach of the report, this Implementation Group and Programme Office will be based in the Department of the Taoiseach.

While the programme of reform that the Commission outlines is undoubtedly an opportunity for transformational change, it is also extremely challenging, requiring actions across Government. It is prudent that we take some time now to ensure that the necessary structures and resources are in place to deliver this programme of transformation. The Commission has suggested that transformation should be substantially completed by the centenary of the establishment of An Garda Síochána in 2022. That is, in my view, a realistic target.

Anti-Social Behaviour

324. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will seek assurances from the Garda Commissioner that additional attention will be provided to an area (details supplied) in the run up to Halloween and including Halloween day and night; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43550/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, the allocation of all Garda resources, including personnel, is solely a matter for the Garda Commissioner and his management team and I have no direct role in this regard. However, I can assure the Deputy that An Garda Síochána continue to regard all forms of anti-social behaviour very seriously.

Working with communities to tackle public disorder and reduce anti-social behaviour is a key priority for An Garda Síochána. This approach includes a strong focus on quality of life issues and collaboration with local authorities to help address the causes of anti-social behaviour. I might add that there is a range of strong legislative provisions available to An Garda Síochána to combat anti-social behaviour, including provisions under the Criminal Justice (Public Order) Acts, the Criminal Damage Act and the Intoxicating Liquor Acts. There are also the incremental provisions contained in the Criminal Justice Act 2006 which provide, in Part 11, for warnings and civil proceedings in relation to anti-social behaviour by adults and, in Part 13 of the Act, for warnings, good behaviour contracts and civil proceedings in relation to anti-social behaviour by children.

Clearly, Garda visibility in our communities is very important and this Government remains committed to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country in order to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and to deter crime. An Garda Síochána is currently undertaking a programme of accelerated recruitment, as part of the Government's commitment to a strengthened service through the Five Year High Level Reform and Workforce Plan, which will see an overall workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021.

While An Garda Síochána will continue to tackle these problems head-on, they cannot eradicate the problem of anti-social behaviour alone. Specifically in relation to young offenders, it is also up to us as adults, particularly the parents and guardians of our young, to ensure that children are raised to be respectful and law-abiding. These lessons begin in the home, are further reinforced in our schools and then by wider society in general. We must all work together to ensure that such behaviour is never normalised and is tackled immediately.

Garda Expenditure

325. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the expenditure, excluding salaries, on each Garda station in County Louth in the past five years; the requests made by the individual stations in County Louth for expenditure; the criteria by which funding was allocated to the relevant station or stations that received funding from the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43677/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, the Garda Commissioner is the Accounting Officer for the Garda Vote and is responsible for the effective and efficient use of the resources at his disposal. In accordance with the Garda Síochána Act 2005, the Commissioner is also responsible for carrying on and managing and controlling generally the administration and business of An Garda Síochána.

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

Closed-Circuit Television Systems Provision

326. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the roll-out of community CCTV in a town (details supplied) in County Tipperary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43698/18]

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

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

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

A grant-aid scheme was launched by my Department in 2017 to assist groups in the establishment of community-based CCTV systems in their local areas. The scheme is intended to run for 3 years with funding of €1 million available each year. Eligible community groups can apply for grant-aid of up to 60% of the total capital cost of a proposed CCTV system, up to a maximum grant of €40,000.

I can inform the Deputy that my Department has not received an application for grant-aid from the area in question. I can however confirm that my officials are available to assist any interested groups in the area who wish to make an application. A dedicated email address is available to provide assistance to any groups interested in availing of the grant aid scheme - *communitycctv@justice.ie*.

There have to date been 27 applications to the scheme. 20 applications have been approved to date, involving approved funding of over €480,000. 4 applications are being considered. The remaining 3 applications have been returned to the applicants to enable them to supply the information necessary to qualify for grant aid.

In establishing the grant-aid scheme, the Department consulted broadly, including with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner, An Garda Síochána, the Office of the Attorney General and the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA). Nonetheless the Department is continuing to engage with all relevant parties to provide information on the scheme and clarify any queries arising. As I have said previously, I am keen to ensure that all interested groups, in both rural and urban areas, have the opportunity to take advantage of the availability of this grant aid scheme. Full details of the grant aid package are available to download from my Department's website - www.justice.ie.

Leave to Remain

327. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of requests for leave to remain there have been from children in each of the years 2012 to 2017 and to date in 2018; the number of these granted; the grounds for rejection; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43699/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Leave to remain is not applied for by applicants - it is a potential outcome of the consideration of whether or not a deportation order should be made in the case of a person who has been served with a formal notification of intention to deport. Persons under 18 years who are the subject of this process are considered as part of the overall family in each case.

The grounds to be considered as part of this process are as outlined in Section 3(6) of the Immigration Act 1999. Each case is considered in detail on the basis of its own individual facts and circumstances, under all of the headings set out in section 3(6) of that Act, and all other applicable legislation, before a final decision is made.

Following the commencement of the International Protection Act 2015 on 31st December 2016, permission to remain in the case of applicants for international protection has been considered as part of a single application procedure (under which eligibility for refugee status, subsidiary protection and permission to remain are considered as part of one process. The permission to remain element is considered should a person not qualify for either refugee status or subsidiary protection). It is not possible to separate the permission to remain element of this process for statistical purposes, except to note the numbers who have been granted permission to remain as per the following table.

The number of grants of leave to remain/permission to remain relating to minors for each of the years from 2012 to 2018 (as of 19th October 2018) are outlined in the table below:

Numbers of Leave To Remain/Permission to Remain Grants relating to any persons under 18 at the time of their decision

Year Granted	Leave To Remain granted following consideration under Section 3(6) of the Immigration Act 1999	Permission To Remain Granted (International Protection Office)	Year Total
2012	146	-	146
2013	238	-	238
2014	335	-	335
2015	638	-	638
2016	279	-	279
2017	81	28	109

Year Granted	Leave To Remain granted following consideration under Section 3(6) of the Immigration Act 1999	Permission To Remain Granted (International Protection Office)	Year Total
2018 (up to 19.10.2018)	89	52	141
Total	1,806	80	1,886

Garda Deployment

328. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí and Garda bicycle patrols assigned to Maynooth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43700/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for the distribution of resources, including personnel, among the various Garda Divisions and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter.

I understand that Garda management keeps the distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities, so as to ensure their optimum use. Responsibility for the efficient deployment of all official Garda vehicles, including mountain bikes, in each Division is assigned to the Divisional Officer, who may allocate mountain bikes between districts and stations in line with operational requirements.

I am informed by the Commissioner that there is 1 mountain bike allocated to Maynooth Garda Station.

The information requested by the Deputy in relation to Garda personnel as provided by the Garda Commissioner is available on my Department's website through the following link.

Garda Numbers 2009-2018

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

http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/An_Garda_Siochana_facts_and_figures.

Local Authority Funding

329. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the categories of funding available to local authorities through his Department; the amount of funding provided for each scheme in 2016 and 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43734/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department's Vote (Vote 24) provided grant funding to local authorities under the following categories in 2016 and 2017 (categorised in line with the categorisation applied in the C&AG Report on the Accounts of the Public Services):

Category	2016	2017
Recreation and other local services (Cultural projects)	€344,023	€74,845
Housing and urban regeneration (Other housing supports)	€927,957	€1,534,120
Total	€1,271,980	€1,608,965

Insofar as this Department's expenditure is concerned, "Recreation & other local services" includes payments to support initiatives such as Traveller Pride Week and the Cultúr Migrants Centre. The "Housing & urban regeneration" category includes payments to support integration and resettlement initiatives sponsored by the Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration and the Irish Refugee Protection Programme.

Home Repossessions Rate

330. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of homes, including family homes, repossessed in each of the past five years for which figures are available; the number of persons and families made homeless as a result of such court actions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43741/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy is aware, under the provisions of the Courts Service Act 1998, management of the courts is the responsibility of the Courts Service, which is independent in exercising its functions, which include the provision of information on the courts system.

However, I have had inquiries made and the Courts Service has informed my officials that it is not in a position to provide the information sought by the Deputy in relation to the number of homes, including family homes, repossessed in each of the five years and the number of persons and families made homeless as a result of such court actions. In order to be of assistance to the Deputy, the Courts Service has instead provided details of the number of Possession Orders granted in the past five years.

Circuit Court:

The following Tables A and B provide details of the number of Possession Orders granted by the Circuit Court in the years 2013 to 2017. For 2013 and from January to August 2014 (Table A) cases were categorised as being "Residential" or "Non-Residential". From September 2014 (Table B) the categorisation changed to "Primary Home", "Buy to Let" or "Other/Unknown". The Courts Service has advised that data in relation to Possession Orders for 2018 to date is not yet available.

TABLE A

Period	Residential	Non-Residential	Total
2013	330	33	363
January to August 2014	448	76	524

TABLE B

Period	Primary Home	Buy to Let	Other/Unknown	Total
September to December 2014	319	103	117	539
2015	918	148	218	1,284
2016	854	62	172	1,088
2017	733	15	130	878

The Deputy should note that under section 101 of the Land and Conveyancing Law Reform Act 2009, all applications for repossession in cases of ‘housing loan’ mortgages created after 1 December 2009 must be made in the Circuit Court. In addition, under section 3 of the Land and Conveyancing Law Reform Act 2013, with effect from 31 July 2013, all applications for repossession in cases of mortgages created before 1 December 2009 on private residences or family homes must also be made in the Circuit Court.

As the figures above show, there has been a decline in the number of Possession Orders granted over the period concerned. At its peak in 2015 a total of 918 Possession Orders were granted in respect of primary homes – 77 per month. In 2017, this figure had dropped to 733 Possession Orders – 61 per month. This equates to a drop of over 20% in the three year period. I might also add that the issue of a possession order does not, in many cases, lead to a loss of ownership of the family home and can be a catalyst for a solution between lender and homeowner which will see them retaining possession of the home. The introduction of the Abhaile Scheme, from 2016, has provided help to over 10,000 households in serious mortgage arrears, most of whom are in the most serious category of arrears (exceeding 720 days), and has been a contributing factor to the decrease in Possession Orders being granted.

High Court:

The Courts Service has also indicated that High Court statistics in relation to the number of Possession Orders granted do not distinguish between Buy to Let and Private Dwelling. The number of High Court Possession Orders granted in the years 2013 to 2 March 2018 is set out in the table.

TABLE C

Year	High Court Possession Orders
2013	108
2014	88
2015	65
2016	47
2017	40
From 1 January 2018 to 2 March 2018	14

Please note that the Courts Service Annual Report figures for 2014 and 2015 included Well Charging Orders in addition to Possession Orders.

I should add that the Government recently approved the drafting of the Courts and Land and Conveyancing Law Reform (Amendment) Bill 2018, which will provide further protections for people in mortgage difficulties, particularly those people who, for whatever reason, have been unable to avail of a Personal Insolvency Arrangement. It is expected that the Bill will be published during the current session.

This Government’s paramount objective in the context of resolving the mortgage arrears problem is to keep borrowers in their homes wherever feasible. We consider that repossession of private residences is a last resort when all other options have failed. In that context, I would urge all borrowers in mortgage arrears to contact their lender with a view to engaging in an effort to reach a sustainable solution which will allow them to stay in their homes.

331. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the action he has taken to implement the Review of the Coroner Service – Report of the Working Group; his plans to expedite the publication of recommendations from coroners' reports on road traffic accidents in order that local authorities and other agencies can consider their recommendations in a timely manner; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43742/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Coroners Bill 2007 provided for a comprehensive reform of the Coroners Act, 1962 and of the existing coroner system, including the establishment of a new Coroner Service. It incorporated many of the recommendations made by the Coroners Review Group in 2000 and by the Coroners Rules Committee in 2003, as well as those emanating from a detailed review of reforms to the coronial systems in other common-law jurisdictions (particularly Australia, New Zealand and Northern Ireland).

The changed public financial situation and other issues required that a review of the provisions of the 2007 Bill be undertaken. That review remains to be definitively concluded.

My current priority is progressing the Coroners (Amendment) Bill 2018, which has been scheduled for Committee Stage in the Dáil in mid-November. That Bill does contain certain of the proposals made in the Review of 2000 and of the 2007 Bill.

As regards inquests into fatalities following road traffic accidents, the current position is that it is up to each individual coroner to notify the relevant authorities of any recommendations made at such inquests. Neither I nor my Department have any function in this regard.

Garda Transport Data

332. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda public order vans allocated to each Garda division in Dublin as of 1 January 2018 and 15 October 2018; if the additional 15 Garda public order vans due to be purchased in 2018 have come into the fleet; if not, when they will come into the fleet; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43756/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will be aware that there has been very significant investment in Garda resources across the State in recent years. The Government's Capital Plan 2016 – 2021 provides €46 million for investment in the Garda fleet, to ensure that An Garda Síochána has a modern, effective and fit-for-purpose fleet, in addition to the investment of almost €30 million in the period 2013 to 2015. In total in the period 2013 - 2017, almost €44 million has been invested in the fleet with some 2,000 vehicles coming on stream to ensure that Gardaí can be mobile, visible and responsive on the roads and in the community to prevent and tackle crime.

As the Deputy will appreciate, decisions in relation to the provision and allocation of Garda vehicles across the various Garda divisions are a matter for the Commissioner in light of his identified operational demands and the availability of resources. As Minister, I have no direct role in that matter.

I understand however that Garda management keeps the distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure their optimum use. Responsibility for the efficient deployment of all official vehicles in each Division is assigned to the Divisional Officer, who may allocate vehicles between districts and stations as required by operational requirements.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that the following table sets out the public order vehicles within the Garda fleet assigned to Dublin Metropolitan Region, correct as at 18 October 2018.

Division	Total
DMR North	5
DMR North Central	1
DMR South Central	1
DMR Region	7

I am advised by the Garda authorities that there has been no allocation of public order vehicles in 2018 to date. I am however advised that orders have been placed for 15 large vans for Public Order Units and that delivery of these vehicles, following fit-out for use by An Garda Síochána, is now expected in Q1 2019 with allocation to commence towards the end of that quarter.

Garda Recruitment

333. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans for a recruitment drive for the Garda Band; the details of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43757/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for carrying on and managing and controlling generally the administration and business of An Garda Síochána, including by arranging for the recruitment, training and appointment of its members, including members of the Garda Band. I am informed by the Commissioner that he is committed to the Garda Band and to the recruitment of additional members over time, as required. There are currently no plans to recruit new members to the Band.

Vacancies in the Garda Band, when they do arise, are advertised in the national media and on www.publicjobs.ie and are filled following an interview, test of musical ability, medical examination and character clearance.

The current personnel strength of the Garda Band is 27. There are also 2 administrative support staff assigned to the Band.

Legal Aid Service Waiting Times

334. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the waiting times for persons to receive free legal aid in each of the law centres throughout the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43762/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The provision of civil legal aid in the State is delivered by the Legal Aid Board pursuant to the Civil Legal Aid Act 1995 and the Civil Legal Aid Regulations 1996 to 2017.

There are significant demands on the Board and I am conscious that this gives rise to waiting times for certain services at most of the Board's law centres. However, waiting times have been reduced over the last number of years due to measures introduced by the Board and the Deputy

will be glad to know that the Board's budget was increased to €40.796m for 2019.

The Board is extremely conscious that delays in service can lead to difficulties not just for the client but also for the wider community, as well as the courts system. In this regard, certain matters are dealt with as priority matters which means they receive the next available appointment at the law centre. Such matters include domestic violence, child abduction, child care, and asylum and related matters. In addition, the Board refers the vast majority of applications relating to private District Court remedies, for example maintenance, custody, access and guardianship, to private solicitors on its panels.

All other applications are placed on the waiting list. I can advise the Deputy that details of the waiting times in each law centre are published on a regular basis by the Board on their website <https://www.legallaidboard.ie/en/Our-Services/Legal-Aid-Services/Waiting-times/>.

Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission Staff

335. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the amount of additional funding to be made available to Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission, GSOC, following budget 2019. [43823/18]

336. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he is satisfied that the additional funding he is providing will meet the needs of the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission, GSOC, and allow it to carry out its investigations thoroughly and promptly in view of the concerns raised by GSOC in relation to the resources available to it to properly investigate the killing of persons (details supplied). [43824/18]

337. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of personnel employed by the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission, GSOC; and the rank and responsibilities of each. [43825/18]

338. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the business case made by the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission, GSOC, in February 2018 for additional staffing requirements. [43826/18]

339. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the additional resources he has allocated will meet the business case made by the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission, GSOC. [43827/18]

340. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on the number of additional staff the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission, GSOC, was seeking; the number of additional staff funding outlined in budget 2019 will provide for; and if it will meet the information technology requirements of GSOC. [43828/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 335 to 340, inclusive, together.

Following the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform's budgetary measures this month, I announced that GSOC would be allocated an additional €1.6 million in funding for 2019. I secured a budgetary increase of €0.6 million for 2019 and €1 million has been redirected from a now discontinued project and permanently attached to GSOC's annual budget. This will increase GSOC's 2019 budget to €10.7 million.

The additional €1.6 million in funding will enable GSOC to raise the staffing levels some-

what. In the meantime officials from my Department, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the Commission have held discussions on the proposal from GSOC for additional staffing. I am awaiting a response from DPER to the proposal.

This Government has always been committed to ensuring that GSOC has the necessary supports and resources in order to fulfil its statutory functions and mandate. This commitment is demonstrated by allocating this extra funding so that GSOC will be able to maintain the high standards it operates to. The overall budget allocation to GSOC is expected to meet GSOC's administrative needs, including information technology requirements, in terms of fulfilling the organisation's current remit, and to provide for an increase in staffing, including to further expand the unit established to deal with protected disclosures.

GSOC's current staffing compliment is 91. The breakdown is provided in the following table.

Operations Staff:

Position	No.
Director of Investigations (Asst. Sec. equivalent)	1
Deputy Director of Investigations (PO equivalent)	1
Senior Investigations Officers (AP equivalent)	8
Investigations Officers (HEO equivalent)	21
Casework Assistant Principal Officers	3
Casework Higher Executive Officers	7
Casework Executive Officers	4
Casework Clerical Officers	8
Analysts (HEO equivalent)	2
Assistant Investigations Officers (EO equivalent)	7
Protected Disclosures Unit	
Investigations Officers (HEO equivalent)	3
Executive Officer	1
Librarian and Legal Staff:	
Librarian (Engineer Grade III)	1
Head of Legal Unit (Principal Officer equivalent)	1
Solicitors (Assistant Principal equivalent)	2
Legal assistant (CO grade)	1
Administrative staff:	
Director of Administration (Asst. Sec. equivalent)	1
Assistant Principal Officers (Administration)	3
Higher Executive Officers (Administration)	7
Executive Officers (Administration)	5
Clerical Officers (Administration)	3

Visa Applications

341. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his attention has been drawn to the ongoing delays in processing decisions in respect of applications for visas lodged with the Irish Embassy visa office in Delhi; the reason for the delay in processing these applications; if he has considered allocating additional staff resources to deal with increased

demand for these visas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43942/18]

342. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his attention has been drawn to the impact of the ongoing delays in processing decisions in respect of applications for visas lodged with the embassy visa office in Delhi (details supplied); his views on whether this is acceptable management of the visa processing system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43964/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 341 and 342 together.

I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the New Delhi Visa Office has been experiencing high volumes of visa applications due to seasonal demands at this time of year. This is in line with similar trends from previous years and measures have been put in place to deal with this demand. More generally, it points to an increase in visa applications from people wishing to come to Ireland for a wide variety of reasons.

I am informed that business and conference visas are currently being processed within ten days. Study visas at this time are being processed within four weeks. Employment and visit visas are currently being processed within seven weeks. Processing times for long stay visas invariably take longer and are generally determined by the volume of applications received, the particular merits of individual applications, their complexity, whether there is a need to investigate or inquire further, and the time taken to receive applicant responses.

The Deputy can be assured that every effort is being made to keep processing times to a minimum, with a number of measures put in place to deal with the expected demand this summer. This included the assignment of additional staff to help process these applications including student visa applications, and more generally the streamlining of visa processing where possible. The position continues to be kept under close review.

Departmental Bodies

343. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the involvement of State bodies under her aegis in attending Saudi Arabia's Future Investment Initiative; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43222/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): None of the State bodies under the aegis of my Department is attending Saudi Arabia's Future Investment Initiative event.

Ministerial Meetings

344. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the details of engagements, meetings or correspondence that she has had with a person (details supplied) in the past three years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43386/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I have had no engagements or meetings with and I have received no correspondence from the person referred to.

Local Authority Funding

345. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the categories of funding available to local authorities through her Department; the amount of funding provided for each scheme in 2016 and 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43723/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Local Authorities are eligible to apply for funding under Science Foundation Ireland's Discover Programme Call and Science Week funding, which aim to support and develop science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) education and public engagement sector in Ireland by:

- investing in, developing and extending activity and ability in this area, and
- exploring and encouraging novel means of engaging the public.

Details of funding provided to Local Authorities for grants that involved payments in 2016 and 2017 are outlined in the table. Awards are made following international review by an expert panel.

SFI Programmes

Programmes	Title	Research Body	Maximum Grant Approved	Total Payments 2015	Total Payments 2016	Total Payments 2017	Total Payments 2018
SFI Discover Programme Call 2014	Discovery Science Festival 2015	Cork City Council	32500	29250	3250		
SFI Discover Programme Call 2014	Mayo Science & Technology Festival 2015	Mayo County Council	16000	14400	1600		
SFI-Discover Programme Call 2015	VEX IQ Junior Robotics Programme	Cork City Co t/a Lifetime Lab	50000	45000		5000	
SFI Discover Programme Science Week 2016	Mayo Science Festival	Mayo County Council	16000		14400	1600	
SFI Discover Programme Science Week 2016	Monaghan Science Festival	Monaghan County Council - Library Service	35000		31500	3500	
SFI Discover Science Week 2017	Cavan Monaghan Science Festival	Monaghan County Council - Library Service	35000			31500	3500

Questions - Written Answers

Programmes	Title	Research Body	Maximum Grant Approved	Total Payments 2015	Total Payments 2016	Total Payments 2017	Total Payments 2018
SFI Discover Science Week 2017	Wex-sci. Science Week Events organised by Wexford County Council and Wexford Public Library Service	Wexford County Council	8000			7200	800
SFI Discover	Teen Entrepreneur STEM Camp	Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council	14410			12969	
SFI Discover	Steam through Fingal libraries	Fingal County Council	50000			45000	
SFI Discover Science Week 2018	Louth Libraries Science Week Library Programme	Louth County Council	8000				7200
SFI Discover Science Week 2018	Mayo Science and Technology Festival	Mayo County Council t/a Mayo Science & Technology Festival	26500				23850
SFI Discover Science Week 2018	Cavan Monaghan Science Festival	Monaghan County Council	35000				31500
SFI Discover Science Week 2018	WexSci Wexford Science Festival	Wexford County Council	35000				31500
SFI-Discover Programme Call 2015	“Exploristica” Adventures in Statistics	Cork City Co t/a Lifetime Lab	25000	22500		2500	
SFI Discover	MathsWorks Mobile 2.0	Cork City Co t/a Lifetime Lab	25000			22500	
		Total Payments to date per year	411,410.00	111,150.00	50,750.00	131,769.00	98,350.00

IDA Ireland Site Visits

346. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of IDA and Enterprise Ireland site visits to County Leitrim since 2016 to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43773/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): IDA Ireland continues to highlight the benefits of expanding or locating in all counties of Ireland to its client base, including County Leitrim. It is important to remember, however, that the final decision as to where to invest always rests with the company concerned. It is also the case that site visit activity does not necessarily reflect investment potential, as almost 70% of all new foreign direct investment comes from existing IDA Ireland client companies. Enterprise Ireland does not conduct site visits.

The table below sets out the number of IDA Ireland site visits to County Leitrim from 2016 to Quarter 2 of 2018. Figures for Quarter 3 of this year will be compiled by the end of October.

County	2016	2017	Q1 2018	Q2 2018
Leitrim	8	5	2	3

IDA Ireland Jobs Data

347. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the work of the IDA in securing employment opportunities in north County Tipperary, specifically Tipperary town; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43776/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): IDA Ireland continues to highlight the benefits of expanding or locating in every part of Ireland, including in County Tipperary. There are now over 122,000 people employed across 649 firms in IDA client companies located outside of Dublin, with 45% of all new foreign direct investment (FDI) jobs created last year based in regional locations. The IDA is focused, as am I, on increasing those numbers further.

IDA Ireland does not compile job creation data on specific towns and locations within counties. As regards County Tipperary more broadly, there are currently eleven IDA client companies based there employing a total of 3,665 people. FDI-supported employment in County Tipperary has increased by almost 9% from 2016 to 2017 with 297 net new jobs created. The IDA continues to engage with its existing client base to support them in growing their business and footprint there further. Some of the most prominent IDA client companies in County Tipperary include Abbott Ireland, Boston Scientific and Merck Sharp and Dohme (MSD) who together employ 2,500 people. IDA Ireland also owns sites in Clonmel and Tipperary Town that are being actively marketed to its clients.

It is important to remember that FDI only forms one part of the broader approach to fostering enterprise and job creation in regional locations. Indigenous enterprise is also, of course, responsible for a significant portion of employment growth, especially outside Dublin. My Department and all its agencies, including Enterprise Ireland and the Local Enterprise Offices, work together to ensure that jobs and investment are spread as fairly as possible across the country.

Job Creation

348. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the steps she has taken in budget 2019 to encourage and promote job creation in counties Sligo, Leitrim, Roscommon and Donegal and the north west; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43877/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Since becoming Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, I have made jobs and enterprise in the regions my top priority. Enterprise development has been central to our success in reducing national unemployment from a high of 16% to 5.4% at the end of September 2018 - the lowest level in over a decade.

The Border (Sligo, Leitrim, Donegal, Cavan, Monaghan) and West (Galway, Mayo, Roscommon) regions have seen good progress, with employment in these regions increasing by 2.6% and 12.6% in total respectively from Q1 2015 to Q2 2018, according to the CSO Labour Force Survey.

In 2017, Enterprise Ireland reported job increases in both the North West and West of 7% each; while IDA reported increases of 4% across the Border region and 5% in the West. Through partnership between Enterprise Ireland and the Local Authorities, the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) across Sligo, Leitrim, Donegal and Roscommon have 753 client companies employing 3,410 people; and last year those companies added 267 new jobs in total.

I am happy to say that in Budget 2019, I secured an increase in my Department's total exchequer allocation by 9.1% year on year, up from €871m to €950.2m.

This is made up of a record €620m in capital and €330.2m in current funding, which includes:

- an increase of €65m in capital – up 11.7% on this year's allocation of €555m; and
- an increase of €14.2m in current – almost 4.5% more than our 2018 allocation of €316m.

Regional development was one of my three main priorities for Budget 2019 and I approved a range of measures to drive indigenous enterprise development and regional growth.

I allocated an extra €5m to the 31 LEOs, up 22% on 2018, which have a presence in every county, including Sligo, Leitrim, Roscommon and Donegal, to support start-ups and growth and in particular to support businesses to prepare for Brexit. The LEOs will work with the broad range of small and micro indigenous enterprises across sectors to ensure that they are informed and have plans in place to manage the new trading relationships on the island and with the UK more generally. This will include a new customs training programme for all businesses, exporters and importers, to be rolled out in conjunction with Enterprise Ireland.

The IDA's regional property programme is critical to encouraging more foreign direct investment into the regions. So, I was pleased to announce an allocation of €10m to the next phase of the IDA's Regional Property Programme. Project Ireland 2040 names the Border and Midlands regions as priority areas for this Programme, and so the funding will be used to start building advanced facilities in a number of regional locations. The next phase of the IDA Regional Property Programme will see new buildings constructed in a number of regional locations, including in Sligo.

IDA Ireland is working to promote Counties Sligo, Leitrim, Roscommon and Donegal to a range of potential investors, but especially in the areas of global business services, research and innovation and high-tech manufacturing. The IDA also regularly engages - with a view to encouraging job creation and investment - with key stakeholders on the ground in these counties,

including with local authorities, public bodies, the education sector and companies from both its own client base and from the indigenous sector.

I was also pleased to announce an additional capital allocation €2.75m to Enterprise Ireland to start developing regional innovation and technology clusters with Institutes of Technology right across the country, positioning them as drivers of world-class start-ups and growth enterprises.

Through Enterprise Ireland, I also doubled funding for the Online Retail Pilot Scheme to €1.25m in 2019, which will support SMEs in the retail sector to have a stronger online presence. This new Scheme follows through on our commitment to increase the scale and internationalisation of indigenous enterprise; increase productivity in high-employment sectors; and encourage Brexit readiness.

In addition, I also secured funding for a new phase of Enterprise Ireland's Seed & Venture Capital Scheme out to 2024. The new scheme, which is worth €175m, will be oriented towards seed and early stage investments, where there is a very clear market failure.

I announced an additional €1.8m investment for the Design Craft Council of Ireland (DCCOI) which will assist craft enterprises all over the country to develop and generate additional export sales and online revenue opportunities, increased market diversification so as to underpin sustainable growth.

Finally, I announced a €300m Brexit Future Growth Longer Term Loan Scheme for loans of up to 10 years. The Scheme has been developed by my Department with the European Investment Bank Group, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, and the Department of Finance together with the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland.

This Scheme will provide businesses the opportunity to borrow for up to ten years to support capital investment. It addresses the lack of availability of loans in the marketplace for loan-terms of longer than five-to-seven years.

In April of this year, along with Minister Breen, I met with the Chairs of all the Regional Action Plan for Jobs committees and other regional stakeholders, to start a process to Refresh and Refocus all Regional Plans to ensure their effectiveness, relevance and impact out to 2020, particularly in light of Brexit. I had a further meeting with the Chairs of the Regional Committees last week in my offices and I am pleased with the ambition and quality of the strategic actions being developed. The refreshed West and North West Region Action Plans for Jobs will further strengthen a collaborative approach at regional level which will enhance the impact and delivery of the supports outlined in Budget 2019, and existing supports, to increase job creation and enterprise development.

Enterprise Support Services Expenditure

349. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the level of grant aid paid by her Department or by the agencies under its remit in each of the years 2011 to 2017 in respect of the provision of animal feed compounding facilities and-or feed milling facilities; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43901/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Enterprise Ireland (EI) is the state agency with the responsibility for supporting companies to diversify, scale and achieve in global markets. The food sector accounted for €11.58 billion in client exports in 2017, representing a 10% increase on the 2016 figure.

Buyers of Irish food are increasingly interested in the way in which food is produced, especially regarding meat and poultry. Quality and traceability back to farm of origin are key aspects for food producers, and safe, sustainable animal feed is a key part of the supply chain. Feed mills need to operate at a high level to satisfy the requirements of the customers.

EI engages the sector with a range of Innovation, Lean, Client Management Development and other supports. The table below represents all payments to companies in the animal feed sector from 2011 to 2017.

Payments to companies in the Animal Feed Sector 2011-2017							
2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2011 - 2017 Total Payments
€198,720	€200,830	€254,542	€372,105	€86,600	€190,955	€274,919	€1,355,108

Hospital Appointments Status

350. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive an appointment with the ear, nose and throat department in Beaumont Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43280/18]

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

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

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

Hospital Beds Data

351. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health if the 37 surge beds at University Hospital Kerry will be in place for winter 2018-2019 in line with the recommendations of the health service capacity review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43165/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): €10 million in funding is being made available in 2019 to enable additional acute beds to be opened for Winter 2019/2020. This is the first step in the process of implementing the Capacity Plan which identifies over 600 acute beds to be phased in by the end of 2020, including 33 additional beds in Kerry University Hospital.

My Department is currently in discussions with the HSE, in the context of the National Service Plan 2019, to agree a capacity programme for 2019 that maximises this investment and supports the management of winter pressures into the future.

Health Services

352. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if the case of a person (details supplied) will be reviewed; the status of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43167/18]

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

Services for People with Disabilities

353. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter raised in correspondence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43173/18]

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

354. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive an appointment for a gastroenterologist at UHW; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43178/18]

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.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

355. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health if funding is available towards the purchase and maintenance of arterial assist devices; the HSE's position on the use of such devices; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43182/18]

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.

Healthcare Infrastructure Provision

356. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the details of each building project contained in the current capital plan 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. [43189/18]

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.

Cross-Border Health Initiatives

357. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health the status of the progress being made on the North-South agreement on children's cardiac surgery being carried out in Dublin in order to prevent children from Northern Ireland travelling to Birmingham and-or Manchester; if persons have been treated to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43198/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In June 2016, I gave my approval for the establishment and funding of an All-Island Congenital Heart Disease Network, centred on Our Lady's Children's Hospital Crumlin (OLCHC) and serving as an all-island centralised hub for paediatric cardiothoracic surgery and interventional cardiology. As part of the Network, OLCHC provides cardiothoracic surgery and paediatric cardiac catheterisation for patients from Northern Ireland. The phased implementation of the Network commenced in late 2015, with OLCHC providing surgery and cardiac catheterisation for emergency cases from Northern Ireland. Treatment of urgent cases commenced in March 2017.

I am pleased to advise the Deputy that the transfer of elective cases from Northern Ireland, the next step in the phased implementation of the Network, began in April this year. Plans for an extension to the Paediatric Intensive Care Unit (PICU) in OLCHC to accommodate all elective patients from Northern Ireland are also at an advanced stage. This is an example of the benefits for patients of North South cooperation in healthcare, with the two Departments of Health and services North and South working together in the interests of patients.

Health Services Expenditure

358. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health if he has sought changes to the timing of allocations to the health service under the National Development Plan 2018-2027 to bring forward spending of over €900 million originally earmarked for the end of the ten-year programme; and the outcome of such discussions as part of the recent estimates process. [43200/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The €10.9 billion provided for the public

health sector in the National Development Plan is very welcome and will allow for implementation over the next 10 years of a solid, ambitious plan to build a better health service for the future. This funding provides us with the opportunity to further reform and modernise our health service to meet the needs of our growing and ageing population. Capital investments over the coming decade will support existing Government priority projects and commitments, facilitate the shift to new models of care and enable the roll-out of new additional capacity, guided by the implementation of Sláintecare.

Seeking to deliver on the National Development Plan and following discussions with my colleague the Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform, Budget 2019 provides:

- €20m additional capital funding in 2018
- Capital funding of €667m in 2019 – an increase of €174m (35%)
- €50m capital funding brought forward to 2020 and ringfenced for developing health service capacity.

HSE Expenditure

359. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the way in which section 10(b) of the Health Service Executive (Financial Matters) Act 2014 is being honoured in the health budget for 2019; and if the deficit recorded in 2018 will be considered as a first charge in 2019. [43201/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Section 10 (b) of the Health Service Executive (Financial Matters) Act 2014 states “(3) (a) If the amount of net expenditure incurred by the Executive in a financial year is greater than the amount determined by the Minister for that year, the Executive shall charge the amount of such excess to its income and expenditure account for the next financial year and (b) If the amount of net expenditure incurred by the Executive in a financial year is less than the amount determined by the Minister for that year, the Executive shall, subject to the approval of the Minister given with the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, credit the amount of such surplus to its income and expenditure account for the next financial year”.

It is important to note that the sum of a deficit or surplus as it arises, will not translate in full into a charge or credit on the Annual Financial Statements of the HSE, as any overrun or underspend in the voluntary sector is not subject to a first charge under the legislation in the HSE accounts.

While it is anticipated that there may be some areas that will experience overruns in 2018, it is too early yet to be definitive in terms of the final out turn for the health services at year end.

A Supplementary Estimate will be provided in 2018 to the HSE.

If a deficit arises at year end the requirements under Section 10 (b) will be fully applied.

Healthcare Infrastructure Provision

360. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the capital projects in the health service which have been delayed for three months or more in 2018; and the reason for the delay in tabular form. [43202/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Delivery of capital projects is a dynamic process, constantly evolving to take account of changing circumstances.

At any time there are hundreds of projects in the Health Service Executive's multi-annual Capital Plan.

These projects progress at different rates given their size and project type.

The HSE must stay within the projected 5 year capital profile, its annual notified capital allocation and must ensure a full uptake of its annual notified capital allocation.

The HSE retains the flexibility to manage the individual projects within its investment programme to deliver the maximum number of priority projects from the funding available.

As a consequence individual projects will be advanced at varying speeds in order to leverage the funding available efficiently.

Hospitals Building Programme

361. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the status of the project to provide a modular build at South Tipperary General Hospital; when the project will be completed; and the number of extra beds to be provided. [43210/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Improving access to health care services is a key priority in 2019. I understand that the works in relation to the planned modular build at South Tipperary General Hospital are progressing, and that recruitment processes are currently in train, with the objective of opening the 40-bed ward block, in the first quarter of 2019.

Cancer Screening Programmes

362. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide a copy of the 2010 contract agreed between a company (details supplied) and the national cervical screening programme, CervicalCheck; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43211/18]

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

Nursing Homes Support Scheme

363. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health when the new guidelines for the fair deal scheme will come into effect; and the detail of the changes to the financial assessment for the scheme and changes to the way in which assets are assessed. [43219/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The proposed policy change to the Nursing Homes Support Scheme (NHSS), to cap contributions from farm assets at 3 years where a family successor commits to working the productive asset, has been approved by Government. I hope to progress the legislation in the Oireachtas in the autumn session. My Department is working on the development of draft Heads of Bill while considering a number of ancillary policy and operational matters which may need to be addressed in the proposed legislation.

The impact of potential changes to the NHSS will be considered in the context of the HSE's 2019 National Service Plan, with changes expected to take effect next year following the legislative process. It is intended that this proposed policy change, the 3 year cap, will be extended to eligible existing participants in long term residential care so that they are not disadvantaged, but that there would be no retrospective recoupment of contributions for those who have paid contributions over and above the 3 year period.

Hospital Waiting Lists

364. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive a date for scoliosis surgery in UCHG; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43229/18]

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

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

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

365. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive surgery as required in UCHG; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43230/18]

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

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

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

366. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health the reason there has only been one scoliosis surgery carried out in UCHG in 2018 in view of the fact that seven persons are on the waiting list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43231/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Saolta Hospital Group has advised that scoliosis surgery is currently carried out at University Hospital Galway (UHG). To date this year UHG has carried out one scoliosis surgery and there are currently seven patients awaiting scoliosis surgery at the hospital.

The Saolta Hospital Group advises that the waiting list for spinal surgery is a priority for UHG and work is ongoing to ensure that arrangements are in place in order to facilitate the level of complexity involved in relation to spinal surgery for patients with scoliosis.

At present, Saolta advises that UHG has limited capacity to undertake elective spinal procedures but is actively working on developing the elements required to support the service including inpatient beds, high-end equipment, theatre capacity, and staffing from within existing resources.

Hospital Waiting Lists

367. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health the length of time the first person that is on the waiting list for scoliosis surgery in UCHG has been on the waiting list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43232/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Mental Health Services Funding

368. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if he will review a matter (details supplied); his plans to invest in this unit in County Cavan; the timeframe involved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43239/18]

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

Services for People with Disabilities

369. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of funding for an escort for a bus in relation to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43240/18]

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.

Respite Care Services Provision

370. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an application for respite care for their child by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43241/18]

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.

The Programme for Partnership Government states that the Government wishes to provide more accessible respite care to facilitate full support for people with a disability.

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

371. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal can expect to receive an appointment from Letterkenny University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43242/18]

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

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

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

372. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43243/18]

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.

HSE Expenditure

373. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the estimated and-or expected HSE overspend for the full year to 31 December 2018; if he will provide the breakdown as opposed to the budget of the areas in which the overspend occurred; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43244/18]

424. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the estimated overrun in health for 2018; the areas of the healthcare system and geographies the overrun is allocated to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43636/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 373 and 424 together.

The Department is engaging closely with the HSE to ensure that every effort is made to maximise cost containment and cost avoidance measures and identify a series of mitigating actions that do not impact on the ability of the HSE to deliver on the planned activity levels set out in the NSP 2018. While it is anticipated that there may be some areas that will experience overruns in 2018, it is too early yet to be definitive in terms of the final out turn for the health services at year end.

A number of areas within the HSE are contributing to the overspend year to date.

1. A private patient income shortfall arising from the campaign by the private health insurers to dissuade their policyholders from using their insurance when admitted through an ED

2. Non achievement of the tranche 3 of the VIP programme

3. Higher level of State Claims Agency payouts than budgeted for

4. PCRS driven by costs and demand for drugs (in particular Hi Tech and LTI drugs)

5. Higher level of spend on national reform projects

6. Higher level of spend on service areas (Acute and social care)

7. Other smaller items, such as overseas treatment, winter response

The overspend in the service areas is driven by a number of factors, including non achievement of VIP tranche 2, higher levels and higher complexity of demand, costs associated with meeting national standards, emergency placement over level funded.

The actual overspend in these areas manifests as both overspend in pay and non pay.

A Supplementary Estimate will be provided in 2018 to the HSE, and this funding will carry forward into 2019.

Cancer Services Provision

374. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health his plans for a new cancer centre in County Cork in view of An Bord Pleanála's refusal to grant Mercy University Hospital permission for same; the location in which the new centre will be built; when the centre will be open for patients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43254/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Cork University Hospital is currently the designated cancer centre for the south-west region. The proposed new building in Cork is a project undertaken by the Mercy University Hospital Foundation; my Department has had no role in the development of this project.

Ministerial Meetings

375. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the meetings and dates on which he met with stakeholder organisations and professional bodies (details supplied) in relation to the implementation of termination of pregnancy services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43255/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The following meetings took place regarding the implementation of the expanded service for termination of pregnancy:

- 1 June — Terminations for Medical Reasons Ireland;
- 14 June — Opposition Members Briefing;
- 13 September — START (Southern Taskgroup on Abortion and Reproductive Topics);
- 2 October — Stakeholders Meeting (HSE, Medical Council, RCPI, ICGP, IOG, IFPA, START, and Well Woman's Clinic)
- 2 October — National Women's Council of Ireland.

I am pleased to say that Dr. Peter Boylan has been appointed by the HSE to assist with their preparations with the implementation of arrangements for termination of pregnancy and related services. Dr. Boylan's role will include consultation with key stakeholders, in particular he will play a key role in liaison with medical colleges to ensure robust clinical guidelines are developed to support the delivery of the service.

Vaccination Programme

376. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the reason the timeline for rolling out the HPV test by October 2018 was missed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43256/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I gave approval earlier this year for a switch to HPV testing as the primary cervical screening test, with cytology as a reflex test. This change will improve the sensitivity of testing, reducing the number of false negatives arising, although it is important to be clear that false negatives will always be part of any cervical screening programme.

This change in testing remains a priority, but it must be implemented in a way that prioritises quality and safety. Work on this complex project is well under way, with the intention of making the switch to HPV screening as soon as possible. Funding to implement the switch, and to extend HPV vaccination to boys subject to completion of the Health Technology Assessment currently under way by HIQA, has been allocated in Budget 2019, underlining the Government's commitment to these essential projects.

Hospital Services

377. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if a long-term stay bed will be provided for a person (details supplied) in County Cork. [43268/18]

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

Cancer Screening Programmes

378. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the contract situation between the HSE, his Department and a laboratory (details supplied); if a new laboratory will be chosen to test smear test slides instead of the laboratory; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43282/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Screening saves lives. CervicalCheck has been successful in reducing cervical cancer rates in Ireland and, as Dr Scally stated in his report on the issues relating to CervicalCheck, which was published on the website of my Department on 12 September, continuation of the screening service in the coming months is of crucial importance. Dr Scally's report provided welcome reassurance about the quality management processes in the laboratories currently contracted by CervicalCheck, and confirmed that he found no reason why the existing contracts for laboratory services should not continue until the new HPV regime is introduced.

The HSE has now advised that Heads of Agreement have been signed with the laboratories contracted by CervicalCheck, to extend their contracts pending the introduction of HPV testing as the primary screening test. This allows for the continuation of the service without interruption.

The switch to HPV testing as the primary screening mechanism for the CervicalCheck programme will involve a reconfiguration of the laboratory work involved, and will be subject to a tendering process for any work carried out outside the public sector.

Hospital Transfers

382. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be transferred to the National Rehabilitation Hospital, Dún Laoghaire, in view of the fact that the planned transfer has been delayed on numerous occasions. [43286/18]

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.

Rural Practice Allowance Scheme

383. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the status of an application by a person (details supplied) for a rural practice allowance; if consideration is being given to grant half the allowance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43291/18]

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

Diabetes Strategy

384. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health his plans to create a centre of excellence in diabetes care in the north west in view of the fact that there is no centre of excellence in diabetes care above the Dublin and Limerick line; his further plans to increase the level of staffing in the diabetes team in Letterkenny University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43303/18]

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.

Respite Care Services Provision

385. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if he has considered allocating additional resources in order to provide residential respite care spaces in the community; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43328/18]

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.

The Programme for Partnership Government states that the Government wishes to provide more accessible respite care to facilitate full support for people with a disability.

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

386. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health his plans for maintenance works in a hospital (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43336/18]

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.

Emergency Departments

387. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Health the outlay of funding dedicated specifically for the upgrading of Beaumont Hospital emergency department with regard to the budgetary provision; when the upgrade of Beaumont Hospital will be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43338/18]

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

Medical Card Eligibility

388. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if a matter raised in correspondence by a person (details supplied) will be clarified; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43346/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In support of Government policy in promoting employment/training, applicants for a medical card who are in receipt of certain allowances/benefits, including Job Seekers Allowance, for a period of 12 months or more, can retain their medical card for 3 years on taking up employment. Furthermore, applicants who participate in certain Government schemes, including those in receipt of the 'Back to Education Allowance', retain their eligibility for a medical card for the duration of the scheme.

Based on the limited details provided the Deputy's constituent should be advised to contact the HSE's Primary Care Reimbursement Service (PCRS) regarding their eligibility for a medical card under the 3 year retention of a medical card on return to work provision in the HSE's Medical Card Guidelines.

If you are returning to work, you may be able to keep your card for 3 years. This can be from when you start employment to when your benefits end.

You must have been receiving a full social protection payment or government employment scheme payment for 12 consecutive months.

You will need to submit a new medical card application stating you are applying on this basis.

Health Reports

389. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health the status of the implementation of Sláintecare. [43347/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): This Government is fully committed to improving and transforming our health services to provide high quality, fair and accessible care to the population. It has approved the Sláintecare Implementation Strategy as Government policy and the vehicle to achieve this transformational reform. I am conscious of the cross party support for Sláintecare and will work to maintain this throughout implementation. I would like to assure the Deputy that Sláintecare implementation is a key priority for me and the Government.

The Sláintecare Implementation Strategy was published in August. The Strategy provides the framework within which a system-wide reform programme will be advanced to deliver the Committee's vision of a health system in which care is provided in the right place, at the right time, by the right person and is always provided on the basis of need and not ability to pay. The Implementation Strategy contains 106 linked actions to be delivered over the first 3 years of implementation.

In tandem, a dedicated Sláintecare Programme Office has been established in the Department of Health. This office is tasked with leading the implementation of the Strategy. An experienced Executive Director has been appointed to lead the Sláintecare Programme Office and recruitment of staff is currently under way.

Other Sláintecare implementation structures are also being established. The Sláintecare Implementation Advisory Council will hold its inaugural meeting on 24th October. Dr. Tom Keane has been appointed as Chair of the Council.

The Programme Office has commenced the preparation of a detailed action plan for 2019 which will be published before the end of this year. This will include detailed milestones and timelines for year one and the assignment of responsibility for each action.

The Programme Office is also designing an inclusive consultation and communication process for the public and staff in the health sector. Communication and consultation was identified as a critical requirement in implementation by the Committee on the Future of Healthcare.

A number of specific actions in the Implementation Strategy are already under way. The independent review of the impacts of the removal of private practice from public hospitals is ongoing and expected to report before the end of 2018.

Renegotiation of the GP contract has commenced with GP representatives on a package of measures including service improvements and reforms to the GMS contract.

Government approval has been secured for the establishment of an independent board for the HSE. The Bill has passed committee stage in the Seanad and it is hoped that it will be enacted this year.

A public consultation on the geo-alignment of Hospital Groups and Community Healthcare Organisations has been completed. This is the first step in a process of broader health service structural reform.

Finally, budget 2019 features over €200m additional funding which will directly support a range of additional services including initiatives proposed in the Sláintecare Report and committed to in the Sláintecare Implementation Strategy including:

- Ringfenced funding for the Sláintecare Programme Office;
- €20m for the establishment of a new ringfenced Sláintecare Integration Fund to drive improvements in the way we deliver care across the system;
- Funding for a new GP contract;
- Expansion of free GP care, by an increase in the weekly income threshold for GP Visit card by €25 which could benefit up to 100,000 people;
- Additional funding for 100 new therapy posts to address assessment of need waiting lists for children with disabilities and funding to ensure that the needs of all those leaving school in 2019 will be addressed;
- €55m in new development funding aimed at further enhancing community mental health teams for adults and children;
- Reducing user charges and out of pocket payments by further reductions in prescription charges - 50 cent reduction in prescription charges from €2.00 to €1.50 for all medical card holders over the age of 70 and by a €10 reduction in the monthly Drugs Payment Scheme threshold from €134 to €124;
- Increased investment of €20m in the National Treatment Purchase Fund. This funding will be used to treat 70,000 patients on waiting lists in 2019; and
- Additional funding for care redesign and the National Children's Hospital.

Diabetes Strategy

390. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health if access under the long term illness scheme will be expanded to include all persons with type 1 diabetes on that scheme for a monitoring system and associated devices (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43348/18]

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

Services for People with Disabilities

391. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health if the case of a child (details supplied) that has received no supports to date will be examined. [43366/18]

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

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

Medical Card Eligibility

392. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health if a person over 70 years of age is entitled to a medical card once they reach the age of 70 regardless of income; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43367/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Persons over 70 years of age do not have automatic eligibility for a medical card but they do have automatic eligibility for a GP visit card regardless of income. However, under the Health (Alteration of Criteria for Eligibility) (No. 2) Act 2013, when a person attains the age of 70, the medical card income limits are €500 gross income per week for a single person and €900 gross income per week for a couple.

Also, persons aged 70 or older, who are assessed as ineligible under the gross income thresholds, may also have their eligibility assessed under the means-tested medical card scheme if they so wish, for example in the event that they face particularly high expenses, e.g. nursing home or medication costs. This scheme is open to all persons, irrespective of their age and assessment is based on net income and assessable outgoing expenses. The general scheme, although having lower income thresholds, provides for income disregards and relevant outgoings to be taken into account in the assessment process. Furthermore, persons, including those aged over 70 years, may be deemed eligible for a medical card on a discretionary basis, if they are judged to face undue hardship in arranging General Practitioner medical and surgical services as a result of medical or social circumstances.

There are no proposals at present to amend the current income limits for the granting of eligibility for medical cards for persons aged 70 and over. However, it should be noted that the gross income limits are reviewed annually.

Mental Health Services Provision

393. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 675 of 7 September 2018, when the new mental health unit will commence in Naas Hospital; the expected completion date of the unit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43372/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service

matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Occupational Therapy Waiting Lists

394. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health his plans to reduce the long waiting times experienced by children in counties Laois and Offaly that are in need of an assessment for occupational therapy. [43373/18]

395. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health his plans to reduce the long waiting times being experienced by children in County Kildare that are in need of an assessment for occupational therapy. [43374/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 394 and 395 together.

As these questions relate to service matters, I have arranged for them to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply.

Mental Health Services Expenditure

396. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Health the amount of spending on mental health initiatives or services for each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43381/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The amount of funding allocated to mental health services for the last five years was:

2018 €910.6m,

2017 €852.1m,

2016 €826.6m,

2015 €791.8m,

2014 €766m.

HSE Mental Health Division spent the following amounts over this period:

2018 €910.6m (projected),

2017 €860.2m,

2016 €825m,

2015 €785.4m,

2014 €735.8m.

These figures do not include funding for mental health services provided by other Departments such as the Department of Justice, Equality & Law Reform. This funding has enabled improvements and enhancements of mental health services, which continue to be a priority for the Government. Examples include:

- Improvements to mental health service infrastructure.
- The enhancement of Community Teams for CAMHS, General Adult and Psychiatry of Later Life.
- The new Children's Hospital and the National Forensic Hospital will see an additional 30 beds bringing the total number of inpatient beds for CAMHS to 106 in 2021.
- The addition of 20 psychologists, 114 assistant psychologists, 10 ANPs and 130 psychiatric undergraduate nurse places. These will help to alleviate waiting lists and improve the delivery of children's mental health services nationally.
- Development of clinical programmes on self-harm, eating disorders, and perinatal with a further three models of care being designed on dual diagnosis, ADHD in adults and early intervention in psychosis.
- The continued development of counselling services across both primary and secondary care, including the provision of Jigsaw youth mental health services in 13 locations nationwide.
- Continued roll out of a seven-day-a-week service for all CHOs, The further development of 24-hour Mental Health Service is being considered in light of the evidence coming from the implementation of the seven-day-a-week service in relation to demand for out-of-hours services and staffing needs for this. It is envisaged that all CHOs will have some level of seven-day-a-week cover by Quarter 1, 2019.

Ministerial Meetings

397. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the details of engagements, meetings or correspondence that he has had with a person (details supplied) in the past three years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43395/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): There has been no correspondence, engagements or meetings with me or my office with the individual concerned in the past three years.

Hospital Appointments Status

398. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) can expect an appointment. [43407/18]

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

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

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

Disability Services Funding

399. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health his plans to provide funding to an organisation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43408/18]

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.

HSE Staff Data

400. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 822 of 12 June 2018, the number of midwives listed in the response that are student midwives and fully qualified midwives, respectively; if the numbers provided include student midwives; the number of midwives listed that are student midwives; the level of training of the student midwives; the number of the vacancies listed that have been filled; the number of vacancies remaining; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43413/18]

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 Consultant Recruitment

401. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health if a full-time consultant in pain medicine will be appointed in the South Infirmity Victoria University Hospital, Cork; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the HSE has not replaced a consultant post in pain medicine in the hospital since a consultant retired in 2015; if his attention has been further drawn to the waiting lists in this department and the cancellation of outpatient and procedure lists for September, October and November 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43429/18]

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 Facilities

402. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health the status of the provision of

a catheterisation laboratory at Sligo University Hospital; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the HSE has spent more than eight times the cost of a new catheterisation lab sending patients to other hospitals and facilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43445/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The National Review of Specialist Cardiac Services is ongoing and it is expected that the work will be completed by the end of June 2019.

The aim of the Review is to achieve the optimal patient outcomes at population level with particular emphasis on the safety, quality and sustainability of the services that patients receive by establishing the need for an optimal configuration of a national adult cardiac service.

As set out in the National Development Plan 2018-2027, investment in cardiac catheterisation laboratories and other cardiac services infrastructure nationally will be informed by the outcome of the National Review.

Clinical Indemnity Scheme

403. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health his plans to re-examine the conditions by which consultants can prescribe medicinal cannabis for persons with Dravet syndrome in such a way as to not make them personally liable for their entire treatment thereafter which understandably makes them reluctant to prescribe medicinal cannabis in these situations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43446/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have not received any reports from hospital consultants regarding insurance companies refusing to provide cover for neurological paediatricians prescribing medicinal cannabis.

Irish-based medical practitioners who wish to prescribe cannabis products containing THC may apply to the Minister for Health for a licence under the Misuse of Drugs Acts.

The Chief Medical Officer has advised that the granting of such a licence must be premised on an appropriate application being submitted to the Department of Health, which is endorsed by a consultant who is responsible for the management of the patient and who is prepared to monitor the effects of the treatment over time.

Under existing arrangements consultants in public hospitals are covered by the Clinical Indemnity Scheme (CIS) in respect of the prescription of THC-based medicines for a patient under their care provided that the consultant is permitted to do so under a licence granted by the Minister for Health under the Misuse of Drugs Acts and where he/she has exhausted all other treatment options for that patient.

In relation to private consultants the CIS covers the excess over the indemnity ceilings (or Caps) set by the State for private indemnifiers of consultants working in private practice settings. Effectively, the private indemnifier's liability in respect of any claim is capped at the relevant indemnity ceiling and the State assumes responsibility for any amount in excess of the cap. Consultants in private hospitals should check with their Medical Defence Organisations to establish that such organisations will cover them up to the Caps limit in cases where they are considering prescribing THC-based medicines for a patient, under licence from the Minister and where he/she has exhausted all other treatment options for that patient.

Treatment Abroad Scheme

404. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding providing medical treatment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43447/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The HSE operates the Treatment Abroad Scheme (TAS) for patients entitled to treatment in another EU/EEA Member State under EU Regulation 883/2004, where the treatment is not available in the Irish public hospital system.

The treatment must be a treatment which the patient could legally avail of in the public healthcare system in Ireland if the treatment were available in Ireland.

GPs refer patients to consultants for acute care and it is the treating consultant who, having exhausted all treatment options including tertiary care within the country, refers the patient abroad under the terms of the TAS. The consultant must specify the specific treatment and in making the referral accepts clinical responsibility in relation to the physician and facility abroad where the patient will attend.

Applications to the TAS are processed and a determination given in accordance with the statutory framework prior to a patient travelling to avail of treatment. The statutory framework stipulates the patient must be a public patient and is required to have followed public patient pathways.

Information on the TAS can be accessed on the HSE treatment abroad website and also by phone at 056 7784551.

Hospital Waiting Lists

405. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for a person (details supplied) will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43464/18]

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.

Home Care Packages Provision

406. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Health when a homecare package will be approved for a person (details supplied) in view of the fact that an application for an increase in homecare hours has been made on medical grounds; and if he will make a statement

on the matter. [43477/18]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

407. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for an MRI scan for a person (details supplied) will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43478/18]

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.

Primary Care Centres Provision

408. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Health the progress made on the PPP for Donegal town health centre; the further progress made since the confirmation of the intention to proceed with a PPP in March 2018; the timeframe for the complete delivery of this project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43483/18]

447. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Health the progress made on the PPP for the Dunfanaghy health centre; the exact progress made since the confirmation of the intention to proceed with a PPP in March 2018; the timeframe for the complete delivery of this project moving forward; if a contract has been signed for the new building; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43688/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 408 and 447 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 Treatment Purchase Fund Eligibility

409. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health when the National Treatment Purchase Fund will approve funding for a procedure to be carried out for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43507/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Reducing waiting time for patients for hospital operations and procedures is a key priority for the Government. The Inpatient and Daycase Action Plan 2018 outlines the combined impact of Health Service Executive (HSE) and National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) activity in 2018 to reduce the number of patients waiting for treatment. The Plan has already resulted in ongoing improvements with a 16% decrease in the number of patients waiting for procedures since July 2017.

Under the Waiting List Action Plan the NTPF have committed to make offers of treatment to patients waiting for one of 50 high-volume procedures including hip replacement. All patients who are clinically suitable for outsourcing who are waiting more than 9 months for one of these targeted procedures will be offered treatment in 2018 and 2019.

In terms of treatment offers, the NTPF authorises public hospitals to offer outsourced treatment to clinically suitable long waiting patients who are on an inpatient/day case waiting list for surgery, having been referred on to such a list following clinical assessment by a consultant/specialist at an outpatient clinic. NTPF authorisations are made in respect of the longest waiting patients first.

National Maternity Hospital

410. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health when he plans to sign contracts with the new national maternity hospital; the guarantees he has secured to ensure that reproductive services including abortion will be provided in this hospital; and if he will report to Dáil Éireann before contracts are signed [43519/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Following extensive mediation discussions, agreement was reached between the St Vincent's Healthcare Group and the National Maternity Hospital (NMH) on the relocation of the NMH to the Elm Park campus. The terms of this agreement provides for the establishment of a new company which will have clinical and operational, as well as financial and budgetary independence in the provision of maternity, gynaecology and neonatal services.

It is vitally important that the legal and governance arrangements associated with this project are robust. Considerable work has been undertaken to develop a legal framework to protect the State's significant investment in the new hospital. This legal framework will underpin the operational and clinical independence of the new hospital, ensuring care in the new maternity hospital will be delivered without religious, ethnic or other distinction and any medical procedure which is in accordance with the laws of the land will be carried out there. Once finalised, proposals will be subject to consideration with the parties concerned.

While the approval process is one for myself, as Minister for Health, I can confirm that I intend to brief Government once the legal framework has been finalised. I will, of course, be very happy to share the agreement with the House, as appropriate, in due course.

Hospital Consultant Remuneration

411. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the estimated cost to

restore junior consultants' salaries to bring salaries in line with their colleagues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43520/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Public Service Pay Commission recently concluded a review in relation to recruitment and retention in respect of key health service grades, including consultants.

In terms of pay, it identified the two-tier pay system as being one of number of factors affecting recruitment and found that the differential in pay between pre-existing and new entrant consultants is greater than for other categories of public servants. The Commission proposed that the Parties to the Public Service Stability Agreement jointly consider what further measures could be taken, over time, to address this difficulty.

It is estimated that it would cost approximately €45m to bring the pay of new entrant consultants into line with their colleagues. The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, my Department and the HSE have noted the Commission's views and consideration will need to be given to potential solutions which are in line with public sector pay policy and available budgets.

Hospital Consultant Recruitment

412. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the number of consultant doctor vacancies here; the actions he is taking to fill these vacancies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43521/18]

413. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the actions he is taking to attract and retain medical consultants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43522/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 412 and 413 together.

The Public Sector Pay Commission in its Report published on 4 September 2018 addressed consultant vacancies and identified difficulties in attracting applications for many posts at present. It acknowledged that the pay rates for new entrants had been highlighted as a factor in this and recognised that the implementation of the settlement of the 2008 Consultant Contract claim, while necessary of itself, would serve to highlight further the differential in pay between the pre-existing cadre of consultants and new entrants. It also stated that the proposed incremental measures for new entrants across the public service, including consultants, that have now been confirmed, would not be sufficient to address the differential.

In terms of the number of consultant vacancies, the Pay Commission noted that at the end of 2017 the number of serving consultants at 2,971 (whole time equivalents) was 169 below the total Establishment figure of approved consultant posts of 3,140 and that it had been advised of approximately 400 posts either vacant or filled on a temporary or agency basis.

Given its analysis, the Pay Commission proposed that the Parties to the Public Service Stability Agreement jointly consider what further measures could be taken, over time, to address the pay differential between pre-existing consultants and new entrant consultants which has increased following the settlement of the 2008 Consultant Contract claim. The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and my Department have noted the Commission's views and consideration will need to be given to potential solutions which are in line with public sector pay policy and available budgets. This will be a significant challenge given the amounts involved.

The Government remains committed to increasing the consultant workforce. Notwithstanding recruitment and retention challenges, the number of consultants employed in the public health services has increased by 118 in the 12 months to end August 2018 and by 479 in the past five years to 3,032 (whole time equivalent's). Where vacancies exist, the HSE endeavours to fill essential posts on a locum or temporary contract basis to support service delivery. The HSE is also committed to improving the recruitment process, offering contracts to the Hospital Group rather than individual sites and focusing on family friendly arrangements.

Hospital Accommodation Provision

414. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health when the additional 2,600 hospital beds promised in the National Development Plan 2018-2027 will be delivered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43523/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Service Capacity Review was a key commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government, and was commissioned in response to the growing demand for health services. The Review, which reported earlier this year, examined capacity requirements in key elements of acute care, primary care and services for older people.

Increasing capacity alone will not address the challenges faced, but on the basis of significant reform over the next 10-15 years, the report recommends an additional 2,600 acute beds by 2031. The National Development Plan (NDP) provides for a major increase in capacity across the health system including the full complement of additional acute beds by 2028 - 3 years ahead of schedule.

Arising from the recommendations in the Health Service Capacity Review, my Department engaged with the HSE this year to identify the location and mix of beds which could be opened to alleviate overcrowding in our hospital Emergency Departments for Winter 2018/19. This process culminated in the development by the HSE of a Capacity Plan, which identified over 600 acute beds and 290 residential care beds, to be phased in between 2018 and 2020.

As a first step towards the implementation of the Capacity Plan, €10 million in funding is being made available in 2019 to enable additional acute beds to be opened for winter 2019/2020. My Department is currently engaging with the HSE to finalise the details of this investment.

Under the NDP three new dedicated elective-only hospitals will be introduced which will increase capacity in the hospital system and provide a better separation of scheduled and unscheduled care.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

415. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health when the HSE drug assessment committee will consider the application of Translarna which is of benefit for muscular dystrophy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43532/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Service Executive has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines under the community drug schemes, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013. The 2013 Act does not give the Minister for Health any powers in this regard.

The Act specifies the criteria to be applied in the making of reimbursement decisions which

include the clinical and cost effectiveness of the product, the opportunity cost and the impact on resources that are available to the HSE.

The HSE has received a new application for the reimbursement of Ataluren (Translarna) from PTC Therapeutics.

The application is being assessed at present in accordance with the criteria set out in the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013.

Negotiations between the HSE and the company are actively underway. Once these negotiations have concluded, the application will be considered by the HSE Drugs Group and Leadership team.

Tax Reliefs Eligibility

416. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health if he has engaged with the Minister for Finance regarding the VAT liable on counselling and psychotherapy services; and his views on whether there should be an exemption for these services in view of the increasing number of persons presenting with mental health issues. [43533/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The Minister for Health has not held any discussions with the Minister for Finance concerning the issue raised by the Deputy.

The criteria in relation to tax relief for medical expenses is primarily a matter for decision by the Minister for Finance, and the Revenue Commissioners. It is open to any individual who experiences financial hardship in respect of certain health or personal social care to apply, in certain circumstances for medical card assistance.

Hospital Consultant Recruitment

417. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health if the difficulties faced by hospitals in getting consultants to fill vacancies will be addressed in view of the significant number of vacancies; if the vacancy for a temporary consultant psychiatrist at Beaumont Hospital has been filled; if the position of paediatric pathologist at Temple Street Children’s University Hospital has also been filled; and the number of vacancies to date. [43534/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Public Sector Pay Commission in its Report published on 4 September identified difficulties in attracting consultant applications for many posts at present. The Commission noted that at the end of 2017 the number of serving consultants at 2,971 (whole time equivalents) was 169 below the total Establishment figure of approved consultant posts of 3,140 and that it had been advised of approximately 400 posts either vacant or filled on a temporary or agency basis.

Given its analysis, the Pay Commission proposed that the Parties to the Public Service Stability Agreement jointly consider what measures could be taken, over time, to address the pay differential between pre-existing consultants and new entrant consultants which has increased following the settlement of the 2008 Consultant Contract claim. The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and my Department have noted the Commission’s views and consideration will need to be given to potential solutions which are in line with public sector pay policy and available budgets. This will be a significant challenge given the amounts involved.

The Government remains committed to increasing the consultant workforce. Notwithstanding recruitment and retention challenges, the number of consultants employed in the public health services has increased by 118 in the 12 months to end August 2018 and by 479 in the past five years to 3,032 (whole time equivalents). Where vacancies exist, the HSE endeavours to fill essential posts on a locum or temporary contract basis to support service delivery. The HSE is also committed to improving the recruitment process, offering contracts to the Hospital Group rather than individual sites and focusing on family friendly arrangements.

I have asked the HSE to revert to you directly in relation to the filling of the posts at Beaumont Hospital and Temple Street Children's University Hospital.

Hospital Consultant Recruitment

418. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the effects pay discrimination for new entrants is having on the recruitment and retention of medical consultants here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43535/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Public Sector Pay Commission in its Report published on 4 September 2018 identified difficulties in attracting consultant applications for many posts at present and acknowledged that the pay rates for new entrants had been highlighted as a factor in this. The Commission also recognised that the implementation of the settlement of the 2008 Consultant Contract claim, while necessary of itself, would serve to highlight further the differential in pay between the pre-existing cadre of consultants and new entrants.

Given its analysis, the Pay Commission proposed that the Parties to the Public Service Stability Agreement jointly consider what further measures could be taken, over time, to address the pay differential between pre-existing consultants and new entrant consultants which has increased following the settlement of the 2008 Consultant Contract claim. It did not consider that recently announced measures for new entrants generally would address the difference.

Notwithstanding recruitment and retention challenges, the number of consultants employed in the public health service has increased by 118 in the 12 months to end August 2018 and by 479 in the past five years and the Government remains committed to further growth. The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and my Department have noted the Commission's views and consideration will need to be given to potential solutions which are in line with public sector pay policy and available budgets. This will be a significant challenge given the amounts involved.

Maternity Services

419. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the status of the introduction of the 20 week anomaly scan at a hospital (details supplied); if it is now available to all women; if not, if it will be available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43539/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The National Maternity Strategy is very clear that all women must have equal access to standardised ultrasound services. The Strategy is being implemented on a phased basis and this work is being led by the National Women and Infants Health Programme. The Programme's Implementation Plan for the Strategy includes a number of actions to facilitate the provision by all maternity hospitals/units of dating and anomaly scans to all pregnant women.

Furthermore, additional development funding of €4.15 million is being allocated to maternity services this year. The Programme has prioritised improving quality and safety, establishing community midwifery teams and increasing access to anomaly scans. I understand that the Programme has approved the appointment of an additional 28 ultrasonographers which was the total requirement identified to provide 100% access to anomaly scanning.

Pending the completion of the requisite recruitment and training processes, I am assured that the Programme will continue to work with the six Hospital Groups to assist in increasing access to anomaly scans for those units with limited availability. The Programme is also working with the Maternity Networks to ensure foetal medicine expertise is available when an anomaly is identified. In relation to Cavan General Hospital specifically, I have asked the HSE to reply to you directly.

Addiction Treatment Services

420. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the funding allocated to HSE addiction services in CHO area 9 in each of the years 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43548/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): 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 Staff Data

421. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the number of HSE staff and grade employed in CHO area 9 addiction services; the number of positions vacant; the length of time each has been vacant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43549/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): 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 Staff Recruitment

422. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health if all four assistant psychologist positions for County Wexford have been filled as per the south-east community healthcare operation plan 2018. [43628/18]

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

Services for People with Disabilities

423. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health his plans to ensure that the HSE reviews the decision to reduce funding to a voluntary organisation (details supplied) that is providing essential services for children with autism; if the funding will be restored in respect of

this particular project to the level of grant aid provided in previous years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43629/18]

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.

Question No. 424 answered with Question No. 373.

General Practitioner Data

425. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the research or data he has commissioned or his attention has been drawn to regarding the number and location of general practitioner surgeries that are no longer accepting new patients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43637/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I am aware of reports of some general practitioners no longer accepting new patients.

Where a medical card or GP visit card holder experiences difficulty in finding a GP to accept him/her as a patient, the HSE has the power to assign that person to a GP's GMS patient list where the person has been removed from another GP's list or refused entry onto a GP's list, and the person has unsuccessfully applied to at least three GPs in the area who are contracted to provide services under the GMS scheme.

The assignment of a GMS patient to a GP's list can be reviewed by the HSE on the request of the GP after 6 months from the date of assignment, and, if appropriate, the patient can then be reassigned to an alternative GP.

Persons who do not hold a medical card or GP visit card access GP services on a private basis.

GPs are private contractors and issues relating to the acceptance of private patients are a matter of private contract between the clinician and his/her patients.

While I have no role in relation to such matters, I would expect clinicians to consider the importance of patients having access to a GP service close to home when deciding whether or not to accept private patients.

More generally, the Government is aware of workforce issues facing general practice, including the influence of demographic factors, and has implemented a number of measures to improve recruitment and retention in general practice.

GPs play a crucial role in the provision of primary care services. The number of GPs on the specialist register continues to increase – up from 2,270 in 2010 to 3,668 in 2018 and the number of GPs with a GMS contract has also risen from 2,098 in 2008 to 2,494 as at 1 July 2018.

GP training places have been increased from 120 in 2009 to 193 in 2018 and the Government's objective is to continue to achieve annual increases in the number of training places available while ensuring that all of the places are filled.

Entry provisions to the GMS scheme have been changed to accommodate more flexible GMS contracts and the retirement age has been extended to 72. An enhanced support package for rural practices has been introduced with improved qualifying criteria and an increased financial allowance of €20,000 per annum.

The Government remains committed to the continued development of GP capacity to ensure that patients across the country continue to have access to GP services and that general practice remains an attractive career option.

National Treatment Purchase Fund Eligibility

426. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health his views on whether the NTPF should be extended to cover children with special needs who are waiting for treatment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43638/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Reducing waiting time for patients for hospital operations and procedures is a key priority for the Government. In Budget 2019 we have further increased investment in this area, with funding to the National Treatment Purchase Fund to increase from €55 million in 2018 to €75 million in 2019, an overall increase of 150% since this government came into office.

In 2019, the NTPF plans to deliver 25,000 Inpatient Day Case treatments, an increase of 5,000 from the 20,000 procedures committed to in the Waiting List Action Plan 2018. Furthermore, 40,000 first outpatient appointments will be arranged as part of the 2019 activity.

NTPF activity next year will cover approximately 50 high to medium volume procedures and will be through a combination of treating patients in outsourced facilities and supporting the public system initiatives. In addition, the NTPF will take a targeted approach in 2019 for procedures not included in the high to medium volume bracket.

My Department is working closely with the NTPF and the HSE to finalise a coherent Waiting List Action Plan for 2019 before the end of the year. The priority of my Department is to maintain a seamless continuation of the considerable progress made this year into next year. This will include the continuing engagement of the NTPF with the HSE and public hospitals, inviting proposals for waiting list initiatives either through the private sector or through public sector insourcing. The NTPF will provide funding to the solutions proposed if appropriate.

In terms of treatment offers, the NTPF authorises public hospitals to offer outsourced treatment to clinically suitable long waiting patients who are on an inpatient/day case waiting list for surgery, having been referred on to such a list following clinical assessment by a consultant/specialist at an outpatient clinic. NTPF authorisations are made in respect of the longest waiting patients first.

Ministerial Meetings

427. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of meetings he has had with general practitioner representative organisations including organisations (details supplied) in relation to talks on the new general practitioner contract; and if he will make a

statement on the matter. [43639/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Government is committed to engaging with the representatives of general practitioners on the development of a package of measures and reforms to modernise the GMS Contract.

The goal is to develop a contractual framework that has a population health focus, providing in particular for health promotion, disease prevention and for the structured care of chronic conditions. This will enable general practitioners to better meet the needs of patients and will also promote general practice as a viable and rewarding career for both existing doctors and future medical graduates.

I have not met with either of the organisations referred to by the Deputy in relation to the talks on the GMS contract this year.

However, officials from my Department and the HSE are due to recommence engagement with GP representatives shortly.

General Practitioner Contracts

428. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the status of the new general practitioner contract negotiations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43640/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Department and HSE recommenced engagement with the IMO in early October on a package of measures consisting of service improvements and contractual modernisation and reform.

The goal is to develop a contractual framework that has a population health focus, providing in particular for health promotion, disease prevention and for the structured care of chronic conditions. This will enable general practitioners to better meet the needs of patients and will also promote general practice as a viable and rewarding career for both existing doctors and future medical graduates.

Agreement on the delivery of these service improvements and contractual reforms has the potential to facilitate a substantial increase in the resourcing of general practice on a multi-annual basis.

In line with the long established approach to such processes, and by agreement of the parties concerned, I am not in a position to give further details at this stage.

Hospital Beds Data

429. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health if previously closed acute beds in Letterkenny University Hospital will be reopened in 2019; if so, the number of beds which will be reopened; when this will happen; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43641/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): €10 million in funding is being made available in 2019 to enable additional acute beds to be opened for Winter 2019/2020. This is the first step in the process of implementing the Capacity Plan which identifies over 600 acute beds to be phased in by the end of 2020, including a 20-bed short stay ward in Letterkenny University Hospital.

My Department is currently in discussions with the HSE, in the context of the National Service Plan 2019, to agree a capacity programme for 2019 that maximises this investment and supports the management of winter pressures into the future.

Hospital Beds Data

430. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of new acute beds opened in 2018; the locations of those beds; the breakdown of those beds by type, for example, ICU, HDU, ward and rehab; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43643/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Increasing bed capacity is a Government priority.

Over the past 12 months an additional 240 beds have been opened of which:

- 148 opened by end quarter 4 2017; as detailed in Table 1
- 92 opened by end quarter 3 2018, as detailed in Table 2

A further 79 additional beds are planned for quarter 4 2018 and early 2019, as detailed in Table 3.

Table 3 does not take account of the impact of the €10 million in funding in Budget 2019 to increase acute bed capacity in line with the recommendations of the Health Service Capacity Review. My Department is currently in discussions with the HSE, in the context of the National Service Plan 2019, to identify the sites for investment and the associated number of beds, as part of an agreed capacity programme for 2019.

Table 1 - Q4 2017 Acute Beds

Hospital Group	Hospital	Type of bed	Number of beds
RCSI	Our Lady of Lourdes Drogheda	Acute beds (part of new bed block)	25
RCSI	Beaumont Hospital	Acute beds	20
Dublin Midlands	St James' Hospital	Acute beds	23
Dublin Midlands	Naas General Hospital	Acute beds	11
Ireland East	The Mater Hospital	Acute beds	24
Saolta	Galway University Hospital	Acute beds	28
UL	Limerick University Hospital	Short Stay beds	17
Total			148

Table 2: Q1 - Q3 2018 Acute Beds

Hospital Group	Hospital	Type of bed	Number of beds
Ireland East	St Vincent's Hospital	Acute beds	22
Ireland East	Mater Misericordiae University Hospital	HDU beds	2
Ireland East	St Luke's Hospital Kilkenny	Acute beds	14

Hospital Group	Hospital	Type of bed	Number of beds
RCSI	Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital Drogheda	Acute beds (part of new ward block)	4
South South West	Cork University Hospital	Acute beds	30
South South West	Cork University hospital	Critical care beds	2
South South West	Waterford University Hospital	Acute beds	18
Total			92

Table 3: Planned beds - Q4 2018 and early 2019

Hospital Group	Hospital	Type of bed	Number of beds
Ireland East	Mater	ICU	1 (2018)
Ireland East	Mater	HDU	4 (early 2019)
South South West	Cork	HDU	4 (Q1 2019)
South South West	South Tipperary General Hospital	Acute beds (additional modular ward)	40 (2019)
RCSI	Our Lady of Lourdes Drogheda	Acute beds (additional ward)	30 (early 2019)
Total			79

Hospital Beds Data

431. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of new acute beds he plans to open in 2019; the locations of those beds; the breakdown of those beds by type, for example, ICU, HDU, ward and rehab; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43644/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Improving access to health care services is a key priority in 2019. In the first quarter of 2019, in the region of 80 additional beds will be brought on stream, including an additional 30-bed ward in Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital Drogheda, a 40-bed modular ward block in South Tipperary General Hospital and 4 high dependency beds in the Mater and Cork University Hospital respectively. In addition, the new ED planned for Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital Drogheda is due to open early in 2019.

Furthermore, €10 million in funding is being made available in 2019 to enable additional acute beds to be opened for winter 2019/2020. This is the first step in the implementation of the Capacity Plan, which has identified over 600 acute beds to be phased in between 2018 and 2020. My Department is currently engaging with the HSE to finalise the details of this investment.

Healthcare Infrastructure Provision

432. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health his plans to include funding to upgrade the Rotunda Hospital in the capital plan in view of ongoing multi-year delays in a new campus being built; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43645/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Health Service Executive is respon-

sible for the delivery of healthcare infrastructure projects, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly in relation to this matter.

Hospital Accommodation Provision

433. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the preparations being made to increase acute hospital capacity in winter 2018-2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43646/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My Department is working closely with the HSE to ensure that local and regional winter plans at hospital and local level are consolidated and supported through policies and plans at national level to ensure the most effective response to the winter challenges to unscheduled care provision. As part of Budget 2019, an additional €10 million in funding is being provided for once-off initiatives in 2018 to manage the known increase in demand that our hospital services will experience in the coming months, with a focus on supporting patients in the over 75 age group.

In the first quarter of 2019, in the region of 80 additional beds will be brought on stream, including an additional 30-bed ward in Our Lady of Lourdes Drogheda, a 40-bed modular ward block in South Tipperary General Hospital, and four high dependency beds in the Mater and Cork University Hospital respectively. In addition, the new ED planned for Our Lady of Lourdes Drogheda is due to open early in 2019.

Furthermore, €10 million in funding is being made available in 2019 to enable additional acute beds to be opened for Winter 2019/2020. This is the first step in the implementation of the Capacity Plan, which has identified over 600 acute beds to be phased in between 2018 and 2020. My Department is currently engaging with the HSE to finalise the details of this investment.

HSE National Service Plan

434. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health when the 2019 HSE service plan will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43647/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As provided for under legislation (Health Act 2004 as amended), my Department must write to the Health Service Executive to notify it of its allocation for 2019 not later than 21 days after the publication by the Government of the Estimates for Public Services. The legislation further provides that, on receipt of the letter of determination, the Executive has 21 days to prepare and submit its Service Plan for 2019 for my approval. The Health Act allows me to extend the period provided to the HSE to prepare, adopt and submit its Service Plan, if required. I understand that work is already underway within the HSE on the 2019 National Service Plan and I can state that the letter of determination issued from my Department on 17th October, 2018.

Following the submission of the draft National Service Plan, the legislation provides 21 days for me to examine the proposed plan and where necessary to seek amendment to, or approve, the plan. The National Service Plan must be laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas within 21 days of its approval. Once the Service Plan is laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas the HSE will ensure it is published at the earliest possible time.

Health Services Staff Remuneration

435. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health his views on whether the provision of health care is being undermined by reduced salaries for those recruited since 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43648/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Government remains committed to the recruitment and retention of health service personnel. Notwithstanding recruitment and retention challenges, the number of consultants and nurses employed in the public health services have increased overall.

The Public Service Pay Commission recently concluded a review in respect of key health service grades, including nurses and midwives and consultants and its Report was published on 4 September. For consultants, in terms of pay, it identified the two-tier pay system as being one of number of factors affecting recruitment and found that the differential in pay between pre-existing and new entrant consultants is greater than that for other categories of public servants. The Commission proposed that the Parties to the Public Service Stability Agreement jointly consider what further measures could be taken, over time, to address this difficulty.

In terms of nurses and midwives, it found the recruitment and retention issues to be multi-factorial and not solely due to pay. It recommended increases to a number of allowances and reducing the time to progress to senior staff nurse. These will benefit approximately 18,000 nurses.

Separate to this, agreement has also been reached on the new entrant salary scale for those recruited into the public service since 2012. This will benefit all health care staff who are signed up to the Public Service Stability Agreement. It is hoped that this range of measures will ultimately assist in improving recruitment to the public health service.

Disability Services Data

436. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the waiting time to assessment and to access therapies for children with special needs by county or by the smallest available geographic breakdown if county level data is not available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43649/18]

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.

General Practitioner Services

437. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health his plans in relation to general practitioner recruitment and retention over the next five years (details supplied). [43308/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Government is aware of workforce issues facing general practice, including the influence of demographic factors, and has implemented a number of measures to improve recruitment and retention in general practice.

GPs play a crucial role in the provision of primary care services. The number of GPs on the specialist register continues to increase – up from 2,270 in 2010 to 3,668 in 2018 and the number of GPs with a GMS contract has also risen from 2,098 in 2008 to 2,494 as at 1 July 2018.

GP training places have been increased from 120 in 2009 to 193 in 2018 and the Government's objective is to continue to achieve annual increases in the number of training places available while ensuring that all of the places are filled.

Entry provisions to the GMS scheme have been changed to accommodate more flexible GMS contracts and the retirement age has been extended to 72. An enhanced support package for rural practices has been introduced with improved qualifying criteria and an increased financial allowance of €20,000 per annum.

The Government remains committed to the continued development of GP capacity to ensure that patients across the country continue to have access to GP services and that general practice remains an attractive career option.

Health Services Reports

438. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health the reason the Central Island Healthcare review has still not been published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43574/18]

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

Autism Support Services

439. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health if appropriate funding will be provided for autism assistance dogs in view of the fact that at present they receive no HSE funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43531/18]

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.

Mobility Allowance

440. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health his plans to replace the mobility allowance and motorised transport grant withdrawn in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38836/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Deputy will be familiar with the background to the closure of both the Mobility Allowance and Motorised Transport Grant schemes in February 2013.

My colleague, the Minister for Health and I brought a Memorandum to Government on proposals for a new Transport Support Payment Scheme towards the end of the last Dáil session. Following consideration of the matter, it was decided to withdraw the Memorandum from the Cabinet Agenda at the time. A new Transport Support Payment Scheme remains a priority and we intend to revert to Government with revised proposals to reflect the discussions at that Cabinet meeting and further discussions between ourselves, in due course.

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

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

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

Health Services Expenditure

441. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the full extent of the health expenditure overrun in 2018 and in each of the previous years back to when annual overruns became a feature of costs in the health services including the operation of the health boards; if a particular feature has emerged which might point to the most common cause of overruns; if it is applicable to specific sectors or disciplines; if specific action has been taken at year end with a view to arresting the trend; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43663/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): A number of areas within the HSE are contributing to the overspend in 2018:

1. A private patient income shortfall, arising from the campaign by the PHI to dissuade their policyholders from using their insurance when admitted through an ED
2. Non-achievement of the tranche 3 of the VIP programme

3. Higher level of State Claims Agency payouts than budgeted for
4. PCRS driven by costs and demand for drugs (especially Hi Tech and LTI)
5. Higher level of spend on national reform projects
- 6 Higher level of spend on service areas (Acute and Social Care)
7. Other smaller items, such as overseas treatment, winter response

The overspend in the service areas is driven by a number of factors, including non-achievement of VIP tranche 2, higher levels and higher complexity of demand, costs associated with meeting national standards, emergency placement over level funded.

Over the last 5 years, the Health sector received the following supplementary estimates:

- 2017 - €195m
- 2016 - €600m (not an official supplementary, included in 2016 Health allocation, approved by the Oireachtas)
- 2015 - €665m
- 2014 - €680m
- 2013 - €219m

There are a number of key drivers that contribute to the increases in expenditure in recent years in the health service. These are;

- **Aging demographics:** The population in Ireland over 65 years per the CSO census data has increased 54% since 1996. Both the numbers and the age profile within the over 65yrs are contributing factors. The number of the population aged 85 and over has increased 95% from 1996 to 2016 or over 32k (Source: CSO census).

- **Increase in co-morbidities:** Due to the continuous improvements in health delivery more people are living longer with more illnesses, but they require increased ongoing support from the health system e.g. diabetes, dementia

- **Regulation:** There are almost 1100 designated centres in disability services that require to be registered under the National standards for residential and respite for adults and children with a disability. There are 25 designated centres remaining to be registered by HIQA. A significant element of the overrun has arisen following HIQA inspections of a designated centre and the recommendations for improvements required to be implemented prior to achieving registration.

- **Emergency Residential Places:** The Community Healthcare Organisations prioritized 790 individuals in 2017 who require an immediate service response in terms of new residential placements to be provided to meet identified waiting list. An analysis of the waiting lists highlighted the Death or Incapacity of the main carer which accounts for 29.5% of total cases. Such immediate priorities frequently lead to a bed-blocking situation in local respite services, which has the knock-on implication of reducing dramatically the overall quantum of respite available to non-residential service users within the CHO area. Almost two-thirds of required residential placements (65.5%) are for individuals who require supports to be delivered at high support staffing levels and frequently at 1:1 or above. The majority of new placements are commissioned from private providers as there is minimal capacity available in the public system.

- **State Claims Agency:** An actuarial assessment for potential claims under the Clinical Indemnity Scheme is prepared annually by the State Claims Agency and a determination is taken with regard to the level of funding that will be required by year end. As the year end position is an estimate it can come in under or over budget. In the last few years it has come in over budget, this is typically due to settlement of cases prior to the courts closing at year end. The increasing cost of settlements is determined by the court system and not within the remit of the health system.

- **Drugs:** The main drivers behind this is the expenditure on new High Tech drugs, in areas such as cystic fibrosis, rheumatology, and cancer drugs, increased spend on drugs on the Long Term Illness scheme e.g. diabetes, cystic fibrosis, epilepsy and General Medical Services Drugs & Pharmacy costs.

Pensions: Health is one of the few public services which has its pension costs reflected in its Vote; changes to pension rates, and the fact that pensioners are living longer has resulted in a significant increase in the share of the health vote which is attributable to pensions.

- **Pay :** The growth in both staff numbers, pay rate premia and underlying pay costs linked to Workplace Relations Commission agreements.

It is important to note that growth in health expenditure is a feature of all health systems and is not unique to Ireland.

Medicinal Products Supply

442. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if a required medical product will be supplied to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43664/18]

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

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

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

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

The decision to introduce a new reimbursement approval process is a matter for the HSE.

However, I fully support the objectives of the HSE Medicines Management Programme.

Hospital Beds Data

443. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when the short stay ward in Letterkenny University Hospital will be open; the number of beds which will be opened in 2018; the plans in budget 2019 that included this opening; the number of beds that will be opened in 2019 and 2020; if they will be open on a permanent basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43668/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Arising from the recommendations in the Health Service Capacity Review, my Department engaged with the HSE this year to identify the location and mix of beds across the hospital system which could be frontloaded to address pressures being experienced in our hospital Emergency Departments.

This process culminated in the development by the HSE of a Capacity Plan, which identified over 600 acute beds and 290 residential care beds, to be phased in between 2018 and 2020, including a 20-bed short stay ward in Letterkenny University Hospital.

As a first step towards the implementation of the Capacity Plan, €10 million in funding is being made available in 2019 to prepare the ground for opening additional acute beds for winter 2019/2020. My Department is currently engaging with the HSE to finalise the details of this investment.

Ambulance Service

444. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43681/18]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

445. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) will be called for a surgery. [43683/18]

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

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

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

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

446. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding scoliosis surgery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43686/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The long-term strategy to develop sustainable scoliosis services from 2018 has been prioritised by the Department and the HSE. The Children's Hospital Group, with the additional €9 million provided to the HSE in 2018, has continued to progress the move toward the implementation of a long-term sustainable and safe paediatric orthopaedic service, including scoliosis services for children and young people.

Figures for the end of September for the full scoliosis waiting list breakdown, for both spinal fusion and spinal other, are provided for the Deputy below. In terms of capacity, Children's Hospital Group (CHG) aims to deliver 446 procedures this year, compared to 371 in 2017, and 224 in 2016. This represents an increase in activity of 99.5% since 2016.

End September

Spinal Fusion	OLCHC	Temple Street	Cappagh	Totals
Active	51	6	2	59
Planned	2	0	0	2
TCI	1	1	9	11
Suspended	15	9	2	26
Total	69	16	13	98
Spinal Other	OLCHC	Temple Street	Cappagh	
Active	27	2	0	29
Planned	11	18	0	29
TCI	4	6	0	10
Suspended	9	2	0	11
Total	51	28	0	79
Fusion & Other	120	44	13	177

Question No. 447 answered with Question No. 408.

Hospital Waiting Lists

448. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding a medical procedure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43689/18]

450. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding waiting lists; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[43695/18]

451. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding waiting lists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43702/18]

453. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons aged 16 to 21 years of age waiting for spinal surgery in the Mater Hospital; the wait times experienced by these children and young adults; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43705/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 448, 450, 451 and 453 together.

The long-term strategy to develop sustainable scoliosis services from 2018 has been prioritised by the Department and the HSE. The Children's Hospital Group, with the additional €9 million provided to the HSE in 2018, has continued to progress the move toward the implementation of a long-term sustainable and safe paediatric orthopaedic service, including scoliosis services for children and young people.

In terms of capacity, Children's Hospital Group (CHG) aims to deliver 446 procedures this year, compared to 371 in 2017, and 224 in 2016. This represents an increase in activity of 99.5% since 2016.

In terms of the operational issues raised by the Deputy, including wait times for first spinal assessments; waiting times for growth rod insertion; MRI wait times at OLCCH and TSCUH; and the number of those between the ages of 16-21 at MMUH, I have asked the HSE to prepare a direct response.

Treatment Abroad Scheme

449. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding scoliosis surgeries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43691/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Last year, the HSE published the Scoliosis Waiting List Update and Service Development Plan, which addressed treatment for children requiring corrective surgery for scoliosis. The approach set out in the Plan included insourcing of surgical procedures in the Children's Hospital Group (CHG), and the broader public hospital sector, as well as outsourcing initiatives, including private providers nationally and abroad.

In 2017, as part of the outsourcing initiative, families were offered the opportunity to have their child's surgery abroad. CHG advise that in total as part of this initiative 28 patients have had their treatment abroad and that arrangements have been agreed with services in the UK to undertake follow up reviews to ensure those children who received outsourced surgery in the UK receive appropriate follow up care as per the agreed protocol. This will include face to face outpatient clinics in Our Lady's Children's Hospital Crumlin, in addition to phone call and Skype follow up, if needed. These reviews are scheduled according to the patient's clinical care plan.

This year a small number of families were offered the opportunity to have their child's surgery abroad but did not avail of the offer as they did not want to travel abroad. One child did have surgery abroad in 2018; this was a procedure that was due to have taken place in 2017, but

which was deferred until 2018.

The CHG advise that the €9 m investment in paediatric orthopaedics this year, which includes scoliosis services, has already improved access for surgery and outpatient review. By September 2018 there had been a reduction of 26% in the waiting times experienced to access surgery since the start of the year. This year the CHG aims to deliver 446 procedures, compared to 371 in 2017, and 224 in 2016.

Questions Nos. 450 and 451 answered with Question No. 448.

Hospital Waiting Lists Action Plans

452. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to carry out an independent clinical review of scoliosis services for children here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43704/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The long-term strategy to develop sustainable scoliosis services from 2018 has been prioritised by the Department and the HSE in the 2018 HSE National Service Plan. An additional €9 million has been provided to the HSE in 2018 specifically to develop paediatric orthopaedic services, including further increasing access to scoliosis services.

In September my Department and I met with the Deputy Director General of the HSE and the CEO of the Children's Hospital Group to discuss their short term and long-term plans to provide a better service for patients and their families.

The increased investment in scoliosis has brought stability to the service and the current capacity for services has expanded. The Children's Hospital Group advises that 446 procedures will be delivered this year, compared to 371 in 2017, and 224 in 2016. This represents a doubling of activity since 2016.

Waiting list figures for 12 October show 130 patients waiting; this includes patients who have been asked to come in for a procedure, those who have been given a date for a procedure in the near future, and those who are waiting for a date for a procedure. This represents a reduction of 61, or 32%, in comparison to the same week last year, when the list stood at 191 patients.

Question No. 453 answered with Question No. 448.

Ombudsman for Children Reports

454. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Health the reason recommendations made by the Ombudsman for Children contained in the report on scoliosis, *Waiting For Scoliosis Treatment A Children's Rights Issue*, have not been implemented to date, including the meeting of four month targets for scoliosis surgery in accordance with international best practice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43706/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The development of a sustainable scoliosis service has been prioritised by my Department and the HSE in 2018. An additional €9 million was provided to the Children's Hospital Group in 2018, to support the development and implementation of a sustainable and safe paediatric orthopaedic service for children and young people.

The Ombudsman for Children published their report, 'Waiting for Scoliosis Treatment; A Children's Rights Issue' in March 2017. In August 2018 the Ombudsman for Children published an update on their initial report which welcomed actions taken to generate improvements in scoliosis services, such as the increase in the number of surgeries that take place, fewer children waiting over 12 months for surgery, increased capacity, and additional resources. The Ombudsman has met with me and my Department, as well as other stakeholders, in relation to this matter, and consequently has stated that there is a clear and absolute commitment from all involved to address the matter of scoliosis in the best interest of the children.

While the most recent update welcomed the improvements in scoliosis services, the Ombudsman's August update also pressed for the need of continued action to address waiting lists for initial assessment, access to diagnostics, and increased treatment activity, and my Department continues to work with the Children's Hospital Group to ensure that these issues are addressed, that activity levels continue to increase, and that waiting lists are reduced.

The CHG advise that the investment in paediatric orthopaedics this year, which includes scoliosis services, has already improved access for surgery and outpatient review. By September 2018 there had been a reduction of 26% in the waiting times experienced to access surgery since the start of the year. This year the CHG aims to deliver 447 procedures, compared to 371 in 2017, and 224 in 2016.

Hospital Services

455. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the safeguarding of children in the HSE in regard to their elective spinal surgeries; the way in which he plans to ensure that a lack of capacity and beds over the winter months will not lead to cancelled surgeries for children that are on a list for spinal surgery in the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43707/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The long-term strategy to develop sustainable scoliosis services from 2018 has been prioritised by the Department and the HSE. The Children's Hospital Group, with the additional €9 million provided to the HSE in 2018, has continued to progress the move toward the implementation of a long-term sustainable and safe paediatric orthopaedic service, including scoliosis services for children and young people.

In terms of capacity, Children's Hospital Group (CHG) aims to deliver 446 procedures this year, compared to 371 in 2017, and 224 in 2016. This represents an increase in activity of 99.5% since 2016.

In relation to the safeguarding of beds for elective spinal surgeries for scoliosis patients, as this is a service matter I have asked the HSE to respond the Deputy directly.

Counselling Services Provision

456. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if he will review a matter (details supplied) with a view to extending the hours and finance being made available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43720/18]

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

Local Authority Funding

457. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health the categories of funding available to local authorities through his Department; the amount of funding provided for each scheme in 2016 and 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43732/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): There is no scheme through my Department that provides funding to local authorities.

Services for People with Disabilities

458. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health when the HSE will roll out the recommendations in the national policy and strategy for the provision of neurorehabilitation services in Ireland 2011-2015. [43753/18]

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.

Health Services Data

459. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the number of children waiting to see a community ophthalmic physician in County Kildare; the number waiting longer than one year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43759/18]

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.

Health Services Data

460. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the number of children waiting to see a community ophthalmic physician in County Laois; the number waiting longer than one year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43760/18]

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

461. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the length of time a person is waiting for an assessment with the NDT team in south County Kildare; the number of children waiting; the number waiting over one year; and the reason for delays in assessment. [43761/18]

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.

General Practitioner Services Provision

462. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the procedures by which a family in an area has no family general practitioner in view of the fact the general practices in the area are not taking on additional patients; the position regarding the HSE allocating a particular general practitioner to the family; if there is a requirement on general practitioners to take up these allocations from the HSE; the period of time this lasts for; if the general practitioner is free to discharge the family from the practitioner's practice after a six month period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43764/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Where a medical card or GP visit card holder experiences difficulty in finding a GP to accept him/her as a patient, the HSE has the power to assign that person to a GP's GMS patient list where the person has been removed from another GP's list or refused entry onto a GP's list, and the person has unsuccessfully applied to at least three GPs in the area who are contracted to provide services under the GMS scheme.

The assignment of a GMS patient to a GP's list can be reviewed by the HSE on the request of the GP after 6 months from the date of assignment, and, if appropriate, the patient can then be reassigned to an alternative GP.

Persons who do not hold a medical card or GP visit card access GP services on a private basis.

GPs are private contractors and issues relating to the acceptance of private patients are a matter of private contract between the clinician and his/her patients. While I have no role in relation to such matters, I would expect clinicians to consider the importance of patients having access to a GP service close to home when deciding whether or not to accept private patients.

Hospital Waiting Lists Action Plans

463. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the targets in place for reducing outpatient waiting times in Naas General Hospital in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43765/18]

464. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the outpatient waiting times in Naas General Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43766/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 463 and 464 together.

In Budget 2019 the Government has prioritised improving access and reducing waiting

times for patients, with funding to the National Treatment Purchase fund (NTPF) increasing from €55 million in 2018 to €75 million in 2019, of which, €6 million will be committed to outpatient activity.

To date in 2018, the NTPF has approved almost 12,700 additional first-time outpatient appointments and this is projected to increase to 40,000 appointments next year. I recently met with the CEOs of all hospital groups to discuss improving access for patients and requested that they work with the NTPF and HSE in 2019 develop innovative proposals to address the number of long waiters on outpatient lists in 2019.

In addition, the Central Waiting List Validation function, which was established in the NTPF last month, will deliver a standardised approach to validation across all hospitals in line with best patient-centred practices. This new function will have many benefits including the identification of patients on waiting lists who are ready and available to proceed with hospital care, the reduction in the Did Not Attend rate (DNA), and an improvement in information for managing waiting lists. The NTPF estimates that 30,000 patients who no longer require treatment will come off the outpatient waiting list in 2019 as a result of this activity.

The data on Outpatient waiting times in Naas General Hospital, sought by the Deputy is outlined below:

There are currently 8,131 patients on Outpatient waiting list in Naas General Hospital, and of these 55% are waiting 9 months or less. 1,042 patients on the Outpatient list have received an appointment date.

Specialties in Naas General Hospital, with high numbers of patients waiting include, Dermatology (1,576), General Medicine (1,894), Cardiology (1,284) and Orthopaedics (2,122).

Outpatient Waiting times in Naas General Hospital

0-3 Months	3-6 Months	6-9 Months	9-12 Months	12-15 Months	15-18 Months	18+ Months	Total
2355	1285	860	798	605	571	1657	8131

Speech and Language Therapy Provision

465. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding speech and language therapy at a school (details supplied) in County Sligo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43768/18]

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.

Primary Care Centres Provision

466. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the status of the planned primary care centre for Ballaghaderreen, County Roscommon; if a site has been chosen for this development; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43780/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the HSE has responsibility for the provision, along with the maintenance and operation of Primary Care Centres and other Primary Care facilities, the Executive has been asked to reply directly to the Deputy.

Medical Card Applications

467. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health when a decision will issue in relation to an application for a medical card by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43786/18]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

468. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Clare will receive an appointment in Croom Hospital, County Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43790/18]

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.

Cancer Screening Programmes

469. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43792/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Deputy may be aware, I have also received the attached correspondence and I expect that a reply will issue from my office in the coming days.

In relation to the issue of turnaround time for smear tests, the HSE advises that Cervical-Check laboratory activity remains significantly above normal levels. This is a result both of

out-of-cycle smears, and also increased uptake generally. This has impacted turnaround times for results of smear tests. The HSE also advises that every effort is being made to ensure that tests are processed as quickly as possible, having regard to the high standards required for testing. This is a priority concern for my Department and the HSE. The recent agreements reached with the contracted labs include arrangements to address the backlog in testing.

It is important to emphasise that smear tests are a screening and not a diagnostic process, and if any woman is concerned or is experiencing any symptoms, she should consult with her GP.

In addition to MedLab Pathology Laboratory, services for CervicalCheck are also provided by Quest Diagnostics in the USA and the Coombe Women and Infants University Hospital in Dublin. Under the terms of their contract with CervicalCheck, MedLab can redirect tests to other laboratories within their group at times when they are experiencing increased demand. This includes The Doctors' Laboratory in London (TDL).

As part of his Scoping Inquiry into CervicalCheck, Dr Gabriel Scally visited all laboratories which currently provide services for CervicalCheck, including TDL. His report was published on the website of my Department on 12 September. Dr Scally has stated that he is satisfied with the quality management processes in the current laboratory sites and found no reason, on quality grounds, why the existing contracts for laboratory services should not continue until the new HPV testing regime has been introduced. This provides very welcome reassurance for women in Ireland.

I would like to assure the Deputy that I place a very high priority on women's health. I am committed to returning to Government within three months, as recommended by Dr Scally, with a full plan for the implementation of his recommendations. Development of this plan is underway, overseen by the CervicalCheck Steering Committee, which I established in June.

Hospital Appointments Status

470. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive a date for a surgery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43795/18]

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.

Cancer Research

471. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the amount and type of investment in pancreatic cancer research here; his plans to co-operate with other countries fighting the disease; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43848/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): It is not currently possible to quantify the amount of investment across all areas of pancreatic cancer research, which can span clinical trials, epidemiological studies of causes and outcomes, and laboratory based research. The funding sources for such research include the Health Research Board and Science Foundation Ireland, cancer charities and pharmaceutical company funded clinical trials.

In line with the National Cancer Strategy 2017-2026, a National Cancer Research Group is currently being established. The Group will improve co-ordination and oversight of cancer research nationally and provide a forum for the agreement of research priorities. The Group will also seek to achieve continuity of funding and to ensure that funding allocations are linked to the agreed research priorities.

Hospital Facilities

472. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Health his plans to reopen the short-stay unit at Letterkenny University Hospital; the timeline for the reopening of the unit; the number of beds planned for same; the timeframe for the recruitment of the new staff required for the short stay unit; if a budget has been ring-fenced for the unit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43861/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Arising from the recommendations in the Health Service Capacity Review, my Department engaged with the HSE this year to identify the location and mix of beds across the hospital system which could be frontloaded to address pressures being experienced in our hospital Emergency Departments.

This process culminated in the development by the HSE of a Capacity Plan, which identified over 600 acute beds and 290 residential care beds, to be phased in between 2018 and 2020, including a 20-bed short stay ward in Letterkenny University Hospital.

As a first step towards the implementation of the Capacity Plan, €10 million in funding is being made available in 2019 to prepare the ground for opening additional acute beds for winter 2019/2020. My Department is currently engaging with the HSE to finalise the details of this investment.

Hospital Facilities

473. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Health his plans to upgrade Croom Orthopaedic Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43867/18]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

474. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which a chain of command exists within the health service in respect of each discipline with particular refer-

ence to the need to ensure the abolition of waiting lists and/or identification of their case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43924/18]

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

This year has seen ongoing improvements with the number of patients waiting for inpatient and day case procedures (IPDC), now at 72,700 from the peak of 86,100 in July 2017, amounting to a 16% reduction. The number of patients waiting over 9 months has reduced from over 28,000 to under 19,200 in the same period equating to a 32% reduction.

In Budget 2019 the Government has further increased investment in this area, with funding to the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) to increase from €55m in 2018 to €75m in 2019.

In 2019, the NTPF plans to deliver 25,000 Inpatient Day Case treatments, building on the 20,000 procedures delivered in 2018. In addition, 5,000 Gastro Intestinal Scopes will be carried out, bringing to 9,000 the additional scope activity provided by the NTPF since the start of 2018. Furthermore, 40,000 Outpatient appointments will be arranged as part of 2019 activity. It is expected that as a result of validation a further 34,000 patients will be removed from the waiting lists by the NTPF Central Validation Unit.

My Department is working closely with the NTPF and the HSE to finalise a coherent Waiting List Action Plan for 2019 before the end of this year. The priority of my Department is to maintain a seamless continuation of the considerable progress made this year into next year.

More broadly, the Sláintecare Implementation Strategy, which was published on 8th August 2018, provides the framework within which a system-wide reform programme will be advanced. It is a further step in the detailed implementation process for this programme and sets out four overarching goals and ten high-level strategic actions which will be the key focus for the first three years of the reform programme. At its core, the strategy focuses on establishing the building blocks for a significant shift in the way in which health services are delivered in Ireland.

The recent Budget provided an increase of €1.05 billion in Health funding. This brings the health budget for 2019 to €17 billion. This is the highest level of Health investment in the history of the State. This will allow the health service to meet additional demands due to the demographic pressure of a growing and ageing population. The additional funding provided as part of Budget 2019 will directly support a range of additional services including initiatives proposed in the Sláintecare Report and committed to in the Sláintecare Implementation Strategy.

Cancer Screening Programmes

475. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health his plans for the elimination of the backlog and waiting lists for women awaiting the results of cervical smear tests; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43925/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): On 30 April last, I announced that any woman who had had a CervicalCheck smear test, and whose GP considered that they should have a further test, could access such a test without charge. This decision was taken in the context of the need to provide reassurance to women in light of the media attention surrounding CervicalCheck. I am advised by the HSE that current CervicalCheck laboratory activity remains significantly above normal levels. This is a result both of out-of-cycle smears, and also increased

uptake in the screening programme generally. This has impacted turnaround times for results of smear tests.

The HSE advises that every effort is being made to ensure that tests are processed as quickly as possible, having regard to the high standards required for testing. This is a priority concern for my Department and the HSE.

Heads of Agreement have now been signed with the contracted labs to extend their contracts pending the introduction of HPV testing as the primary screening test, and these include arrangements to address the backlog in testing.

It is important to emphasise that smear tests are a screening test and not a diagnostic one, and if any woman is concerned or is experiencing any symptoms, she should consult with her GP.

Hospital Waiting Lists

476. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which it has been found possible to identify the precise issues within the health services that continue to cause delays and long waiting lists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43926/18]

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. Improving waiting times for hospital procedures is a key commitment in the Programme for Government. Investing in additional capacity, including beds and theatre space; the progression of recruitment and retention of staff; the delivery of the NDP project, including dedicated elective only hospitals and the ambitious reform agenda in the Sláintecare Report will improve waiting times and access for patients.

In the recent Budget the Government further increased investment to tackle hospital waiting lists, with funding to the NTPF to increase from €55m in 2018 to €75m in 2019.

The latest Waiting list figures for September, published by the NTPF show that the number of patients on the inpatient and daycase waiting list now stands at 72,700. This represents a 16% reduction in the overall number of patients waiting for an inpatient or day case procedure from a peak of 86,100 in July 2017. The number of patients waiting over 9 months has reduced from over 28,100 to under 19,200 in the same period equating to a 32% reduction.

While the total numbers on the Outpatient waiting list continues to grow, a targeted approach by the HSE and Hospital Groups in late 2017 and into 2018 has impacted on the level of growth. The period January-September 2017 saw growth of almost 57,800 while growth has reduced to 14,800 in the same period in 2018. In addition, the NTPF is working closely with Hospital Groups inviting proposals to facilitate the trialling of funded interventions, and at the end of September had approved almost 12,700 outpatient appointments.

In addition, the recent Budget provided an increase of €1.05 billion in Health funding. This brings the health budget for 2019 to €17 billion. This is the highest level of Health investment in the history of the State and will allow the health service to meet additional demands due to the demographic pressure of a growing and ageing population. The additional funding provided as part of Budget 2019 will directly support a range of additional services including initiatives proposed in the Sláintecare Report and committed to in the Sláintecare Implementation Strategy. Sláintecare will focus on meeting the demand for health care that our population currently has, and which will continue to grow in future years.

Medical Card Eligibility

477. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the reason it remains consistently difficult to obtain discretionary full medical cards for cancer patients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43927/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE's Expert Group on Medical Need and Medical Card Eligibility examined the issue of awarding medical cards on the basis of illness and concluded that it was not feasible, desirable, nor ethically justifiable to list medical conditions in priority order for medical card eligibility. The Expert Group also concluded that a person's means should remain the main qualifier for a medical card. This position remains unchanged.

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

With regard to persons suffering from cancer and other serious medical conditions the HSE also has a system in place for the provision of medical cards in response to emergency situations i.e. in circumstances where persons are in need of urgent or on-going medical care that they cannot afford and also for persons in palliative care who are terminally ill. These medical cards are issued within 24 hours of receipt of the required patient details and a letter which confirms the medical condition from a doctor or consultant. With the exception of terminally ill patients, all medical cards, granted on an emergency basis, are followed up with a full application within a number of weeks.

I would also like to note that since 1 July 2015, the HSE adopted the position that all children under 18 years of age with a diagnosis of cancer are awarded a medical card. This card is valid for a period of 5 years.

Emergency Departments Waiting Times

478. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the degree to which adequate provision is being made at various hospitals nationally to ensure that patients waiting on trolleys are reduced to the minimum; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43928/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I wish to acknowledge the distress overcrowded EDs cause to patients, their families and frontline staff working in very challenging working conditions in hospitals throughout the country.

This Government remains committed to tackling overcrowding in EDs and improving access to health services. Preparations and planning for Winter 2018-19 are well advanced at hospital and local level. The Department of Health is working with the HSE to ensure that these local and regional plans are consolidated and supported through policies and plans at national level to ensure the most effective response to the winter challenges to unscheduled care provi-

sion.

As part of Budget 2019, an additional €10m in funding is being provided in 2018 to anticipate and manage critical demand pressures for health service, most particularly in respect of emergency pressures in the initial and latter parts of the year. This funding will focus on initiatives to enable the hospital system to de-escalate before Christmas. Supporting patients in the over 75 age group will be a priority, with measures to respond to surge in demand with home support packages, transitional care beds, GP out-of-hours and aids and appliances to support the journey home of patients following a hospital stay.

I have asked that there be a significant uplift in the provision of social care measures to promote hospital discharging in the first quarter of 2019 in response to the expected surge in demand after the Christmas period.

Improving access to health services is a key priority in 2019. In the first quarter of 2019, in the region of 80 additional beds will be brought on stream, including an additional 30-bed ward in Our Lady of Lourdes Drogheda, a 40-bed modular ward block in South Tipperary General Hospital, and four high dependency beds in the Mater and Cork University Hospital respectively. In addition, the new ED planned for Our Lady of Lourdes Drogheda is due to open early in 2019.

A further €10 million will be invested next year to enable additional beds to be opened to alleviate pressure on Emergency Departments for Winter 2019/20 and the years ahead, on foot of the recommendations in the Health Service Capacity Review. The Department of Health will finalise the details of this investment, in consultation with the HSE.

Minister Daly has established a Working Group to undertake an independent expert review of delayed discharges, which can impact on patient flow and ED performance. This Group is due to report back to him by October 2018.

School Medical Examinations

479. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which school medical examinations continue to identify health issues; the extent to which a satisfactory follow-up including treatment takes place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43929/18]

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.

Health Services Data

480. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the number of procedures undertaken in the wake of school medical examinations in each of the past three years to date; the degree to which this corresponds with the health issues identified in the course of the examinations in each of the past three years to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43930/18]

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.

Nursing Staff Data

481. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the number of nurses employed throughout the health services; the extent to which numbers have fluctuated over the past three years; the degree to which further augmentation of numbers is required; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43931/18]

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

Hospital Consultant Recruitment

482. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the number of consultants employed throughout the health sector; the number of vacancies remaining to be filled; the extent to which it has been found possible to attract Irish persons from abroad to fill the post; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43932/18]

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

General Practitioner Data

483. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which he remains satisfied regarding the adequacy of the number of general practitioners available nationally in both urban and rural settings; his plans to ensure an even spread of such staff in anticipation of augmentation of the primary care sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43933/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Government is aware of workforce issues facing general practice, including the influence of demographic factors, and has implemented a number of measures to improve recruitment and retention in general practice.

GPs play a crucial role in the provision of primary care services. The number of GPs on the specialist register continues to increase – up from 2,270 in 2010 to 3,668 in 2018 and the number of GPs with a GMS contract has also risen from 2,098 in 2008 to 2,494 as at 1 July 2018.

GP training places have been increased from 120 in 2009 to 193 in 2018 and the Government's objective is to continue to achieve annual increases in the number of training places available while ensuring that all of the places are filled.

Entry provisions to the GMS scheme have been changed to accommodate more flexible GMS contracts and the retirement age has been extended to 72. An enhanced support package for rural practices has been introduced with improved qualifying criteria and an increased financial allowance of €20,000 per annum.

The Government remains committed to the continued development of GP capacity to ensure that patients across the country continue to have access to GP services and that general practice remains an attractive career option.

Home Care Packages

484. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which home

care packages have been developed in the course of the past three years to date; the way in which the costs compare with hospital or nursing home costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43934/18]

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. This allows care to be provided in the community, which is a key principle of the vision of and implementation plan for Sláintecare.

There has been sustained significant investment in these services over the past number of years which has seen the growth in the home support budget from a base of €306m in 2014 to €418m in 2018.

The HSE has begun streamlining home care services by introducing a single funded home support service in 2018. This brings together the funding for home help and standard home care packages which now operates as a single home support service from 2018 onwards. The HSE's 2018 National Service Plan provides for a target of some:

- 17.094m home support hours to be provided to 50,500 people, which compares with last year's 16.34m hours delivered to 50,000 people (home help and home hours combined). This is an increase on 2017 provision of 754,000 hours to 500 more people;

- 235 intensive home support packages will provide 360,000 home support hours for people with complex needs.

A further initiative saw 324 people being provided with Home Support services in the context of the adverse weather earlier this year.

I have asked the HSE to reply directly to the Deputy's query in relation to cost comparisons.

Orthodontic Services Waiting Lists

485. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the number of children in each category awaiting orthodontic treatment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43935/18]

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.

Hospital Staff Data

486. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which an adequate number of junior hospital doctors remain available and on call with particular reference to meeting the challenges of the winter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43936/18]

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

Questions - Written Answers
Health Services Staff Data

487. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which the number of doctors, nurses, consultants and other staff within the public health sector has increased in each of the past three years to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43937/18]

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

Healthcare Infrastructure Provision

488. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when approval will issue for the next phase of development of Naas General Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43938/18]

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.

Primary Care Centres

489. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the degree to which he remains satisfied regarding the extent to which the public health sector is catered for in primary care centres already in operation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43939/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Government is continuing to deliver Primary Care Centres (PCCs) in line with our commitment to expanding primary care services. There are now 124 PCCs in operation, with another 83 sites at various stages of development from early planning to construction.

I have visited many of these centres and have seen first-hand the excellent work being undertaken and the myriad of services being delivered to communities. PCCs help to support the interdisciplinary delivery of care and can enable the seamless and joined up provision of care to patients. In addition to the core GP, nursing and therapy services delivered by Primary Care Teams, a range of additional services are available from PCCs, including child health developmental clinics, counselling services, oral health care, diabetes clinics and much more besides. I would also note that a number of Community Intervention Teams operate from primary care centres.

In addition, the centres can facilitate community engagement and participation through the provision of meetings rooms or group spaces, while the centres also fulfil a key role in terms of facilitating meetings and training for HSE and other public service staff. Clearly, the range and scale of services being provided by and within PCCs is helping to bring care closer to home and is having a positive impact on patient health. The effective utilisation of PCCs will be integral to the future organisation and operation of community-based services envisioned by Sláintecare.

Harbours and Piers Funding

490. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if funding will be provided for a slipway (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43203/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department owns, operates and maintains six designated State-owned Fishery Harbour Centres, located at Castletownbere, Dingle, Dunmore East, Howth, Killybegs and Ros An Mhíl under statute. In addition, my Department also has responsibility for the upkeep and maintenance of North Harbour at Cape Clear, as well as the maintenance of a small number of specific piers, lights and beacons throughout Ireland, in accordance with the 1902 ex-congested Districts Board piers, lights and Beacons Act.

Coornagillagh pier, Tuosist, Co. Kerry is owned by Kerry County Council and responsibility for its maintenance, repair and development rests with Kerry County Council in the first instance.

My Department does provide limited funding to assist coastal Local Authorities in carrying out small scale projects for the development and repair of Local Authority-owned piers, harbours and slipways under the annual Fishery Harbour and Coastal Infrastructure Development Programme, subject to available Exchequer funding and overall national priorities. I have allocated over €2.2m for these purposes under this year's Programme.

Records indicate that my Department did not receive a funding application under the 2018 Programme for Coornagillagh Pier. Should an application be submitted by Kerry County Council in relation to this pier under future programmes, it will be given due consideration taking account of the terms and conditions of the scheme, the priority attached by the Council and available funds.

Land Parcel Identification System

491. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding a person (details supplied) who has received a letter in relation to an overclaim on two parcels; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43226/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The overclaims in this case were identified as part of the standard review of land details contained in the Land Parcel Identification System.

As part of the review process, officials in my Department requested the submission of supporting evidence to determine the eligibility of the land in question. This new information has been received and the resulting review is now complete. The original eligible area has now been restored, and this will be reflected when the balancing payments under the Basic Payment Scheme issue later this year.

Common Fisheries Policy

492. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the regulations in place for fishermen trawling and-or dredging for mussel seeds on the foreshore, off the coast and in areas of special conservation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43236/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): While all Irish

sea-fishing activities operate in the context of the Common Fisheries Policy and its regulations, the fishing of seed mussel by Irish sea-fishing boats is controlled primarily by the following national legislation:

- Sea-Fisheries and Maritime Jurisdiction Act 2006 (No 8 of 2006): Section 13 of this Act provides the Minister with powers to grant authorisations to the owners of fishing boats to fish for fish stocks and to determine for which fish stocks an authorisation is required.

- Determination (No.28) of the Need for an Authorisation for Certain Fish Stocks: This Determination restricts access to certain fish stocks, including mussel seed, to those fishing boats that hold an authorisation for that stock.

- S.I. No. 311 of 2006 – Mussel Seed (Fishing) Regulations 2006: These Regulations set out the conditions that must be complied with by any boat operating in the mussel seed fishery.

- S.I. No. 261 of 2008 – European Communities (Health of Aquaculture Animals and Products) Regulations 2008: These Regulations give effect to Council Directive 2006/88/EC of 24 October 2006 on animal health requirements for aquaculture animals and products thereof, and on the prevention and control of certain diseases in aquatic animals.

- S.I. No. 290 of 2013 – European Union (Birds and Natural Habitats) (Sea-fisheries) Regulations 2013: These Regulations provide for Fisheries Natura Plans for wild fisheries that may impact on Natura 2000 sites, the appropriate assessment of those plans, a process of public and statutory consultation and for the Minister to accept, reject or amend such plans. It provides powers for the Minister to control fishing via a permit system and Fisheries Natura Declarations and further provides for offences and penalties.

- Fisheries Natura Declaration No. 2 of 2018 (Mussel Fishing): This Declaration makes conditional and prohibits fishing for mussels in a number of Natura 2000 sites around the Irish coast.

- Fisheries Natura Declaration No. 1 of 2017 (Castlemaine Harbour): This Declaration sets restrictions on the fishing of mussel seed in Castlemaine Harbour.

- SI 369 of 2018 – Sea-Fisheries and Maritime Jurisdiction (Mussel Seed) (Opening of Fisheries) Regulations 2018: Statutory instruments are used to allow or prohibit fishing for mussel seed. SI 369 of 2018 allows fishing for mussel seed to take place in the exclusive fishery limits of the State from 17 September up to 21 December 2018 inclusive.

Further information concerning sea-fisheries interactions with Special Areas of Conservation and other Natura 2000 sites can be found online at www.fishingnet.ie.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Payments

493. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a farmer (details supplied) in County Clare will receive an ANC payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43266/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): An application under the Areas of Natural Constraints Scheme was received from the person named on 23 April 2018. The processing of this application has been completed and payment will issue to the nominated bank account shortly.

Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme

494. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary for the targeted agricultural modernisation schemes, TAMS II, scheme; the reason for the delay in payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43301/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): No payment can be made to this applicant as he has not yet submitted his payment claim. This has to be submitted on the online TAMS system. As the approval in place will expire on the 25 January 2019 it is important that the claim for payment is submitted prior to this date.

Teagasc Data

495. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of students enrolled in level 5 and 6 green cert in agriculture in each of the years 2010 to 2017 and to date in 2018; the student numbers in each agricultural college in each of the years 2010 to 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43307/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The details requested by the Deputy are an operational matter for Teagasc who deliver the Green Cert.

The Deputy's question has been passed on by my Department to Teagasc who have been requested to respond to the Deputy within 10 days.

Basic Payment Scheme Payments

496. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payments will issue to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43319/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): An application under the 2018 Basic Payments Scheme was received from the person named on 15 May 2018. Application for the Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) scheme is integrated into the Basic Payments Scheme application form and in order to apply for the ANC scheme applicants must tick the appropriate box on the online application form. My Department's records show that in the case of the person named no such tick or indication of application for the ANC scheme was made.

An official from my Department will contact the person named directly in relation to the appropriate next step.

The processing of the Basic Payments Scheme application by the person named has been completed and the advance payment of 70% has issued to his nominated bank account.

Basic Payment Scheme Payments

497. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payments will issue to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[43335/18]

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 12th 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.

Processing of this inspection necessitated the verification of the position on the ground by means of a field visit. This field visit has been completed and the results are currently being processed to finalisation 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.

Agriculture Scheme Appeals

498. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of appeals lodged by farmers on Killery, Crossboy, Dromore and Castleore mountains with respect to land eligibility and burnt land for the purpose of the basic payment scheme 2018 payments; if the lands burnt in 2017 are eligible for the 2018 basic payment scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43349/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The appeals mentioned relate to the eligibility of the burned land under the 2017 Basic Payment Scheme (BPS).

For the 2018 scheme year, all BPS applications were required to be submitted through the Department's online application system. The land details and maps available to BPS applicants on the online system were updated to show the most up to date information available for 2018.

All things being equal the lands in question are eligible under BPS in 2018.

I understand that any appeals received by the Agriculture Appeals Office concerning the mountains mentioned have either been assigned to an Appeals Officer or are in the process of being assigned to an Appeals Officer. I am advised that the oral hearings of those appeals are currently being arranged with the first appeals due for hearing on 24th October. On completion of the appeal process, a comprehensive decision letter will issue to each appellant.

Animal Welfare

499. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason a person (details supplied) has had a departmental official assigned to their farm; the purpose of the placement of this official on their farm; and the reason they have been instructed to make the official aware of activity on the farmland prior to carrying out those activities. [43362/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The farm in question is currently under an on-going Animal Health & Welfare notice, further comment at this time on the matter would not be appropriate.

Ministerial Meetings

500. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the details of engagements, meetings or correspondence that he has had with a person (details supplied) in the past three years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43385/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I wish to advise the Deputy that neither I nor the staff of my Department have had any engagements, meetings or correspondence with the named person (details supplied) in the past three years.

Basic Payment Scheme

501. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when an ANC payment will issue to a person (details supplied); if this will be issued as soon as possible in view of the circumstances; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43439/18]

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 20th April 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.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Payments

502. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if an ANC payment will be issued to a person (details supplied) without further delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43460/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): An application under the Areas of Natural Constraints Scheme was received from the person named on 26 March 2018. The processing of this application has been completed and payment has issued to the nominated bank account.

Brexit Issues

503. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the contingency plans he has drafted in the event of a no-deal Brexit; the interactions and negotiations he has had to date with EU coastal partners on this important matter for the fishing sector here; the engagements he has had to date with the fishing and marine sector specifically on the matter; the further actions he plans to undertake in order to have a robust contingency plan in place should a no-deal scenario result from the Brexit negotiations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43492/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): It is still Gov-

ernment's view that a 'no deal' outcome remains unlikely but we are planning for all scenarios. Ireland's contingency and preparedness planning is well advanced. Government has launched a new Getting Ireland Ready public awareness campaign, with information on the Government's latest preparedness and support measures. Outreach events have already taken place this month in Cork, Galway and Monaghan, with a further event to follow in Dublin (25 October).

I am hopeful that progress can be made in the short-term on both the Ireland-Northern Ireland back-stop and on the framework for the discussions on the future EU-UK relationship, so that they can be incorporated into a Withdrawal Agreement that will provide for a transition period.

Some mitigation measures are already in place while future potential measures have been identified. The implementation of these measures will depend on the outcome of the negotiations.

The Government has introduced a range of measures to deal with the short-term impacts of Brexit. In terms of dealing with Competitiveness issues, my Department introduced a €150 million low-cost loan scheme and increased funding under the Rural Development and Seafood Development Programmes in the 2017 Budget. In Budget 2018, I, along with my colleague, the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, introduced a new €300m "Brexit Loan Scheme" to provide affordable, flexible financing to Irish businesses that are either currently impacted by Brexit or who will be in the future - at least 40% of which will be available to seafood businesses.

I have followed up these measures with further initiatives as part of Budget 2019, which contains a €78 million Brexit package for farmers, fishermen, food SMEs and to cover additional costs in my Department. €7 million has also been provided to support Brexit preparedness work within my Department, namely, to meet the staffing and IT costs associated with the additional import control and export certification requirements arising from Brexit.

In line with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade-coordinated 'whole of Government' approach to Brexit, my Department is planning for an orderly Brexit which involves, inter alia, a transition period. It is very welcome that the European Council has proposed that the whole of the EU acquis - including the Common Fisheries Policy - will apply to the UK during the transition.

Our enterprise agencies are continuing to work with seafood companies to help them to deal with Brexit through making them more competitive, diversifying market exposure, and up-skilling teams.

In recent months, I have continued to have positive, regular meetings with my European colleagues, especially those from the group of 8 Coastal Member States whose fisheries are potentially most impacted by the UK's withdrawal from the EU. I am also working closely with key stakeholders in the Irish fishing industry and am pleased at the level of unity on these key issues. The results of my engagement with the Barnier Task Force, in close collaboration with the Tánaiste are evident in the agreed EU position on fisheries.

My priority has been, and remains, to maintain existing levels of access to waters and resources. However, in a worst case scenario of a disorderly departure in March 2019 those reciprocal arrangements could be endangered. Such issues could not of course be dealt with in isolation from the overall scenario of a disorderly Brexit and any measures taken would have to be carefully considered by ourselves in partnership with relevant Member States, the Task Force and stakeholders.

The actual agreement on a future relationship can only be finalised and concluded once the UK has become a third country, that is, after it leaves the EU on 29 March 2019. This is why a status quo transitional arrangement is so important.

Forestry Sector

504. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a carbon credit can be claimed against forestry (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43633/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): At present, removals of greenhouse gases by forests in Ireland are not linked to meeting our emissions reduction targets up to 2020. In addition, greenhouse gas removals from Irish forests are not included in the Emissions Trading Scheme. Therefore there are no carbon credits associated with forestry that can be traded formally either within Ireland or the EU as a whole.

Knowledge Transfer Programme

505. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his attention has been drawn to problems with issued knowledge transfer payments particularly for partnership farms (details supplied); the steps he will take to rectify the situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43696/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Knowledge Transfer (KT) is one of a suite of measures included under the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 and involves the formation of knowledge transfer groups across the beef, dairy, equine, sheep, tillage and poultry sectors. Farmer participants attend group meetings and produce a Farm Improvement Plan in consultation with their KT Facilitator. For each year of the three year programme participants receive a reimbursement in the amount of €750 for a primary sector and €375 for a secondary sector where all requirements of the programme have been met.

Payments for Year One of the knowledge transfer (KT) programme commenced in late October 2017.

In the initial stages of the payment phase for this programme an issue arose in relation to participants who were in Registered Farm Partnerships. This issue related to the requirement to match the data in the Farm Improvement Plan to the individual farmer participants in the Registered Farm Partnerships. Officials in my Department have since rectified this issue.

To date, over 19,070 out of approximately 19,100 farmer payments, amounting to approximately €12.5m, have issued across all 6 KT Sectors.

The persons named were partners in a Registered Farm Partnership with both participating in the Knowledge Transfer Dairy Programme. The partnership was dissolved in July 2017 impacting on processing of their payments for Year One with part payment issued to one of the persons named. Work is ongoing to finalise this case and issue a balancing payment to the persons named.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Payments

506. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when an areas of natural constraint, ANC, payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43716/18]

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 20th February 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 has been processed and the person named was notified of the initial findings on 18th October 2018. The notification issued outlines the options available at this stage, namely to accept the findings or to submit comments to my Department for consideration. On completion of this process, the inspection outcome will be finalised and any payments due will issue to the nominated bank account of the person named as soon as possible.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Payments

507. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when an areas of natural constraint, ANC, payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43719/18]

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 15th May 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 inspection. This inspection identified over-declarations in area of between 3% and 10% of the area claimed. This resulted in the area determined being reduced by 0.75 times the difference between the area claimed and area determined, as required under the governing EU regulations. A letter detailing the initial inspection findings issued to the person named on 2nd of October 2018. Based on my Department's records no acknowledgement of receipt of or comments were submitted on the inspection findings. Therefore the inspection findings have been processed to finalisation and a letter detailing the final outcome issued on 19th October 2018. In the event that the person named is dissatisfied with the outcome of the inspection they can request a review of this decision within 28 days of the date of this letter.

Payment due under the Areas of Natural Constraints Scheme is now being processed based on the outcome of the inspection and will issue to the nominated bank account of the person named shortly.

Local Authority Funding

508. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the categories of funding available to local authorities through his Department; the amount of funding provided for each scheme in 2016 and 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43722/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department makes funding available to local authorities in respect of a wide range of schemes (including demand-led schemes). The categories and the amount provided for each in 2016 and 2017 are set out in the table below:

Scheme	2016	2017
Control of Horses	853,868.64	706,673.36
Commission for Economic Development of Rural Areas	562,224.57	186,450.00
Fishery Harbour & Coastal Infrastructure Development Programme	3,770,432.79	2,795,364.74
Forestry Grants	0.00	121,701.58
Forestry NDP Support	2,286.00	0.00
Grants for Institutional R&D Food Sector	13,881.00	0.00
Haulbowline Island Licensing Project	2,259,209.27	3,957,131.64
School Milk Scheme	3,790.37	3,473.81
Total	7,465,692.64	7,770,795.13

Harbours and Piers Funding

509. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if extra funding will be provided for additional berthage at Dún Laoghaire Harbour and Dublin Port; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43755/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department owns, operates and maintains six designated State-owned Fishery Harbour Centres, located at Castletownbere, Dingle, Dunmore East, Howth, Killybegs and Ros An Mhíl under statute. In addition, my Department also has responsibility for the upkeep and maintenance of North Harbour at Cape Clear, as well as the maintenance of a small number of specific piers, lights and beacons throughout Ireland, in accordance with the 1902 ex-congested Districts Board piers, lights and Beacons Act.

Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council is responsible for the maintenance and development of Dún Laoghaire Harbour in the first instance; the Council's parent Department is the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government.

As indicated, my legislative remit does not extend to Dún Laoghaire Harbour, and given that the ownership of, and overall responsibility for the Harbour rests with the County Council, it is the Council who will decide if it wishes to carry out any further development of Dún Laoghaire Harbour.

My Department does however provide limited funding to assist coastal Local Authorities in carrying out small scale projects for the development and repair of Local Authority owned piers, harbours and slipways under the annual Fishery Harbour & Coastal Infrastructure Development Programme, subject to available Exchequer funding and overall national priorities.

Any application for funding from Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council in relation to Dún Laoghaire Harbour under future programmes will be given due consideration in the context of the criteria set out and available Exchequer funding.

Under the Harbours Act of 1996, the Dublin Port Company was established as stand-alone

economic entity with a mandate to sustain and grow the business of Dublin Port. Any queries in relation to the future development of Dublin Port should be directed to the Dublin Port company.

Aquaculture Licences

510. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason high levels of microplastics found in farmed shellfish here would be different from that farmed in the UK in view of surveys showing high levels of microplastics in shellfish farmed in the UK; and if he will suspend the licensing of shellfish aquaculture here pending further studies. [43801/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department is advised by the Marine Institute that while it is clear from several studies that microplastics are present in the environment and can be filtered by bivalve shellfish, there is little evidence on the impact to human health of such micro-plastic pollution.

Applications for aquaculture licences are considered by my Department in accordance with the provisions of the 1997 Fisheries (Amendment) Act, the 1933 Foreshore Act and applicable EU legislation.

The licensing process includes a period of statutory and general public consultation in respect of applications and licensing decisions are made following the fullest consideration of all aspects of each application including environmental, technical and public interest aspects.

Aquaculture Regulation

511. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his Department tested for microplastics in farmed shellfish and finfish here prior to awarding an organic label to the industry. [43802/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department remains the Competent Authority under EU regulations but has delegated the certification function to independent control bodies, in accordance with the relevant EU regulations and in common with the practice in many other countries across the EU. The control bodies in question act under formal service agreements with my Department and are themselves subject to audit by my Department, by INAB (the Irish National Accreditation Board) and by the various EU audit authorities.

The organic status of food products including shellfish and finfish here in Ireland is certified by rigorous on-going assessment undertaken on behalf of my Department by the Organic Control Bodies referred to above. While tests for micro plastics are not specifically undertaken, my Department is advised by the Marine Institute that while it is clear from several studies that micro-plastics are present in the environment and can be filtered by bivalve shellfish, there is little evidence on the impact to human health of such micro-plastic pollution.

Aquaculture Regulation

512. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will withdraw the organic label from shellfish in the interest of public health until the levels of mi-

croplastics in farmed shellfish here can be assessed. [43803/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department is advised by the Marine Institute that while it is clear from several studies that microplastics are present in the environment and can be filtered by bivalve shellfish, there is little evidence of the impact on human health of such micro-plastic pollution.

Applications for aquaculture licences are considered by my Department in accordance with the provisions of the 1997 Fisheries (Amendment) Act, the 1933 Foreshore Act and applicable EU legislation.

The licensing process includes a period of statutory and general public consultation in respect of applications and licensing decisions are made following the fullest consideration of all aspects of each application including environmental, technical and public interest aspects.

My Department remains the Competent Authority under EU regulations but has delegated the certification function to Organic Control Bodies, in accordance with the relevant EU regulations and in common with the practice in many other countries across the EU. The organic status of operators in the food sector including shellfish and finfish here in Ireland is certified by rigorous on-going assessment undertaken on behalf of my Department by these Organic Control Bodies. The control bodies in question act under formal service agreements with my Department and are themselves subject to audit by my Department, by INAB (the Irish National Accreditation Board) and by the various EU audit authorities.

Based on the fact that there is little evidence on the impact on human health of such microplastic pollution I have no plans at present to withdraw the organic label from shellfish.

Aquaculture Regulation

513. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason his Department is taking more than 12 months to investigate breaches of licence conditions at specific salmon farms operated by a company (details supplied). [43804/18]

514. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the specific dates of the engineering reports that started the investigations by his Department into breaches of licence conditions at sites operated by a company (details supplied). [43805/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 513 and 514 together.

My Department is currently conducting a formal examination of possible breaches of licence conditions at a number of aquaculture sites operated by the company referred to by the Deputy. The sites in question and the dates of the applicable engineering inspections are as follows:

- Roanacarrig, Co Cork. Engineering Inspections 23rd July 2013, 10th June 2014, 8th June 2015.
- Deenish, Co Kerry. Engineering Inspection 2nd July 2015.
- Inishfarnard, Co Cork. Engineering Inspection 28th July 2016.
- Lough Swilly, Co Donegal. Engineering Inspection 7th July 2017.

- Inver Bay, Co. Donegal. Engineering Inspection 14th November 2017.

Examinations of possible breaches of licence conditions are carried out by my Department as quickly as possible having regard to the technical, scientific and legislative complexities involved in each case.

Aquaculture Licence Appeals

515. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on whether it is acceptable that a public body such as the Aquaculture Licence Appeals Board can refuse to explain the basis for its recent decision to double the permitted production capacity at a site operated by a company (details supplied) without public consultation; and if this is a breach of the Aarhus Convention. [43806/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The purpose of the Aquaculture Licences Appeals Board (ALAB) is to provide an independent authority for the determination of appeals against decisions of the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine on aquaculture licence applications.

All determinations and the reasons for those determinations made by the Aquaculture Licences Appeals Board are published on its website. The determination and reasons for the determination in this particular case is available on the ALAB website, link as follows:

<http://www.alab.ie/media/alab/content/boarddeterminations/2018/ALABDetermination100518.pdf>

It should be noted that aquaculture licence appeals are operational matters for the independent Aquaculture Licences Appeals Board and I have requested the Board to respond directly to the Deputy.

Aquaculture Licence Appeals

516. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if members of the board of the Aquaculture Licence Appeals Board or members of the board's staff received communications, written or oral, relating to the board's consideration of an appeal or his decision to amend the licence for a salmon farm at Inishfarnard, County Cork, contrary to section 31 of the Fisheries (Amendment) Act 1997. [43807/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The purpose of the Aquaculture Licences Appeals Board is to provide an independent authority for the determination of appeals against decisions of the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine on aquaculture licence applications. Issues in relation to communications, written or oral, to Board members or staff regarding a specific appeal are operational matters for the Aquaculture Licence Appeals Board and I have requested the Aquaculture Licence Appeals Board to respond directly to the Deputy on the specific information requested in relation to those matters.

Sheep Welfare Scheme Applications

517. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the case of a person (details supplied) regarding a sheep welfare form will be examined; and

if he will make a statement on the matter. [43819/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): An application was received under the Sheep Welfare Scheme from the person named on 24 January 2017. Under the terms and conditions of the scheme, applicants to the scheme are required to submit the annual Sheep Census return within the required deadlines. In the case of this application a query arose as to the date the Sheep Census return for 2017 was received.

Following a review of this case, the applicant forwarded a receipt of postage to the Sheep Census section to clarify the position and the date of receipt of the sheep census was amended accordingly. The applicant has been fully paid with respect to the 2017 scheme year and following the amendment to the date of receipt of the sheep census, the 2018 Sheep Welfare application will continue to be processed.

GLAS Payments

518. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a GLAS payment for a person (details supply); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43853/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named was approved into GLAS 2 with a contract commencement date of 1 January 2016 and has received all payments in respect of scheme year 2016.

An issue arose for 2017 in relation to GLAS claims on a LPIS parcel without a reference/MEA area.

The person named has been previously advised to contact the Department's Basic Payment Section directly in relation to this issue.

Animal Feedstuffs

519. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the level of grant aid paid by his Department or by the agencies under its remit in each of the years 2011 to 2017 in respect of the provision of animal feed compounding facilities and-or feed milling facilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43900/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department did not provide any direct grant aid assistance to feed mills during the period 2011-2017.

However, in conjunction with my colleague the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, Ms. Heather Humphreys TD, a €300 million Brexit Loan Fund was announced in April 2018 which enables companies to access lower cost funding on more competitive and favourable terms. Feed manufacturing companies and feed mills that meet the eligibility criteria would be in a position to avail of these reduced cost loans.

In addition, Enterprise Ireland provides a number of investment funds to industry including Job Expansion and various sector specific Capital Investment Programmes. Projects apply directly to Enterprise Ireland and work with EI staff to present applications to the various committees for approval.

Broadband Service Provision

520. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of a contract to supply broadband to a school (details supplied) in County Galway; when progress will be made on the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43304/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The school referred to by the Deputy is in the AMBER area on the High Speed Broadband Map which is available on my Department's website at www.broadband.gov.ie. The AMBER areas represent the target areas for the proposed State led Intervention under the NBP and is the subject of an ongoing procurement process.

The procurement process to appoint a bidder for the State intervention network is now at the final stage with evaluation ongoing of the final tender received on 18 September. The Taoiseach has asked Mr. Peter Smyth, the independent process auditor to the NBP procurement to review the process. Mr. Smyth will submit a report to the Taoiseach and to me as Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment within three weeks. This review will take place in parallel to the evaluation being carried out by the Department's procurement team on the final tender for the plan.

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 Task force to address obstacles and improve connectivity in respect of existing and future mobile phone and broadband services.

Under this Task force, engagement between telecommunications operators and local authorities through the Broadband Officers is continuing to strengthen. These Broadband Officers are acting as single points of contact in local authorities for their communities. The appointment of these officers is already reaping rewards in terms of ensuring a much greater degree of consistency in engagements with operators and clearing obstacles to developing infrastructure. The Department of Rural and Community Development maintain a list of Broadband Officers, a link to which is available on my Department's website at

<https://www.dccae.gov.ie/en-ie/communications/topics/Broadband/national-broadband-plan/Pages/NBP-Information-Leaflets.aspx>.

National Broadband Plan

521. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will provide the terms of reference for the review of the national broadband plan tender process to be conducted by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43350/18]

525. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will provide a timeline for the completion of a review (details supplied) of the tendering process for the national broadband plan. [43354/18]

527. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he is satisfied that the remaining bidder in the national broadband plan has not broken protocols with regard to interactions with his Department; the actions he will undertake if the bidder was found to have broken these protocols; and if he will make a statement on the

matter. [43356/18]

537. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the rationale for not including conversations between the CEO of a company (details supplied) and his predecessor in a review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43462/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 521, 525, 527 and 537 together.

The terms of reference for the independent NBP process auditor's review of the National Broadband Plan procurement process have been finalised and are available at https://merri-onstreet.ie/en/News-Room/Releases/National_Broadband_Plan_Procurement_Process_-_Terms_of_Reference_for_Review_by_Mr_Peter_Smyth.html.

These terms of reference include timeline and scope and empower the Process Auditor, at his own discretion, to review all relevant documentation held by the Department and/or to seek written or oral inputs from any relevant parties.

I await the outcome of the review.

Metropolitan Area Networks Programme

522. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will conduct a review of the relationship between his Department, a person (details supplied) and a company in the context of the extension of a concession agreement for the metropolitan area networks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43351/18]

524. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will conduct a review of the relationship between a person (details supplied) and his Department on issues not related to the national broadband plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43353/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 522 and 524 together.

My Department entered into two Concession Agreements with enet Ltd., a privately owned company in 2004 and 2009 respectively, following two separate public procurement processes. These agreements set out the terms under which enet is required to manage, operate and maintain the Metropolitan Area Networks. In March, 2017, following detailed consideration of available options by the Department, the Concession Agreements were extended to 2030, i.e. Concession Agreement I was extended by 10 years and Concession Agreement II by 6 years.

The Concession Agreements each provide for an option to extend the term of the agreements for up to a maximum period of 10 years. I am informed that the decision to extend the agreements is in compliance with EU and national procurement regulations and was informed by legal advice and advice from external consultants.

Departmental Meetings

523. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if officials met representatives of a fund in the context of the sale of the shares of

a company (details supplied); the nature of those meetings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43352/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): In 2017, the Irish Infrastructure Fund acquired a majority 78% shareholding in enet. I understand from the Department that in accordance with the terms of the Concession Agreement, enet notified the Department of the change of ownership arising from the sale of its shares and officials did not meet with representatives of the Irish Infrastructure Fund in relation to the transaction.

Question No. 524 answered with Question No. 522.

Question No. 525 answered with Question No. 521.

Climate Change Policy

526. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of actions taken to tackle climate change since February 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43355/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): A number of significant policy initiatives have been undertaken by this Government since February 2016 to address climate change.

Ireland's first National Mitigation Plan, which the government published in July 2017, is a whole-of-Government Plan, reflecting, in particular, the central roles of the Ministers responsible for the four key sectors with the most significant contribution to national emissions: Electricity Generation; the Built Environment; Transport; and Agriculture, Forestry and Land Use. The Plan provides a framework to guide investment decisions by Government in domestic measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

In January of this year the government published Ireland's first statutory National Adaptation Framework which represents our national policy response to the challenges posed by the impacts of climate change. Seven Government Departments, with responsibility for twelve priority sectors, are currently preparing sectoral adaptation plans for submission to Government for approval by 30 September 2019 in line with the requirements of the Climate Act 2015.

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. 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 (NDP) will be on climate action and this capital investment will enable us to deliver a significant reduction in our greenhouse gas emissions over the period to 2030.

My Department is also working closely with other relevant Departments and Agencies on the preparation of a National Energy and Climate Plan. This work has, in turn, been informed by work undertaken to prepare the Energy White Paper, the National Mitigation Plan, National Adaptation Framework and National Development Plan. An initial consultation on the preparation of Ireland's draft National Energy and Climate Plan is taking place from 9 October until 12 November. I intend that the draft Plan, once completed, will be the subject of a separate public consultation.

In accordance with the Climate Act 2015, the Government must also prepare and submit to the Oireachtas an Annual Transition Statement. In support of this written Statement I, as well as other relevant Ministers, intend to provide an oral report to each House. This process ensures that responsible Ministers are directly accountable to the Oireachtas to ensure real progress is made in reducing emissions in their respective sectors. I expect to be in position to lay the 2018 Annual Transition Statement before the Oireachtas shortly.

Question No. 527 answered with Question No. 521.

Metropolitan Area Networks Programme

528. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will release the pricing review of the metropolitan area networks; if not, the reason; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43357/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): As stated in the reply to Parliamentary Question No. 42146 of 16 October, 2018, the Department is engaging with the Management Services Entity (enet) in relation to the implementation of the recommendations of the Review and the Review will be published shortly.

Freedom of Information Data

529. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of freedom of information requests his Department has received regarding a concession agreement with a company (details supplied); the number granted; the number refused; the number granted following the intervention of the Office of the Information Commissioner; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43358/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department received eleven FOI requests in relation to the Metropolitan Area Networks (MANs) and to the Concession Agreement with enet who manage the MANs on behalf of the State, in the period from 1 January 2012 to 16 October 2018.

Of these, four requests were part-granted and five were refused, as provided for within the exemption provisions of the FOI Act. Two FOI requests are currently being processed.

The decision in relation to one request received in 2015 was the subject of an appeal to the Office of the Information Commissioner, and is the subject of ongoing legal proceedings.

Freedom of Information Data

530. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of freedom of information requests received regarding the national broadband #plan; the number granted; the number refused; the number granted following the intervention of the Office of the Information Commissioner; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43359/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department received fifty-four FOI requests regarding the National Broadband Plan and related matters in the period from 1 January 2012 to 16 October 2018.

Of these, three were withdrawn, while two requests were granted, seventeen requests were part-granted and fifteen requests were refused in accordance with the relevant provisions of the FOI Act. Seventeen FOI requests are currently being processed.

The decision in relation to one request received in 2015 was the subject of an appeal to the Office of the Information Commissioner, and was upheld by that Office.

National Broadband Plan

531. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the rationale for the continuation of a review (details supplied) of the national broadband plan and the tendering process in parallel; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43360/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The conclusion of the National Broadband Plan (NBP) State led intervention procurement process and delivery of high speed broadband is a priority commitment for this Government.

On 17 October 2018, the Taoiseach requested a report from the NBP process auditor to be presented within three weeks. The terms of reference for this report specify that the process auditor is not required to consider any substantive issues relating to the bid submitted by the bidder in the NBP procurement process. The focus of that report is separate to and independent of the evaluation of the final tender received from the remaining bidder on 18 September. Accordingly, the evaluation of that final tender by the NBP Evaluation Team, which commenced in September, is continuing in parallel.

National Broadband Plan

532. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the details of all meetings which took place between representatives of the national broadband plan tender team and bid teams; the issues discussed; if he will release the minutes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43361/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): In reply to Question No. 248 on 18 October, to the House last week, with respect to the nature of the “Competitive Dialogue” procedure used in the NBP Procurement process, I described the confidential nature of the process and indicated that it is not proposed to publish details of meetings held as part of an on-going procurement process. Maintaining confidentiality is necessary and normal practice to protect the integrity of procurement processes.

Proposed Legislation

533. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the national broadband plan Bill; and his plans to pass this Bill in advance of awarding the national broadband plan contract. [43375/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): On 24 July 2018 Government approved the priority drafting of the National Broadband Plan Bill 2018. My Department is developing this legislation in consultation with the

Office of Parliamentary Counsel in the Attorney General's Office.

The NBP Bill is included in the Priority Legislation programme for the current Dáil Session 2018.

Electric Vehicles

534. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the details of the roll-out of electric car chargers in a town (details supplied). [43377/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The majority of the existing network of publicly accessible charge points was rolled out by the ESB through its eCars programme. This network includes 77 fast chargers, mainly on national routes. A map showing the locations of charging points throughout Ireland is available at <https://www.esb.ie/our-businesses/ecars/charge-point-map>. There are currently charging posts at three locations in Mullingar. As each charging post consists of two charging points, this gives a total of six charging points in the town. In addition, there are fast charging stations located nearby on the N4 near Ballinaleck, the M6 near Kilbeggan and the M4 near Johnstown Bridge. Fast chargers are vital to overcome 'range anxiety' and are generally focussed around the national road network.

A key aspect of the work of the Low Emission Vehicle Taskforce, co-chaired by my Department and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, involved examining how best to support the development of the electric vehicle charging. The first phase of the Taskforce's work, which focused on electric vehicles, is now complete and the progress report is available on my Department's website.

Arising out of the work of the Taskforce a support scheme is in place to support electric vehicle charging at home, the primary method of charging for the majority of electric vehicles both internationally and in Ireland. My Department, in conjunction with the SEAI, is working on how best to support the provision of greater levels of on-street public charging.

It is also important to note the role of the Climate Action Fund. The first Call for Applications, which was launched in July, includes provision for supporting electric vehicle charging networks along with a range of other project types. The deadline for applications has now passed and I can confirm that 97 applications have been received. An assessment process of these applications is currently underway.

Ministerial Meetings

535. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the details of engagements, meetings or correspondence that he has had with a person (details supplied) in the past three years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43388/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I have had no meetings with the person identified by the Deputy.

Energy Schemes

536. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if the public consultation on a roadmap for improving energy efficiency in the rental sector, as committed to in A Strategy to Combat Energy Poverty, has been carried out; the process and timeframe for its publication; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43426/18]

542. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if the pilot scheme set to be introduced to provide energy efficiency grant supports to landlords or approved housing bodies that choose to participate in HAP was commenced; if so, the details of the pilot scheme; the way in which it works; the number of landlords and approved housing bodies, respectively, engaged in HAP that have applied for the grant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43514/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 536 and 542 together.

The Government's Strategy to Combat Energy Poverty 2016-2019, contains an action to examine the impact of introducing minimum thermal efficiency standards for rental properties. Research indicates that rental properties are twice as likely to be E, F or G rated on the Building Energy Rating (BER) scale. However, rental properties present a particular challenge in terms of energy efficiency upgrades owing to the split incentive issue. A split incentive occurs where landlords meet the cost of improvements, while tenants would reap the benefit, so neither party is motivated to upgrade the dwelling. This is why there is currently under-investment in improving the energy performance of rental properties.

Grants for energy efficiency, funded by my Department and administered by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI), are already available to landlords. Improving the energy efficiency of rental properties will deliver multiple benefits, including improved living conditions and health outcomes, enhanced asset value and reduced energy bills. However, in identifying the appropriate policy interventions the priority has also been to ensure that the approach taken to address energy poverty will also not adversely impact the housing supply situation.

To find a way forward that supports action in the two critical policy areas of energy poverty and housing supply, options for improving energy efficiency in the rental sector will be consulted on as part of the new Long Term Renovation Strategy. Ireland must produce a new Long Term Renovation Strategy under the new EU Energy Performance in Buildings Directive and the consultation process for this must start in early 2019.

Question No. 537 answered with Question No. 521.

Broadband Service Provision

538. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the planned roll-out of high-speed fibre broadband to 115,000 premises in Ballinasloe, Roscommon town, Manorhamilton and a further six towns in County Donegal, as launched on 7 September 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43463/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): In September 2017 enet/SSE announced a project to bring high speed broadband to 115,000 homes and businesses across the West and North West of Ireland on a commercial basis. No change was made to the High Speed Broadband Map as a result of this intended roll out. My Department understands that these premises no longer feature in enet/SSE's commercial roll out plans. The 115,000 premises referenced by the Deputy are predominantly in the AMBER area of the High Speed Broadband Map and will therefore be served by the State-led

National Broadband Plan intervention.

Internet Safety

539. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to introduce measures to restrict access by children to pornography on smart phones; if Internet service providers have a role to play in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43468/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Government's Action Plan for Online Safety 2018-2019, which was launched by the Taoiseach on 11 July 2018, contains 25 actions to be implemented or substantially progressed by the six sponsor Departments before the end of 2019. These Department are the Department of Justice and Equality; the Department of Children and Youth Affairs; the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation; the Department of Health; the Department of Education and Skills; and my own Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment.

The actions contained in the plan cover a range of activities including education and awareness raising, communicating with the public, putting in place robust oversight and consultative structures, and legislative measures.

Action 20 provides for the establishment of a National Advisory Council for Online Safety which will provide advice to Government on online safety policy issues, identify emerging issues where Government intervention may be warranted, and provide input into the eventual renewal of the Action Plan. The Council's membership is drawn from key stakeholder groups, including industry and NGOs.

Action 17 provides for the implementation of the revision to the Audio Visual Media Services Directive, which has been negotiated for the past two years in Brussels and the text of which will be finalised and published in November 2018. Member States will be required to put in place by means of co-regulation, a method of ensuring that Video Sharing Platform Services (VSPS) established in their jurisdiction have specific measures in place to ensure that users, but especially minors, are protected from harmful content.

Much work remains to be done on the definition of a VSPS, including the issuing by the European Commission of detailed guidance on how the definition should be interpreted by Member States, and the nature of the co-regulatory system to be established. These issues are being examined in the context of the preparations of the implementation of the revised Directive, which is required to be implemented 21 months from the date of its publication.

My Department will conduct a public consultation on how Ireland should approach the implementation of the revised Directive in the coming months.

Better Energy Homes Scheme Applications

540. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when a response to a query to the SEAI (details supplied) will be answered in view of the fact the matter has been ongoing for a number of months. [43475/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department funds The Better Energy Warmer Homes Scheme which is administered by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI). Measures are carried out by

SEAI in the basis of the findings of surveys of each home and the scheme delivers a range of energy efficiency measures at no cost to low income households vulnerable to energy poverty, who meet the defined eligibility criteria. Measures currently available under the scheme include attic and wall insulation, draught proofing, lagging jackets and low energy light bulbs, single glazed window replacement and heating system replacement. The measures are carried out free of charge.

In reference to the case raised by Deputy Shortall, officials in my Department have been in contact with the SEAI and I have been informed that the applicant applied for the Scheme and had a survey carried out on 7 February 2018. I understand that the surveyor, on the day of initial inspection, explained the results of this survey to the applicant. Upon receiving a subsequent complaint from the applicant, SEAI carried out a review of the applicant's survey to ensure all recommendations were correct at the time of survey. The applicant was then contacted by phone on 31 May 2018 by SEAI and was informed that the survey recommendations were correct.

SEAI operates a dedicated Customer Service helpline (1850 250 204) for the general public that can also answer queries in relation to application status and provide updates to homeowners.

Mining Industry

541. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will review a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43480/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Canney): The operation of a mine in Ireland is subject to three statutory consents: a State Mining Facility from my Department; Planning Permission from the Local Authority and an Integrated Pollution Control Licence (IPC) from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). As the State Mining Facility consent authority, my Department is responsible for ensuring that Lease/Licence conditions are adhered to and that the relevant mine is operated in line with best practice and with all legal and regulatory obligations.

In relation to the recent developments at Magheracluone, officials from my Department's Exploration and Mining Division (EMD) have an oversight responsibility with regard to the company's management of and response to the mine collapse. EMD have engaged an independent expert consultant to assist in assessing reports and any technical solutions submitted to them by the company to that end.

EMD officials have been continuously liaising with the company and the other statutory consent authorities as part of this process to ensure a consistent and co-ordinated effort to effectively minimise disruption, remediate damage already caused to the extent possible, and provide all necessary assurances in regard to the future operation and safety of the facility.

The review and investigation underway is utilising a range of technical expertise and is now at an advanced stage. The various parties are aware of the implications of recent events and are working towards an acceptable outcome that takes account of the concerns of the local community and the paramount objective of securing the safe operation of the facility, recognising that this is a business which has provided employment in the community since 1936.

Question No. 542 answered with Question No. 536.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

543. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when high speed broadband will be available to all households in a village (details supplied) in County Cork; the details and timelines in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43552/18]

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

In April 2017 my Department 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.

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

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

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

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

There are 290 premises in the townland of Ballygarvan, Co Cork referenced by the Deputy. 61 (21%) fall within the AMBER area and will be served under the State led Intervention. 192 (66%) of premises are in a BLUE area and are or will be served by commercial providers, while 37 (13%) are LIGHT BLUE and fall to be served by eir's planned rural deployment.

The procurement process to appoint a bidder for the State intervention network is now at the final stage with evaluation ongoing of the final tender received on 18 September. The Taoiseach has asked Mr. Peter Smyth, the independent process auditor to the NBP procurement to review the process. Mr. Smyth will submit a report to the Taoiseach and to me as Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment within three weeks. This review will take place in parallel to the evaluation being carried out by the Department's procurement team on the final tender for the plan.

In April 2017, my Department signed a Commitment Agreement with eir in relation to its plans to provide high speed broadband to 300,000 premises in rural areas on a commercial basis. Information on eir's planned rural deployment is available at <http://fibrerollout.ie/eircode-lookup/>. A copy of the Commitment Agreement is available on my Department's website www.dccae.gov.ie.

Data for Q2 2018 submitted by eir to my Department indicates that the company had passed some 175,000 premises nationwide as part of its ongoing deployment.

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.

Waste Tyre Disposal

544. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if additional tyre collection facilities will be arranged for counties Cavan and Monaghan in view of the huge demand on a previous collection date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43632/18]

545. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if support will be provided for the once-off collection and recycling of farm tyre waste in the remaining counties where a collection service has not taken place to support the sustainable and environmentally friendly management of this waste stream; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43656/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 544 and 545 together.

In 2017, my Department made available funding of €1 million to local authorities to deal with the clean-up of existing stockpiles of tyres illegally dumped across the countryside. This was done to support the introduction of a new compliance scheme for tyres and waste tyres from 1 October 2017. The new full compliance scheme to deal with Ireland's chronic waste tyres problem, which is operated by Repak ELT with a registration and reporting role for the Producer Register Limited (PRL), is funded by a visible Environmental Management Cost (vEMC) on the sale of new tyres. The new compliance scheme provides the assurance to drivers and consumers that their old tyres will be disposed of responsibly by the retailer when they buy new tyres.

At that time, the Minister also indicated that he would look at the issue of old tyres on farms and €700,000 was recently allocated to remove tyres from farms. Irish Farm Film Producers Group (IFFPG), the national farm plastics recycling compliance scheme, agreed to undertake the removal of tyres from farms through 4 bring centres around the country. The collections, which were chosen because they represent a good geographical spread, took place as follows:

- Cootehill Mart, Co. Cavan (29 September)
- New Ross Mart, Co. Wexford (9 October)
- Athenry Mart, Co Galway (13th October) and
- Gort Drum Mines, Monard, Co. Tipperary (20th October)

In total, approximately 4,253 tonnes of tyres were collected from these bring centres and the €700,000 budget was fully expended.

Farm Waste Disposal

546. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will reallocate the unspent funds that were to be used for the 2018 farm hazardous waste collection centres to support the completion of the nationwide collection and recycling of farm tyre waste. [43665/18]

547. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to ensure that the farm hazardous waste collection centres will resume in 2019 in view of their success in the collection and recycling of hazardous waste on farms; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43666/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 546 and 547 together.

From 2013 to 2017 inclusive, the EPA carried out annual farm hazardous waste collections as a pilot scheme. The aim of this pilot scheme was to ascertain the types and volumes of waste on farms which needed to be disposed of safely. During the pilot, over 1,000 tonnes of hazardous waste including pesticides, veterinary products, waste oil, contaminated containers, paint, WEEE and batteries has been collected and disposed of safely.

I expect the EPA to publish their findings in relation this pilot scheme shortly. However, I have received a draft of same and the range and quantity of hazardous waste removed convinces me that there is an absolute necessity for such collections in order to provide an outlet for farmers to dispose of these wastes safely.

One of the main recommendations by the EPA is that a national scheme be developed to collect these hazardous wastes. My Department is currently exploring with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and other stakeholders how this might be developed and funded.

The pilot study was primarily funded through the National Waste Prevention Programme with a contribution from other stakeholders and farmers. As the Deputy is aware, however, I made separate funding of €700,000 available this year for the collection of waste tyres from farms.

Local Authority Funding

548. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the categories of funding available to local authorities through his Department; the amount of funding provided for each scheme in 2016 and 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43725/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department provides funding through a number of schemes to local authorities, the details of which are set out in the following table.

Categories of funding available to local authorities	Amount of funding provided (€ inc. VAT)2016	Amount of funding provided (€ inc. VAT)2017
Warmth and Wellbeing Pilot Scheme – free energy efficiency home upgrades	€0.5m (72 homes upgraded)	€6.5m (360 homes upgraded)

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Categories of funding available to local authorities	Amount of funding provided (€ inc. VAT)2016	Amount of funding provided (€ inc. VAT)2017
Deep Retrofit Pilot Programme – grant funding for residential energy efficiency projects*		€0.86m(First year of the pilot and focused on building capacity in the market for deep retrofit and building the pipeline of projects for 2018. Spend relates to completed and partially completed homes, grant support for project management was also provided).
Better Energy Communities – grant funding for energy efficiency projects	€16.7m (37 community projects awarded funding covering 385 community and commercial buildings and 2,013 homes)	€22.7m (44 community projects awarded funding covering 491 community and commercial buildings and 1,965 homes)
Funding for Tyres Historic Stockpiles Clean up	N/A	€323,371
Regional Waste Management Planning Offices	€327,788 (Environment Fund)	€410,000 (Environment Fund)€953,490 (Vote)
Local Authority Enforcement Measures Grant Scheme	€7,316,946	€7,228,403
Anti-Dumping Initiative Grant Scheme	N/A	€1,256,705
Waste Enforcement Regional Lead Authority Offices Operational Costs	€859,380	€879,646
Waste Enforcement Initiatives	€48,223	€286,665
Biodegradable Waste Strategy	€250,000	€200,000
One Day Collections of Small Scale Quantities of Hazardous Waste Grant Scheme	€73,943	€100,000
Recoupment of clean-up costs associated with illegal diesel laundering	€1,020,563	€224,213
North/South Waste Repatriation	€481,580	N/A
Landfill Remediation	€6,723,159	€5,267,842
Local Agenda 21/Local Environmental Partnership Fund (LA21)	€388,646	€441,815
Anti-Litter and Anti-Graffiti Awareness Scheme (ALAGS)	€684,840	€865,071
Protecting Uplands and Rural Environments (PURE)	€89,147	€114,800
Geopark grant Clare County Council	€25,000	€25,000
Geopark grant Waterford County Council	€25,000	€25,000

Air Pollution

549. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the progress that has been made on the roll-out of additional monitoring sites for air pollution (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43739/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): Ambient air quality monitoring in Ireland is carried out in accordance with the requirements of the 2008 Clean Air for Europe (CAFE) Directive (Directive 2008/50/EC) and the

Fourth Daughter Directive (Directive 2004/107/EC of 15 December 2004). These Directives also include rules on how Member States should monitor, assess and manage ambient air quality.

Under the Directives, EU Member States must designate “zones” for the purpose of managing air quality. For Ireland, four zones were defined in the Air Quality Standards Regulations, 2011. The zones in place in Ireland in 2017 are Zone A: the Dublin conurbation; Zone B: the Cork conurbation; Zone C: comprising 23 large towns in Ireland with a population of more than 15,000; and Zone D: the remaining area of Ireland. Ireland currently has a nationwide network of 33 monitoring stations which measure levels of air pollutants in the four zones. This information is delivered to the public in near real-time at www.airquality.epa.ie. The numbers and locations of the monitoring equipment for each pollutant are determined by the requirements of the Directives for ambient air monitoring in each zone.

Following a review by the Environmental Protection Agency of air quality monitoring and information provision in Ireland, a decision was taken to develop a new Ambient Air Quality Monitoring Programme (AAMP) which aims to enhance and build on current arrangements. One of the key objectives of the programme is to enhance the provision of real time air quality data to the public. The AAMP will more than double the capacity of ambient air quality monitoring in Ireland by 2022, and enhance the provision of real time air quality data to the public. My Department has committed funding of some €5 million over the lifetime of the programme.

The new programme is progressing well. Of the 39 stations in this phase, 10 were due to be completed by the end of this year and 8 of these are now active. These are at Roscommon, Enniscorthy, St Anne’s Park in Dublin, University College Cork, Dundalk, Carlow (town), Malin Head and Carnsore Point. A further 15 stations are planned in 2019 and 14 in 2020. In addition, a number of station upgrades are underway, and to date upgrades have been made to stations at Heatherton Park in Cork, Castlebar, Kilkenny (city), Finglas, Marino, Phoenix Park, Ballyfermot, Davitt Road and Ringsend.

The locations of the monitoring stations are determined by the EPA in line with the provisions of the relevant Directives.

Further details on the monitoring programme can be found at the following website: <http://www.epa.ie/pubs/reports/air/quality/epanationalambientprogramme.html>

Television Licence Fee Collection

550. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if a group of self-catering houses operated by the one owner can be treated as one unit for television licence purposes; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that having to pay a television licence for each house is a substantial burden on owners in view of the fact that in many instances occupancy of such accommodation may only amount to the equivalent of four months of the year (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43783/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): Currently, only one class of TV licence exists and this covers any number of devices so long as they are all in the same property (residential or commercial).

In accordance with Section 142 of the Broadcasting Act 2009, any premises at which a television is located requires a TV Licence regardless of its use. Therefore, owners and controlling management companies of all holiday home accommodation premises which include a televi-

sion set, are required to purchase a separate TV Licence for each accommodation unit.

Legislative Measures

551. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43799/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): My views on the Private Members Motion referred to by the Deputy will be outlined in detail in the debate on the Private Members Motion, which has been scheduled for discussion on Tuesday 23 October.

National Broadband Plan Data

552. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of premises connected to and premises passed with high speed broadband, respectively, in each of the years 2011 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and the percentage of total premises this represents. [43847/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): 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.

There are 2.3m premises in the country. In 2012 less than 700,000 (30%) of all premises had access to high speed broadband through commercial operators. When this Government came into office in 2016 1.2m (52%) had access to high speed broadband. Today 1.7m (74%) of premises can access this service.

My Department does not receive detailed information on connections to premises from industry, other than those related to eir's ongoing commercial deployment. This is due to its obligations as part of a Commitment Agreement signed with my Department in April 2017 to provide high speed broadband to some 300,000 premises. According to the latest figures supplied to my Department by the company, some 37,000 premises have been connected to the new network.

The Commission for Communications Regulation, Comreg, publishes a quarterly key data report on the telecommunications industry in Ireland. The Q2 2018 report contains information on connections which may be of interest to the Deputy: <https://www.comreg.ie/publication/quarterly-key-data-report-q2-2018/>

National Broadband Plan Funding

553. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the capital funding allocated for the national broadband plan in budgets 2013 to

2019; the projected allocation for capital expenditure for the national broadband plan in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43857/18]

554. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the funding allocated for the national broadband plan in budgets in each of the years 2013 to 2019; the projected allocation for current expenditure for the national broadband plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43858/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 553 and 554 together.

Capital allocation for the NBP in each year from 2013 to 2018 is set out in the following table.

Year	NBP Capital Allocation
2013	€0.5M
2014	€1.3M
2015	€4.1M
2016	€10M
2017	€15M
2018	€15M

There was no current funding allocation.

With regard to the capital budget for 2019, funding for the NBP will be provided from within the overall funding envelope of €87 million for the Communications Programme in Budget 2019, with individual programme allocations still to be finalised and published in the Revised Estimates for Public Services.

National Broadband Plan Funding

555. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the funds set aside for the completion of the national broadband plan to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43859/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Government allocated an initial €275 million in the Capital Plan published in September 2015, for the initial years of the network build-out for the National Broadband Plan State intervention. The €275m represented an initial stimulus, in the knowledge that significant further funding will be required over the lifetime of the proposed 25 year contract.

In addition, the European Regional Development Fund has committed €75 million funds to the NBP State led intervention as part of its 2014-2020 Operational Programme.

The total State subsidy to be allocated to the NBP State-led Intervention will be determined on completion of the procurement process.

National Broadband Plan Funding

556. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and

Environment the funds spent on the national broadband plan from its announcement in 2013 to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43860/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): Expenditure on the National Broadband Plan was first incurred in 2013.

The total expenditure to date since then is approximately €22.2 million. This expenditure includes the cost of corporate finance 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.

In addition, the Department also has staff and other administrative costs, along with travel and expenses costs for the independent Steering Group members and event costs related to the NBP. The following table sets out payments by year.

Table 1: NBP Total spend by Year

Year	Cost
2013	€394,507.01
2014	€681,326.58
2015	€2,978,462.99
2016	€2,345,659.49
2017	€10,050,457.78
2018	€5,745,111.99
TOTAL	€22,195,525.84

All figures include VAT

The schedule of companies paid and services engaged by year is also attached.

A schedule of payments made to date on the NBP is set out in the following tables for each year, specifying the companies paid and the services engaged.

Table 2: Schedule of NBP Payments in 2013

Company/Payee Name	Services Provided	Cost
PRISA Technologies Ltd T/A Prisa Consulting	Technical, commercial, economic, financial and procurement advice	€323,491.23
Transport Infrastructure Ireland	Staff secondment	€67,899.16
Word Perfect Translation Services Limited	Translation services	€3,116.62
TOTAL for 2013		€394,507.01

Table 3: Schedule of NBP Payments in 2014

Company/Payee Name	Services Provided	Cost
AVC Ltd	Audio visual services	€2,257.05
Clever Cat Design	Design and branding services	€12,346.70
D4 Catering 4. U.	Catering	€231.08
Strategic Scout Ltd	Steering Group costs	€6,101.07
Kieran Clancy Photography	Photography	€346.86

Company/Payee Name	Services Provided	Cost
Mason Hayes and Curran	Legal advisory services	€12,286.22
Mespil Hotel	Steering Group costs	€423.50
National Adult Literacy Agency Ltd (NALA)	Literacy advisory services	€854.29
Park Town Consulting	Policy advisory services	€6,089.25
PRISA Technologies Ltd T/A Prisa Consulting	Technical, commercial, economic, financial and procurement advice	€494,981.54
Consultant A (Anonymized under GDPR)	Steering Group costs	€4,195.07
Tony Harris Design	Design services	€2,324.70
Transport Infrastructure Ireland	Staff secondment	€109,417.11
Vilicom Engineering Ltd	Technical advisory services	€25,184.68
W1 Design	Design services	€4,287.46
TOTAL for 2014		€681,326.58

Table 4: Schedule of NBP Payments in 2015

Company/Payee Name	Services Provided	Cost
Analysys Mason	Technical advisory services	€449,210.01
Buswells Hotel	Steering Group costs	€958.40
Café Sol	Catering	€434.02
Club Travel Ltd	Travel costs	€1,747.95
Department for Digital, Culture Media & Sport	Steering Group costs	€100.65
Doyle Kent Planning Partnership Ltd	Environmental advisory services	€7,995.00
Dublin Chamber Of Commerce	Steering Group costs	€832.60
Strategic Scout Ltd	Steering Group costs	€15,997.32
Consultant B (Anonymized under GDPR)	Process auditor for legal tender evaluation	€4,458.75
KPMG	Financial and procurement advisory services	€729,831.57
Mason Hayes and Curran	Legal advisory services	€339,615.23
Mediavest Ltd	Newspaper publication costs	€4,646.89
Mespil Hotel	Steering Group costs	€922.00
PricewaterhouseCoopers	Economic and strategic advisory services	€1,040,440.67
PRISA Technologies Ltd T/A Prisa Consulting	Technical, commercial, economic, financial and procurement advice	€302,020.35
Consultant A (Anonymized under GDPR)	Steering Group costs	€8,305.18
Transport Infrastructure Ireland	Staff secondment	€69,629.07
Vilicom Engineering Ltd	Technical advisory services	€1,317.33
TOTAL for 2015		€2,978,462.99

Table 5: Schedule of NBP Payments in 2016

Company/Payee Name	Services Provided	Cost
Analysys Mason	Technical advisory services	€556,924.82
Club Travel Ltd	Travel costs	€422.48
Deloitte	Tax and VAT advice	€5,412.00
Department for Digital, Culture Media & Sport	Steering Group costs	€441.91
Doggett Group	Design and print services	€4,314.84
Elaine Tohill Ltd T/A Press	Catering - bidder dialogue	€7,512.00
Here and Now Business Intelligence	Communications advisory services	€7,380.00
Hilton Dublin (Charlemont Hotels Group Ltd)	Meeting room hire	€470.00
Strategic Scout Ltd	Steering Group costs	€591.15
KPMG	Financial and procurement advisory services	€513,409.38
KPMG	Specialist personnel	€585,206.33
Mason Hayes and Curran	Legal advisory services	€456,505.65
Pricewaterhouse Coopers	Economic and strategic advisory services	€143,145.58
PRISA Technologies Ltd T/A Prisa Consulting	Technical, commercial, economic, financial and procurement advice	€11,070.00
Public Affairs Ireland	Training course	€362.85
RPS Consulting Engineers	Environmental advisory services	€27,312.15
T Kilmartin & Sons	Design and print services	€178.35
The Irish Farmers Association	National Ploughing Championships 2015 costs	€25,000.00
TOTAL for 2016		€2,345,659.49

Table 5: Schedule of NBP Payments in 2017

Company/Payee Name	Services Provided	Cost
Achilles Procurement Services	Procurement advisory services	€5,166.00
Analysys Mason	Technical advisory services	€1,302,540.54
Andrew Fox Photography	Photography	€450.00
Bernard Coyle Enterprises	Event costs	€1,353.00
Café Sol	Catering	€104.01
Club Travel Ltd	Travel costs	€38.94
Commerce Decisions Limited	Tender evaluation tool	€41,294.10
Deloitte	Tax and VAT advice	€16,236.00
Doggett Group	Design and printing services	€942.18
Elaine Tohill Ltd T/A Press	Catering	€5,602.80

Company/Payee Name	Services Provided	Cost
Here and Now Business Intelligence	Communications advisory services	€5,904.00
Hilton Dublin (Charlemont Hotels Group Ltd)	Meeting room hire	€1,282.00
Strategic Scout Ltd	Steering Group costs	€6,317.73
Consultant C (Anonymized under GDPR)	Independent Chair costs	€5,000.00
KPMG	Financial and procurement advisory services	€3,342,817.76
KPMG	Specialist personnel	€1,434,957.98
Consultant D (Anonymized under GDPR)	Communications advisory services	€4,305.00
Consultant E (Anonymized under GDPR)	Procurement board costs	€1,932.63
Mason Hayes and Curran	Legal advisory services	€3,003,411.09
Maxwell Photography	Photography	€499.38
Mespil Hotel	Steering Group costs	€109.65
Consultant F (Anonymized under GDPR)	Independent Chair costs	€3,546.90
Pembroke Hall Limited	Meeting room hire	€254.61
Peter Smyth Management Consultancy Ltd	Process auditor costs	€1,968.00
PricewaterhouseCoopers	Economic and strategic advisory services	€759,926.73
Consultant A (Anonymized under GDPR)	Steering Group costs	€2,082.45
Quigg Golden	Independent Chair costs	€1,650.00
RPS Consulting Engineers	Environmental advisory services	€43,190.22
Shearwater Hotel	Event costs	€1,154.85
The Gap Partnership Ltd	Specialist training	€27,378.93
Think Media Limited	Design and printing services	€29,040.30
TOTAL for 2017		€10,050,457.78

Table 6: Schedule of NBP Payments in 2018 (to date)

Company/Payee Name	Services Provided	Cost
Analysys Mason	Technical advisory services	€1,115,387.37
Bank of Ireland Visa (Department credit card)	Administrative procurement process costs (PMO)	€310.97
Club Travel Ltd	Travel costs	€1,493.96
Deloitte	Tax and VAT advice	€24,354.00
Department for Digital, Culture Media & Sport	Steering Group costs	€250.50
Doggett Group	Design and printing services	€510.45
Elaine Tohill Ltd T/A Press	Catering - bidder dialogue	€849.00

Company/Payee Name	Services Provided	Cost
Here and Now Business Intelligence	Communications advisory services	€16,236.00
Strategic Scout Ltd	Steering Group costs	€6,941.94
Consultant C (Anonymized under GDPR)	Independent Chair costs	€2,000.00
KPMG	Financial and procurement advisory services	€2,497,834.80
KPMG	Specialist personnel	€902,993.92
Marsh Ireland	Insurance advice	€11,531.25
Mason Hayes and Curran	Legal advisory services	€1,021,850.64
Mediavest Ltd	Newspaper publication costs – public consultation	€9,736.89
Consultant F (Anonymized under GDPR)	Independent Chair costs	€7,500.00
Pembroke Hall Limited	Meeting room hire	€444.22
Peter Smyth Management Consultancy Ltd	Process auditor costs	€7,872.00
PricewaterhouseCoopers	Economic and strategic advisory services	€75,031.93
Consultant A (Anonymized under GDPR)	Steering Group costs	€4,264.20
Consultant G (Anonymized under GDPR)	Telecommunications regulatory advice	€6,150.00
Quigg Golden	Independent Chair costs	€602.70
RPS Consulting Engineers	Environmental advisory services	€30,965.25
TOTAL for 2018		€5,745,111.99

Military Aircraft Landings

557. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if all of the seven airplanes (details supplied) on contract to the US military that were present at Shannon Airport on 10 October 2018 were in full compliance with stipulations that neither aircraft nor the US troops aboard were involved in military operations, military exercises or intelligence gathering. [43163/18]

559. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the fact that on 10 October 2018 no less than seven aircraft (details supplied) on contract to the US military were refuelled at Shannon Airport; and the number of US troops each plane carried. [43161/18]

560. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if munitions of war permits were requested for the seven aircraft (details supplied) on contract to the US military that were present at Shannon Airport on 10 October 2018; and if so, the number of aircraft such permits were sought for. [43162/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 557, 559 and 560 together.

Shannon Airport has confirmed that five aircraft, registration numbers N207AX, N342AX,

N351AX, N477AX and N819AX, landed in Shannon Airport on the 10th of October 2018.

These stops were classified as technical stops in accordance with the Second Freedom of the Air as allowed for by the 1944 International Air Services Transit Agreement. All of the aircraft listed above were granted exemptions to carry munitions of war by my Department in accordance with the Air Navigation (Carriage of Munitions of War, Weapons and Dangerous Goods) Orders, 1973 and 1989.

Shannon Airport has no records of aircraft with the registration numbers N225AX or N710CK being in Shannon Airport on the 10th of October 2018. My Department also has no records of applications for an exemption to carry munitions of war by these aircraft on the 10th of October 2018.

My Department is not in a position to supply the number of troops carried as passengers per flight.

Decisions whether to grant permission for the use of landing and refuelling facilities at Shannon Airport in respect of such aircraft take into account the views of other relevant government departments and are fully consistent with Ireland's traditional policy of military neutrality, as applied by successive Irish Governments for over 50 years.

Road Projects Status

558. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding the funding for the proposed Narrow Water Bridge between County Louth and County Down; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43171/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As indicated in response to Parliamentary Question 42797/18, the Fresh Start Agreement includes a commitment to undertake a review of the proposed Narrow Water Bridge project with a view to identifying options for its future development. A draft options paper has been prepared and is due to be the subject of further consultation with interested stakeholders before it is finalised.

When completed the options paper is due to be submitted for consideration by the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) when that body is reconvened.

Pending future decisions on the project, there is no specific allocation of funding for a Narrow Water Bridge scheme.

Questions Nos. 559 and 560 answered with Question No. 557.

Bus Services

561. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans for the Kildare and Edenderry bus routes which are operated by Bus Éireann; and if another service provider is due to take over the operation of these services. [43265/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue raised is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) 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.

Transport Infrastructure Ireland Funding

562. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if funding for an overpass will be provided to replace the dangerous junction at N17 Lisduff, Claremorris, County Mayo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43332/18]

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

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

Motor Tax Collection

563. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the details of the precise extra costs on an annual basis for motor tax offices and the driver and vehicle computer services division of the administration of non-annual motor tax payments; and the way in which these relate to the extra payments made by drivers making non-annual motor tax payments. [43339/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The information requested has not been costed by my Department.

The Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General, in its Report on the Administration and Collection of Motor Tax, published in December 2016, estimated that the cost of a motor tax transaction in a motor tax office is €10 and that the cost of a transaction online is €5. The same processes, and therefore, costs apply to the processing of an application for a half-yearly or quarterly disc as for that of an annual disc.

Public Transport Fares

564. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason there is an administration fee for a person replacing a broken tax saver travel ticket; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43370/18]

565. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the procedure for a replacement Tax saver ticket will be reviewed in order to reduce inconvenience to commuters. [43371/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 564 and 565 together.

As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. Matters relating to fees payable by consumers to replace lost annual tickets/smartcards are day-to-day operational issues for the transport operators concerned in the first instance and I have no function in such matters.

If a tax saver ticket is on a Leap Card then the arrangements for replacement are as per

<https://about.leapcard.ie/card-replacement-refunds>

Since the National Transport Authority is responsible for the Leap Card Scheme, any queries regarding the policy applicable to replacing Leap Cards should be addressed to the Authority.

Noting this I have referred the Deputy's questions to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within ten working days.

Ministerial Meetings

566. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the details of engagements, meetings or correspondence that he has had with a person (details supplied) in the past three years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43401/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): No such meetings took place in the past three years and no correspondence was received from the person either.

Roads Maintenance

567. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a proposal to establish a national fund to survey dangerous roadside trees and hedges will be considered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43411/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is a statutory function of each road authority in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993.

Works on regional and local roads are funded by local authorities' own resources supplemented by State grants. Within the overall resources available to it, the selection and prioritisation of works is a matter for each local authority.

Section 70 of the Roads Act 1993 sets out the responsibility of landowners to take all reasonable steps to ensure that trees, hedges and other vegetation growing on their land are not, or could not become, a danger to people using a public road or interfere with the safe use of a public road or the maintenance of a public road.

A local authority can serve notice requiring a landowner to take action to address a hazard. This section also allows the relevant road authority to step in where a landowner fails or is unable to take action to remedy a hazard and to seek recovery of reasonable costs from the landowner. This is, therefore, a matter for management between the landowner and the relevant local authority.

As Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) and the relevant local authority are responsible for maintenance of national roads, I have referred the Deputy's Question to TII for direct reply. If the Deputy does not receive a reply within 10 working days please advise my Office.

Regional Airports

568. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will consider re-establishing the subvention towards the operating costs for daily flights between Dublin and Sligo airports in view of the return to strength of the economy over the

past seven years and in view of the fact that there is no motorway link from Mullingar to Sligo (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43540/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy will know, Exchequer supports for Sligo Airport ceased following a Value for Money Review of the Regional Airports Programme and an associated Government Decision in June 2011. Accordingly, from 2012, the Regional Airports Programme only provides targeted support in the areas of safety and security to four regional airports at Donegal, Ireland West Airport Knock, Kerry and Waterford.

The Exchequer funding available over the lifetime of the current Regional Airports Programme 2015-2019 will be fully required to provide these limited supports, and to support air services on our two existing PSO routes from Donegal and Kerry to Dublin.

In relation to the road link between Mullingar and Sligo, the National Development Plan (NDP) 2018 to 2027 does provide for a number of schemes on this section of the N4. The N4 Collooney Castlebaldwin scheme is going to Government for approval and, if approved, the local authority will subsequently enter into a tender process. There are two further projects which are at an early stage of appraisal and design, namely the N4 Mullingar to Longford and the N4 Carrick to Dromod.

As the Deputy refers, Project 2040 is Ireland's overarching policy initiative, which is informed by the NDP. The NDP, which provides for the road projects outlined above, does not include provision for extending funds under the Regional Airports Programme to other airports such as Sligo and there are no plans to revisit this issue.

Rail Network Safety

569. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will seek assurances from the chief executive officer of Iarnród Éireann that additional security personnel will be deployed at a station (details supplied) in the run up to Hallowe'en; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43547/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue raised is a matter for Iarnród Éireann and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the company for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Fáilte Ireland Funding

570. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the funding allocated by Fáilte Ireland to entities (details supplied) in each of the years 2011 to 2017 and to date in 2018. [43551/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): I have asked Fáilte Ireland to provide the Deputy directly with any information it has in regard to funding these bodies. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Road Tolls

571. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the fact that some tolled roads, including the M1 and Galway bound toll, charge taxis the commercial rate while others charge taxis the lower non-commercial rate; the reason this is the case; the legislation or regulation under which this anomaly exists; his plans to bring the rates charged in line potentially by charging the lower rate unilaterally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43721/18]

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

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

Noting the above, I am referring the question to TII for direct reply within 10 working days. Please inform my private office if you do not receive the information.

Local Authority Funding

572. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the categories of funding available to local authorities through his Department; the amount of funding provided for each scheme in 2016 and 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43738/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The information requested by the Deputy is available in the table.

The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of the relevant local authority in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from the Council's own resources supplemented by State road grants. Details of the regional and local road grant allocations and payments to local authorities are outlined in the regional and local road grant booklets which are available in the Dáil Library.

The Sports Capital Programme (SCP) is operated by my Department and provides grants to assist in the development or refurbishment of sports facilities and the provision of sports equipment. Grants are available to sports clubs, voluntary and community groups, national governing bodies of sport, and local authorities. My Department also operates the Local Authority Swimming Pools Programme. Details of all allocations and payments, under both schemes, for the years referred to by the Deputy are available on my Department's website <http://www.dttas.ie/sport/english/sports-capital-programme>.

2016	2017	Categories of funding
€400,000	€400,000	Bike Week
€9,970,000	€6,500,000	Smarter Travel Programmes
€17,500,000	€9,300,000	STMG Programme
€1,200,000	€2,300,000	Regional Cities Programme

2016	2017	Categories of funding
€2,670,640.40	€5,633,702.27	Greenways

Natural Gas Grid

573. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the delays in regulatory approval for the proposed compressed natural gas pumps at a filling station (details supplied); if he will take steps to expedite its opening; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43740/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I am very aware of the significant role that compressed natural gas (CNG), particularly as a pathway towards renewable gas, can potentially play in reducing emissions from the transport sector. I was very pleased that in Budget 2019, the Minister for Finance announced the introduction of Accelerated Capital Allowances for natural gas fuelled vehicles and vehicle refuellers, further underpinning the Government's support for natural gas as a vehicle fuel.

I am informed that the first proposed commercial compressed natural gas (CNG) pumps have been installed at the Topaz Filling Station in Dublin Port. I understand that commissioning of the pumps is subject to necessary regulatory approval and that these processes are ongoing. The determination of individual planning applications is a matter for the relevant local authority. As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have no role in any of these processes.

Road Traffic Legislation

574. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide a copy of the regulations under section 1(1) of the Road Traffic Act 1961 allowing local authorities to make by-laws regarding the use of vehicles in public places which may include animal drawn vehicles under section 46(a) of the Road Safety Authority (Commercial Vehicle Roadworthiness) Act 2012 in view of a further incident involving collisions between horse-drawn carriages and mechanically propelled vehicles (details supplied); and if he will commence section 31(1) of the Road Traffic Act 2016 which allows the National Transport Authority to make regulations under section 20(5) of the Taxi Regulations Act 2013 in relation to horse-propelled hackney carriages. [43743/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I assume the Deputy means to refer to Part 19 of the Local Government Act 2001. It is under this Part that local authorities can choose to regulate horse-drawn carriages that operate for carriage of persons for reward. Part 19 (as amended) is available at the following link:

[[/debates%20authoring/webattachments.nsf/0/DE9C91E03D1AB6D28025832F0068DD05/\\$File/PART%2019%20redacted.pdf?openelement](/debates%20authoring/webattachments.nsf/0/DE9C91E03D1AB6D28025832F0068DD05/$File/PART%2019%20redacted.pdf?openelement)Part 19 for PQ 574

Regarding section 31 of the Road Traffic Act 2016, following legal advice received, the prudent decision was not to commence this section. The legal risk associated with this provision was considered unacceptably high with a strong likelihood that the regulations under the provisions could be challenged and ultimately struck down. Understandably, given this information, I decided not to commence section 31.

Road Safety Data

575. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the most recent breakdown of figures for road casualties and collisions here relate to 2014; and his plans to expedite the making available of such information in a more timely manner. [43744/18]

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

Rail Network Expansion

576. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the provision of a new train station at Pelletstown; the funding being provided in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43750/18]

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 NTA has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area, including the provision of a new train station at Pelletstown on the Maynooth rail line.

Noting the NTA's responsibilities in the matter raised, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for a more detailed reply. Please contact my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 days.

Bus Services

577. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position with regard to a review of the route licensing system in conjunction with the National Transport Authority to ensure wider concerns such as rural isolation or whether competition is sustainable on a route are included in decisions on whether to grant or refuse bus route licences to operators; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43815/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The regulation of the large public service vehicle industry, including the licensing of bus passenger services, is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the provisions of the Public Transport Act 2009.

I have referred your question to the NTA for direct reply to you. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

National Transport Authority Remit

578. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to introduce legislation to provide the NTA with greater licensing powers to approve or reject route amendments by Bus Éireann and private operators; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43816/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Licensing of commercial bus passenger services is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the

provisions of the Public Transport Regulation Act 2009. In licensing commercial bus services, it is important to note that the 2009 Act requires the NTA to seek to achieve, in the public interest, regulated competition in the provision of such services. Section 13 of this Act provides for the Authority to apply conditions to a licence in respect of the operation of the bus passenger service to which it relates.

My current proposals for amending the Public Transport Regulation Act, 2009 relate to school transport services provided by commercial operators and this is published as one of the heads in the General Scheme of the Railway Safety (Amendment) Bill 2018 and is available on the Department's website.

Road Projects Status

579. Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to improve the Pettigo to Laghey Road (details supplied) in County Donegal; the progress made on this project since he met with a cross-party delegation from Donegal County Council earlier in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43854/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The position remains as outlined in response to PQ32861. A copy of the response is outlined below:

The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of each local authority, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from local authorities' own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter for the local authority.

Before the financial crisis, local authorities could apply on a regular basis for grants for Specific (schemes costing less than €5m) and Strategic Improvement Grants (schemes costing more than €5m) for the strengthening, widening or realignment of regional and local roads. However, the extent of the cutbacks in grant funding during the crisis meant this grant scheme had to be curtailed from 2013 because expenditure on maintenance/renewal was falling well short of what was required to adequately maintain the regional and local road network.

The current Capital Plan does provide for the gradual build-up in funding for the road network but it will take some years yet to reach the level required even for the basic maintenance and renewal of the network. For this reason, there continues to be very limited scope for funding new or additional projects under the Specific and Strategic Grant Programmes.

Any projects proposed by local authorities for consideration under these Grant Programmes are assessed by the Department on a case-by-case basis. All projects put forward by local authorities for consideration must comply with the requirements of the Public Spending Code and the Department's Capital Appraisal Framework (CAF) and it is important for local authorities to prioritise projects within their overall area of responsibility with these requirements in mind. To date, Donegal County Council has not submitted a proposal to my Department regarding the R232 Pettigo to Laghey.

My Department is providing grant funding this year for the Tír Chonail bridge and Fintra bridge projects. An allocation of €600,000 has been provided to Donegal County Council in 2018 for Tír Chonail bridge and approval has been granted to Donegal County Council by the Department to award the contract for works on the bridge.

As regards Fintra bridge, an allocation of €150,000 has been provided in 2018 for prepara-

tory work associated with the project, including project appraisal.

As regards the timeframe to deliver the projects, the implementation of individual projects within grant programmes is the responsibility of the relevant local authority. Grant funding for these projects in 2019 will be considered in liaison with Donegal County Council as part of the decision making process for next year's grant allocations.

Road Projects Status

580. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans for a new bridge at Fintra, Killybegs, on the R263 in County Donegal; the timeline for the delivery of this project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43855/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The position remains as outlined in response to PQ32861. A copy of the response is outlined below:

The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of each local authority, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from local authorities' own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter for the local authority.

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As regards the timeframe to deliver the projects, the implementation of individual projects within grant programmes is the responsibility of the relevant local authority. Grant funding for these projects in 2019 will be considered in liaison with Donegal County Council as part of the

decision making process for next year's grant allocations.

Traffic Management

581. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the review of the traffic signs manual, which constitutes a ministerial direction to road authorities under section 95(16) of the Road Traffic Act 1961, will be completed; when he plans to publish the results of this review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43959/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Traffic Signs Manual is available from my Department's website and stipulates the traffic signs to be used on Irish roads, their layout and symbols, the circumstances in which each sign should be used and the rules for positioning them.

Work towards updating the Manual is at an advanced stage and it is expected to be completed during 2018 with a view to publication early in 2019.

Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries

582. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the method by which new members of the mother and baby home collaborative forum will be appointed as vacancies arise. [43363/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The independent Selection Panel which I appointed to nominate representatives to the Forum for my consideration, selected 19 applicants from the expressions of interest received.

All 20 members of the Collaborative Forum, which includes the Chairman, are Ministerial appointments. Should a vacancy arise, I will consider any further appointments on a case by case basis, having due regard to the representative nature of the Forum.

A number of factors are considered when appointing a member to the Collaborative Forum. The key consideration in selecting a replacement for the Forum, will be maintaining a balanced and inclusive representation within the Forum, of the various Mother and Baby Homes and related institutions being examined by the Commission of Investigation.

Ministerial Meetings

583. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the details of engagements, meetings or correspondence that she has had with a person (details supplied) in the past three years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43387/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I can inform the Deputy that I have had no engagements, meetings or correspondence with the person concerned.

I was once briefly introduced to the person referred to.

Tribunals of Inquiry Reports

584. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her views on the issues raised by the disclosures tribunal with respect to the Child and Family Agency, Tusla; the measures she is taking in order to address them; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43425/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): In my view the report from the Disclosures Tribunal is devastating in its assessment of the poor management, supervision and record management in Tusla's Cavan Monaghan area. It is clear that the standards of local management and administration expected from a publicly funded body were not met. In this context, the apology made by Tusla to the McCabe family is the least that could be expected.

I have written and spoken to the Chair of Tusla about the findings of the Tribunal and I will be meeting the Board of Tusla shortly to underline the need to address these and other serious shortcomings in Tusla, as identified by the report.

The Deputy will be aware that in March 2017, as a result of what had come to light in respect of Sgt McCabe and his family, I directed HIQA to carry out a separate statutory investigation into Tusla. This report was published in June 2018.

In September 2018, I received the Action Plan from Tusla's Board to address the findings from the HIQA investigation. The implementation of this plan will also address many of the findings in the Disclosures Tribunal report.

Tusla has stated that it is addressing the findings in the Disclosures Tribunal report by:

- Reorganising and improving management and governance arrangements;
- Introducing a dedicated specialist team to manage retrospective abuse;
- Increasing supervision of the staff involved;
- Increasing quality assurance of policies on the ground.

Tusla has accepted that the practice and governance in this case was exceptionally poor and has commenced a HR process around the management of this case. It is expected that this process will be completed in due course.

The Government has increased funding to Tusla by over €30 million for 2019, which will enable these and other reforms to take effect.

Child Protection

585. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of the serious incident review announced by her on 28 March 2018 into concerns regarding the management of a serious and complex case of alleged child abuse and neglect involving a number of children; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43471/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Deputy is referring to an independent review which I intend to commission, in agreement with the Minister for Justice and Equality, to examine and report on the management of a complex and serious case of alleged child abuse and neglect involving sixteen children in four families.

While there is no evidence of any serious mishandling of the case by either Tusla or An

Garda Síochána, I believe that it would be good practice to arrange for a short, focused independent ‘Serious Incident’ review of the actions taken in the case.

The primary purpose of the review will be to ensure that any learning which may arise in relation to information exchange is captured and informs future work.

The Special Rapporteur on Child Protection, and Chair of the Review Panel, Dr Geoffrey Shannon, has assisted with drafting the terms of reference for the review. These Terms of Reference have now been agreed with the Department of Justice and Equality, and have been jointly submitted by myself and Minister Flanagan for the consideration of the Attorney General.

It is not possible to give a timeframe for the delivery of the report at this stage, given the complex and unusual nature of this case, and the importance of ensuring that this non-statutory review does not risk prejudicing the on-going investigation and criminal prosecution.

Local Authority Funding

586. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the categories of funding available to local authorities through her Department; the amount of funding provided for each scheme in 2016 and 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43724/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The types of funding available to local authorities from my Department primarily relate to youth programmes and services. In addition, my Department provides funding for national recreation and play funding, children participation activities and children and young people’s services committees.

The amount of funding in the period concerned is set out in tabular format below.

-	2017	2016
Youth Programmes and Services	€2,523,532	€2,457,812
Comhairle na nÓg	€624,465	€662,849
Children and Young People’s Services Committees	€11,100	€104,368
National Recreation Week	€42,500	€33,488
National Play Day	€16,000	€14,102

Protected Disclosures

587. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she or the board of Tusla have received a disclosure which includes a complaint in regard to the performance of a person (details supplied) among other named national managers or former national managers in Tusla since its formation in 2014. [43769/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I would like to inform the Deputy that it would not be appropriate for me to comment on disclosures under the Protected Disclosures Act 2014 relating to any individual. I have referred the Deputy’s question to the Board of Tusla for direct reply.

Protected Disclosures

588. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if the human resources section of Tusla has received a disclosure which includes a complaint in regard to the performance of a person (details supplied) among other named national managers or former national managers in Tusla since its formation in 2014. [43770/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): It would not be appropriate to comment on disclosures under the Protected Disclosures Act 2014 relating to any individual. I have referred the Deputy's question to Tusla for direct reply.

Paediatric Services

589. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of children awaiting paediatric occupational therapy appointments in each CHO area to date in 2018, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43771/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I can inform the Deputy that the matter referred to is under the remit of my colleague the Minister for Health.

Child Detention Centres

590. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 586 of 16 October 2018, the reason the full and original report by a company (details supplied) is not being made available for public scrutiny as opposed to a review of the report. [43797/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Minister for Children and Youth Affairs has been advised by Oberstown Children Detention Campus that the Report referred to by the Deputy was shared with the relevant parties, including the Oberstown Board of Management, staff representatives and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. It was not made available to the public as the review was intended for internal purposes, with a focus on evaluation and improvements in efficiency and effectiveness of processes.

Child and Family Agency

591. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to audit or investigate the penalisation of managers within Tusla that have raised complaints or submitted protected disclosures in regard to the practice and performance of the organisation in regard to child safety. [43814/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): It would not be appropriate for me to comment on disclosures under the Protected Disclosures Act 2014 relating to any individuals. This is an operational matter for Tusla under their Grievance Procedure and also their Protected Disclosures Policy and Procedure. I have referred the Deputy's question to Tusla for direct reply.

Child and Family Agency Services

592. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the reason an organisation (details supplied) was not informed or given the opportunity to make an input into a review process carried out by Tusla in counties Galway and Roscommon on the decision to terminate its service level agreement with the organisation despite the fact that it is a partnership organisation that meets the criteria specified as priority areas for Tusla; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43955/18]

594. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the reason a decision was taken by Tusla in counties Galway and Roscommon to terminate its service level agreement with an organisation (details supplied) and to no longer fund its services from December 2018 despite positive outcomes of its programmes over a 16 year period; if this decision will be reversed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43957/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 592 and 594 together.

Earlier this year, Tusla, the Child and Family Agency undertook a process to develop a Creative Community Alternative (CCA) plan in all 17 Tusla Areas, including the Galway/Roscommon area. The CCA plan establishes regional frameworks to provide outcome-focused alternatives for young people in residential or foster care, or those who may be at risk of admission to care.

Following this process, in June 2018, Tusla made a decision not to renew its Service Level Agreement (SLA) with the organisation in the Galway/Roscommon area, referred to by the Deputy.

Under the terms of the current Agreement, the organisation in question is contracted to provide a support service to 18 young people in need in the Galway/Roscommon area. The young people are assigned an advocate that will work with them over a 6 month period.

Tusla has advised that it is of the view that the organisation referred to by the Deputy does not meet the needs of high-risk young people, particularly those who require long-term intervention that is provided by professionally qualified staff.

Tusla's CCA plan for the Galway/Roscommon was informed by a detailed analysis of the demographic profile of the area, rates of referrals to Tusla social workers and family services teams, and a financial analysis. The CCA plan is also aligned with Tusla's key strategies, including its Commissioning Strategy, Prevention Partnership and Family Support (PPFS) Strategy, and Child Protection and Welfare Strategy.

Tusla has also advised me that the decision to suspend the SLA with the organisation referred to by the Deputy was communicated to its CEO and Director of Services on 28 June, 2018. A further face-to-face meeting was held in September 2018 and no change was made to the earlier decision.

It is good practice for Tusla to review its services on a continuous basis, including the work carried out by Tusla staff in the Galway/Roscommon area through its CCA plan. This may include, but does not necessarily require, input from third-party organisations that are commissioned by Tusla to provide services.

Tusla will continue to work with the organisation to which the Deputy refers until the end of 2018, which is in line with the SLA signed by both parties.

593. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the amount of funding allocated to an organisation (details supplied) in each of the years 2011 to 2017 and to date in 2018, by county in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43956/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department has not provided direct funding to the named organisation in the years specified by the Deputy. However, the Deputy might wish to note that Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, provides funding to the organisation in question under Sections 56-59 of the Child and Family Agency Act, 2013. In addition, Oberstown Children's Detention Campus provide funding to the organisation for the purpose of targeting young people leaving Oberstown.

My Department does not held detailed information on the amount of funding these two agencies provided to the organisation as this is an operational matter. However, I have asked both agencies to reply directly to the Deputy with the information requested.

Question No. 594 answered with Question No. 592.

Library Projects

595. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if funding will be made available to build new libraries at Mohill and Carrick-on-Shannon; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43779/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): Our Department funds a Libraries Capital Programme that will invest €29m in 19 projects, as well as the My Open Library service, between 2016 and 2022. While the programme is currently fully committed, funding for new library projects will be considered as additional funds become available.

In the meantime, Leitrim County Council might consider submitting applications for Mohill and Carrick-on-Shannon libraries as elements of broader regeneration proposals under the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund. The fund supports coordinated and integrated projects that seek to revitalise rural Ireland and make a significant and sustainable impact on rural communities. Some €315m is available under the fund between 2019 and 2022. The first call for proposals closed at the end of September, but a further call is expected to issue in 2019.

The provision of library services, including the provision of library buildings, is primarily a matter for local authorities in their capacity as library authorities under the Local Government Act 2001.

Broadband Service Provision

596. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of an offer for a Wi-Fi hotspot which was made to a school (details supplied) in County Galway in June 2018; when progress will be made on the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43306/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Seán Canney): As a part of the prioritisation strategy for roll out of the National Broadband Plan, my Department, in consultation with Local Authority Broadband Officers and the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment, have identified a network

of close to 300 Broadband Connection Points which will provide free Wi-Fi to rural communities in advance of high-speed broadband being rolled out in their area.

The aim of these hubs is to provide early access to high-speed broadband for rural communities that are situated in areas that are otherwise likely to only be connected towards the end of the roll out process.

These hubs will be prioritised during the roll out of the National Broadband Plan, with the cost of connecting these locations shared between the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment. The school referred to by the Deputy was identified by the relevant Local Authority as an ideal location to act as a Broadband Connection Point.

Officials from my Department have recently requested the Local Authority Broadband Officers to engage with relevant stakeholders and management boards responsible for the locations which have been identified to act as Broadband Connection Points to seek their approval in principle in order for them to be ready for connection once roll out of the National Broadband Plan in the State intervention area commences.

Ministerial Meetings

597. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the details of engagements, meetings or correspondence that he has had with a person (details supplied) in the past three years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43399/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I can confirm that I have not had any engagement, correspondence or meetings with the person in question.

For the sake of completeness, I would refer the Deputy also to my answer to Parliamentary Question No. 310 of 18th October 2018.

Town and Village Renewal Scheme

598. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the reason a project (details supplied) was not approved for funding under the town and village renewal scheme 2018; the reason its application was not approved; if there is a review mechanism and an appeal system in relation to same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43476/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The 2018 Town and Village Renewal Scheme was launched in April of this year. The scheme is funded by my Department and administered through the Local Authorities.

Local Authorities were required to seek expressions of interest from communities for proposals under the scheme, and to selected up to 12 proposals for submission to my Department by 30th June for consideration.

I can confirm that Laois Co. Council submitted 12 proposals to my Department for consideration; however, an application in respect of the town referred to by the Deputy was not received by my Department.

On 5th October, I announced the allocation of over €21 million to 224 projects in towns and

villages across the country under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme. These included 11 projects to the value of €872,094 in Co. Laois.

Details of all projects approved under the scheme are available on my Department's website at: <https://drcd.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/Town-and-Village-2018-successful-projects-08-Oct-18.pdf>.

Town and Village Renewal Scheme

599. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the projects per village being funded under the allocations made in the most recently announced 2018 town and village renewal scheme in counties Sligo and Leitrim; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43546/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The 2018 Town and Village Renewal Scheme was launched in April of this year. The scheme is funded by my Department and administered through the Local Authorities. Local Authorities were required to seek expressions of interest from communities for proposals under the scheme. They then selected up to 12 proposals for submission to my Department for consideration.

On 5th October last, I approved funding of just over €21 million under the scheme for 224 projects in towns and villages right across the country.

Eleven projects in Co. Sligo were approved for total funding of €1,138,400. Nine projects in Co. Leitrim were approved for total funding of €737,520.

The full list of successful projects under the 2018 Town and Village Renewal Scheme, including those in counties Sligo and Leitrim, are available on my Department's website at:

<https://drcd.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/Town-and-Village-2018-successful-projects-08-Oct-18.pdf>.

Telecommunications Services Provision

600. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the timeline for the release of information on the mobile coverage blackspots pilot project to encompass all 31 local authority areas expanded in March 2018; if a map of blackspots will be made available; the actions he will take to address these blackspots; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43657/18]

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

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

With regard to the specific issue of mobile phone blackspots, my officials, in conjunction

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

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

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

It was not envisaged that the data gathered through this exercise would be published due to the constantly changing nature of the information. However, through another action in the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce report, ComReg intends to publish a composite national coverage map by the end of the year. This will allow consumers to check which mobile phone operator can provide the best coverage in their area.

ComReg meets my Department on a quarterly basis to provide an update on the progress of this action and has stated that all relevant data has now been collected from the mobile operators and the composite map is currently being developed.

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

Telecommunications Infrastructure

601. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the terms of reference, membership and progress of the working group to explore the feasibility of developing a standardised policy for accessing and utilising State assets for the deployment of telecommunications infrastructure established in March 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43658/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Seán Canney): The Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce was established in 2016 to identify immediate solutions to broadband and mobile phone coverage deficits, and to investigate how better services could be provided to consumers prior to full build and roll out of the network planned under the National Broadband Plan (NBP) State Intervention. The Taskforce published its final report in December 2016, addressing a wide range of issues impacting on the provision of broadband and mobile phone services.

An Implementation Group, chaired by the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment and Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development, was established in early 2017 to oversee the implementation of all of the actions con-

tained in the Taskforce Report.

Arising from 2018 work programme of the Implementation Group, a Working Group on State and Publicly Owned Assets was established earlier this year to explore the feasibility of developing a standardised policy for accessing and utilising State assets for the deployment of telecommunications infrastructure.

The Terms of Reference of the Working Group are to:

1. Develop a policy statement for the siting of telecommunications infrastructure on or in publicly and State-owned assets, and submit for approval by Government;
2. Work with key stakeholders to develop a comprehensive dynamic database of public and State-owned property assets and make it available to telecommunications companies;
3. Consult as appropriate with key stakeholders;
4. Develop appropriate templates for use by public bodies for the licensing of telecommunications infrastructure.

The Working Group is chaired by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment and includes officials from the Department of Rural and Community Development, the Office of Public Works, the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, the Department of Housing Planning and Local Government, and NewERA.

I understand that the Working Group has met on a regular basis in 2018, with a view to reporting to the Government by the end of this year.

Broadband Service Provision

602. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the timeline for the completion of the review of the role of broadband offices; if this review will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43659/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Seán Canney): My Department provides funding to support the employment of a Broadband Officer in each Local Authority. Broadband Officers have a remit in relation to both broadband and mobile phone access.

These Officers play an important role as the dedicated local point of contact for telecoms operators on coverage and roll out issues, and for promoting telecommunications infrastructure development in their respective Local Authority areas.

The response to the appointment of the Broadband has been very positive, with the telecoms industry strongly welcoming the structures put in place. Their employment is also ensuring a much greater degree of consistency in engagement with the industry and in clearing obstacles to the roll out of the necessary infrastructure.

The 2018 Work Programme of the Implementation Group which was established to drive the actions in the report of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce includes a commitment to review the role of Broadband Officers in order to define and standardise the scope of their role across all Local Authorities.

This review is being led by the County and City Management Association and is supported

by my Department. The review will determine what expertise and knowledge is necessary to complement the existing skillset of the Broadband Officers. The review will be published following sign off by the County and City Management Association.

Telecommunications Infrastructure

603. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if his Department is informed of planning applications made for mobile infrastructure; if so, the process by which his Department is informed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43660/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Seán Canney): One of the functions of my Department is to work with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment and with Local Authorities to identify and remove any barriers that impact on the roll out of telecommunications infrastructure, including mobile phone and broadband infrastructure, particularly in rural Ireland.

However, my Department has no function in relation to planning applications and my Department is not informed of applications made for mobile phone infrastructure by telecommunications providers.

Full details of my Department's role and work in relation to mobile phone and broadband issues are available on my Department's website at: <https://drcd.gov.ie/about/rural/rural-development/mobile-phone-and-broadband-taskforce/>.

Local Authority Funding

604. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the categories of funding available to local authorities through his Department; the amount of funding provided for each scheme in 2016 and 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43736/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The table shows the amount of funding provided for each of my Department's programmes/schemes in 2016 and 2017, where the funding is allocated to Local Authorities/Local Community Development Committees.

Category	2016 €	2017 €
CLÁR	€8.24 million	€4.93 million
2016 Rural Recreation Scheme 2017 re named Outdoor Recreation Scheme	€4.13 million	€11.63 million
2017 Local Improvement Scheme Roads	-	€16.96 million
Library Lease Subsidy Payments	€816,369	€818,348
1916 Book-fund Grant	€176,943	-
My Open Library service infrastructure	€1.13 million	-
Radio-frequency identification funding (RFID)	-	€91,559
Libraries Ireland Funding	-	€3.4 million
Libraries Capital Programme	€1.67 million	€3.001 million

Category	2016 €	2017 €
Additional Staff Resources Local Community Development Committees (LCDC's)	-	€624,128
Broadband Officer Payments(Paid in 2016 for 2017 Paid at end 2017 for 2018)Funding available for 2019 has been increased to €42,000. If all LAs draw down before end of year (Expected): Overall Total - 1,302,000EUR, Will be paid at end 2018 for 2019	€1.085 million * (31 LA x 35,000EUR)	€1.085 million * (31 LA x 35,000EUR)
Social Inclusion & Community Activation Programme	€35.08 million	€37.3 million
Community Facilities Scheme	-	€2 million
RAPID	-	€4.7 million
Local & Regional Development	€293,447	€774,648
Dublin Inner City Co-op	€548,443	€448,000

In respect of **Public Participation Networks (PPN)** total funding of €1.55m per annum was available to local authorities in 2016 and 2017 from the Department to local authorities in respect of Public Participation Networks, an allocation of €50,000 was available to each local authority, provided this was matched by at least €30,000 from each local authority. This funding was to be used for the purposes of developing and maintaining a PPN, including the costs associated with the PPN Resource Worker.

The **Town and Village Renewal Scheme** is funded by this Department and administered by the Local Authorities (LA) in each area. Towns and Villages can apply through their LA for funding under the scheme to support the rejuvenation of the town/village. The Town and Village Renewal Scheme was launched in the second half of 2016 with a budget of €10 million. A total of 170 projects were approved under the scheme in 2016.

A further 281 projects were approved for a total of €21.6 million under the 2017 scheme. The 2018 Town and Village announcement brings the number of projects approved under the scheme since 2016 to more than 670 with an allocation of €21.3m .

CLÁR 2017

CLÁR provides funding for small scale infrastructural projects in disadvantaged rural areas that have experienced significant levels of de-population.

Measures 1 and 2 of the 2017 programme were applied for through the Local Authorities:

- Measure 1: Support for Schools/Community Safety Measures
- Measure 2: Play Areas

CLÁR 2016

The following measures were funded through the Local Authorities under the programme in 2016:

- Measure 1 Safety Measures for Schools and Community Sports Facilities
- Measure 2 Playgrounds and Multi-Use Games areas
- Measure 3 Local Access Roads

Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme

The Outdoor Recreation Scheme is a scheme of funding to support development and necessary maintenance, enhancement or promotion of recreational infrastructure including the trail network throughout Ireland. Funding was made available for Greenways, Blueways and Equestrian Trails.

Under the 2017 scheme the following funding measures were available:

Measure 1: Small Scale Maintenance/Promotion and Marketing

- Measure 2: Medium Scale Repair/Upgrade and New Trail Development

- Measure 3: Large Scale Repair/Upgrade and New Strategy Trail Development

In 2017, funding to the value of €11.63 was provided for projects through the Local Authorities.

Rural Recreation Scheme 2016 funding totalling €4.13 Million was made available to Local Authorities under the Programme. The Scheme was renamed the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme in 2017.

The Local Improvement Scheme, or LIS, is a programme for improvement works on small private or non-public roads in predominantly rural areas. It was relaunched in 2017 after a gap of a number of years. A total of 23 Local Authorities benefitted from scheme to the value of €16,960,703.

Rural Economic Development Zones (REDZ) are functional, rather than administrative, geographic areas that reflect the spatial patterns of local economic activity and development. They are, in effect, sub-county zones within which most people live and work. The central objective of the REDZ concept is to encourage development on a more collaborative and functional area basis using the synergies and interdependencies between rural towns and their outlying areas to generate local economic activity. The **REDZ 2016** scheme invited Local Authorities to submit suitable projects for consideration under the scheme. Successful projects were awarded funding of up to 80% of the total project cost, with the balance of funding being met from local sources (Local Authority, private sector or community-based funding) with a minimum 5% cash contribution. 47 projects received funding of **€6.142m** under REDZ 2016. The REDZ scheme did not run in 2017.

LEADER Programmes Expenditure

605. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the grants announced under the LEADER program in County Mayo from 1 January 2017 to 30 June 2018; the amount of each grant referred to drawn down as of 30 September 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43881/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): LEADER forms part of Ireland's Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 and has a total budget of €250 million over that period.

Table 1 provides details of the grants approved under the LEADER programme in County Mayo from 1 January 2017 to 30 June 2018, along with details of the amount drawn down in respect of each grant approval as of 30 September 2018.

Expenditure on the projects is drawn down as these projects are implemented and the promoters submit claims for payment to the Local Action Groups which administer the LEADER programme locally.

Grant funding can be drawn down on a phased basis and a maximum of five phased payments are permitted. The approved works must be fully completed by the project promoter prior to the final payment.

Table 1: LEADER Grants for Mayo from 1 January 2017 to 30 June 2018 and Claims paid as of 30 September 2018

Project Name	Promoter Name	Address	LEADER Grant Amount	Date Project Approval	Claims Paid Value
Ballinrobe Agricultural Show Ltd	Ballinrobe Agricultural Show Ltd	BallinteeunBallinrobeCo. Mayo	€6,073.75	17/07/2017	€6,071.96
Louisburgh Horse & Pony Show	Louisburgh Horse Show Company Clg	ShraughLouisburghWestportCo. Mayo	€11,471.28	17/07/2017	€4,035.93
Expansion of Achill Bikes	Michael A Lavelle T/A Achill Tours	Teach Cruachan-Keel WestDooaghCo. Mayo	€11,564.46	18/07/2017	€11,564.46
The Achill Experience	Comhlacht Forbartha Aitiuil Acla Cuideachta Faoi Theorainn Rathaiochta	CrumpaunKeel-WestportCo. Mayo	€89,469.00	20/07/2017	€88,676.01
IRD Kiltimagh Broadband Extension	IRD Kiltimagh Ltd	Enterprise House1 Aiden StreetKiltimaghCo. Mayo	€7,887.37	18/08/2017	€7,887.37
Rural Broadband capacity expansion	Croagh Patrick Community Network Society Ltd	16 Ashwood MeadowWestportCo. Mayo	€8,148.67	18/08/2017	€6,626.91
Louisburgh Community Broadband Scheme	Louisburgh Community Futures	CarrowniskeyWestportCo. Mayo	€9,945.74	22/08/2017	€0.00
Newport Astronomy Club-Telescope	Newport Astronomy Club	FauleensNewport-WestportCo. Mayo	€2,586.10	22/08/2017	€2,586.10
Emotioncubes	Brendan Murphy	Knock RoadClaremorrisCo. Mayo	€9,359.44	26/09/2017	€0.00
Westport 250	Westport Tourism Organisation	CloonkeenCastlebarCo. Mayo	€8,148.00	27/09/2017	€8,146.87
Enhance Fahy Community Centre facilities	Fahy Community Development Company CLG	DerryribbeenClogherWestportCo. Mayo	€5,966.23	27/09/2017	€0.00
Tiernaur Hall Renovation	Tiernaur Hall Society Ltd	Tiernaur HallRoskeenTiernaurCo. Mayo	€41,839.50	27/09/2017	€34,440.00

Questions - Written Answers

Project Name	Promoter Name	Address	LEADER Grant Amount	Date Project Approval	Claims Paid Value
Luisne Travels from the Heart - Equipment	Ballinrobe Family Resource Centre Ltd	Credit Union HouseMain Street-BallinrobeCo. Mayo	€2,550.12	28/09/2017	€2,465.13
Luisne Travels from The Heart - Training	Ballinrobe Family Resource Centre Ltd	Credit Union HouseMain Street-BallinrobeCo. Mayo	€8,600.00	28/09/2017	€4,000.00
Aghamore Community Amenities Centre	Aghamore Community Development Company Ltd	Lower AghamoreCo. Mayo	€300,000.00	29/09/2017	€0.00
Cill Chomáin GAA Community Development Ltd	Kilcommon GAA Community Development Ltd	LenarevaghGlenamoyBallinaCo. Mayo	€300,000.00	02/10/2017	€0.00
Charlestown Bridge Club	Charlestown Bridge Club	CloonaweemaCharlestownClaremorrisCo. Mayo	€2,165.37	02/10/2017	€2,165.37
Linenhall Arts Centre Sound & Lighting	Linenhall Arts Centre CLG	Linenhall Street-CastlebarCo. Mayo	€30,185.12	20/10/2017	€30,185.12
Workshop Fit-Out	Nigel O'Reilly Goldsmith Ltd.	CloonconlanStraid-eFoxfordCo. Mayo	€22,752.57	20/10/2017	€22,752.57
Creation and Development of new Mulranny Tourism Promotional Website	Mulranny Tourism Group	MulrannyWestport-Co. Mayo	€4,363.42	30/11/2017	€2,181.03
Advanced Teacher Training	David Whelan	Rosmalley HouseRosmalleyWestportCo. Mayo	€3,240.00	04/12/2017	€0.00
Knock Community Centre Ltd Feasibility Study	Knock Community Centre Ltd.	Knock Community CentreCarramore NorthKnockCo. Mayo	€8,055.00	06/12/2017	€0.00
Charlestown & District Men's Shed	Charlestown and District Men's Shed	CBP The ComplexSwinford RoadCharlestown-Co. Mayo	€4,516.35	06/12/2017	€0.00
The installation of electronic point of sale (EPOS) system at the Community Centre	Inishturk Community Club Ltd	Bellavaum, Inishturk-Co. Mayo	€4,050.00	18/12/2017	€4,050.00
Holistic Therapy Training	Cora Keating	Granuaile HouseThe QuayClare IslandCo. Mayo	€4,905.00	19/12/2017	€0.00
Prison House tourism accommodation	Tom O'Connor	Prizon RoadBallaCastlebarCo. Mayo	€50,000.00	20/12/2017	€0.00

Project Name	Promoter Name	Address	LEADER Grant Amount	Date Project Approval	Claims Paid Value
Castlebar Social Services - New Building Extension	Castlebar Social Services CLG	Castle StreetCastlebarCo. Mayo	€225,235.64	20/12/2017	€0.00
Motorhome / Caravan Serviced Site	Nevins Newfield Inn Ltd	Nevin's Newfield InnNewfieldCo. Mayo	€50,000.00	20/12/2017	€0.00
RJM Spray painting Ltd	RJM Spray Painting Ltd	KilbegClaremorrisCo. Mayo	€22,175.35	20/12/2017	€0.00
Expansion of Teach Cruachan B&B	Michael A Lavelle T/A Achill Tours	Teach Cruachan-Keel WestDooaghCo. Mayo	€41,972.01	20/12/2017	€0.00
Bellacragher Boat Club/ Safety Boat	Bellacragher Boat Club	ClagganBallycroy-WestportCo. Mayo	€30,000.00	20/12/2017	€0.00
CE Certification for Structural Steel Business	Seanie Hayes T/A Hayes Mechanical & Engineering	BallintubberClaremorrisCo. Mayo	€6,967.25	20/12/2017	€6,967.25
Archaeological Investigation of Ballintubber Abbey	Ballintubber Abbey Trust	Ballintubber AbbeyBallintubberClaremorrisCo. Mayo	€101,380.17	04/01/2018	€75,850.60
Farm Shop	John Martin Lally	MuingsBarnatraBallinaCo. Mayo	€16,323.57	12/01/2018	€0.00
River Tunneling Project-A&D	East Mayo Anglers Association	Market streetSwinfordClaremorrisCo. Mayo	€3,825.00	20/02/2018	€0.00
Corrib/Mask Rescue (Irish Red Cross)	Corrib/Mask Rescue	CappaghduffToormakeadyClaremorrisCo. Mayo	€28,120.56	21/02/2018	€0.00
River Tunneling Project-Training	East Mayo Anglers Association	Market StreetSwinfordClaremorrisCo. Mayo	€1,450.00	21/02/2018	€0.00
Grass cutting and enhancement work in Ballina UDC	Ballina Tidy Town Company Limited By Guarantee	Moy Valley Resource CentreBunree RoadBallinaCo. Mayo	€18,187.50	23/02/2018	€0.00
Anthony Golden Community Park - Feasibility Study	Anthony Golden Community Park Trust	KnockduffBallinaCo. Mayo	€4,372.65	26/02/2018	€0.00
Behy Community Hall Fit Out	Behy Community Hall Ltd	Behy MoreBallinaCo. Mayo	€69,336.28	06/03/2018	€0.00
Feasibility Study for a Potential Walking Trail from Healys Hotel Pontoon Bridge to Knockmore Bay	Knockmore/Pontoon Development Group	MinterburnTavanaughmoreFoxfordCo. Mayo	€23,291.00	03/04/2018	€0.00

Questions - Written Answers

Project Name	Promoter Name	Address	LEADER Grant Amount	Date Project Approval	Claims Paid Value
Removal of Litter - Training	River Moy Search and Rescue Ballina Limited	12 Brusna Court-BallinaCo. Mayo	€23,712.00	03/04/2018	€0.00
Achill Seal Caves Caravan & Camping Park	Lorraine & Enda McHugh	CladdaghDooniver-AchillCo. Mayo	€49,922.00	10/04/2018	€15,457.01
Clare Island Animal Transport	Michael Oliver Moran	ToremoreClare IslandWestportCo. Mayo	€5,936.59	17/04/2018	€0.00
A&D into Alternative Treatment Technologies	Maloney & Matthews Animal Collection Ltd	CurraboyBallinrobeCo. Mayo	€13,875.00	23/04/2018	€13,875.00
New Glamping Business at Crossboyne	Peter Murphy	CrossboyneClaremorrisCo. Mayo	€25,550.00	23/04/2018	€0.00
Balla Town Enhancement 2017	Balla Community Resource Development CLG	The SquareBallaCastlebarCo. Mayo	€7,455.45	23/04/2018	€0.00
Upgrade & Refurbishment of Existing IT Training Room	Mayo Abbey Parish CDC CLG	Mayo AbbeyClaremorrisCo. Mayo	€6,348.75	23/04/2018	€6,348.75
Walk West Ireland	Derek Davidson	TobernavenLa-hardaneBallinaCo. Mayo	€37,115.50	25/04/2018	€0.00
Blacksod Environmental Education Centre	Dulra Iorrais Teo	EllyClogherBelmulletCo. Mayo	€18,600.00	25/04/2018	€0.00
Audio Recording Facility principally for Teenagers	Clar Regional Centre Ltd (T/A Claremorris Town Hall)	Claremorris Town HallTown Hall RoadClaremorrisCo. Mayo	€16,520.43	25/05/2018	€0.00
Balla Church Centenary Book	Balla Community Council Ltd	BallaCastlebarCo. Mayo	€3,292.50	25/05/2018	€0.00
Glencorrib Enhancement Project	Glencorrib Community Services Ltd	GlencorribShruleCo. Mayo	€23,017.80	25/05/2018	€0.00
Irish and English Patent Application	Road Traffic Safety Solutions Ltd	CarrowhollyWestportCo. Mayo	€1,638.50	25/05/2018	€0.00
Parke Enhancement Proposal 2018	Parke Community Hall Limited	Parke Community CentreParkeCastlebarCo. Mayo	€26,973.29	25/05/2018	€0.00
Westport Walking Maps	Westport Tourism Organisation	CloonkeenCastlebarCo. Mayo	€1,757.62	25/05/2018	€1,757.62

Project Name	Promoter Name	Address	LEADER Grant Amount	Date Project Approval	Claims Paid Value
Mountain Trail push bikes, electric bikes and related equipment	Noel Reid	Quay RoadNewportWestportCo. Mayo	€23,094.00	21/06/2018	€0.00
Equipment acquisition for jewellery/pottery studio	Sarah Lyons	FalduffLouisburghWestportCo. Mayo	€2,292.34	21/06/2018	€0.00
Fences / Town Plan	Belmullet Tidy Towns	Chapel Street-BelmulletBallinaCo. Mayo	€17,963.49	21/06/2018	€0.00
Walking Path and Grass Mower	Pairc Iearthana Cille Moire Cuideachta Faoi Theorainn Ráthaíochta	DrumBelmulletCo. Mayo	€3,712.50	21/06/2018	€0.00
Kilkelly Community Centre	Kilkelly and District Development Company Ltd.	KilkellyBallyhounisCo. Mayo	€281,444.78	27/06/2018	€0.00
		Total Grants Approved	€1,860,437.28	Claims Paid	€356,333.44

Back to Education Allowance Applications

606. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if an application by a person (details supplied) will be re-examined with a view to approving the back to education allowance in view of the fact that the person was only 11 days short of the required number of days, which is an administrative rule in her Department rather than a statutory rule, and in further view of the fact that there is no formal appeals mechanism in this situation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43515/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): A person wishing to pursue a course of study under the Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) scheme will have to satisfy a number of conditions such as being a certain age, in receipt of a prescribed social welfare payment for a specified time period, pursuing a full-time course of study leading to a recognised qualification in a recognised college and progressing in the level of education held by the client with reference to the National Framework of Qualifications among others.

The conditions under which the BTEA operate are designed to ensure that they address the objective of supporting longer term social welfare customers into employment. It is important that the eligibility rules for the scheme are applied in a fair and consistent manner.

Officials in my Department will carry out a review of the case referred to by the Deputy and will advise the person concerned of the outcome.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Questions - Written Answers
Fuel Allowance Eligibility

607. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will address a matter (details supplied) regarding the qualifying criteria for the fuel allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43166/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The fuel allowance is a payment of €22.50 per week for 28 weeks (a total of €630 each year) from October to April, to over 368,000 low income households, at an estimated cost of €227 million in 2018. The purpose of this payment is to assist these households with their energy costs. The allowance represents a contribution towards the energy costs of a household. It is not intended to meet those costs in full. Only one allowance is paid per household.

My Department also pays an electricity or gas allowance under the house hold benefits scheme at an estimated cost of €182 million in 2018.

The criteria for fuel allowance are framed in order to direct the limited resources available to my Department in as targeted a manner as possible. Therefore the fuel allowance is a means tested payment and qualifying payments are those payments that are considered long term payments by my Department. People on long term payments are unlikely to have additional resources of their own and are more vulnerable to energy poverty than people who have only recently become unemployed, and may only be jobless for a short period.

Any decision to extend the eligibility criteria for fuel allowance scheme to include people on short term payment schemes would require considerable extra funding for the scheme and would have to be considered in the overall budgetary negotiations.

With regards to no right of appeal the fuel allowance scheme is administrative (non-statutory) and therefore decisions on claims cannot be appealed to a Social Welfare Appeals Officer. However, if a customer is dissatisfied with a decision not to grant an allowance, s/he may request a review of his/her claim by a different Deciding Officer. It is open to applicants to supply any additional facts of information in support of his/her application. However, if it is the case that they are simply not qualified for payment, a review will not overturn the previous decision. If following this review, the applicant still does not qualify for the allowance it is still open to them to contact the Office of the Ombudsman.

Under the supplementary welfare allowance scheme a recipient of a social welfare or health service executive payment who has exceptional essential heating costs due to ill health or infirmity and who cannot provide for such costs from within his or her own resources may qualify for a heating supplement. There is no standard rate for a heating supplement. Each case is examined on its merits and the Community Welfare Officer determines the amount to be paid taking account of the level of the expenses in question and the ability of the applicant to contribute towards his or her exceptional heating costs.

The best way to tackle fuel poverty in the long term is to improve the energy efficiency of the dwelling. My Department works with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment on these issues and in moving forward the actions agreed in the Energy Affordability Strategy. In that regard, the Better Energy Homes scheme provides support towards the installation of attic and wall insulation, and heating system upgrades.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Paternity Benefit

608. **Deputy Hildegarde Naughton** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons who have availed of paternity benefit since it was introduced on 1 September 2016, by county, in tabular form. [43181/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Paternity benefit was introduced from 1st September 2016 and provides a payment in respect of two weeks paternity leave to be taken within 26 weeks of the birth of the baby. In the period from the commencement of the scheme up to the end of September 2018 a total of 48,806 people have availed of this leave and have been awarded and paid paternity benefit.

The table shows a breakdown by county of paternity benefit claimants for the period 1st September 2016 up to end September 2018, the latest period for which detailed statistics are available.

PATERNITY BENEFIT Claimants by County Breakdown

County	Awarded Sept - Dec 2016	Awarded 2017	Awarded Jan 2018 – Sept 2018	Total Awarded
Carlow	64	302	206	572
Cavan	75	424	300	799
Clare	107	592	403	1102
Cork	634	3334	2297	6265
Donegal	155	686	509	1350
Dublin	1345	7495	5194	14034
Galway	284	1522	1010	2816
Kerry	127	699	455	1281
Kildare	234	1387	897	2518
Kilkenny	115	511	297	923
Laois	65	409	259	733
Leitrim	43	189	124	356
Limerick	195	1010	696	1901
Longford	40	194	125	359
Louth	141	640	423	1204
Mayo	144	655	408	1207
Meath	209	1104	718	2031
Monaghan	69	341	272	682
Offaly	73	391	288	752
Roscommon	56	337	197	590
Sligo	71	335	248	654
Tipperary	151	828	530	1509
Waterford	129	582	419	1130
Westmeath	101	499	343	943
Wexford	140	757	496	1393
Wicklow	145	775	519	1439
Others	20	141	102	263
TOTAL	4932	26139	17735	48806

I hope that clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Applications

609. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a matter regarding illness benefit in the case of a person (details supplied) will be addressed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43184/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Department recently moved to a new IT system for Illness Benefit (IB). Arising from the changeover, some IB customers have experienced payment difficulties which the Department is working hard to resolve.

The person concerned is now both certified and paid up until 18th October 2018. Her next medical certificate was due on 19th October 2018 and when this is submitted, regular weekly payments of IB will resume.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Payments

610. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when an illness benefit payment in the case of a person (details supplied) will be normalised; the status or changes to the system which have resulted in delayed or irregular payments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43185/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Department recently moved to a new IT system for Illness Benefit. Arising from the changeover, some IB customers have experienced payment difficulties which the Department is working hard to resolve.

The IB claim for the person concerned is now paid up to date. His next medical certificate was due on 15th October 2018 and when this is submitted, regular weekly payments of IB will resume.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Applications

611. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when an issue regarding illness benefit in the case of a person (details supplied) will be rectified; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43187/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Department recently moved to a new IT system for Illness Benefit. Arising from the changeover, some IB customers have experienced payment difficulties which the Department is working hard to resolve.

Payments have now resumed for the person concerned and all arrears owing to her will issue shortly.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Waiting Times

612. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to the significant delays experienced by persons dealing with the illness benefit section since a system changeover in 2018; if the recent changeover has impacted on waiting times; the average time persons are now waiting for decisions on claims; if under and overpayments have been recorded of the benefit; if contact between claimants and her Department have been impacted; her plans to remedy the situation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43197/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department recently moved to a new IT system and this has impacted on payments to some Illness Benefit (IB) customers. The transition has involved moving from a payment in arrears system to a real-time system for IB.

The Department acknowledges that this move has caused difficulties for some customers leading to a large volume of calls to its helpline and long delays in responding to customer queries. In order to address this issue, the Department has deployed additional staff to manage calls from customers and from Oireachtas members.

I want to assure the Deputy that all IB customers will be paid the correct amount for the period of their illness - as certified by their GP. Any customer who has an urgent financial need can apply to the Department's Community Welfare Service to receive an interim payment. Customers in these circumstances should get in touch with their local Intreo Centre.

My Department is working hard to resolve these payment issues as quickly as possible. Where overpayments arise, the Department's normal debt recovery procedures will apply.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Payments

613. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if issues regarding the illness benefit payment system will be addressed and rectified; if her attention has been drawn to the fact that persons are waiting weeks without payment or are receiving reduced payments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43199/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department recently moved to a new IT system and this has impacted on payments to some Illness Benefit (IB) customers. The transition has involved moving from a payment in arrears system to a real-time system for IB.

The Department acknowledges that this move has caused difficulties for some customers leading to a large volume of calls to its helpline and long delays in responding to calls. In order to address this issue, the Department has deployed additional staff to manage customer calls.

I want to assure the Deputy that all IB customers will be paid the correct amount for the period of their illness - as certified by their GP. Any customer who has an urgent financial need can apply to the Department's Community Welfare Service to receive an interim payment. Customers in these circumstances should get in touch with their local Intreo Centre.

My Department is working hard to resolve these payment issues as quickly as possible.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Applications

614. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an illness benefit application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43207/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Department administers the illness benefit scheme to those customers who cannot work because they are ill, they are covered by the appropriate class of social insurance, PRSI, and satisfy the PRSI conditions.

Illness Benefit rates are graduated according to a person's average weekly earnings in the relevant tax year. Average weekly earnings are calculated by dividing the total reckonable gross earnings, without deductions, in the relevant tax year by the actual number of weeks worked in that year.

The person concerned made an Illness Benefit claim in 2018 so the relevant tax year for this claim is 2016 and her earnings in that year determines her rate of payment.

If the person concerned believes this decision is incorrect, she may ask to have it reviewed setting out in detail the facts on which her review is based and enclose further evidence she considers relevant to her case. On receipt of these details, the Department will review her entitlement.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Applications

615. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when the illness benefit payment to a person (details supplied) will be normalised; the status of changes to the system which has resulted in delayed or irregular payments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43208/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Department recently moved to a new IT system for illness benefit, IB. Arising from the changeover, some IB customers have experienced payment difficulties which the Department is working hard to resolve.

The person concerned has been paid up to date and normalised payments should now resume.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

616. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a carer's allowance application by a person (details supplied); and if she

will make a statement on the matter. [43209/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's allowance, CA, is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a child or an adult who has such a disability that as a result they require that level of care. An application for CA was received from the person concerned on 8 November 2017.

It is a condition for receipt of a CA that the person being cared for must have such a disability that as a result they require full-time care and attention. This is defined as requiring from another person, continual supervision and frequent assistance throughout the day in connection with normal bodily functions or continual supervision in order to avoid danger to him or herself and likely to require that level of care for at least 12 months.

The evidence submitted in support of this application was examined and the deciding officer decided that this evidence did not indicate that the requirement for full-time care was satisfied. The person concerned was notified on 27 February 2018 of this decision, the reason for it and of his right of review and appeal and subsequently appealed this decision.

My Department were notified on 17 October 2018 that the appeal had been allowed subject to all other statutory conditions being fulfilled. Additional information was requested from the person concerned on 18 October 2018 regarding his hours of employment. Once the information is received the matter will be processed without delay and he will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pension (Contributory)

617. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will clarify matters (details supplied) in relation to the review of State pension (contributory) pensioners on post-2012 rate bands; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43220/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): A policy to introduce the total contributions approach, TCA, to pensions calculation was adopted by Government in the national pensions framework in 2010, as was the decision to base the entitlements of all new pensioners on this approach from around 2020. In advance of this, on 23 January, the Government agreed to a proposal that will allow pensioners affected by the 2012 changes in rate bands to have their pension entitlement calculated by an interim "Total Contributions Approach" which will include up to 20 years of a new HomeCaring credit. This approach is expected to significantly benefit many people, particularly women, whose work history includes an extended period of time outside the paid workplace, while raising families or in a caring role. The TCA will ensure that the totality of a person's social insurance contributions - as opposed to the timing of them - determines their final pension outcome.

People whose pensions were decided under the 2000-2012 ratebands were subject to a significantly more generous regime than those who qualified before or afterwards, as a yearly average of only 20 contributions per year, out of a maximum of 52, could attract a 98% pension. The effect of the 2012 rate band changes, as it impacted upon those new pensioners since 2012, will be familiar to anyone who followed the debate on this matter over the last six years, and it is to mitigate that impact that this reform was always explicitly intended to achieve.

If pre-2012 pensioners were also allowed avail of HomeCaring Credits, their arrangements, as a group, would continue to be significantly more generous than those of post-2012 pensioners. There would also be a very significant cost which would be expected to be of the order of several hundred millions of euros each year. This in turn would significantly impact upon the funds available for future pension rate increases, with consequential implications for pensioner poverty.

It would also mean that, in being able to choose between TCA and the pre-2012 ratebands, those pensioners would, again, have a more advantageous contributory pension regime than those who reached pension age after 2012, and whose choice is between TCA and the post-2012 ratebands. This would be a less fairer approach than the one being adopted by the Government.

For those with insufficient contributions to meet the requirements for a State pension (contributory), they may qualify for a means tested State pension (non-contributory), the maximum personal rate for which is €232, over 95% of the maximum rate of the contributory pension, and 70% qualify for this pension at the full rate. This rate of payment does not include rent allowance, household benefits or fuel allowance. Alternatively, if their spouse is a State pensioner and they have significant household means, their most beneficial payment may be an increase for a qualified adult, based on their personal means, and amounting up to 90% of a full contributory pension.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Reform

618. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the changes which have been implemented for the payment of illness benefit; the number of issues her Department has dealt with since the changes were made; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43238/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department recently moved to a new IT system and this has impacted on payments to some illness benefit, IB, customers. The transition has involved moving from a payment in arrears system to a real-time system for IB.

The Department acknowledges that this move has caused difficulties for some customers leading to a large volume of calls to its helpline and long delays in responding to calls. In order to address this issue, the Department has deployed additional staff to manage customer calls.

I want to assure the Deputy that all IB customers will be paid the correct amount for the period of their illness - as certified by their GP. Any customer who has an urgent financial need can apply to the Department's Community Welfare Service to receive an interim payment. Customers in these circumstances should get in touch with their local Intreo Centre.

My Department is working hard to resolve these payment issues as quickly as possible.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Local Employment Service

619. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if annual contracts for local employment services will be reviewed; her views on develop-

ing a national, community based not-for-profit employment service that recognises rural employment, underemployment and seasonal employment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43245/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): It is expected that there will be no change to the existing approach to contractual arrangements for 2019. Contracts are currently with divisional managers and they will be circulated to Local Employment Services as soon as possible.

All jobseekers develop with their case officer a personal progression plans, PPPs, which is reflective of the individual jobseeker's personal circumstances. These PPPs take into account the ability to access to local employment types.

Seasonal workers are normally dealt with through our Intreo or JobPath strategies, where case officers will routinely take into account the length of the season for the particular employment type when considering a progression plan.

The focus of my Department is to support those who are unemployed to move to secure, sustainable, full-time employment. Whether this service is conducted through a contracted, community based, or internal activation service, a case officer will take account of all personal circumstances while working with the jobseeker to develop and pursue a progression plan.

In looking to the future, my Department commissioned Indecon to conduct a review of the performance and governance of Local Employment Services and Job Clubs. LES and Job Club providers were aware of the Indecon review and were consulted during the review process. Indecon have completed their review and their reports are currently under consideration by my Department.

I hope this clarifies matters for the Deputy.

Gender Recognition

620. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will report on the implementation of the recommendations of the review of the Gender Recognition Act 2015; when legislation will advance in this area; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43246/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Officials from my Department are currently considering the recommendations of the report, and how they can best be progressed, in conjunction with relevant Government Departments.

I intend to come back to Government later in the year seeking approval to legislate, based on the outcome of the discussions with other Departments, and in due course, the Attorney General; and to lay my own report on the review before the Houses of the Oireachtas.

General Practitioner Services

621. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if reports that general practitioners are charging a fee of €10 to sign illness benefit claim forms will be investigated; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43257/18]

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. The introduction of new forms is designed to improve the administration of the certification process and to make claim and payment procedures more efficient for everyone involved – patients, GPs, and the Department.

The Department has a contract with GPs on the Department for Employment Affairs and Social Protection panel in respect of medical certification for illness and injury Benefit and wrote to just under 3,500 contracting GPs, setting out the changes involved and will continue to communicate with all panel holders as the new process beds in.

In addition, the Department consulted with the Irish Medical Organization, IMO, - a long-standing representative body with a broad range of GPs in its membership. The Department will continue to consult with the IMO under our framework agreement on a range of issues including e-certification, closed certification and changes to forms. The IMO as it is the body that is recognised as holding the representative rights for GPs.

Some general practitioners have continued to use the old forms after the changeover date. In order to facilitate the continued payment of illness and injury benefit to our customers, the Department has, to date, continued to accept these old forms.

A number of reports have been received of customers being asked by individual GPs to pay a fee in order to receive a medical certificate. This is at variance with the Department's contract under which the GP is obliged to complete and return specified medical report forms (including medical certificates), free of charge to the patient, when requested to do so by the Department. These reports will be followed up with the individual practitioners.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

JobPath Programme

622. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons referred to Turas Nua and Seetec for JobPath by county; the number of persons that have completed the JobPath programme by county; the number of those persons that have progressed to further education and training, part or full-time employment and self-employment since commencement of this labour activation scheme by county in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43293/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): JobPath is an employment service, which helps long-term unemployed people to secure and sustain paid employment.

There are two phases to the service. During the first phase, of 12 months duration, a personal advisor, PA, provides practical assistance in searching, preparing for, securing and sustaining employment. The second phase starts if the jobseeker is successful in finding work. During this phase the PA continues to work with the client for a further period of up to 12 months.

These figures are shown by county in the tables:

County	Clients who have started	Clients who have completed	Clients who have commenced Full time employment/ self employment	Clients who have commenced Part time employment/ self employment
Carlow	4355	1838	1007	103
Cavan	4233	1767	697	168
Clare	4535	1905	961	91
Cork	16949	7206	3802	354
Donegal	9774	4388	1187	354
Dublin	37828	16322	6941	674
Galway	8481	3131	1510	163
Kerry	6551	3154	1675	211
Kildare	7864	3399	2022	262
Kilkenny	3747	1600	933	69
Laois	4326	1659	878	99
Leitrim	1772	755	305	47
Limerick	9261	4359	2206	141
Longford	3823	1802	673	129
Louth	8015	3586	1504	229
Mayo	5733	2497	692	72
Meath	4009	1808	658	70
Monaghan	2560	1174	489	150
Offaly	5141	2248	1079	181
Roscommon	1713	673	248	29
Sligo	2934	1255	460	78
Tipperary	8224	3458	1705	276
Waterford	6729	3197	1500	190
Westmeath	6362	2826	1090	308
Wexford	9207	4569	2139	334
Wicklow	5609	2345	1060	170
Total	189735	82921	37421	4952

The JobPath providers arrange for the delivery of a broad range of education and training courses with a particular and strong focus on upskilling the long term unemployed. Some of these courses are provided in-house while others are provided by specialist training providers including the Education and Training Boards, ETBs.

Examples of training and development activities include confidence building, motivation, interview preparation, literacy, IT courses and a variety of industry related skill needs.

However, the primary aim of the service is to assist clients in finding sustainable jobs, and as such, the Department does not separately record progression into education or training for those who have taken part in the JobPath service.

Jobseeker's Allowance Appeals

623. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a decision has been made on a jobseeker's allowance appeal by a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43302/18]

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 registered in that office on 13 July 2018. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant papers and comments by or on behalf of the deciding officer on the grounds of appeal be sought from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. These papers were received in the Social Welfare Appeals Office on 5 September 2018 and the case will be referred to an appeals officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Applications

624. **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. [43309/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Further to question No. 202 on 11 October, and the subsequent email received, the Department has investigated the customer's position.

We have re-checked the customer's record, application and eligibility conditions and the customer does not satisfy the required PRSI contributions for the relevant tax years. Therefore, Illness Benefit is not in payment to him.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy and the Department apologises for any confusion that arose.

Illness Benefit Waiting Times

625. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if there is an issue with the dedicated phone lines for Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas to access illness benefit sections in view of the fact that they are not contactable at the moment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43314/18]

628. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason a number of regular recipients of illness benefit are not receiving weekly payments; the measures being taken to address the payment disruptions in view of the fact that delayed payments cause distress for persons; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43317/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): I propose to take Questions Nos. 625 and 628 together.

My Department recently moved to a new IT system and this has impacted on payments to some illness benefit, IB, customers. The transition has involved moving from a payment in arrears system to a real-time system for IB.

The Department acknowledges that this move has caused difficulties for some customers leading to a large volume of calls to its helpline and long delays in responding to calls, including those from members of the Oireachtas. In order to address this issue, the Department has deployed additional staff to manage calls from customers and from Oireachtas members.

I want to assure the Deputy that all IB customers will be paid the correct amount for the period of their illness - as certified by their GP. Any customer who has an urgent financial need can apply to the Department's Community Welfare Service to receive an interim payment. Customers in these circumstances should get in touch with their local Intreo Centre.

My Department is working hard to resolve these payment issues as quickly as possible.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Payments

626. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason a person (details supplied) received a reduced rate of illness benefit; the reason they received no payment the following week; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43315/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Department recently moved to a new IT system for Illness Benefit, IB. Arising from the changeover, some IB customers have experienced payment difficulties which the Department is working hard to resolve.

The person concerned has been awarded injury benefit at the full rate and is now paid up to date.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Eligibility

627. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a person (details supplied) is entitled to illness benefit in view of the fact they are required to have an emergency operation and they are unable to work; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43316/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): I can confirm that the claim for illness benefit, IB, submitted by the person concerned has been received by the Department. However, it has not been decided to date as the person is a qualified adult on her spouse's Jobseeker's Allowance claim.

Arrangements are being made to adjust the Jobseeker's Allowance claim which will allow the Department to proceed with processing the person's IB claim.

A decision on the claim and any payment of IB that may arise will be made to the person as soon as possible.

I trust this clarifies matters for the Deputy.

Question No. 628 answered with Question No. 625.

Public Services Card Data

629. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of public services cards that have issued in 2017 and to date in 2018; the projected number of cards that will issue from October 2018 to year end 2019; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43318/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department issued over 670,500 Public Services Cards, PSCs, in 2017 and, to the end of September 2018, just under 480,000 PSCs have been issued.

Over 2.92 million people are SAFE registered. The average number of SAFE registrations per month, for the last six months, is just over 37,000. This has reduced from an average of over 45,000 per month in 2017. It is expected that the monthly average will continue to reduce as the majority of people are already SAFE registered.

Replacement cards are issued and arise due to lost cards or a change in entitlement from a basic card to a free travel card. Also changes in entitlement within the free travel scheme can effect demand, such as a change from a single free travel entitlement to a spouse or companion entitlement.

Based on the current trends, my Department expects to issue approximately 500,000 PSCs in 2019.

I hope this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Appeals

630. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application by a person (details supplied) for a review of the decision to refuse their application for a domiciliary care allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43333/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): An application for domiciliary care allowance was received from the person concerned on 20 April 2018. The application was not allowed as the child was not considered to satisfy the qualifying conditions for the allowance. A letter issued on 3 July 2018 setting out the decision of the deciding officer to refuse the allowance.

A review of this decision was requested on the 24 July 2018. The application is currently being re-examined by a deciding officer who has requested additional information in support of the review. When this information is received a revised decision will be made, if warranted. The person concerned will be notified of the outcome of the deciding officer's review as soon as it is completed.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Applications

631. **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. [43383/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): My Department recently moved to a new IT system for illness benefit, IB. Arising from the changeover, some IB customers have experienced payment difficulties which the Department is working hard to resolve.

The IB claim from the person concerned has now been processed and she has been paid up to date.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Ministerial Meetings

632. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the details of engagements, meetings or correspondence that she has had with a person (details supplied) in the past three years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43392/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection has not met the named person or representatives of companies in the past three years to date.

Illness Benefit Reform

633. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when an illness benefit payment will be normalised in the case of a person (details supplied); the status of changes to the system which have resulted in delayed or irregular payments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43417/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Department recently moved to a new IT system for Illness Benefit. Arising from the changeover, some IB customers have experienced payment difficulties which the Department is working hard to resolve.

The person concerned has been certified and paid up to 15th October 2018. Her next medical certificate was due on 16th October 2018 and when this is submitted, payments will resume.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Payments

634. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to introduce a measure to allow persons on carer's allowance to pay a stamp while in receipt of same. [43418/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection

(Deputy Finian McGrath): Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a child or adult who has such a disability that as a result, they require that level of care.

Full-time care and attention is defined as requiring from another person, continual supervision and frequent assistance throughout the day in connection with normal bodily functions or continuous supervision in order to avoid danger to him or herself and likely to require that level of care for at least twelve months.

Persons in receipt of carers allowance can qualify for credits where they have previously entered insurable employment and paid at least one PRSI contribution at Class A, B, C, D, E, H or P and where they have had a recent attachment to the workforce.

Credited contributions (credits) are social insurance contributions designed to protect the social insurance entitlement record of insured workers who are not in a position to make PRSI contributions.

Credits are awarded in circumstances such as unemployment or illness, and their purpose is to help protect the social insurance entitlements of insured persons during periods when they may not be in a position to pay contributions.

In order to qualify for credits, a person must first have entered insurable employment - he or she must have paid at least one PRSI contribution at Class A, B, C, D, E, H or P.

In general credits can only be awarded where an individual has had a recent attachment to the workforce i.e. within the last 2 years.

The Voluntary Contribution Scheme allows those who are no longer working or who otherwise are not paying PRSI, including carers, to protect their PRSI entitlement to certain social insurance benefits, including state pension. A person can apply to join the scheme from 1 year to 5 years from the end of the year in which contributions were last paid, as an employee or as a self-employed worker.

Voluntary Contributions (VCs) are designed to facilitate employees and self-employed individuals, who are no longer paying PRSI, to pay contributions directly to the Department on a voluntary basis, to protect their future state pension contributory, widow(er)'s contributory pension and guardian's contributory pension entitlements.

The scheme is most frequently used by employees who have retired early, or by self-employed individuals who are not required to pay PRSI Class S because their annual income falls below the annual €5,000 liability threshold. To become a voluntary contributor an individual must have paid at least 520 weeks of compulsory PRSI from either employment or self-employment prior to application.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

635. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if an application for carer's allowance by a person (details supplied) will be expedited. [43421/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):

Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a child or an adult who has such a disability that as a result they require that level of care.

I confirm that my Department received an application for CA from the person concerned on the 31 July 2018.

Additional information was requested from the person concerned on 18 October 2018. Once the information is received the application will be processed without delay and he will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Employment Data

636. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons that were designated self-employed that have been restored to employee status as a result of an investigation by her Department in 2017 and to date in 2018 (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43427/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department's Scope section determines employment status and the correct class of pay-related social insurance (PRSI). Where misclassification of workers as self-employed is detected, the correct status and class is determined and social insurance arrears are collected as required.

I understand that the Deputy is seeking information on the overall number of persons that were designated self-employed that have been changed to employee status in 2017 and to date in 2018. I regret that the Department does not collate statistics to report on this specific question.

However, I can advise the Deputy that in 2017 Scope section made 941 decisions, of which 138 resulted in a PRSI classification of class A. In the current year (up to 16 October 2018) 768 decisions have been made, 106 of which have resulted in a PRSI classification of class A.

The class A decisions include civil and public servants, company directors and family employment, as well as self-employed who are determined to be employees.

I hope this information is helpful.

Disability Allowance Appeals

637. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a payment will be expedited for a person (details supplied). [43430/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Following a successful appeal, this lady has been awarded disability allowance (DA) with effect from 30 July 2017. The first payment will be made on 24 October 2018.

Arrears of payment due will issue as soon as possible once any necessary adjustment is calculated and applied in respect of any overlapping payments (if applicable).

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Code

638. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the cost of increasing each person’s social welfare assistance and social insurance payment rate by percentage rates (details supplied). [43435/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The costs sought by the Deputy are presented in the table. The costs are based on the estimated numbers of recipients in 2019, and include the cost of proportionate increases in reduced rates and the qualified adult rates of payment, where applicable.

It should be noted that these costs do not take into account changing trends (increases or decreases) in recipient numbers from 2019 onwards.

Increase in weekly rates	Cost €m
3.3% in 2020	519.6
3.3% in 2021	536.7
3.6% in 2022	604.9
3.8% in 2023	661.4

Invalidity Pension Appeals

639. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the position regarding an invalidity pension review for a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43448/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Invalidity pension (IP) is a payment for people who are permanently incapable of work because of illness or incapacity and who satisfy the pay related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions.

The department received a claim for IP for the lady concerned on the 26 February 2018. The claim was disallowed on the grounds that the medical conditions for the scheme are not satisfied. She was notified on 02 July 2018 of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

The person in question requested a review of the decision and submitted further medical evidence in support of her request. Her file has been sent to a Social Welfare Inspector (SWI) to report on the circumstances of the lady in question. On return of the SWI’s report, the IP claim will be processed and a deciding officer of the Department will be in direct contact with her regarding the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Working Family Payment Data

640. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the way in which, and when, existing recipients of the working family payment will be affected by the changes announced to the scheme in budget 2019; if existing recipients will need to reapply or be reassessed to establish if they will benefit from the changes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43510/18]

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 qualified children and to offer a financial incentive to take up employment.

In line with Budget 2019 provisions, WFP recipients will benefit from a new maintenance disregard. This disregard will amount to €95.00 per week in respect of housing costs, with the remainder to be assessed at 50%. This new measure will be implemented with effect from 28 March 2019.

The Department will identify all relevant customers currently receiving WFP and reassess their entitlement with effect from 28 March 2019. It will not be necessary for existing customers to contact the Department and request a review.

Similarly, all new applications for WFP will have their entitlement from 28 March 2019 calculated in accordance with the provisions announced in the recent Budget.

The level of WFP will continue to be based on 60% of the shortfall between net weekly family income and the relevant weekly family threshold.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Appeals Delays

641. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason there has been a delay in the appeals decision for a person (details supplied); if a decision will be expedited; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43518/18]

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 received by that office on 31 August 2018. The appeal was accompanied by the relevant Departmental papers. The case was referred to an Appeals Officer on 18 October 2018 who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Payments

642. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason the payment of illness benefit to a person (details supplied) has not been issued; if same will issue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43630/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Department recently moved to a new IT system for Illness Benefit. Arising from the changeover, some IB customers have experienced payment difficulties which the Department is working hard to resolve.

The person concerned is both certified and paid up until 10th October 2018. Her next certificate was due on 11th October 2018 and when that is submitted, regular IB payments will resume.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Applications

643. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the position in relation to an application by a person (details supplied) for a disability allowance; if same will be expedited; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43631/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The gentleman referred to has been awarded invalidity pension with effect from the 23 August 2018. Payment will issue to his nominated post office on the 01 November 2018. Any arrears if due from 23 August to 31 October 2018 (less any overlapping social welfare payment) will issue in due course. The gentleman in question was notified of this decision on the 22 October 2018.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Reform

644. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when the illness benefit payment scheme issues will be resolved in view of the fact that they have been ongoing since August 2018 due to the introduction of a new online system of processing payments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43650/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department recently moved to a new IT system and this has impacted on payments to some Illness Benefit (IB) customers. The transition has involved moving from a payment in arrears system to a real-time system for IB.

The Department acknowledges that this move has caused difficulties for some customers leading to a large volume of calls to its helpline and long delays in responding to customer queries. In order to address this issue, the Department has deployed additional staff to manage customer calls.

I want to assure the Deputy that all IB customers will be paid the correct amount for the period of their illness - as certified by their GP. Any customer who has an urgent financial need can apply to the Department's Community Welfare Service to receive an interim payment. Customers in these circumstances should get in touch with their local Intreo Centre.

My Department is working hard to resolve these payment issues as quickly as possible.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Data

645. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons in counties Cavan, Monaghan and Meath on illness benefit; and if

she will make a statement on the matter. [43651/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Illness Benefit is a scheme administered by my Department which provides for a payment to customers who cannot work due to illness. In order to qualify, you must be aged under 66, covered by the appropriate class of social insurance (PRSI) and satisfy the PRSI conditions.

As at 18th October 2018, the number of Illness Benefit claimants in Cavan, Monaghan, and Meath was as follows:

Cavan - 1,350

Monaghan - 1,097

Meath - 3,415

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Payments Administration

646. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application by a person (details supplied) for a social welfare payment; and when they can expect a decision on their case. [43661/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Department recently moved to a new IT system for Illness Benefit (IB). Arising from the changeover, some IB customers have experienced payment difficulties which the Department is working hard to resolve.

The claim from the person concerned is currently being examined and any arrears due will be issued to her in the coming days.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

JobsPlus Scheme

647. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if entitlements which a person was previously on automatically transfer over when they transfer from a community employment scheme to the JobsPlus incentive scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43690/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): JobsPlus is an employer incentive which encourages and rewards employers who offer employment opportunities to the long term unemployed. It provides employers with two levels of payment: €7,500 and €10,000.

Any jobseeker who has been in receipt of a jobseekers payment from this Department for the minimum required period will be considered eligible to be recruited under this incentive. Time spent on community employment may count, for a person in receipt of a jobseekers payment, towards the qualifying period. A person will not automatically transfer from community employment to JobsPlus without first transitioning back to a jobseekers payment.

A person who commences employment through the JobsPlus incentive is no longer deemed a jobseeker and any entitlement that was associated with their claim will cease. As a new employee they may be entitled to receive other payments from this Department such as back to work family dividend or the working family payment subject to satisfying the appropriate conditionality for these schemes.

Anyone commencing employment and unsure of their entitlements should engage with the Department at their local Intreo centre to ensure that they are in receipt of their full entitlements

I trust this clarifies the position

Social Welfare Appeals Status

648. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an appeal by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43692/18]

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

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Jobseeker's Benefit Eligibility

649. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the progress made on the report into part-time and seasonal workers rights and entitlements to obtain jobseeker's benefit which she is in receipt of for some time; the aspects of the report which she plans to incorporate into the social welfare Bill which is due for publication; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43693/18]

663. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will provide a copy of the report into the entitlements and rights of seasonal and part-time workers to obtain jobseeker's benefit once their part-time work ceases; if her attention has been drawn to the fact that the changes made in 2011 and 2012 to the terms and conditions of eligibility for jobseeker's benefit have negatively impacted on these workers; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43876/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 649 and 663 together.

My Department has prepared a report which examines the jobseekers benefit scheme duration and seasonal and part-time workers who have subsidiary employment. It also examines the daily earnings limit of €12.70 that currently applies to employment classed as subsidiary. The daily earnings limits is provided by way of Regulation so any change to this rate can be implemented outside the Social Welfare Bill. I am considering the report and I intend to submit it to the Joint Oireachtas Committee.

I trust this clarifies the matter at this time.

Illness Benefit Applications

650. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when an illness benefit payment will be normalised in the case of a person (details supplied); the status of changes to the system which has resulted in delayed or irregular payments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43694/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): My Department recently moved to a new IT system for Illness Benefit (IB). Arising from the changeover, some IB customers have experienced payment difficulties which the Department is working hard to resolve.

The person concerned is now certified and paid up until 20th October 2018. Her next medical certificate was due on 21st October 2018 and when this is submitted, normalised payments should resume.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Local Authority Funding

651. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the categories of funding available to local authorities through her Department; the amount of funding provided for each scheme in 2016 and 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43729/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department makes funding to local authorities through 2 main programmes - Employment Schemes and the School Meals Programme. In 2016, funding of €7.8m was made to local authorities. The figure for 2017 was €7.0m.

Funding provided to Local Authorities by the Department of Employment Affairs & Social Protection, 2016-2017:

-	2016	2017
Employment Schemes	€6.8m	€6.0m
Miscellaneous Services (includes payments under the School Meals Scheme)	€1.0m	€1.0m
Total	€7.8m	€7.0m

Disability Allowance Payments

652. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason a claim for disability allowance by a person (details supplied) was stopped. [43782/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Following a review of this person's entitlement to disability al-

lowance (DA), her payment was suspended as she failed to supply the information requested by a Social Welfare Inspector (SWI) on 3 August 2018 and 22 August 2018.

Information was received from the person concerned on 16 October 2018 and their application has been referred back to a SWI for a report on the person's means and circumstances.

Once the SWI has completed their report, a decision will be made on their entitlement and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Payments

653. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when disability allowance arrears will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43784/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The arrears of disability allowance due to the person in question have been calculated. These arrears are currently being held by the Department as the person in question owes a debt to the Department.

The Department is obliged to recoup any debt owing to it in an appropriate and timely manner. The method of recovery of an overpayment and negotiations regarding the amount recoverable are dealt with under the Department's Overpayment Recovery Guidelines.

The Department has been in contact with the person concerned with proposals for the recovery of the debt. The recovery plan that will be agreed with the person concerned will include appropriate arrangements in relation to the arrears due.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Appeals

654. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a decision will issue on a disability allowance application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43787/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Based on the evidence supplied in support of this person's application, her application for disability allowance (DA) was disallowed on the grounds that the medical qualifying condition was not satisfied. The person in question was notified in writing of this decision on 21 August 2018.

They requested a review of the decision by a deciding officer (DO) and submitted additional medical evidence for consideration on 4 September 2018 and on 19 September 2018.

Following a review of this additional medical evidence a decision will be made and she will be notified directly of the outcome.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Payments

655. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when carer's allowance arrears will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43788/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a child or an adult who has such a disability that as a result they require that level of care.

An application for CA was received from the person concerned on 5 February 2018.

The application was awarded to the person concerned on 21 May 2018 and the first payment issued to her nominated bank account on 7 June 2018. Payment is being made at half-rate as the person concerned is in receipt of a Disability Allowance.

From 5 February 2018 to 6 June 2018, the person concerned was in receipt of a supplementary welfare allowance at a higher rate than the rate of CA due. Accordingly, there are no arrears due.

The person concerned was notified on 21 May 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.

Back to Education Allowance Eligibility

656. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a review of the eligibility criteria for the back to education allowance is scheduled particularly for those in part-time employment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43789/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Back to Education Allowance scheme (BTEA) is designed to support second chance education. It enables eligible persons to pursue approved education courses and to continue to receive income support for the duration of a course of study, subject to meeting certain conditions.

Entitlement to BTEA is conditional on having ongoing entitlement to the qualifying scheme payment. BTEA participants with eligibility based on jobseekers, transitional jobseekers or one parent family payments who engage in part-time work will be assessed in accordance with their primary payment. This measure ensures that only participants who continue to satisfy the means test of their primary payment or another qualifying BTEA payment will continue to receive income support under BTEA and that resources are directed at those most in need of assistance.

There are no plans to review the eligibility criteria of the BTEA scheme at this time.

I trust this clarifies the matter.

Illness Benefit Payments

657. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if an illness benefit payment will be processed for a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43794/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Department recently moved to a new IT system for Illness Benefit. Arising from the changeover, some IB customers have experienced payment difficulties which the Department is working hard to resolve.

The person concerned was certified up until 14th October 2018. His next medical certificate was due on 15th October 2018 and when that is submitted, payment of IB will resume and all arrears due will be paid.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Payments

658. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to the difficulties being experienced by persons who are receiving or applying for illness benefit; if her attention has been further drawn to the fact that in some cases the illness benefit is arbitrarily reduced, paid intermittently and in some cases stopped entirely; if her attention has been further drawn to the perception that it is impossible to make contact with the relevant section of her Department; the action she plans to take in view of the fact persons in receipt of same are vulnerable, have paid the contributions and in many cases are solely dependent on this payment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43809/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department recently moved to a new IT system and this has impacted on payments to some Illness Benefit (IB) customers. The transition has involved moving from a payment in arrears system to a real-time system for IB.

The Department acknowledges that this move has caused difficulties for some customers leading to a large volume of calls to its helpline and long delays in responding to calls. In order to address this issue, the Department has deployed additional staff to manage customer calls.

I want to assure the Deputy that all IB customers will be paid the correct amount for the period of their illness - as certified by their GP. Any customer who has an urgent financial need can apply to the Department’s Community Welfare Service to receive an interim payment. Customers in these circumstances should get in touch with their local Intreo Centre.

My Department is working hard to resolve these payment issues as quickly as possible.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Payments

659. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when payment will issue to a person (details supplied) who has not received an illness benefit payment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43811/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection

(Deputy Finian McGrath): My Department recently moved to a new IT system for Illness Benefit (IB). Arising from the changeover, some IB customers have experienced payment difficulties which the Department is working hard to resolve.

The person concerned is now certified and paid up until 17th October 2018. His next medical certificate was due on 18th October 2018 and when this is submitted, his IB payments will resume.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Payments

660. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when payment will issue regarding an application by a person (details supplied) for illness benefit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43813/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Department recently moved to a new IT system for Illness Benefit (IB). Arising from the changeover, some IB customers have experienced payment difficulties which the Department is working hard to resolve.

The person concerned is now certified and paid up until 17th October 2018. Her next medical certificate was due on 18th October 2018 and once this is received, payments will resume.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Payments

661. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when payment will issue for an illness benefit application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43817/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Department recently moved to a new IT system for Illness Benefit (IB). Arising from the changeover, some IB customers have experienced payment difficulties which the Department is working hard to resolve.

The IB claim for the person concerned is both certified and paid up until 18th October 2018. Her next medical certificate was due 19th October 2018 and when this is submitted, further payments will issue.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer’s Allowance Payments

662. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a carer’s allowance payment will be processed in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43818/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer’s allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is

habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a child or an adult who has such a disability that as a result they require that level of care.

An application for CA was received from the person concerned on 25 October 2017.

The application was awarded to the person concerned on 5 October 2018 with effect from 7 June 2018 and the first payment will issue to her nominated bank account on 25 October 2018.

Arrears of allowance due will issue shortly.

The person concerned was notified on 5 October 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.

Question No. 663 answered with Question No. 649.

Rent Supplement Scheme Data

664. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of tenancies supported by rent assistance or other such supports since 2014; the projected and-or forecasted number of tenancies supported by rent assistance or other such supports in 2019 and 2020; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43886/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Rent supplement plays a vital role in housing families and individuals, with the scheme supporting approximately 26,500 recipients for which the Government has provided €180 million for in 2018.

Details of the number of rent supplement recipients for the years 2014 to 2017 and for the nine months ending September 2018 are provided in the attached tabular statement. Figures for 2019 forecast year end recipient numbers are also provided. The 2019 figure is predicated on current trends associated with Housing Assistance Payment Scheme (HAP) and the underpinning macro-economic conditions prevailing throughout next year. Given the numerous variables associated with HAP transfer and the wider macro-economic environment forecast figures for 2020 are not available at this time.

The “Rebuilding Ireland - Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness (July 2016), reiterated in the “Housing First National Implementation Plan 2018-2021” (September 2018) is to provide 87,000 flexible housing supports through the HAP and Rental Accommodation Scheme between 2016 and 2021. As part of this commitment will be the transfer of those out of rent supplement with long term housing needs to HAP with a targeted completion date of these transfers by the end of 2020. The strategic goal of returning rent supplement to its original purpose that of a short-term income support has been primarily facilitated by the introduction of the HAP.

Year	Total Recipients
2014	71,533
2015	61,247
2016	48,041
2017	34,378
2018 (to end of September)	26,485
2019 (forecast)	15,000

Illness Benefit Payments

665. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when full payment will issue regarding an illness benefit claim in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43902/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Department recently moved to a new IT system for Illness Benefit (IB). Arising from the changeover, some IB customers have experienced payment difficulties which the Department is working hard to resolve.

The IB claim for the person concerned is now fully paid up to date.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Payments

666. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason a person (details supplied) is receiving partial payment of illness benefit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43903/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Department recently moved to a new IT system for Illness Benefit. Arising from the changeover, some IB customers have experienced payment difficulties which the Department is working hard to resolve.

The person concerned has been paid up to date and normalised payments will now resume.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Labour Activation Measures

667. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a person must sign or agree a personal progression plan with a departmental official following their attendance at their first group information session for jobseekers; if case officers present at these group information sessions are departmental officials or Turas Nua and or Seetec staff; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43907/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The purpose of the activation services provided by my Department is to support jobseekers to make the transition into employment.

All jobseekers referred to the Department’s activation services, including those referred to the JobPath service, are asked to complete an assessment of their skills, qualifications, and work experience for the purpose of agreeing a personal progression plan (PPP). The PPP typically contains a schedule of activities, actions and job-focused targets, taking into account the person’s specific employment preferences. Jobseekers are asked to sign the PPP as an indication of their agreement to carry out the activation measures contained in the document.

All jobseekers are required under the legislation to fully engage with the activation service in this and all other respects. The PPP is a crucial element of each jobseeker’s engagement with any of the Department’s activation services and generally will be a document that will be re-

viewed throughout the person's engagement period as they develop employment related skills and competencies or job related experience from short periods of employment.

Jobseekers that are selected for JobPath are invited to attend an initial information session at which the jobseekers' rights and responsibilities are explained in full. These sessions are delivered jointly by an Officer of my Department and a representative from the JobPath Company.

I trust the above clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Applications

668. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the position regarding an application for illness benefit made by a person (details supplied). [43953/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): My Department recently moved to a new IT system for Illness Benefit (IB). Arising from the changeover, some IB customers have experienced payment difficulties which the Department is working hard to resolve.

The IB claim for the customer concerned was certified up to 18th October 2018. Payments up to that date are due to be paid to the customer on Tuesday 23rd October.

The customer's next medical certificate was due 19th October 2018 and if/when this is submitted, any further payments due will issue.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Property Registration

669. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when a land registry issue will be resolved for a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43281/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Under the Registration of Deeds and Title Act 2006, the Property Registration Authority (PRA) was established as and from 4 November 2006. The PRA replaces the Registrar of Deeds and Titles as the registering authority in relation to property registration in Ireland and, subject to the above Act, is independent in the performance of its functions.

A service for Oireachtas members was introduced by the PRA in 2006 through which information can be obtained on the current status of applications, such as the case referred to. This provides a speedier, more efficient and more cost effective alternative to submitting Parliamentary Questions.

The Deputy's query has been forwarded to the PRA for attention and direct reply via the above mentioned service.

Housing Assistance Payment Data

670. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Gov-

ernment the number of housing assistance payment, HAP, tenancies in each of the years 2015 to 2017 and to date in 2018, by county; the cost for each year expended on HAP by county in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43943/18]

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

At the end of Q2 2018, there were 37,751 active tenancies being supported under the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme in 31 local authority areas. A breakdown of the number of households supported by HAP, in each local authority area since the scheme began in 2014 to Q2 2018, is available on my Department's website at the following link:

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

The HAP scheme is funded through a combination of Exchequer monies and tenant differential rents collected in respect of HAP tenancies. Budget 2018 has increased the Exchequer funding for the HAP scheme to €301 million. This will allow for the continued support of existing HAP households and also enable the additional 17,000 households targeted under Rebuilding Ireland to be supported by HAP in 2018.

The expenditure on, and the number of households in receipt of, HAP on an annual basis are set out in the Table.

Year	Additional Households supported at end of year	Expenditure €M
2015	5,680	15.64
2016	12,075	57.69
2017	17,916	152.69
2018	9,083 (to end Q2)	?

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

I am satisfied with how the HAP scheme is currently operating and I consider it to be a key vehicle for meeting housing need and fulfilling the ambitious programme under Rebuilding Ireland. My Department will, of course, continue to keep the operation of the HAP scheme under review.

Approved Housing Bodies

671. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when funding will be made available to an association (details supplied) in order that it can commence refurbishments to properties and property purchasing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43160/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department has no record of any application for funding by the Housing Association concerned for the property in question. Ordinarily, a housing proposal from an approved housing body is directed to the relevant local authority in the first place, rather than to my Department.

Expert Panel on Concrete Blocks

672. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if work is being undertaken to finalise before Christmas 2018 the terms and conditions of the redress scheme for mica-affected homeowners; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43179/18]

673. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the details of the recent announcement of the mica redress scheme; the date in 2019 from which homes will commence repairs under the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43180/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): I propose to take Questions Nos. 672 and 673 together.

The Expert Panel on Concrete Blocks was established by my Department in 2016, to investigate problems that have emerged in the concrete blockwork of certain dwellings in Counties Donegal and Mayo.

The Panel had the following terms of reference:

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

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

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

(iv) To submit a report within six months.

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

With regard to Recommendation 1, the National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI) Technical Committee, established to scope and fast track the development of a standardised protocol, held its inaugural meeting on 11 September 2017 and has held several further meetings since. The standardised protocol will inform the course of action in relation to remedial works for all affected householders. The draft standard was published on 6 June 2018 for public consultation and ran for a period of six weeks to 18 July 2018. The Technical Committee have finalised the review of the submissions received and it is expected that the standardised protocol will be published in the coming weeks.

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

This standard:

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

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

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

Under Budget 2019, the Government approved in principle the development of a grant scheme of financial assistance to support affected homeowners in the two counties to carry out the necessary remediation works to dwellings that have been damaged due to defective concrete blocks.

The putting in place of such a scheme is now a key priority for my Department and work is well underway on the development of such a scheme, with a view to its completion as soon as possible and funding being available in 2019.

Wastewater Treatment

674. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if Irish Water has been in contact with his Department regarding funding for a regional waste water treatment plant at Clonshaugh, Dublin 17; if so, the level of funding being sought; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43192/18]

693. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on the development of a regional sewage treatment plant at Clonshaugh, County Dublin proposed with regard to the greater Dublin drainage project on behalf of his Department; the stage the development is at; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43669/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 674 and 693 together.

Since 1 January 2014, Irish Water has statutory responsibility for all aspects of water services planning, delivery and operation at national, regional and local level. Irish Water's primary function is to provide clean safe drinking water to customers and to treat and return wastewater safely to the environment. Irish Water takes a strategic, nationwide approach to asset planning and investment, and meeting customer requirements.

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

provide the context within which necessary funding and investment plans by Irish Water will be framed and agreed.

On foot of publication of the Water Services Policy Statement, Irish Water prepared a ‘Strategic Funding Plan’ setting out proposed operational and capital expenditure. Subject to its approval by me as Minister, the Irish Water Strategic Funding Plan 2019-2024 will ultimately feed into annual Exchequer decisions on spending and will be laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas. Based on this Strategic Funding Plan, Irish Water’s next Capital Investment Plan for the five year period from 2020 to 2024 will set out the financial plan for capital investments to support Irish Water’s strategic objectives to deliver improvements to water services.

I, as Minister, in conjunction with the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, must provide consent for all commitments for capital expenditure above €20m.

Irish Water is regulated by the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) as the independent economic regulator. The CRU is responsible for setting the total level of revenue which Irish Water can receive, through Government subvention and from customers, to cover its efficiently incurred costs. This CRU process involves, inter alia, reviewing submissions from Irish Water, including on its investment plan, and thereafter setting appropriate revenue allowances for operating costs, capital costs and other items for given regulatory periods. Consequently, the actual allowed operational expenditure and capital investment is decided by the CRU.

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

Repair and Leasing Scheme

675. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of properties which have applied for the repair and leasing scheme; the number of properties accepted into the scheme in County Donegal since its inception; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43194/18]

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

Data for Donegal County Council for end Q2 2018, is set out in the table. My Department is currently gathering data from local authorities in order to report progress in Quarter 3.

Local Authority	Number of Applications Received end Q2 2018	Number of Lease Agreements Signed end Q2 2018
Donegal County Council	60	0

Feedback from local authorities indicates that in many cases properties requiring extensive repair work and therefore not suitable for the RLS, have been secured under the Buy and Renew

Scheme which facilitates local authorities or AHB's to purchase vacant properties for social housing use.

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

These include:

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

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

Social and Affordable Housing Eligibility

676. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the regulations in place in respect of applicants for inclusion on the social housing regulations that are victims of domestic violence; the supports available for those applicants; the timescales they can expect in respect of turnaround of applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43225/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Responsibility for the development and provision of services to support victims of domestic abuse rests with the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and the delivery of such services is managed through the Child and Family Agency, Tusla. Housing authorities do not provide or oversee services specifically designed for victims of domestic violence.

Victims of domestic violence who seek emergency accommodation from a housing authority are generally placed in temporary accommodation which the council itself arranges or which is operated by a voluntary service provider. It is not necessary for such persons to go on the general housing waiting list to avail of short-term emergency housing. Such support can be provided where victims of domestic violence meet the homeless definition set out in the Housing Act 1988, which is not prescriptive and in practice will generally include victims of domestic violence.

Where victims of domestic violence require continued State support to meet their housing needs, housing authorities are encouraged to work with all service providers to ensure that a victim's housing eligibility and need is assessed in a timely manner. This assessment is carried out in accordance with section 20 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 and

associated Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011, which includes a review of the suitability of the household's current accommodation having regard to a number of considerations, including whether the accommodation is "an institution, emergency accommodation or a hostel", as well as "particular household circumstances" or "exceptional medical or compassionate grounds". This allows a housing authority to consider a victim of domestic violence as having a housing need, and to be placed on a housing list where all other criteria are met.

The allocation of social housing support to qualified households is a matter for individual housing authorities in accordance with their allocation schemes made under section 22 of the 2009 Act. Each housing authority is required to make an allocation scheme specifying, among other things, the manner of, and the order of priority for, the allocation of dwellings to households and classes of households on the waiting list. Households defined as homeless are generally afforded priority in allocation schemes. Allocation schemes may also contain provisions for exceptional or emergency cases, allowing immediate housing outside of normal waiting list priorities, should circumstances warrant it.

In line with commitments in Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness (Action 1.8) and the National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence 2016-2021 (Action 2.30), my Department has issued guidance to all housing authorities in relation to assisting victims of domestic violence with emergency and long-term accommodation needs. The guidance can be accessed using the following link to my Department's website:

https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/guidance_for_housing_authorities_in_relation_to_assisting_victims_of_domestic_violence.pdf.

The purpose of this guidance is to ensure an effective and consistent housing response for victims of domestic violence. The guidance covers a range of scenarios that may arise for victims of domestic violence in seeking social housing supports, including provisions around the use of the Housing Assistance Payment scheme, or the *Rental Accommodation Scheme*, where a victim has a joint interest in the family home, or ownership of alternative accommodation, but would otherwise qualify for social housing support.

Housing Assistance Payment

677. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the fact that local authorities are enticing estate agents into making properties available for homeless persons by offering cash payments on top of the rental income; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43251/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I understand that the question refers to the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP).

HAP provides fast, flexible housing support to households in an area of their choice. Individuals with a housing need, who in the past were reluctant to avail of full time work as they would lose their Rent Supplement support, can now move to HAP and avail of full-time work and retain their housing support, with an adjustment in their differential rent. At the end of Quarter 2 2018, over 37,750 tenancies were being supported by the HAP scheme, including over 9,000 additional households in 2018.

The Homeless HAP Place Finder Service is a targeted support for homeless households who are finding it difficult to secure HAP tenancies. The Place Finder Service has been successfully utilised by the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive (DRHE) across the Dublin local authori-

ties since February 2015, with more than 3,000 households being supported by the Homeless HAP scheme at end Q2 2018.

The Place Finder Service will assist households in emergency accommodation primarily by providing access to deposits and advance rental payments. These elements are the core financial supports now being made available nationally. Local authorities have the option to enhance this service, if required, through their homeless services by assigning dedicated staff to provide assistance in:

- seeking out potential properties suitable for households currently identified as homeless;
- liaising with specific households to establish their specific needs;
- establishing relationships with local property agents and landlords; and,
- supporting those homeless households to exit emergency accommodation and secure a tenancy.

Local authorities, including the DRHE, are promoting the scheme locally, and engaging with letting agents and landlords who might be interested in entering into a HAP tenancy.

Where a local authority decides to enhance the Homeless HAP service beyond the financial assistance provided by my Department, the arrangement, management and oversight of the Homeless HAP Place Finder Service, including any contractual matters that may arise with relevant third parties, is a matter for each individual local authority.

The DRHE, in conjunction with my Department, has put in place an incentive for estate agents whereby, should they make suitable properties exclusively available to homeless families through the Place Finders team within the DRHE, and not advertise them on letting websites or elsewhere or hold reserved viewings for homeless families in emergency accommodation, then, after five properties have been secured in this manner, a payment of €500 per property plus VAT will be made to the agent, following the submission of the appropriate paperwork. A further €500 per property can be made for the sixth and any subsequent properties secured in this manner, provided the agent formally invoices the DRHE for each payment.

The DRHE, and local authorities more generally, do not make payments in cash.

Planning Issues

678. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the position regarding extensions of duration of planning approval in view of the commencement of section 28(1) of the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016, with particular regard to the non-functioning of the commenced section 57 of the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43267/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Section 57 of the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2018, which came into force on enactment, amends section 28(1) of the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016, which remains to be commenced.

In the near future, I expect to make the commencement order required to bring into operation the latter provision, which amended section 42 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 relating to the extension of the duration of a planning permission.

Student Accommodation

679. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he has considered specific build student accommodation to alleviate the lack of student accommodation and to free up rental properties for families in the area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43327/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): Research undertaken by the Higher Education Authority into student accommodation provision estimates that there is significant unmet demand nationally and, with the student population forecast to increase to nearly 193,000 by 2024, significant investment is needed in provision of accommodation nationally.

In July 2016, the Government's Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness identified the under-supply of purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA) in Ireland and the significant related adverse impact that this deficit was having on the wider private rental sector. The increased provision of PBSA was established as a key priority in addressing the current wider housing crisis.

My Department continues to work closely with the Department of Education and Skills through the Inter-Departmental Working Group on Student Accommodation in examining the issue of student housing and potential policy measures to increase accommodation supply. This Group, which includes stakeholders from the Higher Education Institutes, Union of Students in Ireland and other Government Departments, highlighted important issues in developing new student accommodation projects, including the planning and development finance aspects in assembling new development projects.

The work of this Group contributed directly to the initiation of reforms in the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016 which provided for the fast-tracking of planning applications for student housing construction projects of greater than 200 bed-spaces to An Bord Pleanála (which commenced on 3 July 2017). In addition, the legislation provides for the availability of low-cost financing from the Housing Finance Agency to the Higher Education Institutes specifically to support the delivery of new student accommodation projects.

My Department also fed into the preparation of the National Student Accommodation Strategy which was launched by the Department of Education and Skills in July 2017 – a specific action committed to under Rebuilding Ireland. This policy document was developed with input from the key stakeholders in the sector and includes eight key targets and 27 actions to support the delivery of an increased supply of PBSA.

These and other measures by my Department have assisted in delivering a significant increase in the level of PBSA projects coming forward nationally.

Recent analysis from the Higher Education Authority has indicated that, by September 2018, over 5,500 bed-spaces had been delivered since the publication of Rebuilding Ireland and some 4,800 further bed-spaces are currently under construction nationally.

In addition, over 7,900 bed-spaces have received planning permission but are yet to commence construction. The scale of this level of additional student accommodation should exert a downward pressure on the cost of such accommodation, through availability of supply and competition.

Social and Affordable Housing Funding

680. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount of funding released for the construction of social housing under the Rebuilding Ireland programme; if he will provide a schedule of funding issued on a local authority basis; the projects for which funding was released; the amount awarded by project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43329/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Social housing construction is funded under a range of different initiatives such as local authority construction, turnkey developments, rapid delivery and regeneration programmes and through construction and turnkey developments by approved housing bodies. Rebuilding Ireland is a six year programme covering the period 2016 to 2021. In the period to end September 2018, €715 million has been invested in social housing construction projects.

In addition, funding of almost €68 million has been provided to local authorities under my Department's Voids Programme. This funding is provided to support local authorities in remediating those social housing homes that may require a greater level of investment than the normal level of pre-letting repairs that local authorities would ordinarily carry out, as part of their on-going repair and maintenance of local authority housing.

The breakdown of the expenditure over the period in question at individual local authority and project levels is not readily available. However, if the Deputy is concerned about a specific local authority or local authorities, I will have the matter explored further on receipt of the relevant information.

However, insofar as the social housing construction programme is concerned, my Department now publishes, on a quarterly basis, a comprehensive status report of all social housing construction schemes for all local authority areas showing details such as their locations, a range of information relating to their advancement, including those delivered and those progressing through planning, design and construction. The most recent of these reports covers the period up to the end of Quarter 2 2018 and lists 1,067 approved social housing construction schemes, delivering over 16,300 homes. The report can be accessed at the following link: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-publishes-latest-social-housing-construction-report/>. Further project approvals are being added to the construction programme as projects are developed by local authorities and approved housing bodies.

More broadly, a total of €1.4 billion was expended in 2017 on the implementation of the full range of housing programmes, which resulted in the delivery of social housing solutions for almost 26,000 households. In 2018, investment of €1.9 billion is being provided for housing and this was increased further in Budget 2019 with almost €2.4 billion being provided for housing programmes next year.

Local Authority Funding

681. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount allocated to local authorities (details supplied) under capital housing funding in each of the years from 2010 to 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43337/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The information requested in respect of capital funding for housing programmes for Cavan

County Council and Monaghan County Council for the period 2010 to end September 2018 is set out in the table.

Local Authority	2010 €m	2011€m	2012€m	2013€m	2014€m	2015€m	2016€m	2017€m	2018 (to 30/9)€m	Total
Cavan	8.29	3.31	3.70	3.66	4.15	4.40	5.18	6.07	5.06	43.82
Monaghan	10.64	6.32	5.24	3.79	5.18	3.97	7.46	15.68	7.03	65.31

Water Abstraction Regulation

682. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the impact repeal of the Water Supplies Act 1942, as proposed in the water environment (abstractions) Bill, will have on the property rights of persons generally; if he is satisfied that the full entitlements to compensation set out in section 14 of the 1942 Act will be carried forward into the Bill; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43344/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Heads of the Water Environment (Abstractions) Bill were approved by Government in July 2018. It is intended that the Bill will give effect to the obligation under the Water Framework Directive to establish a system of registration and control over the abstraction of water and proposals in this regard were laid out in Ireland's River Basin Management Plan 2018-2021, which I published in April of this year.

The draft Heads propose to repeal the Water Supplies Act 1942 and part of the Local Government (Sanitary Services) Act 1964 and replace them with a modern, fit-for-purpose control regime over the abstraction of water. Recognising the relatively low abstraction pressures in Ireland, the regime will focus on the most significant abstraction volumes and pressures and will be risk-based in order to effectively manage abstraction risks and pressures without imposing an unnecessary legislative burden.

I launched a public consultation on the draft Heads in August, which closed on 12 October 2018. All submissions received, as well as existing legal provisions governing the area of abstractions, including compensation, will be examined closely in the continuing development of the legislation.

Constitutional Amendments

683. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans in respect of holding constitutional referenda over the next 12 months. [42204/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Government announced on 26 September 2017 that it had agreed an indicative timetable for the holding of a number of referendums on proposals for amendments to the Constitution arising from the work of the Citizens' Assembly and the Convention on the Constitution.

In this context, my Department will be responsible for bringing forward appropriate Constitution Amendment Bills on reducing the voting age to 16 and on extending the franchise at Presidential elections to Irish citizens resident outside the State. These referendums will address two of the recommendations of the Convention on the Constitution. Work is being progressed in my Department to inform the development of the appropriate Constitution Amendment Bills.

Subject to the passage of the Constitution Amendment Bills by the Houses of the Oireachtas, it is proposed that these referendums will be held on the same day as the local and European elections which will take place in late May 2019.

Social and Affordable Housing Funding

684. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the cost and funding stream being used for the 20 units of social housing in an area (details supplied); the funding used for refurbishment, capital purchase or long-term lease; if the properties are being funded via the social housing current expenditure programme; if they will remain in private ownership; and if they will be acquired by the State via lease to purchase. [43379/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department has committed capital funding for Donegal County Council to acquire the 20 housing units in question in an unfinished condition. Subject to contract with the vendor, the Council will complete the housing in question and thereafter, they would be part of their permanent social housing stock at an expected overall cost of €2.36 million.

Help-To-Buy Scheme

685. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the grants available for first-time buyers who do not qualify for the help-to-buy scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43380/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The main support that has been put in place by the Government to assist first-time buyers is the Help to Buy Initiative, which is operated by the Revenue Commissioners on behalf of my colleague, the Minister for Finance. As one of the policy aims of this scheme was to incentivise the construction of additional housing units, it is aimed solely at new-build and self-build properties.

While there are no grants available from my Department for this purpose, first-time buyers who are having difficulty in accessing finance through a commercial lender may be able to qualify for mortgage finance under the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan. This scheme was launched on 1 February 2018 following a review of the two existing local authority home loan schemes, the House Purchase Loan and the Home Choice Loan.

The loan enables credit-worthy first-time buyers to access sustainable mortgage lending to purchase new or second-hand properties in a suitable price range. The low rate of fixed interest associated with the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan provides first-time buyers with access to mortgage finance that they may not otherwise have been able to afford at a higher interest rate.

The Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan is targeted at first-time buyers who wish to own their own home, have access to an adequate deposit and have the capacity to repay a mortgage, but who are unable to access a mortgage sufficient for them to purchase their first home. As with the previous local authority loan offerings, the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan is available to first-time buyers only. This is to ensure the effective targeting of limited resources.

Full details of the loan's eligibility criteria and other information are available from the dedicated Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan website <http://rebuildingirelandhomeloan.ie/>.

In addition to this, work is on-going towards increasing the availability of affordable housing in the areas of the country most affected by a lack of affordable housing supply. The Government has committed €310 million to support this programme of work, under the Serviced Sites Fund (SSF), as part of Budget 2019. In 2019 funding of €100 million will be available under the Fund with a further €142 million in 2020 and €68 million in 2021. The funding is available for key facilitating infrastructure, on local authority sites, to support the provision of affordable homes to purchase or rent.

Once the funding is awarded and the infrastructure is provided I expect delivery of affordable homes from 2019 onwards. Separately, all local authorities will now carry out an economic assessment of the requirement for affordable housing in their area, and the authorities' capacity to deliver housing at affordable prices from their sites. Based on this analysis further local authorities may be considered for funding under the SSF.

I envisage a maximum amount of SSF funding of €50,000 per affordable home and on this basis some 6,200 affordable homes could be facilitated. In terms of the type of affordable housing that will be delivered on local authority sites it may be affordable housing for purchase, under the recently commenced provisions of Part 5 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009, or cost rental, which is being advanced on a number of pilot sites before being rolled out more generally. Under the 2009 Act, the maximum discount is 40% of the market value of the home and the local authority takes a charge, equivalent to the discount, against the property, which the household must recoup at re-sale or during the charge period. The funding repaid by the purchaser is paid into a new Affordable Dwellings Fund which can then be used to fund more affordable housing. The scheme applies to new homes, and is targeted at single applicants earning up to €50,000 per annum or €75,000 for dual applicants.

Ministerial Meetings

686. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the details of engagements, meetings or correspondence that he has had with a person (details supplied) in the past three years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43396/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I have had no engagements, meetings or correspondence with the person concerned during my tenure as Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government.

Housing Assistance Payment Applications

687. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if a HAP arrears payment will issue for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43409/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) is a flexible and immediate housing support that is now available to all eligible households throughout the State.

HAP is a form of social housing support under which local authorities make monthly payments on behalf of tenants directly to landlords in respect of rent, subject to the terms and conditions of the scheme. All the terms and conditions of the HAP scheme for both tenants and landlords are available on the dedicated HAP website, www.hap.ie, and associated HAP documentation.

Limerick City and County Council provide a highly effective transactional shared service on behalf of all HAP local authorities. This HAP Shared Services Centre (SSC) manages all HAP related rental transactions for the tenant, local authority and landlord.

My Department does not have any role in respect of individual HAP payments and the person concerned should contact the HAP SCC by phone on 061 556600 or the relevant local authority for details of the refund process.

Local Government Reform

688. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the amalgamated Limerick City and County Council is regarded as an administrative county or an administrative county borough for the purposes of Article 12.4.2^oii of Bunreacht na hÉireann; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43419/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): Limerick City and County Council is an administrative county, as defined in the Local Government Act 2014.

Building Regulations Compliance

689. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of building control management system, BCMS, certificates of compliance on completion of homes for multi-unit developments (details supplied) in County Dublin during 2016, 2017 and the first six months of 2018. [43474/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The issues referred to by the Deputy are a matter for local Building Control Authorities, who are independent in the use of their statutory powers under the Building Control Acts 1990 - 2014.

Building Control Authorities are required to keep certain information pertaining to building works that come under the Building Control Regulations 1997-2015 on a statutory register, including particulars in relation to Commencement Notices, Declarations of Intention to Opt Out of Statutory Certification and Certificates of Compliance on Completion.

The Building Control Management System (BCMS) provides a common platform for clear and consistent administration of building control matters across the local authority sector. The BCMS is an IT enabler, set up to facilitate building control authorities, building owners, builders and construction professionals in discharging their separate responsibilities under the Building Control Act 1990.

The BCMS is centrally hosted by the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) on behalf of the 31 Local Authorities and has enabled this information to be hosted on a central nationwide register, which is readily available and searchable at the following weblink: <https://www.localgov.ie/en/bcms>.

Social and Affordable Housing Data

690. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Govern-

ment the number of social housing current expenditure programme, SCHEP, funded properties by approved housing body, AHB, build (details supplied) in tabular form; and the details for the SCHEP-funded properties targeted with funding in budget 2019. [43495/18]

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

The Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme (SHCEP) is a funding programme that supports the delivery of social housing by providing financial support to local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) for the long term leasing of houses and apartments from private owners and developers.

The SHCEP budget funds the ongoing current costs of homes delivered using a variety of different delivery mechanisms, including properties built or acquired by AHBs using funding under the Capital Advance Leasing Facility (CALF) and Housing Agency Acquisitions Fund (HAA), and leased to local authorities; properties leased on a longterm basis from private property owners by AHBs or local authorities, including properties secured through specific programmes such as the Repair and Leasing Scheme (RLS) and the Enhanced Leasing Scheme. Therefore, SHCEP is a complementary funding stream to a range of capital expenditure programmes like RLS, CALF and the Mortgage to Rent Scheme.

The 2019 budgetary provision for the SHCEP is €155 million which represents an increase of €40 million on the 2018 provision. This is expected to fund the ongoing cost of the existing social housing homes secured with support of the Programme at the end of 2018 which will amount to almost 14,000. In addition, over 4,800 new social housing homes, targeted for delivery across the build, acquisition and leasing streams in 2019 are to be funded under the Programme.

The breakdown of the new social housing homes, by delivery stream, targeted to be funded by SHCEP 2019 is set out in the table below:

Table 1: Dwellings targeted to be funded by SHCEP in 2019

Delivery Type	2019 (Target)
Build	1,988
Acquisition	700
Leasing	2,130
Total	4,818

The breakdown of the dwellings supported under SHCEP up to end Q2 2018, broken down by the schemes requested, is set out in the table below:

Table 2: Number of dwellings funded under SHCEP, by delivery stream requested, year to end Q2 2018

Delivery Type	2018 (end Q2)
AHB CALF (incl. CALF Build, CALF Acquisitions and HAA)	3,045
LA Direct Leasing	3,467
AHB Direct Leasing	617
AHB Mortgage to Rent	296
LA NAMA SPV	41
AHB NAMA SPV	1,150

Delivery Type	2018 (end Q2)
Total	8,616

The breakdown of the costs of the schemes requested, by delivery stream, under SHCEP up to end Q2 2018 is set out in the table below. A separate breakdown of costs in respect of CALF Build and CALF Acquisition is not available. Total spend under SHCEP at end Q2 2018, across all delivery streams was €23,945,263.

Table 3: Total cost of dwellings funded under SHCEP, by delivery stream requested, in the year to end Q2 2018

Delivery Type	2018 Spend (end Q2)
AHB CALF (incl. CALF Build, CALF Acquisitions and HAA)	€10,249,050
LA Direct Leasing	€6,544,540
AHB Direct Leasing	€1,136,410
AHB Mortgage to Rent	€814,961
LA NAMA SPV	€94,375
AHB NAMA SPV	€2,875,728
Total	€21,715,064

Home Loan Scheme

691. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of Rebuilding Ireland home loan applications that have been accepted and rejected; the percentage comparison between those accepted and rejected from the launch of the programme until October 2018, by county in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43506/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): As with the previous local authority home loan offerings, loan applications under the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan are made directly to the local authority in whose area the property proposed for purchase is situated. My Department does not directly collect information on the number of loan applications received by each local authority.

However, as is currently the case, my Department will continue to publish information on the overall number and value of (i) local authority loan approvals and (ii) local authority loan drawdowns. Information up to Q2 2018 is available on the Department's website at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/house-prices-loans-and-profile-borrowers/local-authority-loan-activity>, and this information is updated on a quarterly basis as additional data is compiled.

In addition, the Housing Agency provides a central support service which assesses loan applications that are made to the local authorities and makes recommendations to the authorities as to whether loans should be offered to applicants. I have asked the Agency to centrally compile figures on the numbers of applications that it has assessed and the most recent figures, as at the end of September, indicate that the Agency had received a total of 2,933 applications for assessment from local authorities.

Of the 2,933 applications received, 2,354 were deemed to be valid. Of these valid applications, 2,222 had been assessed and 1,134 of these (51%) had been recommended for approval. A breakdown by local authority of the 1,134 applications recommended for approval and the

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1,088 recommended to be declined is set out in the table below.

Local Authority	Valid Applications Assessed	Recommended to Approve	% Approved	Recommended to Decline	% Declined
Carlow County Council	40	15	37.5	25	62.5
Cavan County Council	7	1	14.3	6	85.7
Clare County Council	40	14	35.0	26	65.0
Cork City Council	77	37	48.1	40	51.9
Cork County Council	169	93	55.0	76	45.0
Donegal County Council	21	13	61.9	8	38.1
Dublin City Council	263	163	62.0	100	38.0
Dún Laoghaire - Rathdown County Council	53	33	62.3	20	37.7
Fingal County Council	321	156	48.6	165	51.4
Galway City Council	46	22	47.8	24	52.2
Galway County Council	83	32	38.6	51	61.4
Kerry County Council	60	26	43.3	34	56.7
Kildare County Council	142	72	50.7	70	49.3
Kilkenny County Council	22	11	50.0	11	50.0
Laois County Council	54	27	50.0	27	50.0
Leitrim County Council	9	2	22.2	7	77.8
Limerick City & County Council	46	28	60.9	18	39.1
Longford County Council	22	12	54.5	10	45.5
Louth County Council	50	19	38.0	31	62.0
Mayo County Council	30	13	43.3	17	56.7
Meath County Council	155	101	65.2	54	34.8
Monaghan County Council	10	2	20.0	8	80.0
Offaly County Council	27	10	37.0	17	63.0
Roscommon County Council	23	11	47.8	12	52.2
Sligo County Council	26	16	61.5	10	38.5

South Dublin County Council	167	84	50.3	83	49.7
Tipperary County Council	58	23	39.7	35	60.3
Waterford City & County Council	20	10	50.0	10	50.0
Westmeath County Council	17	11	64.7	6	35.3
Wexford County Council	66	33	50.0	33	50.0
Wicklow County Council	98	44	44.9	54	55.1
Total	2,222	1,134	51.0	1088	49.0

Each local authority must have in place a credit committee and it is a matter for that committee to make the decision on applications for loans, in accordance with the regulations, having regard to the recommendations made by the Housing Agency.

Fire Service

692. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43662/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The provision of a fire service in its functional area, including the establishment and maintenance of a fire brigade, the assessment of fire cover needs and the provision of fire station premises, is a statutory function of individual fire authorities under section 10 of the Fire Services Act 1981. My Department supports the fire authorities through setting general policy, providing a central training programme, issuing guidance on operational and other related matters and providing capital funding for priority infrastructural projects.

In February 2016, my Department announced a five-year Fire Services Capital Programme with an allocation of €40 million, based on the current annual €8 million allocation, to be used for the purchase of fire appliances and specialist equipment, building or upgrading of prioritised Fire Stations, an upgrade of the Communications and Mobilisation system and improvements to Training Centres.

An upgrade of Killarney fire station is provided for in the current five-year programme. Updated project documentation, including a capital appraisal and detailed cost plan, was received in my Department in March 2017, indicating a total project cost of €498,500. In April 2017, my Department approved Kerry County Council to proceed to tender for the proposed works and a firm tender proposal is awaited from the Council.

The projects in the capital programme are reassessed on an annual basis and priority may be adjusted to bring forward projects offering best value-for-money and to take account of the state of readiness of the projects.

Question No. 693 answered with Question No. 674.

Land Availability

694. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the details of the process under way to extend the land aggregation scheme; if his attention has been drawn to the need for such a scheme in respect of Louth County Council lands at Mullavalley, Louth village, Kilkerley, Ballymakenny, Mount Avenue and Point Road in view of the inability of the local authority to develop these sites for social housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43678/18]

695. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the impact of outstanding loans in respect of purchase by Louth County Council lands at Mullavalley, Louth village, Kilkerley, Ballymakenny, Mount Avenue and Point Road on the budgetary position of Louth County Council on an annual basis; if his Department wishes for Louth County Council to develop these lands for social housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43679/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 694 and 695 together.

The development of publicly owned residential lands for housing is an absolute priority for this Government and we are working closely with all local authorities on the development of their sites. In the first instance, it is a matter for local authorities to bring forward viable and appropriate development proposals. Of course, it is also a matter for each local authority to manage its own finances in a prudent and sustainable manner. In this context, I understand the Housing Finance Agency works with individual local authorities to find the most efficient way of dealing with each authority's outstanding loans.

The Land Aggregation Scheme was introduced in 2010 to assist in the gradual unwinding of loans taken out by housing authorities to purchase land for the social and affordable housing investment programme where loans were due to mature and where it was considered unlikely that land would be developed in the short to medium term.

An initial appraisal of the sites submitted by local authorities was carried out by the Housing Agency, as well as a due diligence assessment. Applications to the value of some €163 million in loans were accepted into the Land Aggregation Scheme. €111 million of loans were fully redeemed and the remaining €52 million are being recouped in the form of annuity loans. I understand that the site at Mount Avenue was accepted under the annuity arrangements.

Local authorities were advised of the discontinuance of the Scheme, in respect of new applications, in 2013. Notwithstanding this, my Department is committed to supporting local authorities to realise new social and affordable homes from their lands without delay. Sites that are not suited for a full social housing development may be more suited to a mixed-tenure development including social, affordable and perhaps private housing.

There is funding available to support local authorities in terms of the delivery of social and affordable housing from their own lands. Next year, €2.4 billion will be invested in housing and over the four years to the end of 2019, €6.6 billion will have been provided.

It is important that local authorities identify the most appropriate development proposals for each site, taking all of the available funding into account. For example, I understand that the site at Mount Avenue was approved for funding of €3.3m under the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF) for the provision of an access road which will support the initial development of 200 homes, with a potential for up to 1,200 homes on the wider lands.

In order to support local authorities further to prepare their sites for affordable housing specifically, the Government recently committed under Budget 2019 to provide €310 million

under the Serviced Sites Fund (SSF). A first call for proposals under the Fund issued to local authorities in Dublin; the Greater Dublin Area (including Louth); Cork and Galway in June 2018, with a closing date for applications of end August. Fifteen proposals were received from nine local authorities under this first call and are currently being assessed. I expect this assessment process to be finalised and an announcement of the first successful bids to be made in the coming weeks. While Louth County Council did not make an application under the first call, further calls for proposals will be made and it will be open to the Council to submit applications at that stage if it considers it appropriate.

Emergency Services Provision

696. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43697/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): Responsibility for the provision of emergency medical services, including pre-hospital emergency care, rests with the Health Service Executive (HSE) which operates the National Ambulance Service (NAS) and emergency departments in hospitals in accordance with health sector legislation and national policy. The HSE operates under the remit of my colleague, the Minister for Health.

As Minister with policy and legislative responsibility for fire safety and the provision of fire services by local authorities, my primary concern, as set out in the Fire Services Acts 1981 and 2003, is that local authority provided fire services are meeting their statutory obligations in respect of provision of fire services and fire safety. These responsibilities include the important activity of community and other fire safety initiatives as well as response to 999/112 calls.

In general, there is a high degree of collaboration and co-ordination of emergency activity among the Principal Emergency Services. In some circumstances, the HSE's NAS calls for assistance from fire services in responding to certain categories of 999/112 emergency calls. Such calls are typically in respect of, but not limited to, ECHO (life threatening) emergencies. As well as being able to call on Community First Responders, the NAS is aware that many fire services are equipped with automatic external defibrillators and have trained their fire-fighters in Cardiac First Responder and Emergency First Responder to Pre-Hospital Emergency Care Council standards. Fire services are so equipped and trained in the first instance to ensure the health and safety of their own staff, but can also use their skills and equipment where they encounter casualties at emergency incidents.

Fire services generally respond to calls for assistance from external bodies in accordance with protocols operated within the three fire services Regional Communications Centres.

The feasibility of fire services (outside of the Dublin Fire Brigade area of operations) being commissioned by the HSE to provide a response service in support of the NAS in responding to ECHO emergency calls was discussed at national level at the Fire Services National Oversight & Implementation Group (FSNOIG), which consists of fire service management and staff representatives. FSNOIG produced a discussion document which could potentially be used as the basis to underpin discussions with the Health sector. The document was discussed at the Management Board of the National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management meeting of 18 July 2018.

Any proposal for formalising such assistance needs to be subject to appropriate governance,

cost reimbursement arrangements and to be set in the context of a service agreement with the HSE/NAS which will not impact on or adversely affect fire services' primary roles. It would be important in such circumstances to ensure that local authority and fire services' resources are not diverted from their statutory fire service and fire safety responsibilities, where they are providing assistance for another public body. The potential impact on the current Community First Responders schemes would also have to be assessed.

As responsibility for the provision of emergency medical services, including pre-hospital emergency care, rests with the HSE, it would be more appropriate to engage with my colleague the Minister for Health in the first instance to advance proposals in this regard.

Brexit Issues

697. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his Department has a contingency plan to mitigate the effects of Brexit; if so, if he will publish same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43712/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Planning for the U.K.'s exit from the European Union was initiated over two years ago and preparedness for different types of Brexit is well underway across Government.

To this end, co-ordination of the whole-of-Government response to Brexit is being taken forward through the cross-Departmental coordination structures chaired by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. In July of this year, the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade presented a comprehensive Memorandum to the Government on Brexit Preparedness and Contingency Planning. On the basis of this Memorandum, Departments were tasked with developing detailed action plans to prepare for Brexit.

My Department is contributing to this process and contingency planning is well advanced. The priorities include assessing any potential impacts on housing and our other areas of responsibility. This is necessarily an iterative and ongoing process, monitoring the progress of the negotiations and working to mitigate the impact of Brexit, and my Department will continue to work closely in this regard with other Departments through the established structures.

Local Authority Funding

698. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the categories of funding available to local authorities through his Department; the amount of funding provided for each scheme in 2016 and 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43733/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department has a diverse business agenda including delivering, in partnership with local authorities and other bodies, on a wide range of programmes in areas such as social housing, urban renewal, water services and fire services capital investment, each of which includes a number of different funding schemes. Information on funding provided by my Department to local authorities for such purposes in 2016, 2017 and earlier years is contained in chapter 4 of the Report on the Accounts of the Public Services 2017: Central Government Funding of Local Authorities, published by the Comptroller and Auditor General in September 2018, which is available at the following link: <http://www.audgen.gov.ie/viewdoc.asp?fn=/documents/annual-reports/2017/Report/En/Chapter4.pdf>.

Fire Service

699. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the fire stations in Dublin that benefitted from the five year fire services capital programme announced in February 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43758/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The provision of a fire service in its functional area, including the establishment and maintenance of a fire brigade, the assessment of fire cover needs and the provision of fire station premises, is a statutory function of individual fire authorities under the Fire Service Act 1981. My Department supports the fire authorities through setting general policy, providing a central training programme, issuing guidance on operational and other related matters and providing capital funding for priority infrastructural projects.

In February 2016, my Department announced a five-year Fire Services Capital Programme with an allocation of €40 million, based on an annual €8 million allocation, to be used for the purchase of fire appliances and specialist equipment, building or upgrading of prioritised Fire Stations, an upgrade of the Communications and Mobilisation system and improvements to Training Centres. The five-year programme proposed the construction/ refurbishment of twenty six (26) fire stations. This included sixteen (16) new builds and ten (10) upgrade/ refurbishments.

Each fire authority submits to my Department requests for funding for prioritised capital requirements. Continued investment in the fire appliance fleet has been identified as a key national priority. All requests for funding from my Department's Fire Services Capital Programme for any fire appliances, equipment or fire station projects will have regard to local authorities' priorities, the value for money offered by proposals and the totality of requests from fire authorities.

My Department has not funded any fire stations for Dublin Fire Brigade as part of the current capital programme. However, under the programme, funding has been announced for six new fire appliances for Dublin Fire Brigade at a cost of approximately €1.8million. Approval for 6 vehicles with 4x4 capability was also issued to Dublin Fire Brigade in May 2018. In addition to this, a fleet replacement proposal for 2018 to 2020 and a request for a turntable ladder costing approximately €800k have been received from Dublin Fire Brigade and these requests are currently under review.

The projects in the capital programme are reassessed on an annual basis and priority may be adjusted to bring forward projects offering best value-for-money and to take account of the state of readiness of the projects.

Planning Issues

700. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if legislation can be amended to ensure that future planting of commercial forestry throughout Ireland is required to have local authority planning permission; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43772/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Planning and Development Regulations 2001 were amended in September 2011 by the Planning and Development (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2011 to provide that initial af-

forestation shall be exempted development, i.e. exempt from the requirement to obtain planning permission.

The justification for exempting this form of activity from the requirement to obtain planning permission is because such activity was subject to a separate statutory development consent system under the European Communities (Forest Consent and Assessment) Regulations 2010, administered by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. The 2010 Regulations were subsequently revoked and have been replaced by the Forestry Regulations 2017, following the commencement of the Forestry Act 2014.

Similar to the 2010 Regulations, the 2017 Regulations make specific provision for public consultation in the application and approval processes relating to afforestation developments. As part of the statutory public consultation process, site notices must be erected at all entrances (to the proposed site) onto the public road in respect of forestry licence applications. Further, notice of applications are published on the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine's website, under public consultation.

I have no proposals to further amend the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 in this regard. However, taking account of wider planning and development considerations, my Department will continue to monitor and keep under review general development activity, in consultation with local authorities, relevant Departments and Agencies and other stakeholders.

Fire Stations Provision

701. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the new fire station in Manorhamilton will be permitted to advance to construction stage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43777/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The provision of a fire service in its functional area, including the establishment and maintenance of a fire brigade, the assessment of fire cover needs and the provision of fire station premises, is a statutory function of individual fire authorities under the Fire Service Act, 1981. My Department supports the fire authorities through setting general policy, providing a central training programme, issuing guidance on operational and other related matters and providing capital funding for priority infrastructural projects.

In February 2016, my Department announced a five-year Fire Services Capital Programme with an allocation of €40 million, based on an annual €8 million allocation, to be used for the purchase of fire appliances and specialist equipment, building or upgrading of prioritised Fire Stations, an upgrade of the Communications and Mobilisation system and improvements to Training Centres. The five-year programme proposed the construction/ refurbishment of twenty six (26) fire stations. This included sixteen (16) new builds and ten (10) upgrade/ refurbishments.

A new fire station at Manorhamilton is provided for in the Capital Programme with an indicative commencement date of 2019. My Department is awaiting a design proposal from Leitrim County Council to enable the project to proceed to the next stage.

Local Authority Housing

702. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Gov-

ernment the status of the allocation of funding for housing voids in County Leitrim; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43778/18]

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

The voids programme, introduced in 2014 by my Department, provides additional support to local authorities in preparing vacant units for re-letting. The purpose of the voids programme is to ensure that vacant units are actively targeted, with a view to minimising the turnaround and re-let time of these units and return them to use in an energy efficient condition. Without substantial refurbishment, these social homes would have been left vacant and in turn would not be part of the active social housing stock.

Section 58 of the Housing Act 1966, provides that the management and maintenance of local authority housing stock, including the implementation of planned maintenance programmes and carrying out of responsive repairs and pre-letting repairs, is a matter for each individual local authority.

Local authorities are actively encouraged to ensure that all vacant properties are brought back into active use as expeditiously as possible. Earlier this year, local authorities, including Leitrim County Council, submitted to my Department details of their work proposals and related funding requirements for the voids programme in 2018. These proposals were evaluated and Leitrim County Council was given approval to proceed with refurbishment works to 21 properties under the voids programme, subject to the relevant funding thresholds, which are listed in the tables below. Given the availability of funding, the completion of the works concerned is now a matter for the Council.

Table 1	
Energy Efficient Measures – 50% ERDF Co Funded	Max Grant
300mm Attic Insulation	€500
Cavity Wall Insulation or Dry lining Wall	€1,000
External Wall Insulation in lieu of cavity wall insulation or dry lining Terrace/End Terrace	Terrace €4,500 End Tec €7,500
Window & External Door Replacement	€4,750
Replacement Boiler or Installation of Renewable Heating System with fully Integrated Heating Controls with exception for solid fuelled central heating appliances.	€1,750
Replacement Radiators and Pipework	€750
Installation of Room Space Heating Stove	€1,000
Total	Terrace: €14,250 End Terrace: €17,250

Table 2	
Ancillary Measures if required	Max Grant
Installation of Kitchen	€1,200
Installation of Bathroom	€1,000
Rewiring of Smoke Alarm	€2,300
Plumbing	€800
Internal Joinery	€800
Internal Painting	€1,500
External Painting	€1,100
Gutter Downpipes/Foul Water Systems	€500
Wheel Chair Access	€500
External Works Upgrade	€800

Table 2	
Waste Disposal	€250
Other Necessary Works not specified Above.	€2,000
Total	€12,750

Local Authority Leases

703. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of houses leased by local authorities by local authority in each of the years 2014 to 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form; the overall cost of those leases; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43908/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Government has set out an ambitious set of targets for the delivery of social housing in the period to 2021 in its Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan. A commitment to deliver 50,000 new social housing homes through a range of delivery mechanisms is being supported by a multi-annual Exchequer commitment totalling €6.5 billion over the period of the plan. These targets will be achieved using a combination of building, purchasing and leasing high quality properties to meet the needs of households on local authority waiting lists around the country.

Of the 50,000 social housing homes to be delivered under Rebuilding Ireland, 10,000 will be leased by local authorities and approved housing bodies under leasing arrangements from a range of different sources.

Data on social housing leasing, funded by my Department, in respect of all local authorities from 2016 to end Q2 2018 is published on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision>. Data in respect of Q3 2018 is currently being collated and will be available shortly. Details in relation to Leasing output for 2014 and 2015 are set out in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Leasing Output 2014 and 2015, by Local Authority

Local Authority	2014 Leasing	2015 Leasing
Carlow	3	31
Cavan	2	3
Clare	12	41
Cork City	4	39
Cork County	102	115
Donegal	20	32
Dublin City	64	185
Dun Laoghaire - Rathdown	0	0
Fingal	52	45
South Dublin	94	120
Galway City	22	25
Galway County	4	30
Kerry	26	51
Kildare	26	30
Kilkenny	0	43
Laois	14	12

Local Authority	2014 Leasing	2015 Leasing
Leitrim	0	5
Limerick	3	0
Longford	3	31
Louth	67	14
Mayo	45	31
Meath	6	42
Monaghan	0	4
Offaly	67	57
Roscommon	0	0
Sligo	2	6
Tipperary	37	31
Waterford	14	13
Westmeath	51	39
Wexford	3	21
Wicklow	3	7
Total	746	1,103

Leasing is an important component of the suite of delivery options available to local authorities in meeting housing needs, the costs of which are met from my Department's Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme (SHCEP).

The SHCEP budget funds the ongoing current costs of homes delivered using a variety of different delivery mechanisms, including properties built or acquired by AHBs using funding under the Capital Advance Leasing Facility (CALF) and Housing Agency Acquisitions Fund (HAA), and leased to local authorities; properties leased on a longterm basis from private property owners by AHBs or local authorities, including properties secured through specific programmes such as the Repair and Leasing Scheme (RLS) and the Enhanced Leasing Scheme.

Exchequer funding for SHCEP in 2018 is €115m, increasing to €155m in 2019. This is expected to fund the ongoing cost of the existing social housing homes secured with the support of the Programme at the end of 2018, which will amount to almost 14,000, together with over 4,800 new social housing homes, targeted for delivery across the build, acquisition and leasing streams in 2019.

Details of the total funding drawn-down by local authorities under SHCEP from 2014 to 2017, and for the first half of 2018, are provided below in tabular form. The total cost of leased dwellings funded under SHCEP for Q1 and Q2 2018 was €13,278,131 (Q1 total €8,072,551; Q2 €5,205,580). A detailed breakdown of payments made to local authorities by my Department, by leasing type, is not available before Q1 2018.

Table 2: SHCEP Expenditure 2014-2018

Period	SHCEP Expenditure
2014	€34,844,780
2015	€42,275,724*
2016	€54,028,752
2017	€84,050,743
Q2 2018	€23,945,263

*Of this figure, a total of €7,933,651 was self-funded by local authorities using funding from their RAS Reserve.

Housing Data

704. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of local authority house completions in each of the years 2013 to 2017; the projected number for 2018 and 2019; the costs per year associated with the completions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43940/18]

705. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of turnkey purchases completed in each of the years 2013 to 2017; the projected number in 2018, by county; the costs per year associated with the turnkey completions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43941/18]

706. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of Part V purchases in each of the years 2013 to 2017; the projected number for 2018, by local authority; the costs per year associated with Part V purchases in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43945/18]

707. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the projected local authority build starts and completions for 2019, 2020 and 2021, by local authority; the amount budgeted for each year for the commencements and completions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43947/18]

708. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the projected Part V build starts and completions for 2019, 2020 and 2021, by local authority; the amount budgeted for those commencements and completions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43944/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 704 to 708, inclusive, together.

Data in relation to local authority social housing delivery, for the period 2013-2017, is available on my Department's website at the following link: <https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision>.

The overall targets under Rebuilding Ireland for social housing build, including Part V and turnkeys, is 4,969 units in 2018 and 6,545 units in 2019. Details in relation to build targets on a local authority basis for 2018, can be accessed on the Rebuilding Ireland website at:

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

Targets are reviewed annually and following Budget 2019, the number of social housing homes to be delivered in 2019 under Rebuilding Ireland is as follows:

Rebuilding Ireland Targets	2019
New build	4,982
Part V	1,260
Voids	303
Total: Build	6,545

Rebuilding Ireland Targets	2019
Total: Acquisition	1,325
Total: Lease	2,130
Total: Build, Acquisition and Lease	10,000
RAS	600
HAP	16,760
Total	27,360

My Department is supporting local authorities in the provision of new build social housing through a range of different initiatives, including the construction of social homes on their own lands, construction delivery in conjunction with Approved Housing Bodies and also, local authorities are working in partnership with private developers to deliver social housing construction through turnkey arrangements.

Through this range of supports, local authorities now have substantial pipelines of new build social housing projects approved, details of which can be seen in the Quarter 2 2018 Construction Status Report, which is available on the Rebuilding Ireland website at the following link: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-publishes-latest-social-housing-construction-report/>.

The Construction Status Report includes construction schemes being delivered through a range of different programmes including turnkey projects. The latest report shows that 381 turnkey projects with 5,164 units are at different stages of planning, construction and completion under the Rebuilding Ireland Plan, with more coming on stream over the remainder of the period to 2021. These projects are being delivered as part of the overall Build Programme and as such no specific targets are set for delivery of turnkeys.

While the management of the social housing delivery programmes is a matter for individual local authorities, my Department has set the targets across the period 2016-2021 and is working closely with all stakeholders to accelerate delivery and further expand pipelines.

In relation to Part V delivery, output details for the period 2013-2017 is available on my Department's website at the following link:

<https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/affordable-housing/affordable-housing-and-part-v-statistics>.

My Department does not track commencements of Part V schemes specifically but additional overall statistical information on Part V delivery to end Q2 2018 is available at the following link:

https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/attachments/social_housing_output_overview_q2_2018.xlsx.

Agreements on Part V arrangements are a matter for local authorities. The current options available to local authorities for Part V delivery are:

- the transfer of ownership of land, subject to the planning permission application, to a local authority for the provision of social housing remains the default option as is currently the case. The land option must be acceptable to the local authority, as well as the developer;
- the building and transfer of ownership to the local authority, or persons nominated, of

completed social housing units on the site subject to the planning permission;

- the transfer of ownership to the local authority, or persons nominated, of completed social housing units on other land;

- the Part V obligation can now be fulfilled by developers through long term leasing of properties; and

- a combination of the options above.

It should be noted that the delivery of build, turnkey and Part V homes are funded as part of the overall social housing delivery programme. While it is not possible to disaggregate on a year by year basis the expenditure on turnkey and Part V social housing homes, analysis of Part V units delivered in 2017, under the Social Housing Capital Investment Programme, indicates an average cost of approximately €194,500. In terms of local authority social housing homes commissioned through turnkey developments under Rebuilding Ireland, the average cost is approximately €233,000 per unit.

The total expenditure for the various housing programmes for 2013 to 2017 was as follows:

Year	Funding (€)
2013	579.9 million
2014	585.4 million
2015	761.7 million
2016	942.7 million
2017	1.408 billion

The total allocation for housing in 2018 is €1.9 billion which will meet the housing needs of 25,500 households in 2018. Of the 25,500 housing supports, almost 8,000 new social homes will be delivered in 2018 through build, acquisition and long term leasing programmes.

The total budget for the delivery of housing programmes in 2019 will be €2.4 billion, which will see the housing needs of almost 27,400 households being met. The funding for housing programmes for 2020 and 2021 will be determined, in the context of the annual budgetary process.

Social and Affordable Housing

709. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 627 of 2 October 2018, the timeline for this project from the beginning pre-planning application to the estimated time of delivery of the four turnkey units; the historical amount of funds released for this project by his Department; if there are funds in excess of the €1.1 million allocated should the project overrun or encounter further unforeseen construction issues (details supplied); if a contractor has been appointed for this project; if there are penalty clauses for a delay in the delivery of the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43954/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department issued Stage 1 approval in principle for the scheme concerned in August 2016 and this was followed by a revised Stage 2 in December 2017 and Stage 3 in April 2018. As stated in my previous reply, Stage 4 approval for construction and associated funding of €1.1m was

sanctioned in July of this year allowing the scheme to progress to construction. An over run of costs is not anticipated. To date €37,661 has been recouped to Wicklow County Council for expenditure on this scheme.

It is understood from the Council, that construction is anticipated to commence on site in the first week of November 2018; however, some enabling works are being carried out prior to commencement. It is expected that the scheme will be completed in the third quarter of 2019.

With regard to penalty clauses, publicly funded construction contracts are regulated by the conditions of contract known as the GCCC Forms of Contract published by the Office of Government Procurement. A requirement of the contract is that the Employer must make a pre-estimate of its loss or damages in the event of non-completion by the due date, which is included in the tender documents. It is a matter for the local authority concerned as the Employer and a contracting party to comply with the requirements of the contract. The Employer should deduct such damages from money due to the Contractor, in the event of non-completion by the due date, unless this date is extended for reasons set out in the contract. Responsibility for complying with the conditions of the contract rests with the two contracting parties, i.e. the local authority and the Contractor.

National Lottery Funding Disbursement

710. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the apportionment details of National Lottery funding given to arts funding bodies over the past five years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43190/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): Under section 8 of the National Lottery Act 1986, the proceeds of the National Lottery are paid into the Central Fund of the Exchequer and therefore National Lottery funding is one of the constituents of Exchequer funding. The apportionment of National Lottery funding to various lines of voted expenditure is the responsibility of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

The components of my Department's Vote, which are part-funded by National Lottery proceeds are:

- Subhead A.9 An Chomhairle Ealaíon (Arts Council)
- Subhead B.3 Grant for An Chomhairle Oidhreachta (Heritage Council)
- Subhead C.4 Irish Language Support Schemes.

Allocations in respect of these subheads are set out in the Revised Estimates Volumes for the years in question and published by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform on its website at www.per.ie. The details from the relevant Revised Estimates Volumes are reproduced below.

Year	A9	B3	C4
	€m	€m	
2014	56.893	4.493	3.695
2015	58.893	4.473	3.695
2016	60.12	5.243	3.595
2017	65.15	6.254	3.795
2018	68.213	6.377	4.582

Wastewater Treatment

711. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if the National Parks and Wildlife Service has been consulted by Irish Water regarding an application (details supplied) to An Bord Pleanála for a waste water treatment plant at Clonshaugh, Dublin 17; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43191/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): In June 2018 an application for the proposed integrated waste water treatment project at Clonshaugh Dublin 17 and associated works (known as the Greater Dublin Drainage Project) was referred to me in my role as a statutory consultee under the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended). Heritage related observations on the proposal issued from my Department in August 2018 to An Bord Pleanála which is the consent authority for this application. Further information pertaining to the application was referred to my Department in August 2018. Agents acting on behalf of Irish Water also consulted with my Department at pre-planning stage.

Any submissions made by prescribed bodies to planning authorities may be taken into consideration by the authority when making its determination on the application and I have no role in this regard, nor can I comment on ongoing planning applications.

Languages Programme

712. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the grants awarded to Irish summer colleges outside of the Gaeltacht in the past ten years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43296/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Seán Kyne): Assuming that the Deputy is referring to capital assistance in his question, my Department has sanctioned €55,480 to Coláiste Bhréanainn, Co Kerry, and Coláiste Eoghain Uí Chomhraidhe, Carraig an Chabhaltaigh, Co Clare, in the past ten years in respect of improvement works under the Department's Community and Language Supports Programme.

Details regarding the capital assistance provided to support both colleges in providing language learning opportunities over the summer months are as follows:

Coláiste Bhréanainn, Baile an Bhuinneánaigh, Co Kerry

€22,833, €5,959 and €18,160 in 2009, 2012 and 2012 respectively, in respect of equipment and upgrade of facilities - Total: €46,952

Coláiste Eoghain Uí Chomhraidhe, Carraig an Chabhaltaigh, Co Clare

€8,528 in 2018 in respect of upgrade works.

Ministerial Meetings

713. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the details of engagements, meetings or correspondence that she has had with a person (details supplied) in the past three years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43389/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): Further to my response to Parliamentary Question Number 347 of 18th October, I have not had any

meetings or correspondence with the person identified by the Deputy during the period in question.

Comhairle Aireachta Thuaidh-Theas

714. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** den Aire Cultúir, Oidhreachta agus Gaeltachta de thoradh Cheist Pharlaiminte Uimh. 682 an 16 Deireadh Fómhair 2018, an ndearna CATT cinneadh maidir leis an treoír a thug an Roinn agus an Roinn Caiteachais Phoiblí agus Athchóirithe; an mbaineann na cúinsí pá céanna leis na heagraíochtaí trasteorann eile; ar pléadh an ciorrú pá seo leis na ceardchumainn sular tugadh an treoír seo; an dóigh leí an Aire go bhfuil sé cothrom go bhfuil oibríthe Fhoras na Gaeilge ar scála pá níos ísle ná oibríthe na n-eagraíochtaí a bhfuil siad ag tabhairt maoiniú dóibh; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [43541/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Seán Kyne): Is iad na Ranna Airgeadais sa dá dhlínse a shocraíonn na prionsabail foirne do na forais trasteorann faoi na socrúithe coiteanna a leagtar síos i gCuid 7 d'Iarscríbhinn 2 don Sceideal d'Acht um Chomhaontú na Breataine-na hÉireann 1999.

Tuigtear dom go mbaineann na cúinsí pá céanna leis na forais trasteorainn ar fad.

Mar a chuir mé in iúl i mo fhreagra ar Cheist Dála Uimh. 682 ar an 16 Deireadh Fómhair, tá cúrsaí pá don fhoireann ó dheas ceangailte go díreach le catagóir a mballraíochta sa Scéim Pinsin Thuaidh Theas, sin é, an bhfuiltear sa bhunsceim nó sa scéim le cearta forchoimeáda. Tar éis plé leis na ceardchumainn i 2014, tuigtear dom gur thángthas ar chomhaontú, le teorainn ama, chun deis aonuaire a thabhairt d'fhostaithe ó dheas na bhforas trasteorann go bhféadfaidís rogha a dhéanamh maidir lena mballraíocht i gceachtar scéime. Tuigtear dom go n-eascraíonn buntáistí difriúla ón dá scéim.

Sa chomhthéacs réamhluaithe, baineann ceisteanna maidir le pá fostaithe Fhoras na Gaeilge le cúinsí oibríochtúla inmheánacha na háisíneachta.

Local Authority Funding

715. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the categories of funding available to local authorities through her Department; the amount of funding provided for each scheme in 2016 and 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43726/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): My Department operates a wide range of funding schemes in the areas of arts, culture, heritage and the Gaeltacht. Details of these schemes, including funding awarded, made available in relation to these Schemes are available on my Department's website. Should the Deputy wish to submit a specific query in respect of any particular scheme my official would be happy to assist him.

Heritage Schemes

716. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the supports provided to protect historic structures at risk in County Kildare in 2017 and to date in 2018; her plans for 2019 in this regard; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43767/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): My Department provides financial support for the protection of heritage buildings and historic structures through a number of schemes which are generally administered by local authorities.

The Built Heritage Investment Scheme is a scheme for the repair and conservation of protected structures on the local authority Record of Protected Structures. It is designed to leverage private capital for investment in small scale conservation projects across the country and to support the employment of skilled conservation professionals and tradespeople. I have allocated funding of €2m in total for this Scheme in 2018. In 2017 and 2018 a total of €100,000 was provided in grant aid under this scheme for 28 projects in County Kildare.

The Structures at Risk Fund enables conservation works to heritage structures, in both private and public ownership, which are deemed to be at significant risk of deterioration. I have allocated €1.3m for the Structures at Risk Fund nationally in 2018. Over the course of 2017 and 2018, a total of €119,000 was allocated to 5 projects in County Kildare under this scheme. Details of the projects approved under both funding schemes are published on my Department's website and on local authority websites.

In terms of future funding, Investing in our Culture, Language and Heritage 2018 – 2027 represents a major capital investment scheme of €1.2 billion in funding over the next 10 years, as part of Project Ireland 2040. This plan will see increased investment in protecting and celebrating our built heritage across the country. More details on the commencement and completion dates for projects and programmes, as well as the timing of the expenditure in relation to them, will emerge as we go through the process of appraisal and planning as required under the Public Spending Code.

The Heritage Council, which my Department funds, also provides grants for the protection and preservation of the built heritage. It is primarily a matter for the Heritage Council to decide how its funding should be allocated across the range of research, education and conservation programmes it supports. Grant schemes are advertised by the Heritage Council on its website www.heritagecouncil.ie.

Departmental Funding

717. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the funding available for a group (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43812/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): My Department does not have a funding scheme for the operational costs of projects such as that referred to in the question. The relevant local authority may be able to provide assistance or advice.

Land Acquisition

718. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her views on a matter (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43820/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): The legal process of acquiring lands from the local landowners to facilitate works to provide enhanced public access to the area has taken longer than had been anticipated but is now close to conclu-

sion.

Seirbhísí Oileán

719. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** den Aire Cultúir, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta cad iad na pleananna atá aici chun feabhas a chur ar Ché na Reannaí ag Athphort ar oileán Árann Mhór; an dtabharfaidh sí sonraí maidir leis na pleananna chun an togra a thabhairt chun críche agus aon dul chun cinn atá déanta aici ón am deireanach a chuir mé an cheist seo; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [43849/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Seán Kyne): Mar is eol don Teachta, tá deontais éagsúla ceadaithe ag mo Roinn do Chomhairle Chontae Dhún na nGall thar na blianta, don togra luaite. Tuigtear go bhfuil gá ceadúnas urthrá a fháil ina leith, nach bhfuil an ceadúnas sin faighte go fóill ag an gComhairle Chontae agus go bhfuil tuilleadh suirbhéanna le déanamh mar chuid den iarratas ar an gceadúnas. Níl iarratas ar chúnamh faighte ag mo Roinn ón gComhairle maidir leis an togra. Má fhaigheann mo Roinn a leithéid d'iarratas, déanfar é a mheas chomh báúil agus is féidir, ag cur san áireamh na hacmhainní atá ar fáil d'fhorbairt na n-oileán agus na héilimh éagsúla ina dtaobh.

Seirbhísí agus Tacaíochtaí Gaeilge

720. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** den Aire Cultúir, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta an dtabharfaidh sí cuntas ar an dul chun cinn maidir le scéim na gCúntóirí Teanga, go háirithe maidir leis na poist bhreise a cheadaigh an tAire ach nár líonadh in 2017 i scoil (sonraí tugtha); cén fáth, i mBliain seo na Gaeilge, go bhfuil scoileanna ag fanacht ar chúntóir teanga le breis agus dhá bhliain; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [43850/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Seán Kyne): Cheadaigh mó Roinnse allúntas méadaithe, ar fiú suas le €1.02 million é ina iomláine, i rith an tsamhraidh do Scéim na gCúntóirí Teanga i leith na scoilbhliana reatha 2018/2019. Mar chuid de sin, cheadaíodh maoiniú chun freastal at 32 scoil bhreise atá ag glacadh páirt sa Scéim Aitheantais Scoileanna Gaeltachta.

In 2017, cuireadh allúntas de €784,442 ar fáil do Mhuintearas Teo. agus d'Oidhreacht Chorca Dhuibhne chun cur ar a gcumas Scéim na gCúntóirí Teanga a reáchtáil do scoilbhliain 2017/2018 thar ceann na Roinne. Ba ionann an t-allúntas sin agus allúntas 2016/2017. Níor cheadaíodh aon scoil bhreise anuraidh agus, mar gheall air sin, níor cheadaíodh aon chúntóir breise.

Tá mo Roinn ag obair ar athbhreithniú ar Scéim na gCúntóirí Teanga i gcomhréir leis an Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna i gcomhthéacs an Pholasaí don Oideachas Gaeltachta. Mar chuid den athbhreithniú sin, déanfar sonrú ar na critéir cháilitheachta do scoileanna chun páirt a ghlacadh sa scéim. Beidh fáilte roimh gach scoil Ghaeltachta iarratas a dhéanamh faoin scéim ach na critéir sin a shásamh.

Is faoin dá eagraíocht thuasluaite atá sé na socrúithe a dhéanamh maidir le hearcú cúntóirí chun freastal ar na scoileanna breise thuasluaite. Tuigtear go bhfuil an obair sin idir lámha faoi láthair.

Seirbhísí Gaeltachta

721. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** den Aire Cultúir, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta an ndéanfaidh sí sonraí a sholáthar maidir leis an bpleanáil do thonnchosc i Machaire Rabhartaigh i gContae Dhún na nGall; an dtabharfaidh sí sonraí breise i dtaobh cén maoiniú atá ar fáil don staid phleanála den togra, cén dul chun cinn atá déanta aici ar an togra seo ón t-ám deireanach a chuir mé an cheist seo; cén uair a cheadaigh a roinn an maoiniú seo agus cén clár ama beacht atá ann maidir le dul chun cinn an togra seo, mar a comhaontaíodh le comhairle contae Dhún na nGall, ós rud é go bhfuil cead tugtha anois ag an roinn an togra a bhogadh ar aghaidh go dtí an staid phleanála; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [43851/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Seán Kyne): Mar is eol don Teachta, is faoi chúram Comhairle Contae Dhún na nGall atá Cé Mhachaire Rabhartaigh. Tá forbairt na cé luaite sa Phlean Forbartha Náisiúnta mar cheann de na tograí oileáin a mhaoineofar faoin Phlean. Tá mo Roinn ag oibriú le Comhairle Chontae Dhún na nGall agus le geallsealbhóirí ábhartha chun forbairt na cé a bhrú chun cinn. Beidh gá don Chomhairle scóip an tionscadail a mheas agus, chuige sin, beidh gá innealtóirí comhairleacha a cheapadh. Tá céimeanna sa treo sin idir lámha ag an gComhairle Chontae. Ní féidir clár ama don tionscadal a leagan amach ag an bpointe seo ach mar aon le haon togra mór infreastruchtúir eile, cuirfear an togra seo i gcríoch go céimiúil faoi réir riachtanais an Chóid um Caiteachais Phoiblí.