

## Written Answers.

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

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

*Questions Nos. 12 to 69, inclusive, resubmitted.*

*Questions Nos. 70 to 75, inclusive, answered orally.*

### Homemakers Scheme

76. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when the women affected by the gaps in the homemaker's scheme can expect to see the changes that will bring them in line with post-1994 women; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46890/18]

**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 last, the Government agreed to allow pensioners, born on or after the 1st September 1946, affected by the 2012 changes in rate bands, to have their state pension (contributory) entitlement calculated under an interim "Total Contributions Approach" (TCA). The changes also provide for up to 20 years of home caring periods in the calculation of that entitlement, for those who took time out of the workplace for parenting children under age 12, or individuals who needed increased levels of care. The new HomeCaring periods recognised under the system are expected to significantly assist many people as it is not restricted to post 1994 periods of care, unlike the existing Homemakers scheme.

The changes apply to those who reached pension age on or after 1st September 2012 who were awarded less than maximum rate, on post Budget 2012 rate bands.

Currently there are approximately 79,000 pensioners in this category and my Department is now in the process of issuing Information Letters to each of them. Work on examination of the social insurance records of the pensioners concerned commenced in September. As social insurance records are unique to individual pensioners, this manual examination phase is expected to continue to the end of the year. To date, over sixty temporary staff members have been recruited to work on this phase. Further recruitment will take place in January 2019 when the first pension reviews are expected to get under way and it is anticipated that the first review outcomes will be notified to pensioners during Quarter 1 2019.

Payment of increases, where awarded, will be made immediately after an individual's re-

view is completed. If a pensioner does not qualify for an increased rate, they will continue to receive their existing rate of entitlement.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

*Questions Nos. 77 and 78 answered orally.*

### **Carer's Allowance Delays**

79. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason there is a backlog of claims in the carer's allowance section (details supplied). [46893/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** My Department is committed to providing a quality service to all its customers. This includes ensuring that applications are processed and that decisions on entitlement are made as quickly as possible.

Carer's Allowance is a means-tested payment, made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and providing full-time care and attention to a child or an adult who has such a disability that they require that level of care.

The target processing time for the scheme is to finalise 70% of new claims within 12 weeks. Currently the average time taken to process new applications is 17 weeks.

The principal reason for the length of time taken to process a Carer's Allowance claim is the growth in recent years in the number of applications received; these increased by 31% between 2015 and 2017.

It is also the case that social welfare schemes with a number of complex qualifying conditions can take longer to process.

Before a decision can be made on entitlement to Carer's Allowance, evidence must be provided in respect of the carer's habitual residence in the State, the level of care they provide, their means and also that the person being cared for has such a disability that they require full-time care and attention. It is sometimes the case that the documentary evidence provided at initial application stage is incomplete or insufficient and this can contribute to the time taken to process applications.

The Department recently launched a re-designed Carer's Allowance application form which includes a new Care Report section which has been arrived at through consultation between officials and medical assessors of my Department and representatives and members of Family Carers Ireland. This new form allows carers to provide more information on the type and level of care they provide, with an aim to providing Deciding Officers with the information they need to expedite decisions on entitlement.

Also, additional staff have also recently been reassigned to the Carer's Allowance area to work on claims processing and this should lead to a reduction in both processing times and in the time taken to implement Appeals Officers' decisions.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

*Question No. 80 answered orally.*

## **Illness Benefit Waiting Times**

81. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when the issues with the new system for illness benefit will be rectified; if additional staff will be allocated in order to address the matter; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46755/18]

83. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to address delays affecting illness benefit payments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46461/18]

91. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if illness benefit recipients that have not received payments or are receiving payments sporadically owing to the recent information technology systems failure and that are experiencing ongoing financial hardship will be automatically granted an exceptional needs payment; and if so, if payments in such instances are means tested. [46637/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 81, 83 and 91 together.

My Department has experienced significant difficulties in processing illness benefit payments in recent times and regrettably these difficulties impacted people in a manner that has correctly been described as unacceptable.

This is a matter of great concern to my Department and I am extremely disappointed and deeply embarrassed by our failure to maintain our usual standard of service.

### **System Change**

The root of difficulties lies in the transfer of the illness benefit scheme to the core Business Objects IT platform on 4 August 2018. This transfer had a number of objectives including:

Moving the illness benefit payments off an old IT platform which is approaching end of life to a newer IT platform which is already managing most of my Department's other payments.

Realising cost savings by eliminating the need for labour intensive data entry and enabling the re-use of existing data already on the Business Objects platform.

Facilitating, in due course, the move from submission of paper medical certificates by people to one whereby an e-certificate is transmitted electronically from the GP to my Department.

Facilitating, also in due course, the move away from certification each week by a GP to a system where a single certificate is provided to cover the entire illness period.

The system change has worked effectively for about 80% of people who claim illness benefit but a number of significant difficulties arose which affected payments.

### **The Split-Payment Issue**

The redesign of the medical certificate enabled the forms to be scanned rather than manually entered into the system. However, approximately 50% of GP practices initially continued to submit 'old' form medical certificates. This led to long delays in claim processing on the new system in early August.

These delays were overcome by my Department implementing an 'automatic certification' process to ensure that people, including those whose GPs were not submitting the correct cer-

tificates, got paid.

While this process did ensure that people received their payments it did result in approximately 15% of recipients receiving a split payment in the period from September to November. People who received split payments were not underpaid as a consequence of this approach; the total amount paid was in accordance with their entitlement.

During this time, my Department also deployed additional staff to process old form certificates received from GP practices. This allowed us to cease the auto-certification process in mid-October and the issue of split payments has since been largely resolved. Approximately 75% of medical certificates now being received are in the correct format. The remaining forms are being processed manually on the day they are received.

### **Payment Gaps/Missed Payments**

The removal of the auto-certification process has belatedly exposed some underlying deficiencies in the design and operation of the new illness benefit system.

The main issue identified relates to the transition from a payment-in-arrears approach to a current-week payment approach, i.e. from a system whereby people are paid their entitlement the week after a period of certification, to one where they are paid during the week of certification. This leaves very little tolerance for late receipt of certificates once a claim is in payment. This is causing significant uncertainty for people.

The new system also has very tightly defined rules which must be satisfied before a claim and a certificate can be accepted and processed. Although these rules are valid in principle, they are leading to payments being delayed for reasons that would not have been applied under the legacy system.

### **Measures Taken to Address The Payment Issues**

My Department is taking three main steps to resolve the issues just described.

First we have deployed additional staff to process the tasks and respond to enquiries arising from the tight application of scheme rules by the new system.

Second, we have developed some new IT routines or 'workarounds' that in effect build in a seven day buffer to address the payment gap issue and automate the processing of tasks to ensure a faster flow-through to payments.

Third we are reviewing the design rules in the system, including the payment in the current week rule, and will modify the system to afford greater flexibility in processing of claims and certificates.

In addition, my Department continues to engage with the medical profession regarding the implementation of e-certification and single / closed certification. These measures will, in time, lead to better service for people.

My Department has also allocated additional managers to take responsibility for the programme of work just set out. This management team includes a full time assistant secretary and additional staff at Principal, Assistant Principal and Higher Executive Officer level.

As a consequence of the measures just described, people who are due a payment and whose certificates and claims are in order should now receive their payment entitlement. Payment volumes were restored to normal levels last week and are being monitored on a daily basis to ensure that they remain at this level. Any further issues that may arise will be quickly identified

and any further remedial action that may be required will be taken.

In stating this it is important to note there are always cases, and were always such cases under the old system, where people's payments are legitimately stopped or paused for a variety of reasons. These types of issues will always remain and would normally be dealt with via our helpline number.

### **Other Issues/Measures**

In addition to these system issues, my Department acknowledges that it did not communicate effectively with people in advance of the new system coming into effect, nor in the immediate post implementation period. While my Secretary General did write to all people in receipt of illness benefit some weeks ago to apologise for the difficulties and to advise of other supports available this communication was, I accept, too little, too late and was of limited comfort to those people affected.

Our experience with the illness benefit transfer has been a salutary reminder that the longer term impact of short-term remedial actions, taken with the best intentions when unanticipated issues arise or failures occur, must be carefully thought through before implementation.

In order to ensure that lessons are identified and learned from this experience, my Secretary General has commissioned an independent review of this project to be undertaken by a retired Revenue Commissioner. It is expected that it will be delivered by the end of the year and its findings will inform our approach to future system and process changes.

### **Conclusion**

As I have already said my Department sincerely regrets and is deeply embarrassed by the difficulties recently encountered by people in receipt of illness benefit.

*Question No. 82 answered orally.*

*Question No. 83 answered with Question No. 81.*

*Questions Nos. 84 and 85 answered orally.*

### **Working Family Payment**

86. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason the working family payment is not eligible for the Christmas bonus; and if she has given consideration to extending this bonus in the short term. [46862/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Christmas Bonus is paid to long-term social welfare recipients, such as pensioners, carers, people with disabilities, lone parents and long term unemployed people, who rely either wholly or mainly on their social welfare payments for financial support. The payment will benefit more than 1.2 million social welfare recipients this year. The Working Family Payment (WFP) is an in-work support which provides an income top-up for employees with children. The Working Family Payment is therefore a supplementary payment rather than a main source of income. It is designed to prevent in-work poverty for workers with child dependants and to offer a financial incentive to take-up employment. According to Eurostat Data, the parental in-work poverty rate in Ireland is less than half the EU average and this is, in large part, due to in-work supports such as the WFP and the Back to Work Family Dividend.

An integral part of the WFP scheme is that once the level of payment is determined, it continues to be payable at that rate for a period of 52 weeks, provided that the person remains in full-time employment. The rate of payment will not change if there is an increase or decrease in the recipient's earnings. A key advantage of this approach, which is unique to the WFP scheme, is that claimants can be certain that they will receive a guaranteed level of income support throughout the period. The average weekly payment across all families is currently in the region of €135 per week.

There are currently over 54,000 families with almost 122,000 children in receipt of WFP. The estimated spend on WFP for 2018 is approximately €431 million, following the increase in the thresholds provided for in Budget 2018.

WFP recipients have not been eligible for the bonus in the past and any changes to the qualifying criteria for the Christmas Bonus would have to be considered in a Budgetary context.

### **Pension Provisions**

87. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the steps she plans to take to facilitate the award of widow's, widower's or surviving civil partner's (contributory) pension in respect of persons married here following a divorce in another jurisdiction the status of whom for remarrying here was in order but that in the event of the death of either party the pension is not payable; the way in which it was permissible for them to marry here; if the matter can be examined with a view to ensuring that full legal status and recognition is applicable; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46794/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** To qualify for a widow(er)'s or surviving civil partner's (contributory) pension, the surviving spouse must be deemed, under Irish State Law, to be the legal widow(er) of the deceased.

The legislative provisions pertaining to the recognition of foreign divorces outside the State are set out in Section 5 of the Domicile and Recognition of Foreign Divorces Act 1986. Responsibility for this legislation lies with my colleague the Minister for Justice and Equality.

In accordance with that Act, a foreign divorce will be recognised in this State, if one of the parties to the divorce was domiciled in the country granting the divorce when those divorce proceedings were initiated. If neither party was domiciled in the country granting the divorce when the proceedings were initiated, the foreign divorce cannot be recognised here.

Where the foreign divorce is not recognised, any subsequent marriage cannot be recognised. In such a case a person cannot be deemed, under Irish State Law, to be the legal widow(er) of the deceased. Consequently, where the subsequent marriage cannot be recognised, there is no entitlement to widow(er)'s contributory pension. In this regard, the Registrar General is the statutory officer responsible for the system of marriage registration in the State.

In determining domicile for social welfare purposes, an applicant is afforded the opportunity to make available to my Department any evidence that either party to the divorce was domiciled in the state granting the divorce at the time the divorce proceedings were initiated.

Under the Family Law Act 1995 a person can apply to the Family Law Court to have a declaration made as to whether a divorce obtained in another country is recognised in this State.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

## Social Welfare Benefits Waiting Times

88. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she is satisfied that the application process and waiting times for payments such as domiciliary care's allowance and carer's and disability allowances are both acceptable and accessible; the steps being taken to reduce waiting times for these payments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46618/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** My Department is committed to providing a quality service to all its customers. This includes ensuring that applications are processed and that decisions on entitlement are made as quickly as possible.

Both Disability Allowance and Domiciliary Care Allowance claim processing times are within their respective targets. In October 2018 the average time taken to process new Disability Allowance applications was 11 weeks and the average time taken to process new Domiciliary Care Allowance applications was 10 weeks.

Carer's Allowance claim processing is currently outside the scheme target, which is that 70% of claims should be processed within 12 weeks. In October 2018, the average time taken to process new Carer's Allowance applications is 17 weeks.

In general, social welfare schemes with a number of complex qualifying conditions can take longer to process. Before a decision can be made on entitlement to Carer's Allowance, evidence must be provided in respect of the carer's habitual residence in the State, the level of care they provide, their means and also that the person being cared for has such a disability that they require full-time care and attention. It is sometimes the case that the documentary evidence provided at initial application stage is incomplete or insufficient and this can contribute to the time taken to process applications.

The Department recently launched a re-designed Carer's Allowance application form which includes a new Care Report section which has been arrived at through consultation between officials and medical assessors of my Department and representatives and members of Family Carers Ireland. This new form allows carers to provide more information on the type and level of care they provide, with an aim to providing Deciding Officers with the information they need to expedite decisions on entitlement.

Also, additional staff have also recently been reassigned to the Carer's Allowance area to work on claims processing and this should lead to a reduction in processing times in that area.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

*Question No. 89 answered with Question No. 84.*

## Employment Rights

90. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the legislative measures she plans to prioritise to deal with bogus self-employment and related denials of workers' rights; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46847/18]

104. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of cases received and then investigated following the publicity campaign on false self-employment; if she is satisfied with the outcome to date; and if she will make a state-

ment on the matter. [46882/18]

109. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her views on the fact that principal contractors are underbidding for projects by being non-compliant with industry registered employment agreements, REAs, which lead to high rates of bogus self-employment. [46887/18]

112. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the measures she is planning to take in order to deal with bogus self-employment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46889/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 90, 104, 109 and 112 together.

The media campaign on false self-employment carried out by the Department in May 2018 was aimed at ensuring that there is better public awareness of the important service the Department provides in determining employment status and to help develop a better understanding of the scale and nature of false self-employment.

The dedicated web page attracted more than 10,500 visits during the campaign.

Scope section received some 50 calls and 30 emails during the campaign from individuals who had become aware of the service directly as a result of the ad campaign.

15 Scope investigations were created as a direct result of the media campaign.

The types of employment include:

- Couriers and van drivers.
- Home tutors.
- Meter readers.
- Personal finance.
- IT and media.
- Pharmaceuticals.
- Construction.

Three cases have been formally decided with PRSI class S applying in those cases. Two cases were deemed by the inspector to be correctly classed as self-employed and formal decisions did not issue. Nine cases are still under investigation. One individual did not wish to pursue the case.

Given the relatively low number of formal requests for determinations, there may be some reluctance by individuals to seek a Scope determination due to concerns over how an employer will react. This suggests that the most appropriate way to address the issue will be through inspection and that anti-victimisation measures may be required to provide assurance to workers that they cannot be victimised if they raise legitimate concerns regarding their employment status.

Although the response was low the response to the campaign will inform the inspection work of DEASP, Revenue and WRC, including in sectors other than construction. The Department has intensified its employer inspection activity since the campaign. A separate series of

investigations took place in the west of the country focussed on the construction sector. Two further projects with a particular emphasis on identifying false self employment are currently planned for the Dublin North and Mid West Divisions.

In considering whether new measures may be required to tackle an issue such as false self-employment account needs to be taken of the available data and evidence as to the prevalence and impact of the issue. It should also be considered if there are existing measures already available in legislation which can be applied to address the issue.

There are already significant legislative powers to investigate and sanction employers and employees who falsely declare their social insurance status as self-employed rather than employed.

On balance the Department's view is that, with the possible exception of anti-victimisation protections, there are already sufficient legislative provisions and powers to enable the State (and in particular the Department) to identify, investigate and enforce, including through criminal prosecutions where necessary, the false declaration of employment as self-employment.

Turning to the related matter of employment rights, there was a commitment in the Programme for Government to address the perceived increase in the casualisation of work and strengthen the regulation of precarious employment. The Employment Miscellaneous Provisions Bill 2017, currently going through the Oireachtas, addresses a number of workers' rights issues, including:

- prohibiting zero hour contracts in most circumstances;
- the requirement that the terms of employments be produced by the employer within five days;
- new minimum payment for employees called in to work but sent home again without work;
- a new right for employees whose contract of employment does not reflect the reality of the hours they habitually work to be placed in a band of hours that better reflects the hours they have worked over a reference period;
- strong anti-penalisation provisions.

With reference to compliance with sectoral or industry employment orders (REAs), these orders are an integral part of the State's industrial relations machinery and are made under industrial relations legislation. Compliance with such orders comes within the statutory functions of the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC). Both the WRC and industrial relations legislation and policy are a matter for the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation.

Bogus self-employment is consistently brought up by Deputies as a prevalent issue. If any Deputy is aware of any such cases, I strongly urge them to bring these to my attention so that my Department can investigate.

*Question No. 91 answered with Question No. 81.*

### **Pension Provisions**

92. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her views on whether the change from a 30-year qualifying base for a State pension (contributory) under the 2010 national pensions framework total contributions approach to a 40-year

approach as outlined in the recent public consultation document on the total contributions approach has been adequately communicated to the public in view of the fact that the recent public consultation on the issue elicited only 300 responses. [46829/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):**

There has been no decision on the number of years required to qualify for a maximum rate pension under the Total Contributions Approach that will apply from 2020, and so the question of publicising such a decision does not, at this point, arise. This issue was, in fact, one of the matters the consultation sought opinions on, and those opinions will inform the final design of that scheme.

The consultation process on the proposed reforms which dates back to October 2007 was extensive and included the then Government publishing the Green Paper on Pensions, conducting regional seminars, a national conference, and consultation meetings with sectoral interests as well as the written submissions.

The Framework model arising from that did propose a 30 year requirement for a maximum rate pension under a Total Contributions Approach (TCA) from 2020, but it also had less generous HomeCaring provisions, which would have seen that reform significantly disadvantage many women who had spent time outside the labour market raising their children. I believe that this would be unfair, given legacy issues around the marriage bar and the availability of childcare.

I launched the public consultation on the design of the TCA on the 28th of May to which stakeholder groups were invited. A number of workshops were also held on the day to elicit views and feedback. Members of the media were also there and the consultation was featured extensively on broadcast and written media.

All Oireachtas members were also invited to a briefing in Leinster House. The consultation was open for over 3 months and we received almost 300 responses from individuals and organisations including open written submissions. Those submissions outlined the views of respondents upon a number of issues, including the number of years required for a full pension, as intended as part of the consultation process.

Analysis of the views submitted is being finalised. When I have considered this analysis, I will bring a proposal to Government in due course, and the scheme will be introduced through the standard democratic process, and the policy choices will, I believe, be broadly debated by members of the Oireachtas. I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

*Question No. 93 answered with Question No. 78.*

### **Gender Proofing of Policies**

94. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her views on the recent ESRI report, which indicated that welfare cuts since the economic crash discriminated against the disposable incomes of women and that lone parents were disadvantaged most of all; the steps she is taking to remedy this gender-based discrimination; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46459/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Programme for a Partnership Government included a commitment to develop a process of budget and policy proofing as a means of advancing equality, reducing poverty and strengthening economic and social rights. The recent ESRI report *“The Gender Impact of Irish Budgetary*

*Policy*” is a valuable contribution which will further inform this process.

In terms of the findings, the report is based on two research assumptions: one where couples’ incomes are shared and the other where their income is treated separately. It is under the latter assumption that women who are not in paid work were found to have lost more than men who were not in paid work. The report states that this was mainly due to changes in the child benefit payment during the recession and the initial post-recession period. However, the report noted that this assumption (that couples do not share income) is somewhat extreme as it is more likely that couples do share a large proportion of their income.

The report also noted that there were no differences in terms of gains or losses to disposable income for single men and women or men and women in couples without children. Men and women in couples with children were also found to experience the same gains and losses, assuming that they shared their income.

The report notes that the main causes of the different gender impacts of budgetary policy are based on the economic activity of the individual and the presence of children. Therefore, the gender differences over the period in question were more likely to have arisen due to the fact that women are more likely than men to be lone parents, to be economically inactive and to benefit more from child-related supports.

In recent years, with the improvement in the fiscal situation, the Government has been in a position to introduce a range of welfare increases from 2016 onwards. This includes a package of measures to support lone parents, encouraging them into the workplace and into education and helping to reduce their childcare costs.

Most recently Budget 2019 included measures specifically targeting families, including lone parent families. These included a €5 weekly increase to working age payments, including the One Parent Family payment and the Jobseekers Transition payment; increases to the qualified child allowance of €2.20 per week for children under 12 years of age and €5 per week for children over 12; additional increases to the earnings disregard for the One Parent Family payment and the Jobseekers transition payment (to €150 per week); an increase in the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance for both primary and secondary school children and an increase in the Christmas Bonus to 100%.

My Department is currently preparing the annual Social Impact Assessment on the range of tax and welfare measures included in Budget 2019. It is an evidence-based methodology which estimates the likely distributive effects of policies on household incomes, families, poverty and access to employment. This year, it will also include gender analysis.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

*Question No. 95 answered orally.*

### **Illness Benefit Waiting Times**

96. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the cause of the difficulties experienced by persons accessing illness benefit payments over the past few months; the reason no information was available; the reason telephone calls were not answered from persons seeking advice; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46823/18]

105. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protec-

tion the details of the problems with the new system for illness benefit claims; and the average delay times in issuing claims. [46886/18]

111. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons awaiting back payment of illness benefit payments; the number of weeks for which the payments are outstanding; the value of outstanding payments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46885/18]

125. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of her handling of delays in the issuing of illness benefit payments; if these delays have been fully addressed; if not, when she envisages payment issues will be resolved; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46624/18]

128. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the steps being taken to address the delays in processing and paying illness benefit; the reason for these delays; when all persons will be paid up to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46878/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 96, 105, 111, 125 and 128 together.

My Department transferred administration of the Illness Benefit scheme to its core Business Objects IT platform in August 2018. Although the system change has worked effectively for over 80% of IB customers, significant difficulties arose following implementation for a number of customers.

My Department is taking three main steps to resolve the issues impacting on payments. First, we have deployed additional staff to process the tasks and respond to the customer enquiries. Second, we have developed some new IT routines or ‘workarounds’ that address the payment gap issues and to ensure a faster flow-through to payments. Third, we are reviewing the design rules in the system to afford greater flexibility in processing of claims and certificates.

As a consequence of the steps just described people who are due a payment and whose certificates and claims are in order should now receive their payment entitlement. I can advise that payment volumes were restored to normal levels over the past two weeks and my officials are monitoring them on a daily basis to ensure that they remain at this level. Any further issues that may arise will be dealt with as they are identified. In addition to these system issues, the Department acknowledges that it did not communicate effectively with customers.

In stating this it is important to note that there are always cases, and were always such cases under the old system, where people’s payments are legitimately stopped or paused for a variety of reasons. These type of issues will always remain and are normally dealt with via our helpline number. Given high call volumes in recent weeks this service was not sufficient to deal with the queries arising but with the additional resources now deployed the helpline service has improved and is continuing to improve.

In order to ensure that we learn from the lessons of this experience, I have arranged for an independent review into how the changes to IB were planned, implemented and – importantly – communicated to customers. I expect this work to be completed by the end of the year.

Finally, I would like to sincerely apologise again for the difficulties and frustration experienced by customers who did not receive the correct IB payment or who experienced delays in their payments over the last few weeks.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputies.

*Question No. 97 answered with Question No. 78.*

### **Housing Assistance Payment Data**

98. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons in receipt of correspondence requiring them to transfer to HAP from rent supplement; the number of persons whose rent supplement has been consequently terminated and are not in receipt of HAP, leaving them with no financial assistance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46884/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Under the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme, responsibility for the provision of rental assistance to those with a long-term housing need is transferring to local authorities. The strategic policy direction of my Department is to return rent supplement to its original purpose of being a short-term income support scheme.

The HAP scheme has been rolled out on incremental basis since 2014 and, as of 1st March 2017, it is now available in all 31 local authorities.

My Department works closely with local authorities to facilitate the transfer of long-term rent supplement recipients to HAP tenancies. As at the end of October 2018, there are 41,947 HAP tenancies in place, of which 10,279 transferred directly from long-term rent supplement with 2,949 rent supplement cases transferred during 2018.

Statistics are not maintained of cases where rent supplement is stopped due to the customer transferring to HAP and where the payment of HAP has not subsequently proceeded. If the Deputy is aware of any cases where a rent supplement claimant has experienced such difficulties, she should bring the case to the attention of the Department and my officials will follow up on them.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Parental Leave Expenditure**

99. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the date in 2019 from which parental leave will be paid under the budget forecasts; the number of persons expected to apply in 2019 and 2020; the full year cost; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46883/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** As part of Budget 2019, I was pleased to announce that 2 weeks paid parental benefit will be provided to both parents from late 2019 for the first year of a child's life. This is in line with the Programme for Government commitment to prioritise additional paid parental leave in the first year.

The projected cost of 2 weeks paid leave for both parents is €32m in a full year. The following is the estimate of the costs and volume of recipients for 2019, 2020 and on a full year basis.

	2019	2020	Full Year
Parental Benefit scheme estimates	€1.5m	€22m	€32m

	2019	2020	Full Year
Estimated number of recipients	2,700	41,000	60,000

It should be noted that there will be associated public service pay costs involved covering substitution costs for front line staff primarily in the Health and Education sectors.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### Pension Provisions

100. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the supports provided to foster parents particularly in the area of pensions in which foster parents would like their role as foster parents recognised as work for pension purposes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46757/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I am informed that Foster Parents are paid a weekly allowance by Tusla of €325 for each child under the age of 12, and €352 for each child over the age of 12. These payments are not taxable, are not subject to PRSI deductions, and are not taken into account for the purposes of means tests administered by my Department, and there are no plans to change this. As a consequence, a Foster Parent with no other income may have no PRSI contributions paid during the period they were fostering. Foster Parents who are working or self-employed pay PRSI contributions in respect of that work and qualify for social welfare entitlements on that basis.

The home-makers scheme makes qualification for a higher rate of State pension (contributory) easier for those who take time out of the workforce for caring duties. The scheme, which was introduced in and took effect for periods from 1994, allows up to 20 years spent caring for children under 12 years of age (or caring for incapacitated people over that age) to be disregarded in the calculation of the yearly average of the pensioner. This will generally have the effect of increasing the yearly average of the pensioner, and may result in a higher rate of pension, depending on their circumstances.

Under the interim Total Contribution Approach (TCA) for those pensioners affected by the rate band changes in 2012, HomeCaring periods will be available to those who looked after children up to 12 years of age or older where fulltime care and attention was required (to a maximum of 20 years for all credits and homecaring periods). There is no post-1994 restriction on the years during which this caring period will have taken place.

Claims continue to be subject to the standard qualifying conditions for State pension contributory also being satisfied, including the requirement that 520 contributions be paid.

Foster parents are entitled to the benefits of the existing homemakers scheme and it is planned this would continue for the new HomeCaring periods under TCA, on the same basis as other homemakers and carers, and will qualify if the carer is in receipt of Child Benefit. If the foster parent is not in receipt of Child Benefit they can still qualify for the home-makers scheme or HomeCaring periods if the caring periods are confirmed by TUSLA (these are cases where caring is for a short period of time).

Accordingly, the current system and the interim TCA system which will be implemented shortly both provide for times spent caring to be taken into consideration in the calculation of pensions.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Pension Provisions**

101. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of her plans to re-examine the situation in which women who were in the workforce and left in earlier years for family duties are not in a position to receive the full State pension (contributory) when they reach retirement age; and her further plans to address this situation. [46754/18]

110. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the measures she will take to ensure equality in the State pension (contributory) scheme; when pensioners affected by current rules can expect to see those measures enacted; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46846/18]

117. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the extent to which progress continues to be made in addressing the issue by which women for one reason or another have been deprived of contributory pensions having retired from the workplace while raising their families due to the marriage ban and who have made a major contribution to society in the course of their working lives; if their cases are being re-examined with a view to crediting them with sufficient contributions to enable them qualify for the State or retirement pension; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46793/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 101, 110 and 117 together.

On 23 January last, the Government agreed to allow pensioners, born on or after the 1st September 1946, affected by the 2012 changes in rate bands, to have their state pension (contributory) entitlement calculated under an interim “Total Contributions Approach” (TCA). The changes also provide for up to 20 years of home caring periods in the calculation of that entitlement, for those who took time out of the workplace for parenting children under age 12, or individuals who needed increased levels of care.

The changes apply to those who reached pension age on or after 1st September 2012 who were awarded less than maximum rate, on post Budget 2012 rate bands. The changes do not apply to anyone already entitled to maximum rate state pension (contributory).

Currently there are approximately 79,000 pensioners in this category and my Department is now in the process of issuing Information Letters to them.

Work on examination of the social insurance records of the pensioners concerned commenced in September. As social insurance records are unique to individual pensioners, this manual examination phase is expected to continue to the end of the year. To date, over sixty temporary staff members have been recruited to work on this phase. Further recruitment will take place in January 2019 when the first pension reviews are expected to get under way and it is anticipated that the first review outcomes will be notified to pensioners during Quarter 1 2019.

Payment of increases, where awarded, will be made immediately after an individual’s review is completed. Where an increase is awarded, it will be backdated to 30 March 2018, or the person’s 66th birthday if later, and arrears paid. If a pensioner does not qualify for an increased rate, they will continue to receive their existing rate of entitlement.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputies.

### **Community Employment Schemes Operation**

102. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to establish a community advisory forum for community employment schemes; and her further plans to increase the payments that support these schemes and the participants. [46880/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Community Employment (CE) helps long-term unemployed people to re-enter the active workforce by breaking their experience of unemployment through a return to work routine. The focus of CE is on developing technical and personal skills to enable a person to return to the open labour market. Persons engaged are provided with work and training placements of 19½ hours duration per week with a not-for-profit community sponsor delivering local services.

The CE programme is monitored on an on-going basis to ensure that the schemes are meeting the needs of communities and jobseekers. The Deputy will appreciate that given the welcome improvements in the labour market in recent years with reducing numbers of long-term unemployed on the Live Register, which is the target cohort for CE, it is proving difficult to fill the number of places available nationwide.

My Department undertook nationwide consultation workshops with key CE scheme sponsors and supervisors during May and early June 2017. As part of these consultations, potential changes to the eligibility criteria were discussed and a number of changes were implemented thereafter.

The general qualifying age for CE for those on the Live Register was reduced from 25 to 21 years. It is now easier for previous participants, who have exhausted their CE entitlement, to re-qualify as participation prior to the year 2007 is disregarded. There is an overall limit of 6 years participation from 2007 (7 years if on a disability payment). While participants between 21 and 55 years on CE are entitled to one year on the programme, this can be extended by up to 2 more years if they are engaged in a recognised training or education award that is helping them progress towards employment. All CE participants age 55 and over can avail of 3 consecutive years on a CE scheme. Since 1st June, I am also facilitating persons to take up a placement on CE or Tús while also attending their JobPath provider. The annual budget provided to CE schemes includes an amount to cover consumable services and materials, including insurance, necessary for the effective operation of the project. As part of Budget 2019, I increased the materials budget by €2m.

The payment rates for participants on community employment (CE) are related to their underlying value of their social protection payment plus €22.50 per week, with a minimum payment to each participant of €220.50. In Budget 2019, I increased this minimum rate payment by a further €5 increase in line with other payments in my Department. In addition, a participant may be eligible, where appropriate, for payments in respect of any qualified dependant adult and children.

I would like to reiterate that the Government strongly supports the work being done through these schemes and I have seen first-hand myself, over recent months, the vital role such schemes are playing in local communities, including supporting social services, across the entire country.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

## Social Welfare Benefits Waiting Times

103. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the processing times for carer's allowance and carer's benefit applications; the reason for the backlog of applications; her plans to address same; if additional staff will be allocated in order to clear same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46875/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** My Department is committed to providing a quality service to all its customers. This includes ensuring that applications are processed and that decisions on entitlement are made as quickly as possible.

Carer's Allowance (CA) is a means-tested payment, made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and providing full-time care and attention to a child or an adult who has such a disability that they require that level of care.

Carer's Benefit (CARB) is a PRSI based payment made to a person who leaves the workforce to care for a child or an adult in need of full-time care and attention. An increased payment can be made on both schemes where full-time care is being provided to two people.

Currently the average time taken to process new CA applications is 17 weeks and the average time taken to process new CARB applications is 14 weeks.

The principal reason for the length of time taken to process applications is the growth in recent years in the number of applications received.

It is also the case that social welfare schemes with a number of complex qualifying conditions can take longer to process. In addition, the documentary evidence provided at initial application stage can sometimes be incomplete or insufficient and this can contribute to the time taken to process applications.

Before a decision can be made on entitlement to CA, evidence must be provided in respect of the carer's habitual residence in the State, the level of care they provide, their means and also that the person being cared for has such a disability that they require full-time care and attention.

Before a decision can be made on entitlement to CARB, a person has to show that they have the required level of PRSI contributions, that they were in full-time remunerative employment and that they have left that employment or reduced their hours of employment to no more than 15 hours per week outside their home, that they are providing full-time care and attention and that the person being cared for has such a disability that they require full-time care and attention.

The Department recently launched a re-designed CA application form which includes a new Care Report section which has been arrived at through consultation between officials and medical assessors of my Department and representatives and members of Family Carers Ireland. This new form allows carers to provide more information on the type and level of care they provide, with an aim to providing Deciding Officers with the information they need to expedite decisions on entitlement. It is planned to incorporate this new Care Report into the CARB application form in the coming months.

Also, additional staff have also recently been reassigned to the carers' payments area to work on claims processing and this should lead to a reduction in processing times.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

*Question No. 104 answered with Question No. 90.*

*Question No. 105 answered with Question No. 96.*

### **Carer's Allowance Delays**

106. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if additional resources will be provided to reduce delays in the processing of carer's allowance applications; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46795/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** My Department is committed to providing a quality service to all its customers. This includes ensuring that applications are processed and that decisions on entitlement are made as quickly as possible.

Carer's Allowance (CA) is a means-tested payment, made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and providing full-time care and attention to a child or an adult who has such a disability that they require that level of care. An increased payment can be made where full-time care is being provided to two people.

The target processing time for the CA scheme is to finalise 70% of new claims within 12 weeks. Currently the average time taken to process new CA applications is 17 weeks.

The principal reason for the length of time taken to process a CA claim is the growth in recent years in the number of applications received; these increased by 31% between 2015 and 2017. While no specific research into this has been undertaken by the Department, it is believed that the increase is broadly in line with demographic changes.

It is also the case that social welfare schemes with a number of complex qualifying conditions can take longer to process. Before a decision can be made on entitlement to CA, evidence must be provided in respect of the carer's habitual residence in the State, the level of care they provide, their means and also that the person being cared for has such a disability that they require full-time care and attention. It is sometimes the case that the documentary evidence provided at initial application stage is incomplete or insufficient and this can contribute to the time taken to process applications.

The Department recently launched a re-designed CA application form which includes a new Care Report section which has been arrived at through consultation between officials and medical assessors of my Department and representatives and members of Family Carers Ireland. This new form allows carers to provide more information on the type and level of care they provide, with an aim to providing Deciding Officers with the information they need to expedite decisions on entitlement.

Also, additional staff have also recently been reassigned to the CA area to work on claims processing and this should lead to a reduction in processing times.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

*Question No. 107 answered with Question No. 78.*

*Question No. 108 answered with Question No. 95.*

*Question No. 109 answered with Question No. 90.*

*Question No. 110 answered with Question No. 101.*

*Question No. 111 answered with Question No. 96.*

*Question No. 112 answered with Question No. 90.*

*Question No. 113 answered with Question No. 75.*

### **Anti-Poverty Strategy**

114. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her views on whether the targets to reduce consistent poverty and child poverty by 2020 will be met; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46812/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The National Social Target for Poverty Reduction (NSTPR) was agreed by Government in 2012 and aimed to reduce consistent poverty from 6.3% in 2010 to 4% by 2016 (interim target) and to 2% or less by 2020. It was an ambitious target, particularly during a time of economic recession, but one to which the Government has remained committed. The most recent poverty data from the CSO Survey on Income & Living Conditions (SILC) 2016 show that the consistent poverty rate had reduced to 8.3% from a peak of 9.1% in 2013.

However, the impact of the economic recovery was not fully reflected in this result, which captured income data for the period 2015-2016. Macro-economic and labour market indicators have shown continued economic and employment growth since then. When combined with measures introduced in recent Budgets, it is expected this will result in further improvements in the consistent poverty rate when the 2017 SILC data are released later this year.

The child-specific poverty target component of the NSTPR was to lift over 70,000 children (aged 0-17 years) out of consistent poverty by 2020, a reduction of at least two-thirds on the 2011 level. The number of children in consistent poverty rose significantly from the 2011 baseline figure of 107,000 to a high of 152,000 in 2014. By 2016, there were 132,000 children in consistent poverty requiring a reduction of more than 95,000 children in order to meet the 2020 target.

It is important to give some perspective and a sense of the size of the challenge Ireland faces in trying to achieve the child poverty target. In this context, it should be noted that at the height of the economic boom in 2008, when the consistent poverty rate for children was its lowest, there were 68,000 children in consistent poverty. So, in order to meet the target, Ireland will have to be more than twice as effective as our best ever performance to date.

Nevertheless, social transfers continue to play a crucial role in alleviating poverty and inequality and Ireland is among the best performing EU States for reducing poverty through social transfers. In 2016, social transfers more than halved the at-risk-of-poverty rate for children, from 40.3 per cent to 19.3 per cent.

In recent years with the improvement in the fiscal situation, the Government has been in a position to introduce a range of welfare increases which support families. Budget 2019 has continued this trend with measures including a €5 weekly increase to working age payments; increases to the qualified child allowance of €2.20 per week for children under 12 years of age and €5 per week for children over 12; additional increases to the earnings disregard for the One Parent Family payment and the Jobseekers transition payment (to €150 per week); an increase in the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance for both primary and secondary school

children and an increase in the Christmas Bonus to 100%.

However, it should be noted that reducing child poverty is not just about income supports and welfare. Rather it is also about supporting parents to make the transition into employment and assisting families through the provision of quality affordable services in areas such as education, health, housing and childcare.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

*Question No. 115 answered with Question No. 75.*

*Question No. 116 answered with Question No. 78.*

*Question No. 117 answered with Question No. 101.*

### **Youth Employment Initiative**

118. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of young persons who have engaged with the YESS scheme; the number of employers that have registered under the scheme; the type of employment experience available to participants; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46859/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Youth Employment Support Scheme (YESS) commenced on Monday 1st October 2018.

A total of 100 vacancies have been advertised by 79 employers and, to date, 26 jobseekers have been successful in securing a placement.

The type of placements offered to jobseekers are quite varied and are across a number of different sectors including retail, wholesale, IT, pharmaceutical, general services and office administration. Each placement will be mentored and the scheme will provide a supportive structure for participants, including case worker support for both placement hosts and jobseekers. Participation on YESS is wholly voluntary.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **JobPath Data**

119. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the percentage of JobPath attendees that gained work after completing the course; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46625/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** JobPath is an employment activation service that supports people who are long-term unemployed and those most at risk of becoming long-term unemployed to secure and sustain paid employment. Jobseekers retain their jobseeker's payment and remain on the Live Register while engaged with JobPath unless they are placed in employment. Jobseekers may be supported through the service for up to 30 months and they have access to a personal adviser (PA) who works with them.

The Department publishes regular updates on the performance of the JobPath service on its website at <http://www.welfare.ie/en/downloads/JobPath-Performance-Report2017.pdf>. The website also includes reports of independent customer satisfaction surveys on the JobPath ser-

vice. These reports indicate that JobPath attendees have higher employment outcomes than non-JobPath attendees and also that attendees are very satisfied with the service. In addition a detailed econometric study of outcomes is being finalised and will be published by the end of the year.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

*Question No. 120 answered with Question No. 84.*

### **Farm Assist Scheme Applications**

121. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the level of red tape involved in the annual forms that applicants for farm assist are required to fill out and return will be reviewed; if the level of information that is required on an annual basis will be reduced; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46876/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Farm assist is a means-tested income support scheme for farmers. To qualify for the payment, a customer must be a farmer, farming land in the State, aged between 18 and 66 and satisfy a means test. The annual farm assist review form is a necessary part of the normal review process for these customers.

Following the Comptroller and Auditor General examination of the Farm Assist scheme in 2014 and the recommendations arising from that report the Department in response reviewed the annual declaration Farm 12 form. The revised form provides for a detailed annual review process which includes seeking information regarding the income generated and the operating costs of the farm all of which are required as part of the annual review process.

The means test for farm assist takes account of all income sources with certain disregards applicable to specific income sources. Different rules apply to income from farming and other forms of self-employment. Income from certain schemes such as the Green Low Carbon Agri Environment Scheme (GLAS), income from employment and income from property and capital are taken into account. An examination of farm outgoings is also included in the assessment process.

Income and expenditure figures for the preceding year are generally used as an indicator of the expected position in the following year. Details of any exceptional circumstances are also taken into account so as to ensure that the assessment accurately reflects the current situation.

The annual farm assist review form is kept under ongoing review by my officials and there are no plans to change the current review criteria.

I hope that clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Community Employment Schemes Supervisors**

122. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the steps taken to honour the pension claim of community employment supervisors and assistant supervisors as per a 2008 Labour Court recommendation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46858/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):**

Community Employment (CE) scheme supervisors are employees of private companies in the community and voluntary sector that receive public funding. They are not employees of my Department or public servants.

There are currently 1,345 Supervisors/Assistant Supervisors employed with CE sponsor organisations. While my Department funds wages and training costs in respect of CE participants and supervisors, it does not - and has not - provided provision for funding for CE supervisor pensions.

Employers, including CE sponsoring organisations, are legally obliged to offer access to at least one Standard Personal Retirement Savings Account (PRSA) under the Pension (Amendment) Act 2002.

On foot of the Labour Court recommendation, the issue of CE supervisor pensions is currently being examined by a Community Sector High Level Forum, chaired by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. A number of Departments, including my own Department, are represented on this group, as are the unions and Pobal.

A detailed scoping exercise was carried out with input from the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES) on the potential costs of providing Exchequer support for the establishment of such a pension scheme for employees across the community and voluntary sector in Ireland.

The exercise clearly illustrated that this matter presents very significant issues for the Exchequer. There is a potential cost to the State of €188 million per annum in respect of funding to enable an employer pension contribution in State-funded community and voluntary organisations, excluding any provision for immediate ex-gratia lump sum payments of pension as sought, which could, depending on the size of the sector, entail a further Exchequer cost of up to €318 million.

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

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Unemployment Data**

123. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her views on the fact that decreases in the live register figure are not reflected in the average amount of income tax paid by taxpayers in County Wexford in each of the years 2011 to 2016; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46854/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Government's primary strategy to tackle unemployment is twofold. First, through policies set out in the Action Plan for Jobs, which sets out Ireland's policies in support of enterprise and employment growth. Second, through Pathways to Work to ensure that a substantial share of the jobs being created by economic recovery are filled by people taken from the Live Register.

**Table 1** shows that the Live Register in Wexford has fallen by 40% in the 6 years to De-

ember 2017, close to the reduction of 42% nationally. In the year to December 2017, the Live Register in Wexford has fallen by 1,364 people, or almost 15.2%, again closely in line with national trends.

**Table 2** compares national average income tax with average income tax paid in Wexford during the period 2011-2017. The figures show that the average amount of income tax paid in Wexford, increased by 57% during this 6 year period, exceeding national average growth of 42%.

**Table 1**

Year	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
National Live Register	444,905	436,254	418,950	383,779	343,556	302,945	258,580
% Change		-1.9%	-4.0%	-8.4%	-10.5%	-11.8%	-14.6%
Wexford Live Register	12,762	12,430	12,158	11,370	10,258	8,978	7,614
% Change		-2.6%	-2.2%	-6.5%	-9.8%	-12.5%	-15.2%

<https://www.cso.ie/en/index.html>

**Table 2**

Year	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Average PAYE Income Tax (€m)	11,375	12,414	12,955	13,951	14,590	15,272	16,202
% Change		9%	4%	8%	5%	5%	6%
Average PAYE Income Tax Wexford (€m)	110	115	122	141	150	161	173
% Change		5%	6%	16%	6%	7%	8%

<https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/index.aspx>

While data from the Labour Force Survey is not available at the county level, trends in the Live Register can give an indication of underlying trends in local unemployment. To date, the policies being pursued under the Action Plan for Jobs and under Pathways to Work have been effective in reducing unemployment, both nationally and in Wexford. I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

## **Anti-Poverty Strategy**

124. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when the national action plan for social inclusion 2018-2021 will be published; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46811/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Tackling poverty remains a fundamental aspiration of Irish society and the Programme for a Partnership Government includes a firm commitment to develop a new Integrated Framework for Social Inclusion, to tackle inequality and poverty. This will be a successor to the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016 (NAPinclusion) and its 2015-2017 update which concluded last year.

My department is developing the new four year plan for the period 2018-2021. Like its predecessor, the plan will have a ‘whole of Government’ approach that aims to improve outcomes for the vulnerable and marginalised in our society, while recognising a shared responsibility across Government to implement actions to achieve the overall objectives. The theme of the new plan is one of active inclusion, which will enable every citizen, notably the most disadvantaged, to fully participate in society, including having a job.

The primary focus will be the reduction of consistent poverty, which in 2016 was 8.3%. This will be achieved through a three pronged approach: supporting incomes through as high as possible a level of employment, and encouraging and assisting people to enter the workforce; setting the relevant welfare payments at appropriate levels; and finally improving access to quality services such as health, education, childcare, training, housing, community supports in order to minimise deprivation for all groups and, in particular those who are on relatively low incomes.

Following consultation on its development earlier this year and engagement with other Departments on appropriate actions for inclusion, work on the new strategy is at an advanced stage.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

*Question No. 125 answered with Question No. 96.*

## **Brexit Issues**

126. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the discussions she has had with the authorities in Northern Ireland and her counterpart in the British Government regarding the operation of the free travel scheme post Brexit; if there will be no disruption to this scheme particularly in respect of cross-Border travel; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46796/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The free travel scheme provides free travel on the main public and private transport services for those eligible under the scheme. These include road, rail and ferry services provided by companies such as Bus Átha Cliath, Bus Éireann and Iarnród Éireann, as well as Luas and services provided by over 80 private transport operators. There are currently approximately 928,216 customers with direct eligibility with an annual allocation of €90 million.

The All Ireland free travel scheme allows a free travel pass holder (those aged 66 and older) to travel free of charge on all bus and rail services within Northern Ireland using a senior smart-

pass card. Similarly, Northern Ireland senior smartpass holders (aged 65 years or older) are entitled to travel for free on services in Ireland using their existing senior smartpass card. This is a bilateral arrangement, and does not apply to other parts of the EU.

A key area of concern is the impact of Brexit on the current reciprocal arrangements for social security schemes and services between Ireland and the UK, including Northern Ireland. This includes the arrangements for the All Ireland free travel scheme.

The Government's long-term objective is to ensure that the reciprocity of rights which currently exist for Irish and UK citizens moving within Ireland and between Ireland and the UK under the Common Travel Area, are safeguarded and maintained.

I met with the UK Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the Right Honourable Esther McVey, on Monday 23rd April 2018. I emphasised my objective of ensuring that the reciprocity of social welfare rights and entitlements, which currently exist for Irish and UK citizens moving within Ireland and between Ireland and the UK under the Common Travel Area, are safeguarded and maintained.

### **JobPath Programme**

127. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans for Turas Nua and Seetec in view of the improvement in the number of persons at work; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46813/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Bringing the long-term unemployed back into the workforce is a key priority for me, and I welcome the on-going reduction in the Live Register.

As the Deputy will be aware, JobPath is a service which supports people who are long-term unemployed to secure and sustain full time paid employment. Two companies, Seetec and Turas Nua, have been contracted by my Department to deliver the service. The contracts are for six years, comprising two consecutive phases: phase one entails four years' of client referrals, while phase two entails a 'run off' period during which time no additional clients will be referred. Therefore client referrals will cease on 31st December 2019 and the contracts will terminate in 2021. It is important to note that services will be delivered to completion for those clients referred during phase one.

The contracts include options to extend phase one for further periods (up to a maximum of 24 months) at my Department's discretion. While proposals to extend the contracts are not currently under consideration, my Department will keep the situation under review.

At present, a full econometric evaluation of the service is being conducted in conjunction with the OECD. The results of this econometric evaluation will inform my Department's consideration of any future developments in this area.

*Question No. 128 answered with Question No. 96.*

### **JobPath Data**

129. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons in the south east to date who have found employment through the JobPath service; the number of persons in the south east who have returned to claim social

welfare payments having previously taken up employment through the JobPath service; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46855/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** JobPath is an employment activation service that supports people who are long-term unemployed and those most at risk of becoming long-term unemployed to secure and sustain paid employment.

Jobseekers may be supported through the service for up to 30 months: under the service jobseekers have access to a personal adviser (PA) who works with them potentially over two phases.

During the first phase, of 12 months duration, the PA provides practical assistance in searching, preparing for, securing and sustaining employment. It should be noted that the aim of the JobPath service is to find sustainable employment for clients during this phase. The second phase only starts if the jobseeker is successful in finding work (during phase one). During this phase the PA continues to work with the jobseeker for a further period of at least three months, and up to 12 months, providing in employment supports. In addition to the two phases jobseekers may also undertake training while with the service and this may extend the period the jobseeker is supported through the service for up to a further 6 months. The duration of the client journey therefore necessitates the requirement of a cohort based approach to reporting and the updating of individual cohort outcome data over time.

In regard to individual clients returning to claim social welfare payments having previously taken up employment through the JobPath service, my Department does not collate and process such specific data and the information requested is currently unavailable.

The Department is currently undertaking an econometric review of this strand of its activation services. Completion of this review is provisionally scheduled for the end of 2018, following which more detailed and robust statistics will be available.

Feedback on the JobPath service has been very positive; the Department recently published the results of the 2017 Customer Satisfaction Survey. While the results of the 2016 survey revealed high levels of customer satisfaction, the 2017 survey has shown an improvement across all aspects of the service, including an improvement between 2016 and 2017 for the overall satisfaction with the service.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Ministerial Meetings**

130. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach the policy in relation to the need for note taking when Ministers and-or Ministers of State meet business and other leaders; and the way in which this policy is outlined. [46498/18]

**The Taoiseach:** The Code of Conduct for the guidance of Office Holders, which was drawn up in accordance with the Standards in Public Office Act 2001, provides that in all cases where meetings are arranged for the purpose of transacting official business, office holders should be accompanied by an official who would act as a note-taker in the office holder's own interest. The code advises that in any event, an official or adviser should attend before the conclusion of a meeting to record details of any decisions reached.

## Brexit Issues

131. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his conversation with Prime Minister May on 5 November 2018 regarding Brexit. [46530/18]

**The Taoiseach:** I spoke by phone to the British Prime Minister, Theresa May on 5 November. The Prime Minister sought the call in order to update me on the current state of the Brexit negotiations.

We both emphasised our commitment to avoiding a hard border and the need for a legally operable backstop.

The Prime Minister raised the possibility of a review mechanism for the backstop.

I indicated an openness to consider proposals for a review, provided that it was clear that the outcome of any such review could not involve a unilateral decision to end the backstop.

I recalled the prior commitments made that the backstop must apply ‘unless and until’ alternative arrangements are agreed.

We both expressed the hope that the negotiations could conclude in a satisfactory manner as soon as possible.

## Employment Data

132. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Taoiseach the number of persons on a wage at or below the minimum wage level by gender and age. [46378/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Seán Kyne):** The Labour Force Survey (LFS) is the official source of estimates of employment (ILO) in the State. This survey replaced the Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) from Q3 2017.

The most recent figures available are for Q2 2018 when the number of employees aged 15 years and over reporting earning the National Minimum Wage or less in the State was 141,700 (7.4%).

Tables 1 and 2 below show the total number of employees (ILO) aged 15 years and over classified by National Minimum Wage (NMW) earnings status, gender and age group in Q2 2018.

**Table 1 Employees (ILO) aged 15 years and over classified by gender and National Minimum Wage (NMW) earnings status**

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Gender	National Minimum Wage earnings status	Q2 18
Male	Employees reporting earning National Minimum Wage or less	63.6
	Employees reporting earning more than National Minimum Wage	810.3
	Not stated	85.4
	Total	959.3

Gender	National Minimum Wage earnings status	Q2 18
Female	Employees reporting earning National Minimum Wage or less	78.1
	Employees reporting earning more than National Minimum Wage	803.5
	Not stated	72.2
	Total	953.8
All employees	Employees reporting earning National Minimum Wage or less	141.7
	Employees reporting earning more than National Minimum Wage	1,613.8
	Not stated	157.6
	Total	1,913.1

Source: Labour Force Survey (LFS), Central Statistics Office, Ireland

Data may be subject to future revision.

Data may be subject to sampling or other survey errors, which are greater in respect of smaller values or estimates of change.

Reference period: Q2=Apr-Jun.

**Table 2 Employees (ILO) aged 15 years and over classified by age group and National Minimum Wage (NMW) earnings status**

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Age group	National Minimum Wage earnings status	Q2 18
15-19 years	Employees reporting earning National Minimum Wage or less	28.4
	Employees reporting earning more than National Minimum Wage	20.8
	Not stated	8.4
	Total	57.7
20-24 years	Employees reporting earning National Minimum Wage or less	41.4
	Employees reporting earning more than National Minimum Wage	112.2
	Not stated	24.7
	Total	178.3
25-34 years	Employees reporting earning National Minimum Wage or less	31.7

Age group	National Minimum Wage earnings status	Q2 18
	Employees reporting earning more than National Minimum Wage	400.7
	Not stated	39.3
	Total	471.7
35-44 years	Employees reporting earning National Minimum Wage or less	16.0
	Employees reporting earning more than National Minimum Wage	493.7
	Not stated	32.7
	Total	542.4
45-54 years	Employees reporting earning National Minimum Wage or less	11.4
	Employees reporting earning more than National Minimum Wage	356.1
	Not stated	29.5
	Total	397.0
55-59 years	Employees reporting earning National Minimum Wage or less	[6.5]
	Employees reporting earning more than National Minimum Wage	127.8
	Not stated	11.1
	Total	145.5
60-64 years	Employees reporting earning National Minimum Wage or less	[4.1]
	Employees reporting earning more than National Minimum Wage	78.9
	Not stated	8.3
	Total	91.3
65+ years	Employees reporting earning National Minimum Wage or less	*
	Employees reporting earning more than National Minimum Wage	23.5
	Not stated	[3.5]
	Total	29.3
All employees	Employees reporting earning National Minimum Wage or less	141.7
	Employees reporting earning more than National Minimum Wage	1,613.8
	Not stated	157.6

Age group	National Minimum Wage earnings status	Q2 18
	Total	1,913.1

Source: Labour Force Survey (LFS), Central Statistics Office, Ireland

\* Estimates for numbers of persons or averages where there are less than 30 persons in a cell are not produced as estimates are too small to be considered reliable.

Parentheses [ ] indicate where there are 30-49 persons in a cell, estimates are considered to have a wider margin of error and should be treated with caution.

Data may be subject to future revision.

Data may be subject to sampling or other survey errors, which are greater in respect of smaller values or estimates of change.

Reference period: Q2=Apr-Jun.

### Departmental Staff Data

133. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Taoiseach the advisers and constituency staff working for him both in respect of his role as Taoiseach and in respect of his role as a constituency Member; and if he will list all appointments in 2017 and to date in 2018. [46843/18]

**The Taoiseach:** Details of the four staff employed by my Department since 2017 to work in my Constituency Office are set out in Table 1 below. Details of advisers appointed to support me in my role as Taoiseach in 2017 and to date in 2018 are set out in Table 2 below.

Table 1

Constituency Office	
Salary Scale (Equivalent)	Number of Employees
Personal Assistant (Higher Executive Officer Scale)	1
Executive Officer	2
Clerical Officer	1

Name	Role	Appointment Date	Cessation Date
Brian Murphy	Chief of Staff	14 June 2017	n/a
John Carroll	Head of Policy and Programme Implementation	05 July 2017	n/a
Patrick Geoghegan	Special Adviser to the Taoiseach	14 June 2017	n/a
Angela Flanagan	Special Adviser to the Taoiseach	14 June 2017	n/a
Philip O'Callaghan	Special Adviser to the Taoiseach	14 June 2017	n/a
Clare Mungovan	Special Adviser to the Taoiseach	08 January 2018	n/a

Jim D’Arcy	Special Adviser to the Taoiseach	04 September 2017	n/a
Nick Miller	Spokesman and Communications Adviser to the Taoiseach	14 June 2017	31 Oct 2017

### Ministerial Meetings

134. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the policy regarding the need for note taking when Ministers and-or Ministers of State meet business and other leaders; the way in which this policy is outlined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46488/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** The requirement for note taking is dependent on the nature, subject and brevity or otherwise of any of my meetings. Where a formal meeting on a specific issue is convened, it is the normal practice for a note of the principal issues raised to be taken and any action points arising from the meeting. This practice is understood and applied by my Department.

### Defence Forces Remuneration

135. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the defence budget allocation for officers and enlisted personnel, respectively, in 2019. [46701/18]

136. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the defence budget allocation for officers and enlisted personnel, respectively, in each of the years 2015 to 2018. [46702/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 135 and 136 together.

The pay of Officers and Enlisted Personnel of the Permanent Defence Force is provided for in Subhead A.3 of Vote 36 – Defence. The following table sets out the budget allocations for this subhead for the years 2015 to 2018.

A.3 Permanent Defence Force: Pay	2015	2016	2017	2018
Officers (incl Army Nursing Service)	€83.2m	€83.2m	€82.7m	€83.7m
Enlisted Personnel	€299.3m	€297.9m	€299.5m	€307.5m
Social Welfare – Employer’s Contributions	€35.0m	€35.0m	€35.0m	€37.0m

The breakdown of the 2019 budget allocation has not yet been finalised.

### Departmental Staff Data

137. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of senior positions held by both men and women, respectively, in his Department. [46997/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** The number of senior established positions held by both men and women in my Department are set out in the table below.

Grade	Men	Women
Secretary General	1	0
Assistant Secretary/ Director	3	1
Principal	11	6

### Military Aircraft Landings

138. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade further to Parliamentary Question No. 323 of 25 October 2018, notwithstanding the fact that allowing the aircraft in question to refuel and transit through Shannon Airport is not in breach of the 1944 International Air Services Transit Agreement, the way in which the transit of a large numbers of troops from a belligerent state through a neutral state on their way to and from war zones complies with Article 2 of the 1907 Hague Convention (V) on neutrality; and the further way in which it complies with the High Court decision in *Horgan v. An Taoiseach* (details supplied). [46551/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** This Government is fully committed to Ireland's longstanding policy of military neutrality, which is characterised by non-participation in military alliances.

Whilst the judgment of Mr. Justice Kearns in the 2003 High Court case of *Horgan v Ireland* did include certain observations on the customary international law of neutrality, these were not relevant to the outcome of the case. The plaintiff's action failed on other grounds.

This Government will continue to promote and uphold Ireland's traditional policy of military neutrality. This is reflected in the imposition by my Department of conditions on landings and overflights by foreign military aircraft and similarly in the advice it provides to the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport on requests for exemptions by civilian carriers under the Air Navigation (Carriage of Munitions of War, Weapons and Dangerous Goods) Order 1973.

### Ministerial Meetings

139. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the policy regarding the need for note taking when Ministers and-or Ministers of State meet business and other leaders; the way in which this policy is outlined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46492/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** There is no formal policy in my Department with regard to note taking when I or Ministers of State meet business people, leaders or other contacts. The requirement for note taking depends on the particular context and is determined on a case by case basis, taking into account the nature, subject matter, length and location of the meeting. Any notes of meetings, as well as my diary,

are subject to Freedom of Information legislation.

### **Human Rights**

140. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the level of reported ethnic and linguistic tensions in Cameroon in the past three years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46580/18]

141. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the political and security situation in Cameroon; the representations that have been made to the Cameroon Government on these matters; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46581/18]

142. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the level of support being provided to refugees in Cameroon; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46582/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 140 to 142, inclusive, together.

The current situation in Cameroon is complex and worrying.

Cameroon held Presidential elections last month amidst security and humanitarian crises. In addition to the grave challenge posed by insecurity in the Anglophone North West and South West regions, Cameroon is also highly affected by the operations of the Boko Haram. A further complication is the large number of refugees from the crisis in the Central African Republic who are taking refuge in the east of Cameroon.

I met the Cameroon Minister for Education in February, when we discussed the situation in his country. The escalation of violence in its South West and North West regions is the most pressing threat to political stability in Cameroon.

The current unrest in the South West and North West regions began in November 2016 when English-speaking teachers and lawyers demonstrated against the dominant use of the French language. Separatists demanded the English-speaking North West and South West secede from the rest of the country. At least 400 civilians, 170 members of the armed forces, and an unknown number of separatists have died in violence associated with the secession crisis. According to UN OCHA, approximately 437,500 people have been displaced, with 26,000 people having sought refuge in Nigeria .

While Ireland does not have an Embassy in Cameroon, our Embassy in Nigeria continues to monitor the situation closely as many refugees from Cameroon are crossing the border into Nigeria. Our Ambassador in Nigeria recently met with Cameroonian refugees based in Calabar, Nigeria. Following this meeting, concerns raised by the refugees were brought to the attention of the Country Representative of UNHCR in Abuja.

The Department is engaged in monitoring in the evolving humanitarian situation and its regional impact, via the UN Resident Coordinator, UNOCHA, the EU delegation in Yaoundé, and in contacts with regional bodies.

In this context, I recall the EEAS statement of 28 September on the situation in Cameroon, which called for constructive and inclusive dialogue for a sustainable solution. It remains the responsibility of the Government of Cameroon to create a secure environment in which all

citizens are protected from violence, and where international human rights standards, including protection for minority groups, are upheld.

Ireland supports the humanitarian efforts of United Nations and civil society bodies providing aid to those affected by the conflict. Irish Aid rapid responders have been deployed to Cameroon and to Nigeria to assist the United Nations to respond to the needs of displaced persons and refugees. In addition, Ireland is directly providing non-food item kits for 5,000 displaced households in Cameroon.

Ireland participated in the May 2018 review of the human rights situation in Cameroon by the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva, under the Universal Periodic Review mechanism.

### **Foreign Conflicts**

143. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the assessment that has been made of the circumstances surrounding the recent kidnapping of approximately 80 persons including children from a school in the town of Bamenda, Cameroon; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46583/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon):** I am aware of the kidnapping on Monday 5 November of 78 schoolchildren and three others in the town of Bamenda in North West Cameroon.

The Government fully supports the 6 November statement of the EU calling for the schoolchildren to be freed immediately and without conditions, expressing solidarity with the families of the kidnap victims, and calling on all parties to engage in a constructive and inclusive dialogue in order to find a solution to the ongoing crisis in the North-West and South-West regions of Cameroon.

I am pleased to hear reports that all 78 children have now been freed and hope that the remaining victims will be freed immediately and without conditions.

The Government remains concerned by the deteriorating political and security situation in Cameroon and will continue to monitor human rights and humanitarian developments in close coordination with our EU partners and through the Embassy of Ireland in Abuja.

### **Foreign Conflicts**

144. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the assessment that has been made of the circumstances surrounding the death of a person (details supplied) in the town of Bamenda, Cameroon on 30 October 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46584/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon):** I am aware of the case of a death late last month of a US citizen in the town of Bamenda in Cameroon. The person in question had been in Cameroon for 12 days when he was shot in a crossfire between Government forces and separatist elements, part of the ongoing violence in that country relating to the desire of certain English speaking communities to secede.

The circumstances of the killing remain disputed. Official Cameroon sources say that the person in question was killed by secessionists planning an attack on a nearby university, and

that four secessionists involved were subsequently killed by Government forces. Secessionists allege that Government forces were to blame for the killing.

I understand that the US State Department is providing assistance to the family of the deceased to return to the US.

While Ireland does not have an Embassy in Cameroon, our Embassy in Nigeria continues to monitor the situation closely. My Department is engaged in monitoring in the evolving humanitarian situation and its regional impact, via the UN Resident Coordinator, UNOCHA, the EU delegation in Yaoundé, and in contacts with regional bodies.

In this context, I recall the EEAS statement of 28 September on the situation in Cameroon, which called for constructive and inclusive dialogue for a sustainable solution. It remains the responsibility of the Government of Cameroon to create a secure environment in which all citizens are protected from violence, and where international human rights standards, including protection for minority groups, are upheld.

### **Human Rights**

145. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the potential threat to a person (details supplied); the actions he will take in relation to this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46652/18]

154. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the case of a person (details supplied) in Pakistan accused of blasphemy and convicted of the offence under Pakistan's blasphemy law and sentenced to death; and if will he raise the person's case with his Pakistani counterpart and request that the person is freed and removed from the exit control list. [47069/18]

156. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he made representations to the Pakistani Government or its ambassador regarding the high profile imprisonment of a person (details supplied) for blasphemy; if requests have been made to his Department to offer asylum to the individual and that person's family following the public disturbances and disorder following the individual's release; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47182/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 145, 154 and 156 together.

Under Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Ireland works within and alongside the EU and UN to address the persecution of religious minorities wherever it occurs.

I am aware of the case of Asia Bibi, a Pakistani woman convicted in 2010 of Blasphemy and sentenced to death. Following an appeal, the Supreme Court of Pakistan recently overturned her conviction. I commend the judges of the Supreme Court for doing so and for upholding the rule of law in a very difficult situation.

I continue to follow developments in the case and strongly condemn all forms of persecution on the basis of religion or belief, irrespective of where they occur and who the victims are.

Ireland attaches great importance to the fundamental human rights of freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief.

I am fully aware of the vulnerable situation of persons belonging to religious minorities in Pakistan and will continue to raise the issue with the Pakistan Government as well as through the framework and mechanisms of the European Union and the United Nations.

Decisions on granting asylum rest with the Minister for Justice and Equality. I understand that neither Ms. Bibi nor her family members have sought asylum in Ireland to date. I also understand that any request for international protection in Ireland from Ms. Bibi would be given every consideration.

## **Human Rights**

146. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the representations made to the Tanzanian Government on the level of the threat to the LGBT community and supporters of opposition parties there; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46738/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon):** ‘The Global Island: Ireland’s Foreign Policy For Changing World’ states clearly that: “We are committed to promoting the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) individuals, who continue to suffer disproportionate levels of violence and face systemic discrimination in many countries.” There is no situation in which a person’s fundamental human rights should be prejudiced because of their sexual orientation.

This clear policy informed the Tánaiste’s letter to the Foreign Minister of Tanzania, Mr Augustine Mahiga, immediately upon learning of statements by the Dar es Salaam Regional Commissioner targeting members of the LGBTI+ community. The Tánaiste called upon the Tanzanian Government to ensure the protection of LGBTI+ people in line with Tanzania’s national and international human rights commitments.

Minister Mahiga subsequently issued a formal statement, distancing his Government from the Regional Commissioner’s comments and reiterating Tanzania’s commitment to uphold its international human rights obligations.

My Department, including through the Embassy of Ireland in Dar es Salaam, is monitoring the situation in Tanzania and working closely with partners in support of the protection and promotion of human rights.

## **Human Rights**

147. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the sanctions he is seeking at EU level against Saudi Arabia for the killing of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46773/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Ireland fully supports calls for independent and impartial investigation into the murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi. High Representative Federica 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’. Having called for investigation we must wait and give consideration to findings based on verifiable evidence before considering next steps. Our approach will be in tandem with our EU partners and will depend on the next steps taken

by Saudi authorities.

As previously mentioned in the Dáil, I met with the Saudi Ambassador, H.E. Mr Nail bin Ahmed Al-Jubeir, on 18 October and stressed the widespread shock caused by the case and the necessity for credible and open investigation. It is imperative that an investigation gets to the facts of the case and ensures that those responsible for the killing are held accountable. Senior officials from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade have reiterated Ireland's concerns to the Ambassador in recent weeks.

Freedom of expression is a fundamental right under international human rights law. Journalists play a vital role in holding governments to account. Ireland has consistently raised issues of human rights in Saudi Arabia, at bilateral, EU and international level. At the UN Human Rights Council in September, Ireland co-sponsored a resolution on 'Safety of Journalists', condemning all violence against journalists and urging all states to ensure accountability for such attacks.

Ireland specifically raised the Khashoggi case at the UN Human Rights Council on 5 November in our intervention during the Universal Periodic Review of Saudi Arabia's human rights record.

Ireland will continue to raise concerns about human rights issues directly with the Saudi authorities, and at EU and international levels, whenever appropriate opportunities arise.

### **Undocumented Irish in the USA**

148. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the progress being made for the undocumented Irish. [46806/18]

150. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on reports that Irish persons may be eligible for E3 visas in the United States of America; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46970/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 148 and 150 together.

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 and I continue to prioritise this issue in all our engagements with the US Administration and Congress.

The Government's Special Envoy to the United States Congress on the Undocumented, Deputy John Deasy, has also been active on the issue and 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.

I welcome the recent tabling of a Bill in the US Congress that, if passed, would allow Ireland to avail of E3 Visas and provide another very welcome pathway for Irish people to gain experience in the US. I not underestimate however the significant difficulties involved in securing the passage of this Bill; requiring as it does a two thirds majority in the House and sixty votes in the Senate.

The Government - including through the Embassy and the work of Deputy John Deasy - will continue to engage proactively with the US Administration and elected representatives,

both Democratic and Republican, on Irish immigration issues and specifically on this Bill.

Government efforts to assist the undocumented Irish in the US will also continue, as they have under previous Administrations. Through our many high-level contacts and discussions, the Government continues to explore a number of different options. This remains a very challenging issue, however, as immigration reform has been a sensitive and divisive issue within the US political system for decades.

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

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**

149. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the efforts being made at EU level to protect the territorial integrity of Georgia; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46969/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Ireland, together with the EU, continues to reaffirm its unwavering support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders, as and when the opportunity presents itself across all local, EU and International platforms.

Central to this support is the Eastern Partnership Initiative, which provides a framework for cooperation between the EU and six countries in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood, including Georgia. The aims of the Eastern Partnership are to promote peace and stability in the region and to enhance economic and political integration between the participating countries and the EU. The model of cooperation with each of the participating states has been tailored to meet their needs and priorities and those of the EU.

At the fifth Eastern Partnership Summit in Brussels in November 2017 a revised Eastern Partnership multilateral architecture was adopted to contribute to the goals of the partnership, particularly by supporting the implementation of the "20 Deliverables for 2020" which sets the future priorities for the initiative. This roadmap identifies a range of short and long-term milestones aimed at developing a stronger economy, governance, connectivity and society to make tangible and pragmatic improvements to the lives of citizens in partner countries. A Ministerial meeting last month, which I attend, provided an opportunity for progress to be reviewed and for re-commitment to the objectives of the partnership.

The EU remains committed to its political association and economic integration with Georgia and the successful implementation of the Association Agreement, including its Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, which entered into force in July 2016.

The EU has praised Georgia's reform efforts while underlining the need to ensure the sustainability of the changes which have already taken place including on democratic development and fundamental freedoms, on constitutional and parliamentary reform, and anti-corruption reforms.

Georgia's new peace initiative, which the EU has fully supported, 'A Step to a Better Future' is aimed at improving the humanitarian and socio-economic conditions of people residing in the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, and at fostering people-to-people contacts, confidence building and reconciliation among the divided communities.

In addition, the appointment last year of a new EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the crisis in Georgia, as well as the EU Monitoring Mission, in which Ireland has representatives, are visible and substantial signs of the Union's commitment to helping Georgia address its security challenges.

*Question No. 150 answered with Question No. 148.*

### **Visa Agreements**

151. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has considered the possibility of a Palestinian sponsored visa programme in circumstances in which persons have a sponsor here that has agreed to provide employment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46971/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Visas, which relate solely to entry into Ireland, are a matter for the Minister for Justice and Equality. Work permits are a matter for the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation. A Palestinian or other person who has secured a Work Permit on the basis of an offer of employment may apply for a work visa to enter the country for that purpose.

In relation to providing opportunities for Palestinians, my Department is in the process of implementing an expanded scheme of educational scholarships specifically for Palestinians who wish to study in Ireland.

### **European Defence Capabilities**

152. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the recent remarks by the French President Mr. Emmanuel Macron supporting the foundation of a true European army (details supplied); his further views on EU institutions being used for increased militarisation; his views on calls for increasing militarisation at the upcoming peace summit in Paris; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46988/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The media reports to which the Deputy's question refers relate primarily to comments made by the French President in the context of the recent launch by France and eight other European states of a "European Intervention Initiative (EI2)". The EI2, according to those participating, is envisaged as a rapid deployment force in order to facilitate a European security response to external emergency crisis situations.

Ireland is not a party to the EI2 and we are not giving consideration to participation. The EI2 is totally outside of EU structures because, as the Protocol on the concerns of the Irish people on the Treaty of Lisbon states explicitly, the Treaty does not provide for the creation of a European Army. There is therefore no legal basis for an EU army.

The EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) is an integral part of the Union's common foreign and security policy. It provides the Union with an operational capacity to undertake missions outside the EU for peace-keeping, conflict prevention and strengthening

international security in accordance with the principles of the UN Charter. Member States contribute civilian and military personnel and assets to these peace support missions: Ireland currently deploys up to 19 civilians in missions in Georgia, Kosovo, Libya, Mali, Niger, Palestine and Ukraine and a further 30 personnel to military missions and operations in Mali, Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Mediterranean. Ireland is a strong supporter of CSDP and of recent initiatives which improve the capacity of the Union to contribute to international peace and security, particularly in support of the UN. Ireland does not believe that these contributions and initiatives are or should be characterised as “militarisation” of the EU.

The Paris Peace Forum, which concludes today, is an event hosted by President Macron. It is not an EU-hosted or managed event. The Forum is discussing key issues such as climate change, human rights, debt and inequality, civil; society space, reform of the UN Security Council and migration. Its stated purpose is to make clear that tackling global challenges requires international cooperation and to advocate for multilateralism. As a strong supporter of both multilateralism and international cooperation, Ireland is attending the Forum and is represented by its Ambassador to France.

### Departmental Staff Data

153. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of senior positions held by both men and women, respectively, in his Department. [47001/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The number of senior positions held by both men and women respectively in my Department at the 30th September 2018 are outlined in the table below:

Grade	Female	Male
Secretary General	0	1
Second Secretary General	1	3
Deputy Secretary General	0	1
Assistant Secretary	7	16
Counsellor	31	53
Principal Officer	5	15
Principal Development Specialist	2	2
Totals	46	91

The Deputy may also be interested to know that there are 59 male Heads of Mission and 24 female Heads of Mission posted to our 83 overseas Missions.

*Question No. 154 answered with Question No. 145.*

### Departmental Bodies Data

155. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of the work of his Department’s committee on human rights; the details of its membership; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47181/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The

NGO Standing Committee on Human Rights was established in 1997 to facilitate formal consultation on human rights aspects of foreign policy on foot of a commitment contained in the 1996 White Paper on Foreign Policy. This was restated in *The Global Island*, Ireland's current Foreign Policy document, which commits the Government to maintaining an open and constructive dialogue with Irish civil society on human rights issues through the Committee.

Members of the Committee are appointed by the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade. When appointing a new Committee this year, it was decided to change its name to the DFAT Committee on Human Rights to reflect more accurately its composition, which includes not only NGOs but also the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission and its Northern Ireland counterpart as well as the Irish Congress of Trade Unions together with a number of individual members, mainly current or past Irish office holders in UN and Council of Europe human rights bodies. The full current membership of the Committee is listed below.

The Committee is chaired by the Director of the Human Rights Unit and meets three to four times per year. DFAT officials and representatives from other Government Departments are invited to attend to give updates on issues which may be of interest to Committee members.

The current Committee met for the first time on 5 September 2018 and the most recent meeting of the Committee took place on 12 November 2018. Topics discussed at this meeting include Ireland's campaign for a seat on the Security Council, Ireland's new international development policy and civil society space.

*Question No. 156 answered with Question No. 145.*

### **Tax Code**

157. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Finance if he has announced, or his plans to announce, changes to capital gains tax or capital acquisitions tax regarding solar panels on farmland as part of budgetary measures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46658/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Finance Act 2017 amended sections 598 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997, and section 89 of the Capital Acquisitions Tax Consolidation Act 2003 to allow that the leasing of agricultural land for solar energy production may be considered qualifying agricultural activity for CGT retirement relief and CAT agricultural relief. These measures apply to disposals made on or after 1 January 2018 where 50 per cent or less of the total area of the leased land was used for that purpose.

As such CGT retirement relief and CAT agricultural relief currently provide for solar panels on agricultural land to be considered qualifying assets if the relevant conditions of the respective reliefs are met.

### **Tax Code**

158. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the changes in flat rate expenses to take effect from 2019; the number of workers affected; the savings expected to accrue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46473/18]

164. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Finance if flat rate expenses allowances for shop assistants have been withdrawn for 2019; the reason for the decision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46552/18]

169. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Finance the reason flat rate expenses (details supplied) have been removed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46683/18]

170. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Finance the expected saving from removing flat rate expenses (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46684/18]

171. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Finance the changes to flat rate expenses by the Revenue Commissioners at all grades made in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46685/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 158, 164 and 169 to 171, inclusive, together.

The legislation governing the deductibility of expenses incurred in employment is set out in section 114 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (TCA), which provides that for an expense to qualify as a deduction against income from an office or employment, the expense must be wholly, exclusively and necessarily incurred in the performance of the duties of the office or employment.

Revenue have advised that they operate the flat rate expense regime on a concessionary basis. They do so where both a specific commonality of expenditure exists across an employment category and the statutory requirement for the tax deduction as set out in section 114 of the TCA is satisfied, namely, the expenses to be covered by the flat rate amount are wholly, exclusively and necessarily incurred in the performance of the duties of the office or employment.

The flat rate expense is agreed following engagement between Revenue and the relevant representative body for the particular group of employees who incur the same expense. This regime developed incrementally over the last 40 to 50 years, and currently incorporates some 53 employment categories covering broadly 134 individual flat rate expenses. A primary advantage of this regime is that it provides an efficient and transparent mechanism for a significant number of PAYE workers (over 536,000 in 2018), who incur a similar expense in the course of their employment duties, to obtain tax relief in respect of the expense without having to submit annual claims to Revenue. It also gives rise to efficiencies for Revenue by reducing the administrative cost of processing large volumes of identical claims for similar groups of employees.

Given the historic nature of some of the flat rate expenses and having regard to changes in employment circumstances, regulations and work practices across employments, Revenue commenced a comprehensive review of flat rate expenses this year. The purpose of the review, which is in line with best practice and good corporate governance, is to ensure the expenses agreed are still justified and appropriate to modern day employments and work practices and are in accordance with the legislative requirement for deduction as set out in section 114 of the TCA. Arising from the review, there may be an adjustment to the quantum of particular flat rate expenses. The flat rate amount may be increased or decreased or it may be withdrawn by Revenue where the continuation is no longer justified.

The flat rate expense categories initially selected by Revenue for review in 2018 were based on a combination of two factors, the quantum in terms of number of claimants and the value. Revenue advised that they will continue their work in this area during 2019, and any revision to a flat rate expense will be communicated to the relevant representative body involved in the review process. It will also be communicated by Revenue by way of update to the relevant Tax and Duty Manual, which is available on the Revenue website.

The flat rate expense for shop assistants was included in the current review. Revenue have

advised that this flat rate expense is now to be withdrawn as they are satisfied that the legislative basis underpinning tax relief for expenses does not justify its continuation. For 2018 there were 75,822 recipients of this particular flat rate expense of €121, which gives rise to a total gross value of €9.1 million.

I am advised by Revenue that the flat rate expense categories listed in the table below will be withdrawn with effect from 1 January 2019. It is not possible for Revenue to accurately quantify the tax saving/cost associated with this withdrawal as it depends on the particular circumstances of the individual recipients.

Flat Rate Expense Category	Flat Rate Expense Amount	Number of recipients in 2018	Total gross value of Flat Rate Expenses - 2018
Agricultural Advisers	€671	122	€81,862
Cardiac Technician	€107/€212	881	€177,535
Journalist in employment	€381/ €153	8,134	€2,255,910
Professional Valuer in the Valuation Office	€680	42	€28,560
Freelance Actors in employment	€750	682	€511,500
Shop Assistant	€121	75,822	€9,174,656

Revenue have advised that, outside of the flat rate expenses regime, all employees retain their right to claim a deduction under section 114 of the TCA 1997 in respect of an expense incurred wholly, exclusively and necessarily in the performance of the duties of their employment, to the extent which the expenses are not reimbursed by the employer.

### Banking Sector

159. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Finance his views on a matter (details supplied). [46476/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I note the Deputy's question on behalf of his constituent in relation to the tracker mortgage issue and the matter of local public banking.

As the Deputy will be aware, my Department, along with the Department of Rural and Community Development, published a Report on Local Public Banking at the beginning of July this year. The findings of the Report are that there was not a compelling business case to justify the provision of approximately €170 million of Exchequer funding to establish a new system of local public banking, based on the model considered.

However, the Government is committed to examining how the concept and objectives of local public /community banking may be furthered in Ireland. This will be through an independent evaluation and stakeholder forum. My Department will carry out a tender process for an external agency to carry out the independent evaluation and stakeholder forum and the terms of reference have been finalised, with input from stakeholders. I anticipate that the completed tender documents will be with the Office of Government Procurement (OGP) in the near future and expect that the tender process will be complete by January 2019.

Irish Rural Link, along with the Savings Bank Foundation for International Cooperation, the international development wing of the Sparkassen Group, put forward a proposal and strategic plan for a potential model of local public banking for Ireland, based on the German model that was considered in the Report. This I would ask the Deputy to draw his constituent's attention to Irish Rural Link's response to the Report on Local Public Banking, which is available on Irish Rural Link's website:

*[http://www.irishrurallink.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Local\\_Public\\_Banking\\_Report\\_Rebuttal\\_public-00000002.pdf](http://www.irishrurallink.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Local_Public_Banking_Report_Rebuttal_public-00000002.pdf)*

This response states that "... it is not proposed that the mortgage market would be a priority of the local public bank..." and that "... providing lower rate mortgages is a goal but not a priority of the model..."

Regarding the tracker mortgage examination, as the Deputy is aware the Central Bank is working to ensure that the tracker mortgage examination is completed as soon as possible. The Bank is producing regular updates of progress on its website, the most recent being published on the 25 April 2018:

*<https://www.centralbank.ie/docs/default-source/consumer-hub-library/tracker-issues/update-on-tracker-mortgage-examination---april-2018.pdf?sfvrsn=4>*

Since then, the Governor of the Central Bank provided some updated information at his recent appearance before the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, and Taoiseach. The Governor indicated that at end-August, 38,400 customers have now been identified in the tracker examination and that some 93% of affected customers have received offers of redress and compensation. Also it was indicated that four of five main lenders are close to completing their redress and compensation phases and that the Central Bank is exerting pressure on the remaining lender to finish its process. The Central Bank has also advised that it is currently pursuing enforcement investigations against all of the main lenders.

The Government has made it clear that they will continue to support the Central Bank's work to conclude the Tracker Mortgage Examination as quickly as possible, and to see all impacted customers provided with redress and compensation.

## **Betting Regulations**

160. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Finance his views on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46477/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As announced in the Budget I have increased the rate of betting duty from 1 per cent to 2 per cent for all bookmakers and the rate of betting intermediary duty from 15% to 25% on the commission earned for betting intermediaries. These measures will take effect from 1 January 2019.

The rate of betting duty at 1% on the amount of bets wagered in Ireland is at an all-time low, and betting duty receipts are exceptionally low when compared to other sectors subject to excise taxes. It is also the case that there is no VAT applied on betting transactions. With the Betting (Amendment) Act 2015 now well embedded in, I believe it is timely to increase the rates of Betting Duty and Betting Intermediary Duty.

I acknowledge that advances in technology have challenged existing business models and have changed the structure of many markets, including the betting market, with more betting

taking place online. I further acknowledge that smaller bookmakers may have ongoing difficulties competing in that environment or indeed with large retail bookmakers. While I have sympathy for small bookmakers I cannot apply the increase to some bookmakers and not others. Ultimately many taxes on goods or services are passed through to the end consumers and bookmakers will need to make commercial decisions on such matters.

I should point out that my Department held a consultation with the sector last year asking if the current model was appropriate and the overwhelming response was that it was. The main focus of the sector's engagement during this consultation was to oppose any increase in the betting duty, which leaves me with few options in this regard other than to impose a straight forward increase in the current regime.

My Department very recently received a proposal from the sector advocating for a change to a gross profit tax model. This is something I am willing to consider in the context of Budget 2020, notwithstanding concerns brought to my attention about the compatibility of this proposal with EU rules and the greater capacity within the model to reduce overall betting duty receipts.

Finally, we must also acknowledge the raised public consciousness of the problem of gambling in society. While problem gambling can result in the problem gambler, and their family, bearing the severest of economic and of course personal costs, the social costs of problem gambling can extend to their employers and to public institutions in the health, welfare and justice systems, such costs ultimately borne by taxpayers. This needs to be better reflected within the betting duty regime.

### **Ministerial Meetings**

161. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance the policy regarding the need for note taking when Ministers and-or Ministers of State meet business and other leaders; the way in which this policy is outlined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46491/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I can inform the Deputy that it would be normal practice for a Department official to accompany the Minister and/or Minister of State at meetings with business and other leaders.

My Department's 'Record Management Guidelines' provides that all formal meetings should be properly documented or minuted. The Department's internal 'Regulation of Lobbying Act 2015 Policy' document provides that in line with best practice, a record or minute of meetings with external bodies should be recorded.

In the case of significant informal meetings, the 'Record Management Guidelines' provide that officials should document informal meetings and telephone conversations in cases where this may demonstrate the rationale behind decisions, to note a request or an approval, or to record where significant policy or administrative decisions are being relayed.

### **Tax Reliefs Data**

162. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Finance the reason the Revenue Commissioners did not issue RICT certificates under the employment and investment incentive, EII, scheme to investors in time for the annual tax return; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46524/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Employment and Investment In-

centive (“EII”) is an incentive whereby investors can claim relief for investments in qualifying companies.

EII is a State Aid. It was a notified aid up to October 2015, after which it came within the General Block Exemption Regulation (GBER). A number of changes to EII were necessary to ensure that it is consistent with GBER.

Revenue advises me that the changes to EII mean that there is increased degree of complexity in determining whether or, not a company qualifies for relief and that this in turn means that each application takes longer to review. Applications received by Revenue are not always complete, with necessary documentation often not provided. In this instance, further information must be sought before a decision can be made. Of the cases currently being worked by Revenue’s EII Branch, 82% have required follow up correspondence. While some of those are requests for clarifications, the majority relate to incomplete applications.

I understand that the EII branch has prioritised the review of all EII 1 Applications received with a view to finalising as many cases as possible before the Return Filing Deadline and that every effort will be made by the it to ensure that as many cases as possible are processed before the Return Filing Deadline.

Revenue also point out that an EII Application can be made once the investment has taken place.

Finally, the Deputy may wish to note that, in Finance Bill 2018, in order to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of EII, including addressing the issue of administrative hold-ups, I have moved to change the administration of EII to a self-certification model. Under this model, a company will be able to self-certify that it complies with the conditions of the relief applicable to the company, while investors will self-certify that they meet the conditions of the relief applicable to the investors.

### **Insurance Compensation Fund**

163. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention and the attention of the Central Bank has been drawn to the liquidation of a company (details supplied) that was the underwriter on structural warranties in a housing estate in County Dublin; if the Insurance Compensation Fund is available to assist in funding alternative underwriters; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46535/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Central Bank of Ireland has advised me that it was notified by the Danish Financial Supervisory Authority on 7 March 2018 that it had ordered Alpha Insurance A/S to cease writing new business including renewal of existing contracts and business with immediate effect. It was further notified on 9 May 2018 that the liquidators of the insurance company Alpha Insurance A/S had filed a petition for bankruptcy.

The Central Bank has indicated that as Alpha Insurance A/S is a Danish based insurance firm, it is subject to prudential supervision by the Danish Financial Supervisory Authority, and therefore it had no role in this decision. It has also informed me that Alpha Insurance A/S was selling non-life insurance policies in Ireland through the broker network on a freedom of services basis and that it also operated in Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Norway, the United Kingdom and Spain.

The Insurance Compensation Fund (ICF) is primarily designed to facilitate payments to claimants in relation to risks in the State where an Irish authorised non-life insurer or a non-life

insurer authorised in another EU member state goes into liquidation. As I understand it, there are no claims outstanding and thus the ICF has no role to play in this case.

In conclusion, as the structural warranty insurance was initially purchased by the property developer, the affected residents may wish to get in contact with the developer in the first instance to see if alternative cover can be arranged.

*Question No. 164 answered with Question No. 158.*

### **Corporation Tax Regime**

165. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the reason he declined to opt for the type of controlled foreign corporation, CFC, rules model A that the majority of EU countries have found to be the most effective in tackling corporate tax avoidance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46568/18]

166. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the analysis he and his officials undertook to determine that the model B approach to CFC rules is a more effective approach in tackling corporate tax avoidance than the model A approach; if he consulted with his European colleagues on CFC rules; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46569/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 165 and 166 together.

The first Anti-Tax Avoidance Directive (ATAD), presented in January 2016 and agreed by all Member States in July 2016, provided for five separate anti-avoidance measures to be transposed on an agreed schedule between 2018 and 2023. One of these measures was the introduction of Controlled Foreign Company (CFC) rules, or the alignment of existing national CFC rules with ATAD where relevant, by 1 January 2019.

CFC rules are an anti-abuse measure, designed to prevent the diversion of profits to offshore entities in low or no tax jurisdictions. Where CFC rules apply, they have the effect of attributing certain undistributed income of such an entity to its parent company.

ATAD provides that Member States may choose one of two options to determine whether income of a CFC should be attributed to a parent company:

A. Option A attributes certain categories of undistributed passive income of a CFC to the parent company, or

B. Option B attributes undistributed income arising from non-genuine arrangements put in place for the essential purpose of obtaining a tax advantage.

These options were unanimously agreed by all Member States on the introduction of ATAD and each Member State must choose between the options in transposing ATAD – neither option is specified to be more effective than the other in tackling corporate tax avoidance. European Commission officials have indicated in discussions their view that Member States do not have the option to incorporate both options, or a hybrid containing elements of both options, when transposing ATAD.

CFC rules introduce a significant new administrative burden both for businesses and for Revenue authorities, therefore my officials engaged in extensive consultation in advance of Finance Bill 2018. In October 2017 my Department published a consultation paper on the Coffey Review recommendations and the implementation of ATAD, inviting submissions on a range of

issues including the implementation of ATAD CFC rules and the choice between Options A and B. Responses to this consultation were summarised in the Corporation Tax Roadmap and have been published in full on my Department's website.

The 2018 Tax Strategy Group paper for corporation tax indicated that, following consideration of the consultation submissions received, it was intended that Ireland would opt for the Option B approach when introducing CFC rules. The paper, which invited comments and discussion on the options set out, was discussed at the TSG meeting in July this year and subsequently published on my Department's website.

Reasons for electing for the Option B approach include:

- Consistency with the existing Irish tax policy focus on the taxation of activities with substance in, or a nexus to, Ireland.

- Consistency with long-standing policy in developing anti-avoidance rules based on principle purpose tests.

- The similarity of Option B to the established CFC rules in the UK, a major trading partner and a jurisdiction with a structurally similar tax system.

- Greater ease of administration for business and Revenue, in view of the calculation of profits to be attributed under internationally understood arms-length transfer pricing principles.

- Focusing on CFC income which has been artificially diverted from Ireland ensures that a proportionate response is applied to the profit shifting risks that exist within an Irish context.

The Corporation Tax Roadmap, published in September, again indicated that an Option B approach was planned. Subsequently the CFC Feedback Statement, also published in September, set out the rationale for the proposed approach and again invited feedback on a range of policy decisions. <https://www.finance.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/CFC-Feedback.pdf>

My officials have engaged with the European Commission in relation to the implementation of ATAD on many occasions over the last year. The Corporation Tax Roadmap, which confirmed our election for Option B was brought to the attention of the relevant European Commissioners and Commission Services and all other EU Member States.

### **Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland Data**

167. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the number of companies and-or SMEs from outside the State that have been granted guarantees and-or risk sharing facilities under the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland in the past two years to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46619/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) is Ireland's national promotional institution. The SBCI's goal is to increase the availability of appropriately priced, flexible funding to viable Irish SMEs. The SBCI uses an on-lending model. This means it does not lend directly to SMEs. The SBCI works with both banks and non-bank finance providers providing low cost liquidity and guarantees. The SBCI currently has seven on-lenders, three banks and four non-bank finance providers.

Since it began its operations in March 2015, to the end of March 2018, there has been €972 million of SBCI supported lending, supporting over 24,000 SMEs and 129,300 jobs. The SMEs who received SBCI finance are from all sectors of the Irish economy and have a wide

geographical spread, with approximately 85% of loans going outside Dublin and 26% of loans going to the Agriculture sector.

The SBCI has not granted guarantees or risk-sharing facilities to any SMEs from outside the State in the past two years to date. Both the Brexit Loan Scheme and the Agriculture Cashflow Support Loan Scheme, which are the SBCI's current risk-sharing guarantee schemes in operation at present, require the beneficiary to be established and operating in the State. The SBCI is seeking to develop its risk-sharing guarantee product offering in 2018, including with the current development of the Future Growth Loan Scheme, which was announced in Budget 2019.

### **Life Insurance Policies**

**168. Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding life assurance providers rejecting applications based on a mental health condition from which a person has since recovered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46645/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I have been made aware of the issue raised by the Deputy through a number of recent parliamentary questions and I have considerable sympathy for people in this specific situation.

However, as Minister for Finance, I am responsible for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation. Neither I nor the Central Bank of Ireland can interfere in the provision or pricing of insurance products, as these matters are of a commercial nature, and are determined by insurance companies based on an assessment of the risks they are willing to accept. This position is reinforced by the EU framework for insurance which expressly prohibits Member States from adopting rules which require insurance companies to obtain prior approval of the pricing or terms and conditions of insurance products. Consequently, I am not in a position to direct insurance companies as to the pricing level that they should apply to particular categories of individuals, nor am I in a position to direct them to provide cover to such individuals.

It is my understanding that insurers use a combination of rating factors in making their individual decisions on whether to offer life assurance cover and what terms to apply. These factors can include age, health, family medical history, occupation and lifestyle. In addition, these may be determined or linked to the length of time with which such a policy may last. Furthermore, my understanding is that insurers do not all use the same combination of rating factors, and as a result prices and availability of cover varies across the market, and that they will price in accordance with their own past claims experience.

In response to a similar parliamentary question last month (PQ No. 118 of 3 October 2018), my officials sought the views of Insurance Ireland. They advised that applicants for any type of life assurance will be asked on the application form detailed health questions and that insurers may request one or more of the following in addition: a report from the applicant's GP; an independent medical examination; or other medical tests. On the basis of the information provided, the application is considered individually and the decision on whether to offer cover and on what terms depends on the facts of that particular case.

Finally, I would note that Insurance Ireland operates a free Insurance Information Service for those who have queries, complaints or difficulties in relation to obtaining insurance. Insurance Ireland can be contacted at [feedback@insuranceireland.eu](mailto:feedback@insuranceireland.eu) or 01-6761914.

*Questions Nos. 169 to 171, inclusive, answered with Question No. 158.*

## Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland Data

172. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the historical amounts allocated to banks (details supplied) to provide funding to small and medium enterprises; if the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland, SBCI, monitors the amounts drawn down from these banks via that stream of funding; if his attention has been drawn to a perceived conflict of interest in the context that the banks use audit and accounting firms that also sit on the selection committee of the SBCI; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46718/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) is Ireland's national promotional institution. The SBCI's goal is to increase the availability of appropriately priced, flexible funding to viable Irish SMEs. The strategic mission of the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) is to deliver effective financial supports to Irish SMEs that address failures in the Irish credit market, while driving competition and innovation and ensuring the efficient use of available EU resources.

The SBCI uses an on-lending model. This means it does not lend directly to SMEs. Rather, the SBCI provides funds through partner finance providers, known as on-lenders. To date the SBCI has provided the following funding to bank on-lenders referred to by the Deputy. These funds have been given to provide lower cost financing to SMEs, all of which has been fully deployed by those banks to over 14,000 SMEs.

AIB	€400 million
Bank of Ireland	€150 million
Ulster Bank	€70 million

The SBCI has also provided funding of over €230 million to its non-bank lending partners.

The SBCI has an independent board of directors and there is a comprehensive governance and oversight structure in place as part of the SBCI's corporate structure. The SBCI also complies with the Revised 2016 Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies. While the SBCI board is accountable to the Minister for Finance, it is independent, and the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland Act 2014 specifically prohibits me as, Minister for Finance, from acting as a shadow director. Therefore, I am not in a position to get involved in or comment on specific decisions made by the selection committee of the SBCI as part of the process of considering prospective on-lenders.

I am advised by the SBCI that it undertakes regular and robust reviews of all its current on-lending partners to ensure that SBCI funding is being deployed to eligible SMEs and that those SMEs receive the full benefit of the lower cost funding. I understand that monitoring is done through a combination of regular meetings between the SBCI and each on-lender, detailed reporting of each loan advanced by the on-lender to the SME, which is updated quarterly, and independent audits.

None of the banks' auditing and accounting firms sit on the selection committee for on-lenders of the SBCI. Instead, I am informed that the SBCI's on-lending partners are selected by the SBCI's board of directors, after a thorough due diligence process.

The Deputy may rest assured that the SBCI is keen to work with any lender, large or small, that can demonstrate it can deliver the required funding advantage to eligible SMEs on terms that protect taxpayer money. The SBCI's strategy in relation to on-lenders is based on developing a strong pipeline of potential on-lenders to achieve diversity in the market and encourage competition.

173. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance the number and location of all completed and unfinished residential units in NAMA's original portfolio including the residential units securing loans acquired by NAMA; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46744/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised that Sections 99 and 202 of the NAMA Act prohibit NAMA from disclosing confidential debtor information, including information on the assets owned by its debtors. It is therefore not possible to provide information on the location of residential units owned by debtors.

I am advised that NAMA's acquired loan portfolio was initially secured by some 22,735 residential units in Ireland which included both completed and partially completed units. This number fluctuated over time as debtors and receivers sold units under their control and new supply came on stream as a result of funding provided by NAMA. I am advised that at acquisition, the majority of completed residential units securing NAMA's portfolio were occupied by tenants and, accordingly, any subsequent disposal of the properties would not have adversely affected these tenancies.

The following table provides a breakdown by county of the 22,735 residential units which secured NAMA's acquired loan portfolio.

County	No of Units
Co. Carlow	203
Co. Cavan	56
Co. Clare	529
Co. Cork	3,729
Co. Donegal	299
Co. Dublin	10,394
Co. Galway	1,380
Co. Kerry	492
Co. Kildare	654
Co. Kilkenny	192
Co. Laois	134
Co. Leitrim	79
Co. Limerick	965
Co. Longford	51
Co. Louth	412
Co. Mayo	344
Co. Meath	475
Co. Monaghan	73
Co. Offaly	129
Co. Roscommon	137
Co. Sligo	466
Co. Tipperary	340
Co. Waterford	264
Co. Westmeath	204
Co. Wexford	472

County	No of Units
Co. Wicklow	262
Grand Total	22,735

### NAMA Property Sales

174. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance the number and location of all residential units sold by NAMA debtors receivers since inception; the number of those units sold at NAMA loan sales by year since its inception; the breakdown of the residential sales into lot sizes (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46745/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised that, since inception, a total of 19,224 residential units located in the Republic of Ireland have been sold by NAMA debtors and receivers. These residential units were owned by NAMA debtors and the sales proceeds were used to repay associated debt. The figures include both completed and partially completed units, as well as over 8,000 new houses or apartments delivered through NAMA funding. Also included are 2,407 units which were sold to local authorities, approved housing bodies or NARPS for social housing use.

A breakdown by year and by lot size of the 19,224 residential units sold is presented in the table below.

Year	Lot Size	Units
2010	1-2	165
	3-20	81
	21-50	-
	51+	51
2011	1-2	365
	3-20	152
	21-50	-
	51+	81
2012	1-2	445
	3-20	122
	21-50	27
	51+	111
2013	1-2	689
	3-20	259
	21-50	143
	51+	123
2014	1-2	1,242
	3-20	498
	21-50	310
	51+	1,364
2015	1-2	1,638
	3-20	1,158
	21-50	722
	51+	1,241
2016	1-2	1,559

Year	Lot Size	Units
	3-20	447
	21-50	250
	51+	1,255
2017	1-2	1,701
	3-20	311
	21-50	275
	51+	450
2018	1-2	1,298
	3-20	158
	21-50	293
	51+	240
Grand Total		19,224

NAMA is prohibited, under Sections 99 and 202 of the NAMA Act, from disclosing confidential debtor information, including the exact location of assets controlled by its debtors. The following table provides a breakdown by year and by county of residential units sold by NAMA's debtors and receivers.

County	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Total
Co. Carlow	1			21	24	37	2			85
Co. Cavan		2	2	1	3	24	1	13		46
Co. Clare	2	7	12	15	35	256	2	25	23	377
Co. Cork	21	104	171	247	296	579	495	279	243	2,435
Co. Donegal	12		29	3	16	36		1		97
Co. Dublin	183	321	289	361	2,120	2,068	2,300	1,986	1,385	11,013
Co. Galway	6	23	31	94	171	383	146	112	45	1,011
Co. Kerry	2	9	4	8	50	202	1			276
Co. Kildare	40	19	38	129	144	90	104	146	154	864
Co. Kilkenny	3	6	10	8	23	86	19		6	161
Co. Laois		16	2	1	63	10	71		21	184
Co. Leitrim		1		1	1	10	17	9	2	41
Co. Limerick	1	8	20	40	138	156	48	5	7	423
Co. Longford			7	5	9	2	2	3	1	29
Co. Louth	7	7	50	43	28	46	5	5	8	199
Co. Mayo	1	2	4	8	42	112	1			170

*Questions - Written Answers*

County	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Total
Co. Meath	4	6	7	110	51	95	37	28	13	351
Co. Monaghan		2			1	3		4		10
Co. Offaly	1	10	1	9	13	31	1			66
Co. Roscommon		2	1	3	6	14	49			75
Co. Sligo	1	5	3	23	26	154		6		218
Co. Tipperary		9	1	8	4	54	12	3	1	92
Co. Waterford	2	10	3	6	19	114	18	2		174
Co. Westmeath		7	4	45	25	55	15		2	153
Co. Wexford	5	12	3	15	68	100	93	5	1	302
Co. Wicklow	5	10	13	10	38	42	72	105	77	372
Grand Total	297	598	705	1,214	3,414	4,759	3,511	2,737	1,989	19,224

The majority of units sold in Co Dublin during the period 2014-2018 were new units funded by NAMA. An additional 6,146 units were included as security for loan sales undertaken by NAMA but there was no change in the ownership of these units arising from the loan sales.

### NAMA Property Sales

175. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of residential and zoned land in hectares sold by NAMA debtors and receivers and through loans sales since inception; if he will provide a list of the zoned residential sites by year, location and local authority area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46746/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised that it was not possible for NAMA to provide the information sought in the time available and therefore I will make arrangements to provide the outstanding information in line with Standing Orders.

### Social and Affordable Housing Data

176. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance the number of social housing units offered to local authorities and approved housing bodies by the name of the development and residential location and the local authority area from inception to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46747/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised that, following the review process undertaken by NAMA, as outlined in my response to PQ [46748/18], NAMA collated a list of potentially suitable properties which was shared with the Housing Agency. The Housing Agency, in turn, engaged with the relevant local authorities to determine if there was demand in the geographical areas in which potentially suitable houses were located.

Under sections 99 and 202 of the NAMA Act, NAMA is prohibited from disclosing confidential debtor information, including information on the assets owned by its debtors. It is therefore not possible to provide information on the exact location of properties identified as potentially suitable for social housing.

NAMA publishes comprehensive information regarding its social housing delivery programme on the agency website ([www.nama.ie](http://www.nama.ie)). The information is updated each quarter.

The following table provides a breakdown by Local Authority of units identified as potentially suitable for social housing by NAMA since inception.

Local Authority Area	Identified by NAMA as potentially suitable	Demand confirmed by local authority	No longer under consideration*	Delivered for social housing use as at September 2018 (i.e. Complete/ Contracted)
Carlow Co. Co.	193	111	82	103
Cavan Co. Co.	49	1	48	-
Clare Co. Co.	235	77	158	55
Cork City	470	157	313	138
Cork Co. Co.	817	325	492	322
Donegal Co. Co.	137	28	109	5
Dublin City	853	424	429	413
Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown Co. Co.	480	294	186	282
Fingal Co. Co.	312	150	162	143
Galway City	203	196	7	196
Galway Co. Co.	145	35	110	32
Kerry Co. Co.	221	59	162	42
Kildare Co. Co.	352	172	180	172
Kilkenny Co. Co.	189	66	123	56
Laois Co. Co.	133	36	97	35
Leitrim Co. Co.	35	0	35	-
Limerick City & Co. Co.	163	35	128	17
Longford Co. Co.	38	0	38	-
Louth Co. Co.	32	27	5	27
Mayo Co. Co.	75	21	54	-
Meath Co. Co.	236	39	197	39
Monaghan Co. Co.	65	62	3	38
Offaly Co. Co.	83	32	51	30
Roscommon Co. Co.	104	0	104	-
Sligo Co. Co.	122	29	93	4
South Dublin Co. Co.	594	148	446	146
Tipperary Co. Co.	161	0	161	-
Waterford City & Co. Co.	109	51	58	51
Westmeath Co. Co.	108	22	86	20

Local Authority Area	Identified by NAMA as potentially suitable	Demand confirmed by local authority	No longer under consideration*	Delivered for social housing use as at September 2018 (i.e. Complete/ Contracted)
Wexford Co. Co.	225	107	118	102
Wicklow Co. Co.	45	14	31	7
Totals	6,984	2,718	4,266	2,475

### NAMA Social Housing Provision

177. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance the criterion used by NAMA to select residential units to be offered for social housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46748/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised that NAMA continuously reviews the assets of all NAMA debtors and appointed receivers to establish if vacant residential properties securing their loans could potentially be made available for social housing. This includes identifying vacant residential properties, as well as exploring opportunities to undertake remediation and completion works at a number of unfinished developments that are in the control of NAMA debtors. In instances where properties are not complete or require remediation, NAMA commits to fund their remediation and/or completion, subject to commercial viability.

Up until end-October 2018, NAMA had identified a total of 6,984 residential properties as being potentially suitable for social housing. The location of these properties was made known to the Housing Agency, which liaised with local authorities across Ireland to determine the demand for these units. NAMA had no direct interaction with the local authorities. Of the units identified, demand was confirmed by local authorities for 2,718 properties, of which 2,475 have been contracted or delivered for social housing use to date. Additionally, as part of new developments, NAMA debtors and receivers provided residential units in compliance with Part V planning obligations.

It is important to note that NAMA's debtors have the right to maximise the sales value of properties securing their loans so as to enable them to maximise their debt repayments. Therefore, NAMA cannot require a debtor to take action which would reduce his/her repayment capacity, such as the sale of property at less than its market value.

### NAMA Social Housing Provision

178. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance the reasons given to NAMA for rejection and acceptance, respectively, by the local authorities and approved housing bodies of the social housing units offered to them; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46749/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised that NAMA has no role in the process of confirming demand for, and assessing the suitability of, properties for social housing. This is a matter between the Housing Agency and local authorities.

I am advised that an important consideration for local authorities is the requirement to pro-

vide for an appropriate mix of housing tenures and to avoid undue housing segregation within individual developments and wider residential areas. In some cases, properties for which demand was confirmed subsequently became unavailable – for example, they were sold or let during the period in which a decision was awaited from the local authority concerned. This is to be expected in the case of a live portfolio. In other cases, the properties identified were incomplete and required remediation works, which NAMA committed to funding if required.

The following table provides a breakdown by local authority of the 4,266 units involved and sets out the reasons given as to why the units were not utilised for social housing.

Local Authority	No Demand	Not suitable – sustainable communities	Not Suitable for other reasons	Not Available
Carlow Co. Co.	27	28	0	27
Cavan Co. Co.	15	17	0	16
Clare Co. Co.	31	118	0	9
Cork City	0	178	0	135
Cork Co. Co.	106	7	0	379
Donegal Co. Co.	16	34	0	59
Dublin City	15	223	8	183
Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown Co. Co.	6	32	17	131
Fingal Co. Co.	6	0	12	144
Galway City	0	0	0	7
Galway Co. Co.	20	40	0	50
Kerry Co. Co.	76	0	0	86
Kildare Co. Co.	48	14	19	99
Kilkenny Co. Co.	34	6	0	83
Laois Co. Co.	47	9	0	41
Leitrim Co. Co.	35	0	0	0
Limerick City & Co. Co.	70	16	0	42
Longford Co. Co.	15	0	0	23
Louth Co. Co.	5	0	0	0
Mayo Co. Co.	17	0	0	37
Meath Co. Co.	60	28	0	109
Monaghan Co. Co.	3	0	0	0
Offaly Co. Co.	37	0	0	14
Roscommon Co. Co.	55	0	0	49
Sligo Co. Co.	60	0	20	13
South Dublin Co. Co.	0	446	0	0
Tipperary Co. Co.	91	57	0	13
Waterford City & Co. Co.	41	10	0	7
Westmeath Co. Co.	65	3	0	18
Wexford Co. Co.	65	0	0	53
Wicklow Co. Co.	0	0	16	15
Totals	1,066	1,266	92	1,842

**NAMA Social Housing Provision**

179. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance the new developments in which residential units were funded by NAMA from inception to date in 2018, by the development location and local authority area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46750/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised that, since 2014, NAMA has funded the construction of 8,013 new residential units in Ireland on residential development land under the control of its debtors and receivers. It is important to note that NAMA can only fund developments which are under the control of its debtors and receivers and which are commercially viable.

Under Sections 99 and 202 of the NAMA Act, NAMA is prohibited from disclosing confidential debtor information, including information on assets owned by its debtors. It is therefore not possible to identify the exact location of these assets.

The breakdown by local authority area of the units funded by NAMA from inception to end-September 2018 is set out in the table below.

Local Authority	Units
Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council	2,003
South Dublin County Council	1,482
Fingal County Council	1,328
Dublin City Council	908
Cork County Council	681
Kildare County Council	577
Wicklow County Council	308
Galway City Council	201
Meath County Council	127
Cork City Council	102
Laois County Council	75
Wexford County Council	56
Kilkenny County Council	42
Clare County Council	37
Monaghan County Council	36
Waterford County Council	34
Galway County Council	16
Total	8,013

**Employment Investment Incentive Scheme**

180. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 34 of 10 October 2017, the timeframe for small businesses to be approved by the Revenue Commissioners for the employment investment incentive, EII, scheme; if he will address the delay for a company (details supplied) in County Longford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46779/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised by Revenue that the company referred to applied for outline approval on 18 August 2017, which was approved on 4 De-

ember 2017. An EII1 Application was then received from the company on the 11 May 2018. Additional information and clarifications were sought from the company from 1 August to 22 October. The company received an answer from Revenue on 9 November.

The Deputy will note that, in Finance Bill 2018, I have moved to change the administration of EII to a self-certification model. Under this model, a company will be able to self-certify that it complies with the conditions of the relief applicable to the company, while investors will self-certify that they meet the conditions of the relief applicable to the investors. In this way, companies and investors will not have to wait on Revenue's certification before claiming relief.

### **Mining Industry**

181. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Finance if a figure (details supplied) in revenue from corporation taxes comes from the four commercial gas fields in Irish waters or from the entire category of mining and utilities sector. [46837/18]

182. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Finance the companies and geographic sites involved in the category of mining and utilities sector that are liable to pay corporation tax; and if he will itemise the contribution to the overall figure from each of these companies. [46838/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 181 and 182 together.

I am informed by Revenue that the net Corporation Tax receipts from the mining and utilities sector overall for the calendar year 2017 was in the region of €45.03 million. Receipts for earlier years are available at: <https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/receipts/receipts-taxhead.aspx>.

Due to Revenue's obligation to protect the confidentiality of taxpayer information, it is not possible to itemise the contribution from individual gas fields or companies.

### **Tax Agreements**

183. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance if he will report on the EU proposals on digital taxation; and if his other EU counterparts have discussed the need for change in this area with him directly. [46799/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Deputy will be aware that the Commission proposal for an interim Digital Service Tax, which imposes a 3% levy on the turnover of certain companies' digital activities, is currently being debated among Member States – both at a technical and political level.

Most recently, digital tax was on the agenda at ECOFIN on 6 November where I reiterated Ireland's principled opposition to the proposal and took the opportunity to remind my fellow Finance Ministers of the achievements that have been made in the field of international tax reform when we have cooperated at a global level.

I also highlighted particular concerns I have regarding the negative consequences for Europe, as a predominantly exporting bloc, from creating a precedent of taxation at point of consumption rather than where value is created. I pointed out that taxing revenue rather than profits would undermine European competitiveness and could intensify already heightened trade ten-

sions.

While Ireland is among a number of Member States which object to the fundamental nature of the proposal, we are joined by a wider group which share our concerns on a series of technical issues yet to be resolved. Discussions will continue this month on the many outstanding technical issues on the proposal with the topic likely to be back on the agenda for December's ECOFIN.

Ireland remains committed to global tax reform and believes that global solutions are needed to ensure tax is paid by companies where value is created. That is why Ireland has been a committed participant in, and strong supporter of, tax reform efforts led by the OECD through the BEPS process. Ireland will continue to actively engage with work in the area of the digital economy at both OECD and EU level.

### Departmental Staff Data

184. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Finance the number of senior positions held by both men and women, respectively, in his Department. [47000/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I wish to inform the Deputy that the senior management team of my Department consists of the grades Secretary General, Assistant Secretary, Director, Principal, Assistant Principal and Special Adviser.

The table below outlines the gender breakdown for each grade as at 8th November 2018.

Grade	Male	Female
Secretary General	1	0
Assistant Secretary	6	0
Director	1	0
Principal	18	9
Special Adviser (1 PO, 1 AP)	2	0
Assistant Principal	39	29
Total	67	38

### Insurance Industry Regulation

185. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance if there is a cap on the percentage an insurance company is entitled to increase a life insurance premium by in order to maintain cover; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47016/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** At the outset, it is important to note that as Minister for Finance, I am responsible for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation. Neither I nor the Central Bank of Ireland can interfere in the provision or pricing of insurance products, as these matters are of a commercial nature, and are determined by insurance companies based on an assessment of the risks they are willing to accept. This position is reinforced by the EU framework for insurance which expressly prohibits Member States from adopting rules which require insurance companies to obtain prior approval of the pricing or terms and conditions of insurance products.

In a general sense, it is my understanding that insurers use a combination of rating factors

in making their individual decisions on whether to offer life insurance cover and what terms to apply. These factors can include age, health, family medical history, occupation and lifestyle. In addition, these may be determined or linked to the length of time with which such a policy may last. Furthermore, my understanding is that insurers do not all use the same combination of rating factors, and as a result prices and availability of cover varies across the market, and that they will price in accordance with their own past claims experience.

Based on the assumption that the Deputy is referring to whole-of-life insurance policies, I have been advised that in the early years the payments for such products are higher than the cost of the policy holder's chosen benefits with the extra money paid going into a plan fund. However, protection benefits become more expensive as policy holders get older with the result that payments into the plan begin to equal the cost of the chosen benefits. In the later years of reviewable protection plans, the cost of the benefits increases significantly, and in order to keep the level of benefits at the current level of payments, the difference is made up from the plan fund.

In order to see if the consumer's regular payment plus any fund that has been built up is enough to cover their chosen benefits for their reviewable protection plan, an insurance company carries out regular reviews of these plans. During such a review the insurance company may find that the consumer's current level of payments is enough to maintain the level of cover that the consumer wants. However, the insurance company may also find that the current level of payments is not enough to maintain the level of cover desired by the consumer, thus explaining why a number of people are finding that their premiums are increasing.

In conclusion, while I have sympathy for the concerns that have been expressed, it is important to note that I am unable to direct insurance companies as to the pricing level or terms or conditions that they should apply, including on the imposition of caps for increases in order to maintain cover under life insurance policies.

## Tax Code

**186. Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Finance if the threshold for remission of vehicle registration tax to take account of the 1% surcharge that will be levied on all new diesel cars as announced in budget 2019 (details supplied) will be increased. [47020/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am informed by Revenue that Statutory Instrument No. 353 of 1994, Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Regulations 1994, which provides for reliefs for disabled drivers, disabled passengers and organisations, was considerably revised by Statutory Instrument No. 634 of 2015 taking effect from 1 January 2016.

A part of this wide-ranging revision was to significantly increase the tax reliefs available from €9,525 and €15,875 to €10,000, €16,000 and €22,000 depending on the level of adaptation to the vehicle.

While the reliefs are available as a repayment of VRT and VAT, they are intended to cover the cost of the adaptations to the car, rather than merely provide a repayment of tax on the vehicle, and in this regard the maximum amounts are very significant.

The Scheme represents a significant tax expenditure, costing €65m in each of 2016 and 2017. This figure does not include the revenue foregone in respect of the relief from Motor Tax. I have no plans to increase the maximum tax reliefs under the scheme.

*Questions - Written Answers*  
**Local Authority Functions**

187. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide local authorities with the power to introduce a transient occupancy tax on hotel rooms; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47022/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** In Budget 2019 I provided for an increase in VAT on hotel accommodation as part of the reversion from 9% to 13.5% for tourism related activities. I have no plans to implement further changes to this sector at this time.

**Fiscal Data**

188. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Finance the projected fiscal space, inflation rate and rates of growth in GDP and GNI for the years 2020 to 2024. [47032/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As I have outlined previously, 'fiscal space' is no longer a useful concept. Government budgetary policy is instead guided by the appropriate fiscal stance - the position that is right for the economy at this point in time and ensures steady, sustainable improvements in public services and living standards.

The table below details the forecasts for inflation (both the headline and core Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices (HICP)), GDP and GNI from 2020-2023. Forecasts beyond 2023 have not been compiled by my Department.

	2020	2021	2022	2023
HICP	1.7	2.9	2.4	2.6
Core HICP <sup>^</sup>	1.8	3.0	2.4	2.6
Real GDP Growth	3.6	2.5	2.6	2.7
Nominal GNI Growth	5.2	4.2	4.3	4.4

<sup>^</sup> Core inflation excludes energy and unprocessed food from the index.

**Gambling Sector**

189. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Finance if, in the context of the recent increase in budget 2019 raising the betting tax from 1% to 2%, he will consider the alternative proposal that will achieve greater action in the Exchequer by levying the tax payable upon gross profit retail increased online and 25% commissions, rather than the current proposal which is levied upon total turnover, and which as continuation could perpetuate a loss of in excess of 3,000 jobs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47089/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As announced in the Budget I have increased the rate of betting duty from 1 per cent to 2 per cent for all bookmakers and the rate of betting intermediary duty from 15% to 25% on the commission earned for betting intermediaries. These measures will take effect from 1 January 2019.

The rate of betting duty at 1% on the amount of bets wagered in Ireland is at an all-time low, and betting duty receipts are exceptionally low when compared to other sectors subject to excise taxes. It is also the case that there is no VAT applied on betting transactions. With the

Betting (Amendment) Act 2015 now well embedded in, I believe it is timely to increase the rates of Betting Duty and Betting Intermediary Duty.

I acknowledge that advances in technology have challenged existing business models and have changed the structure of many markets, including the betting market, with more betting taking place online. I further acknowledge that smaller bookmakers may have ongoing difficulties competing in that environment or indeed with large retail bookmakers. While I have sympathy for small bookmakers I cannot apply the increase to some bookmakers and not others. Ultimately many taxes on goods or services are passed through to the end consumers and bookmakers will need to make commercial decisions on such matters.

I should point out that my Department held a consultation with the sector last year asking if the current model was appropriate and the overwhelming response was that it was. The main focus of the sector's engagement during this consultation was to oppose any increase in the betting duty, which leaves me with few options in this regard other than to impose a straight forward increase in the current regime.

My Department very recently received a proposal from the sector advocating for a change to a gross profit tax model. This is something I am willing to consider in the context of Budget 2020, notwithstanding concerns brought to my attention about the compatibility of this proposal with EU rules and the greater capacity within the model to reduce overall betting duty receipts.

Finally, we must also acknowledge the raised public consciousness of the problem of gambling in society. While problem gambling can result in the problem gambler, and their family, bearing the severest of economic and of course personal costs, the social costs of problem gambling can extend to their employers and to public institutions in the health, welfare and justice systems, such costs ultimately borne by taxpayers. This needs to be better reflected within the betting duty regime.

### **Flood Prevention Measures**

190. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of the flood defences that have been commenced since June 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46612/18]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The following is the current position on the flood defence schemes that have commenced construction since June 2016.

Construction of major flood relief projects has commenced in 12 locations across seven counties since June 2016.

The implementation of the many smaller projects funded under the OPW Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme is the responsibility of individual Local Authorities.

In Co. Cork... Bandon - Construction works commenced in mid 2016 and are due for completion in early 2019. The Scheme is largely operational at this stage.

Skibbereen - Construction works commenced in mid 2016 and are due to be completed in the first half of 2019.

Clonakilty - The Clonakilty Flood Relief Scheme is designed to protect the town of Clon-

akilty from fluvial and tidal flooding. Construction commenced in April 2018 and works are expected to be completed within approximately two years of commencement.

In Co. Galway... Claregalway - Construction works commenced in mid 2016 and are due to be completed in the first half of 2019.

Dunkellin - Construction works commenced in mid 2016 and are due to be completed in the first half of 2019.

In Co. Limerick... King's Island (Advance Works) - The King's Island Flood Relief Scheme is expected to go to planning next year. Advance works on Verdant Place, King's Island (re-pointing the existing stonewall and construction of reinforced concrete wall to the rear) were completed by OPW direct labour in 2017.

Foynes - The tidal flood relief scheme includes a wall over a 1.3km stretch (mainly sheet piled) with 7 demountable barriers of varying lengths and other ancillary works, and protects Foynes from the 1 in 200-year tidal flood risk within the port. Works commenced in September 2016 and were completed in mid 2017.

In Co. Meath... Northlands – Construction of this scheme, which consists of in-situ reinforced concrete walls and precast concrete “U-channels”, began in November 2016 by OPW (direct staff), and was substantially completed in Q1 of 2018.

Ashbourne - Advance works are currently being undertaken by OPW direct labour. A detailed design for a full scheme is nearly complete and work is expected to commence in early 2019 with a 12 month construction programme.

In Co. Tipperary... Templemore - The Templemore flood relief scheme commenced construction in June 2017, with works being done directly by OPW staff, with specialist contractors engaged as necessary. OPW staff have been in ongoing discussions with landowners in the area, as well as with relevant bodies such as IFI and the local angling club. It is envisaged that, barring significant delays, works should be completed in late 2019.

In Co. Westmeath... Athlone - Construction works commenced in late 2017 and will continue until 2020.

In Co. Louth... Bellurgan - Louth County Council is progressing the works which commenced in 2017 and are now substantially complete.

### **Commission for Public Service Appointments**

191. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the details of investigations conducted by the Commission for Public Service Appointments regarding the public recruitment process in the University of Limerick in 2015; the findings of such a report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46982/18]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As the Deputy will be aware, the Commission for Public Service Appointments is the regulatory body for recruitment and selection in the civil and public service. It is responsible for ensuring that appointments to publicly funded positions, that fall within its remit, are done so fairly, transparently and on the basis of merit.

Appointments that fall within the remit of the Commission are those that are subject to the provisions of the Public Service Management (Recruitment and Appointments) Act, 2004. This

includes appointments to:

- Positions in the Civil Service
- Certain positions in An Garda Síochána
- Positions to which the Local Authorities Act 1926 applies
- Positions in the HSE
- Positions in certain public service bodies

The CPSA has informed me that as appointments to positions within Irish universities are not those which are subject to the provisions of the Public Service Management (Recruitment and Appointments) Act, 2004, they are not therefore subject to oversight by the Commission.

With regard to an investigation into recruitment processes in the University of Limerick in 2015, this is not one which was carried out by the Commission, or in which it was involved. The Commission is therefore not in a position to provide any information on the findings of the investigation.

### **Ministerial Meetings**

192. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the policy regarding the need for note taking when Ministers and-or Ministers of State meet business and other leaders; the way in which this policy is outlined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46496/18]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I can inform the Deputy that it would be normal practice for a Department official to accompany the Minister and or Minister of State at meetings with business and other leaders.

My Department's Records Management Guidelines set out the arrangements for filing records of meetings in my Department. These inform efficient record keeping, which supports the Department's business needs and compliance with the relevant legislation.

The Records Management Guidelines provide that all formal meetings should be properly documented or minuted. In relation to informal meetings, the Guidelines provide that Officers should briefly document significant informal meetings and telephone conversations in cases where this demonstrates the rationale behind decisions, or to record when significant policy or administrative decisions are being relayed, or to note a request or an approval.

### **Legislative Measures**

193. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if it would cost the Exchequer if the Public Service Superannuation (Age of Retirement) Bill 2018 was backdated to when his interim measure was announced in December 2017; if so, the cost; if there are legal barriers to backdating the legislation; if there are administrative barriers to backdating the legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46505/18]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** In recognition of the fact that there would be a delay between the Government Decision to amend the mandatory retirement age for public servants and the enactment of the legislation to effect the

statutory changes to give effect to that policy decision, I introduced temporary arrangements for those facing mandatory retirement in the interim. These arrangements enable public servants who reach the age of 65 to remain in place for 1 year until they reach the age of eligibility for the State pension which is currently 66. The purpose of the arrangements is to offer a limited, temporary solution to individuals who reach the age of 65 before the commencement of the necessary legislation. If the interim arrangements had not existed, the individuals concerned would have had to cease working at age 65 because the policy change proposed can only be effected by legislative change.

The interim arrangements were never intended to and indeed could not offer a perfect solution or put these individuals in the same position as the public servants who are covered by the legislation. I understand that the temporary arrangements were welcomed in that context and it was clearly indicated that availing of the arrangements did not confer any rights on the individual public servant to any new arrangement that might be provided for in future legislation. The legislation has been drafted on that basis and is currently under consideration by the Oireachtas.

The public servants who are availing of the interim arrangements have retired and received their pension benefits. This was necessary in order to respect the current statutory requirement for this cohort to retire at age 65. Lump sums have been paid and participants are no longer paying a pension contribution or accruing additional pension benefits. There are significant complexities associated with the unravelling of that arrangement and the extension of legislative arrangements to this cohort. It would raise issues in terms of how pay and pension should be treated in the context of the period while the individual was on the interim arrangements and into the future. It may require the repayment of lump sums awarded which would present its own difficulties in terms of moneys owing to the Exchequer and possibly also for the individuals concerned. Additional costs in terms of pay would arise in order to place them on a commensurate pay point to those currently covered by the Bill while it would compromise, at additional cost, the current policy with existing retire and rehire arrangements across the public service of recruitment at the minimum point.

With any change in policy, there are always individuals who will lose out because they miss the deadline by a matter of days or weeks. When the interim arrangements were introduced on 5 December 2017, there may have been people who would have wished to avail of the interim arrangements but they did not qualify because they reached the age of 65 a matter of days before the date of the Government Decision. Also, it is likely that given the passage of time, some of those who availed of the interim arrangements may have ceased employment given that over a year will have passed by the time the legislation is enacted. No doubt the matters raised will receive significant attention at Committee Stage for the Bill and I will be happy to engage on those issues as part of the legislative process.

### **Coastal Protection**

194. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans, following his recent visit to the area, for the urgent coastal works needed at Laytown and Bettystown; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46514/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran):** I visited this area recently and am aware of the issues in this location, as well as the excellent work that has been undertaken by Meath County Council in Laytown. I am advised that, in the first instance, the management of problems of coastal protection in the area indicated remains a matter for Meath County Council.

Following the severe storms of Winter 2013/2014, the Government allocated funding for clean-up, repair and restoration works in relation to public infrastructure that was damaged in the period 13 December 2013 to 6 January 2014. Funding for repair of damaged coastal protection and flood defence infrastructure was made available to the local authorities via the Office of Public Works (OPW) based on programmes of works submitted by the local authorities. Total funding of €126,792 was allocated by the OPW to Meath County Council for the repair of damaged coastal protection infrastructure. The Council has confirmed that the works at Laytown, including the replacement of gabions/rock armour revetment sea defence systems were carried out using this funding. This, however, was a once off allocation and no further funding is available under this stream.

Meath County Council can apply for funding under the Office of Public Works' (OPW) Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme, under which applications for funding from Local Authorities are considered for measures costing not more than €750,000 in each instance. Funding of up to 90% of the cost is available for projects that meet the eligibility criteria, including a requirement that the proposed measures are cost beneficial.

### **Public Service Pay Commission Reports**

195. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the way in which the 1:12 ratio of average annual earnings in 2014, set out in table 5.3 of the report of the Public Service Pay Commission, was calculated; and if the pay of enlisted ranks in the Defence Forces was included as part of the calculations. [46677/18]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Public Service Pay Commission is an independent body which published its first report in May 2017, to provide inputs on how the unwinding of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest legislation 2009-2015 should proceed.

As noted in the report, the source for the data used in Table 5.3 of the Public Service Pay Commission's May 2017 report is Eurostat's Structure of Earnings Survey. National Metadata in relation to Ireland for this indicator is provided to Eurostat from the Central Statistics Office (CSO).

The Public Administration and Defence category is a statistical classification, which forms the NACE Sector O. As confirmed by the CSO, the enlisted ranks of the Defence Forces are included in this statistical grouping.

Table 5.3 shows the ratio of gross earnings in three sectors which are mostly made up of public sector employees compared to gross earnings in the general economy, across 17 countries. The 1.12 ratio indicates that, in 2014, earnings in the Public Administration and Defence sector were 12% higher than average annual earnings in Ireland.

The Report itself provides for a detailed illustration of the calculation steps by the Commission in Table 5.3, in Appendix F of the Report.

### **Pension Provisions**

196. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of public servants who have availed of the interim arrangement put in place to allow those workers who turn 65 years of age to be rehired for a period of one year until they reach the

66 years of age required for the State pension while new legislation to extend the compulsory retirement age is advanced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46780/18]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As the Deputy will be aware, I deal with staff in the civil service. Other Ministers are responsible for staff in the wider public service.

The Government decided in December 2017 that the retirement age of civil servants would be extended to 70 years of age and that between the date of the Government decision and the enactment of the legislation, civil servants with a retirement age of 65 could be retained until they reached the age of eligibility for the Contributory State Pension currently age 66.

My officials did a survey of civil service departments/offices earlier this year to ascertain how many civil servants were retained under circular 21 of 2017. From this survey I understand that 73 civil servants have been retained under this circular until the end of June 2018.

### **Pension Provisions**

197. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to make an allowance for women who took time out from work from the Civil Service on Civil Service-approved schemes to raise children and whose pension is affected as a result; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46984/18]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Under civil service pension schemes, the pension calculation is, in general, based on pensionable remuneration and total pensionable service of the employee. The focus on service is a fundamental element of defined benefit occupational pension schemes, not just in the civil and public service but in the private sector too, and there are no plans at present to change this.

There are arrangements in place for civil servants who are about to embark on a career break, for the purposes of raising children or otherwise, to apply in advance to have that period of leave reckoned for pension purposes, subject to the normal rules of the civil service purchase of notional service scheme, including that they pay the full cost of the service purchased. Furthermore, civil servants have the option to enter into purchase arrangements, subject to scheme rules, to buy back service during the course of their serving career, which have the effect of covering periods of absences from work for pension purposes.

While these arrangements are established for members of pre-existing civil service schemes (i.e. pre-Single Pension Scheme introduction, 2013), regulations are currently being drafted by this Department setting out rules for purchase under the Single Pension Scheme.

### **Departmental Staff Data**

198. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of senior positions held by men and women, respectively, in his Department. [47005/18]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The tables below provide a gender breakdown of the number of senior positions in my Department and the Office of Government Procurement.

**Public Expenditure and Reform****Headcount & Gender**

Grade	Female	Male
Secretary General	0	1
Assistant Secretary Level	3	5
Principal Officer	17	18
Assistant Principal	54	66
Chief Medical Officer	0	1
Occupational Health Nurse	2	0
Occupational Physician	2	1
Special Adviser	2	0
Totals	80	92

**Office of Government Procurement****Headcount & Gender**

Grade	Female	Male
Assistant Secretary Level	0	1
Principal Officer Level	7	8
Assistant Principal Level	22	32
Totals	29	41

**Public Sector Reform Implementation**

199. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the public sector reforms he plans to pursue. [46827/18]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Since the first public service reform plan was published in 2011, a comprehensive programme of reform has been implemented and public sector reform continues to be a key priority for the Government. The latest framework for reform and innovation in the public service, *Our Public Service 2020* (OPS 2020) – which I launched last December, is a whole-of-public-service initiative designed to build on the previous reforms to which I refer while expanding the scope of reform to focus on collaboration, innovation and evaluation. The OPS 2020 framework contains 18 actions, and it is built on three key pillars as follows:

**Delivering for Our Public** focuses on ensuring that outcomes for the public are central to service delivery. This will be achieved by involving the public in the design and delivery of services, by improving how we listen and communicate, and by ensuring services are cost-effective. By making better use of new technology and data we will also improve service quality and accessibility. The five actions under this pillar will build on existing progress in areas such as shared services and procurement. The development of digital services and eGovernment is key to improving service delivery as is making better use of data and sharing data more effectively between organisations.

**Innovating for Our Future** has six actions that will enable the development of innovative, robust and joined-up strategies and policies related to the delivery of public services. This pillar will also support collaboration across the public service and help make the most of existing skills and experiences, and data. It will also promote a culture of evaluation. The public service needs to be increasingly innovative and collaborative to effectively respond to the complex challenges facing Ireland now and into the future.

**Developing Our People and Organisations** has seven actions which will support public servants and the organisations in which they work. The pillar aims to improve human resource management and to ensure the right mix of skills and tools are there to support public servants in delivering quality services. The actions in this pillar will help to build strong and agile public service organisations. Actions focus on sharing best practice and experience in areas such as strategic human resource management, workforce planning, employee engagement, public service culture and values, and equality, diversity and inclusion.

Six action teams involving over one hundred public servants from across the public sector are already pursuing work programmes under OPS 2020 in the areas such as digital delivery of services, promoting innovation, optimising the use of data, project management, workforce planning, and professional development. In addition to these actions, reform is taking place independent of the framework, whether in a whole-of-government context or Department/Sector led reforms. OPS 2020 includes a chapter outlining key reform strategies from the main sectors namely Health, Justice and Equality, Education, Local Government, Defence and the Civil Service. It also includes material on Government and legislative reform. Significant reforms initiated under the Civil Service Renewal Plan also continue to take effect and work is advancing on a refreshed Civil Service Renewal Plan which will build on the progress to date and align with programme of reform set out in *Our Public Service 2020*.

The implementation of OPS 2020 is underpinned by a shared ownership of its actions across the public service and by ensuring a strong emphasis on evaluating reforms. A Public Service Leadership Board comprising Secretary General and CEO level participants from across the civil and public service has been established to drive the new reform agenda and lead on its implementation. This approach will support and enable public servants and their organisations to perform at their best and to work together to deliver high-quality, value-for-money outcomes that will benefit the economy.

### **Pension Provisions**

200. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the rules in place for cases in which an overpayment of a pension (details supplied) is made over ten years; the look-back time to seek repayment of the pension from the person concerned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46728/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):** My Department has contacted the agency concerned and I understand that they will be in contact with the Deputy's office directly regarding the issue raised.

### **Special Educational Needs Data**

201. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of autism spectrum disorder units and number of places available in schools for children with autism at all levels for the Dublin 8, 10 and 12 areas, in tabular form. [47026/18]

202. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of children on waiting lists for each autism spectrum disorder unit at all levels, including preschool, primary school and secondary school, for the Dublin 8, 10 and 12 areas, in tabular form. [47027/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I propose to take Questions

Nos. 201 and 202 together.

Funding for special education provision in 2018 will amount to some €1.75 billion, up 43% since 2011 and equivalent to 18.7% of the gross overall current allocation for education and training.

My Department's policy is to provide for the inclusive education of children with special educational needs, including Autism (ASD), in mainstream school settings, unless such a placement would not be in the best interests of the child concerned, or the children with whom they will be educated.

The greater proportion of children with Autism attend mainstream classes, but some require the environment of a special class or special school. This decision is based on a recommendation contained within a professional assessment and in consultation with the NCSE.

Special school placements are provided for other students with ASD and very complex special needs who wouldn't manage in a mainstream school even for part of the week.

The NCSE is responsible, through its network of Special Needs Organisers, for the development and delivery and co-ordination of education services to children with Special Educational Needs, including the establishment of special class and special school placements.

Since 2011, the NCSE has increased the number of special classes from 548 in 2011 to 1,459 across the country now, of which 1,196 are Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) special classes.

There are 37 special schools and 237 special classes attached to mainstream schools in Co. Dublin. Of these, 17 are ASD early intervention classes, 139 are primary ASD classes and 41 are post primary ASD classes. The number of ASD special classes in Co. Dublin have increased from 66 in 2011/2012 to 197 in 2018/2019. Details of all special classes for children with special educational needs are available on [www.ncse.ie](http://www.ncse.ie).

The NCSE is aware of emerging need from year to year in Dublin, and where special provision is required it is planned and established to meet that need. I have arranged for the Deputy's question on emerging need to be forwarded to the NCSE for their attention and direct reply.

My Department has no role in relation to processing applications for enrolment to schools and it does not maintain details of waiting lists in schools. The enrolment of a child to a school is a matter, in the first instance, for the parents of the child and the Board of Management of a school.

The Deputy will be aware that my Department has acknowledged that in recent years the establishment of special class provision in some schools and communities has been challenging.

The Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018 when fully commenced will assist in addressing these issues.

The Deputy will be aware that, on the 3rd October 2018, my predecessor Minister Bruton, commenced a number of sections of the Act. On that date the Minister also announced the commencement of Section 8 of the Act, from Monday 3rd December 2018, which will provide the Minister with a power, after a process of consultation with the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), the board of management and the patron of the school, to compel a school to make additional provision for the education of children with special educational needs.

This power will come into effect on Monday 3rd December 2018. The NCSE will engage with the education partners and finalise procedures in advance of this date. This new power

will build on the work which has been done in recent years to facilitate schools to open special classes.

Section 67 of the Act will provide certain powers to the NCSE to designate a school placement for a child in circumstances where a child is experiencing difficulties in securing enrolment.

A number of the remaining sections of the Act which have not yet been commenced including Section 67, require regulations and procedures to be drafted, and will require consultation with the Education Partners prior to commencement.

I intend to have the other remaining sections of the Act commenced in time for admissions to the 2020/21 school year.

### Scoileanna DEIS

203. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Pearse Doherty** den Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna cad chuige nár tugadh stádas DEIS do scoil (sonraí tugtha) i gcontae Dhún na nGall; an dtabharfaidh sé tuilleadh eolais faoin scór a tugadh don scoil mar chuid den phróiseas measúnaithe a bhí déanta ag a Roinn i gcomparáid leis na scoileanna eile atá sa cheantar máguaird, agus iad uilig ag glacadh páirt sa scéim; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [46470/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** Faoi mar is eol don Teachta, tá múnla oibiachtúil atá bunaithe ar staitisticí tugtha isteach ag mo Roinnse chun na scoileanna a bhfuil sé tuillte acu a bheith san áireamh i gClár DEIS a mheas, ionas gur féidir leis na páirtithe leasmhara go léir a bheith muiníneach go bhfuil acmhainní breise á ndíriú againn ar na scoileanna sin a bhfuil na leibhéil is airde de dhian-mhíbhuntáiste iontu.

Is iad seo a leanas na príomhfhoinsí sonraí a úsáidtear i bpróiseas sainaitheanta DEIS; Bunachar Sonraí ar Líne do Bhunscoileanna (POD) agus Bunachar Sonraí ar Líne d'Iar-Bhunscoileanna (PPOD) na Roinne Oideachais agus Scileanna (DES), agus sonraí de chuid na Príomh-Oifige Staidrimh (CSO) ón Daonáireamh Náisiúnta faoi mar atá léirithe in Innéacs HP Pobal do Cheantair Bheaga, ar modh é chun an rachmas nó an míbhuntáiste coibhneasta atá i gceantar geografach ar leith a thomhas. Ní hamháin go bhfuil ráta na dtuismitheoirí aonair san áireamh sna hathróa a mbaintear feidhm astu chun an tInnéacs HP a chur le chéile, ach freisin iad siúd a bhaineann le fás déimeagrafach, cóimheasa spleáchais, leibhéil oideachais, róphlódú, aicme sóisialta agus rátaí gairme agus dífhostaíochta. Déantar na sonraí sin a chur le sonraí daltaí, atá anaithnidithe agus comhiomlánaithe maidir le ceantair bheaga, chun eolas a sholáthar maidir le leibhéal coibhneasta an dian-mhíbhuntáiste sa chohórt daltaí i scoileanna faoi leith. Cuirtear na sonraí sin i bhfeidhm go haonfhoirmeach ar na scoileanna go léir sa tír ar bhealach cóir agus oibiachtúil, chun leibhéal an dian-bhuntáiste i ngach scoil a shainaitheint.

Tá ríomh leibhéal na míbhuntáiste i ngach scoil bunaithe ar chúlra socheacnamaíoch chohórt na ndaltaí atá acu agus feidhm á baint as sonraí a choinnítear go lárnach faoi mar a léiríodh roimhe seo. Níl sé bunaithe ar shuíomh na scoile ach ar Cheantair Bheaga Gheografacha an CSO ina bhfuil an chohórt daltaí ina gcónaí. Dá bhrí sin, tá sé tábhachtach go dtuigfí nach gá gurb ionann déimeagrafach scoileanna atá in aice le chéile agus go bhféadfadh sé leibhéal éagsúla míbhuntáiste a léiriú bunaithe ar chohórt iarbhír na ndaltaí i ngach scoil faoi leith.

Tá doiciméad mionsonraithe ina mínítear an mhodheolaíocht a úsáideadh sa phróiseas sainaitheanta ar fáil ar shuíomh gréasáin na Roinne ag <https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools-/DEIS-Identification-Process.pdf>

Sonraítear i bPlean DEIS 2017 go mbeidh tionchar ag na sonraí feabhsaithe maidir le soch-dhéimeagrafach scoileanna mar thoradh ar an múnla nua sainaitheanta ní hamháin ar mheasúnú scoileanna lena gcur san áireamh sa chlár ach chomh maith leis sin ar scálú acmhainní chun leibhéal tacaíochta níos céimnithe a cheadú. Dá réir sin, beifear in ann an cuspóir deiridh a bhaint amach, is é sin acmhainní a leithdháileadh chun an freastal is fearr is féidir a dhéanamh ar na riachtanais shainaitheanta atá ag scoileanna ar leith.

Chun an méid sin a bhaint amach, ní mór go mbeadh an múnla sainaitheanta reatha chomh cruinn agus is féidir agus déanfar é sin a éascú trí úsáid a bhaint as Eircode chun a chinntiú go gcuirtear isteach seoltaí faoi mar is ceart. Is gá tuilleadh anailíse a dhéanamh chun scrúdú a dhéanamh ar athróa eile, ar athróa iad a aithnítear mar réamhtháscairí maithe i dtaca le míbhuntáiste oideachasúil i gcomhthéacs leithdháileadh acmhainní.

Dá bhrí sin, cinneadh dearbhú cáilíochta sa bhreis a dhéanamh ar an múnla sula gcuirfí leis an úsáid atá beartaithe dó, ar mhaithe le cáilíocht na sonraí a bhaineann le seoltaí a chinntiú agus chun tuilleadh anailíse a dhéanamh. Mar thoradh air sin, níl sé i gceist an clár DEIS a leathnú chuig aon scoileanna breise go mbeidh an obair sin curtha i gcrích.

### Ministerial Meetings

204. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the policy on the need for note taking when Ministers and-or Ministers of State meet business and other leaders; the way in which this policy is outlined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46489/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** There is no definitive policy in relation to minute taking of meetings between the Minister and other parties. However, in practice requests for meetings are considered by the Minister and in the event he agrees to host a meeting with a group within the education sector an official from the line section concerned with the matter is requested to attend. One of the official's duties is to take a minute of the meeting for file purposes.

### Apprenticeship Programmes

205. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if travel and subsistence is available to a person (details supplied) who is in the first year of an apprenticeship; and the other assistance available to the person. [46503/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):** This is an operational matter for SOLAS, who manage the relevant apprenticeship programme. I have asked SOLAS to contact the Deputy directly in relation to the matter.

### Schools Building Projects Status

206. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a new building for the relocation of a school (details supplied); the funding that has been allocated for this project; the estimated completion date for the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46504/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I am pleased to inform the

Deputy that funding was approved for a new 4- classroom building for the school to which he refers in June of this year.

The project has been devolved for delivery to the school authority so it is now a matter for the Board of Management to advance the design and construction work. As the project is in the very early stages of architectural planning it is not possible at this time to say when the project will be completed. With regard to the funding allocated, this is commercially sensitive until the tender process for a contractor for the project has been completed.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

207. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a development at a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46506/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The project to which the Deputy refers has been devolved for delivery to the local Education and Training Board (ETB).

My Department recently approved the project to proceed to Stage 2(a) of the architectural planning process which is the developed design stage. It is a matter for the ETB, as the client for the project, to ensure that this is completed as quickly as possible. Once the Stage 2(a) submission is approved by my Department, the next step for the ETB's Design Team will be to obtain the statutory planning approvals. When these are in place, the project can proceed to tender and construction.

### **Schools Building Contractors**

208. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the completion of works on a project (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46516/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The Schools Bundle 5 Public Private Partnership (PPP) programme comprises five school buildings, including the school referred to by the Deputy (Tyndall College Carlow), and one further education college across four sites in Bray, Wexford, Carlow and Kells. Completion of these projects was delayed due to the liquidation of Carillion Construction Ltd in January of this year and the examinership and subsequent liquidation of Carillion's sub-contractor, Sammon Contracting Ireland Ltd (SCIL).

A replacement contractor was appointed in June 2018 and three of the six schools, Coláiste Raithín and Ravenswell Primary school in Bray and Loreto Secondary School in Wexford, have achieved service commencement and are now fully operational.

The replacement contractor is now completing the remaining three buildings, Tyndall College and Carlow Institute of Further Education in Carlow, and Eureka Secondary School in Kells. These projects are currently targeted for completion by end December 2018/January 2019.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

209. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if tender docu-

ments have been issued to the relevant contractors on schedule, as per 8 November 2018 being specified in the agreed programme for completion in regard to a project (details supplied); if so, the timeline for the stages of completion of the schools building project; the new estimated date for completion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46547/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** As the Deputy will be aware, the project to which he refers has been devolved for delivery to the local Education and Training Board (ETB).

I am pleased to be able to inform the Deputy that completion of the envelope of the two school buildings will commence shortly as part of an arrangement with the Bondsman. This welcome development will weather the buildings and form a neat finish-out package for a new main contractor. That package will be tendered to contractors that have been pre-qualified by the Design Team shortly. The completion date for the project is June 2020 and the Design Team's programme to achieve this is on track.

### Gaelcholáistí Issues

210. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a decision has been reached on the accommodation for the proposed Gaelcholáiste in Maynooth, County Kildare; if it will be accommodated on the same site as schools (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46548/18]

236. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the provision of a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46933/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 210 and 236 together.

As the Deputy will be aware, Maynooth Community College opened in 2014 with an Irish-medium Aonad and it was stated that should the Aonad demonstrate sufficient viability after four years from its date of establishment, a Gaelcholáiste would be established. As part of the Major School Building Projects announcement in November 2015 and in view of the continued support for an independent Gaelcholáiste, it was confirmed that a Gaelcholáiste to serve the North Kildare area will open in 2019, subject to the continued viability of the Irish-medium Aonad at Maynooth Community College.

Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board and An Foras Pátrúnachta are working through the practical arrangements to facilitate the establishment of the Gaelcholáiste and my Department will continue to work with them in this regard.

### Student Grant Scheme Applications

211. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the case of a person (details supplied) relating to a SUSI grant will be examined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46562/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The current qualifying distance of 45km for the higher non-adjacent rate of student grant, takes into account a reasonable radius within which students may commute on a daily basis. The measurement of the distances relating to the award of adjacent or non-adjacent rates of student grant is a matter for the relevant grant awarding authority. The distance measurement for student grant rates is

governed by Article 27(3)(a) and (b) of the Student Grant Scheme 2018. This provides that the relevant distance will be measured in line with agreed guidelines. The guidelines require that the shortest most direct route between the applicant's normal residence and the institution being attended should apply. In determining the shortest most direct route, the relevant awarding authority shall establish:

- the method for measuring a route; and
- the factors to be taken into account in establishing and measuring a route.

SUSI has progressively introduced a number of measures that are intended to make the Student Grant Scheme more efficient for students. One of these measures is the introduction of Eircode which has helped to reduce processing times for applicants. SUSI continues to use google maps to calculate distance from a student's home to college.

If an individual applicant considers that she/he has been unjustly refused a student grant, or that the rate of grant awarded is not the correct one, she/he may appeal, in the first instance, to SUSI. Where an individual applicant has had an appeal turned down in writing by SUSI and remains of the view that the scheme has not been interpreted correctly in his/her case, an appeal may be submitted to the independent Student Grants Appeals Board within the required timeframe. Such appeals can be made by the appellant on line via [www.studentgrantappeals.ie](http://www.studentgrantappeals.ie).

### Ministerial Meetings

212. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has met with a person or persons specifically relating to a matter (details supplied); and if so, the details of such meetings. [46572/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I can confirm that I met with an individual late last month and at that meeting I was given correspondence relating to a number of schools issues. These letters are currently being dealt with in the normal manner of correspondence received by the Minister.

### Ministerial Meetings

213. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has received a request for a deputation from parents at a school (details supplied). [46575/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I have not received a request to meet a deputation from the school in question.

### Schools Building Projects Status

214. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a school (details supplied) will be completed. [46576/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** This project is currently at architectural planning with the design being progressed in preparation for the planning application which will be the next key milestone in the progression of the project. It is expected for the planning application to be lodged before the end of this year. The School Board of Manage-

ment will be invited to view the plans for the new school in advance of the planning application being submitted to the local authority. It is not possible to provide a timeframe for the further progression of the project to tender and construction until such time as planning permission has been secured.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

215. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a school (details supplied) will be completed. [46577/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The Deputy will be aware that the project to which he refers has been devolved for delivery to the local Education and Training Board (ETB). He will also be aware that the main contractor appointed originally to carry out the works went into liquidation.

The ETB and its Design Teams are currently making arrangements for a replacement contractor. The revised completion date for the project is now August 2019 and the programme of work to achieve this is on track.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

216. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a school (details supplied) will be completed. [46578/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The Deputy will be aware that the project to which he refers has been devolved for delivery to the local Education and Training Board (ETB). He will also be aware that the main contractor appointed originally to carry out the works went into liquidation.

The ETB and its Design Teams are currently making arrangements for a replacement contractor. The revised completion date for the project is now August 2019 and the programme of work to achieve this is on track.

### **Schools Building Projects**

217. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a review of an area (details supplied) will be considered with a view to providing a school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46589/18]

**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 may 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.

While the announcement did not include a new post-primary school in Kinnegad (which is located in the Killucan school planning area), I have highlighted that 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.

### **Student Grant Scheme Applications**

218. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if non-rental properties owned that are not primary residences are assessed for capital means for student grant purposes; if so, the calculations used for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46597/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The means test arrangements of the Student Grant Scheme are applied nationally. Student grant applications are means tested on gross income from all sources earned inside and outside the State within a specified reference period. In the case of both employed and self-employed applicants, gross income, before deduction of income tax or universal social charge, is assessed with certain specified social welfare and health service executive payments excluded. Therefore, all income is assessed from the same starting point, eliminating any distortion which might arise from different spending decisions in different households.

Part 3 of the Student Grant Scheme 2018 deals with issues governing the determination of reckonable income. In calculating reckonable income, no account is taken of capital assets. However, income from all sources, whether it arises in the State or not, including rental and other income from land and property are considered as part of the means test for student grants.

### **Schools Inspections**

219. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the need for repairs in a school (details supplied); if he will consider the request from the board of management of the school for a full inspection of the building; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46606/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The school in question should forward details of the issues and a request for an inspection of the building outlining the basis of their request, to officials in the School Building Unit who will review the submission and follow up as appropriate.

### **School Accommodation Provision**

220. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the school capital appraisal section has received a planning approval appeal submitted by a school (details supplied) in County Donegal for the construction of a dedicated autism and sensory room; if his attention has been drawn to the need for this project to be granted approval in view of the unsuitable nature of existing facilities at the school to accommodate pupils; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46627/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I wish to advise the Deputy that an application was received in my Department, from the school referred to, for the provision of additional accommodation to cater for an ASD class.

I can confirm that the application was assessed but not approved for funding on the basis of sufficient accommodation being available within the existing school. The school subsequently requested a review of this decision, which is currently ongoing. A decision will issue to the school in question on the matter as soon as possible.

### School Accommodation Provision

221. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the process for inclusion in a building scheme by a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46647/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department's current focus is to prioritise funding for essential classroom accommodation to meet demographic need.

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. The announcement referred to the commitment to a PE Hall build and modernisation programme in post primary schools, starting in the second half of the Project Ireland 2040 period.

The immediate priority is to provide 20,000 new and replacement school places each year, to ensure that every child has a school place. My Department is not in a position, at this point, to consider the request from the school to which the Deputy refers for a General Purpose Room. The request will however be retained on file for consideration in the event of funding becoming available for this purpose in the future.

My Department has recently clarified the position directly to the school.

### School Placement

222. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there has been progress made on the delivery of an Educate Together school for Leixlip (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46651/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** As the Deputy will be aware, I have announced new plans aimed at accelerating the provision of multi-denominational and non-denominational schools across the country, in line with the choices of parents, families and school communities and the Programme for Government commitment to reach 400 such schools by 2030.

I would point out that the previous model of patronage divestment yielded only a very limited number of schools for transfer to multi-denominational patrons (11 since 2013). I believe that the new schools reconfiguration for diversity process has the potential to significantly increase patron diversity in our school system.

While these new structures are being introduced, my Department will continue to work with the main stakeholders to progress delivery of diversity in areas already identified, including Leixlip.

As the Deputy will be aware, I recently announced plans for the establishment of 42 new schools over the next four years (2019 to 2022), including:

- a new 8-classroom primary school to be established in 2019 to serve the Leixlip school planning area,

- a new 8-classroom primary school to be established in 2019 to serve the Maynooth school planning area, and

- and a new 8-classroom primary school to be established in 2021 to serve the Naas school planning area.

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.

A patronage process is run after it has been decided, based on demographic analysis, that a new school is required. This patronage process is open to all patron bodies, including Educate Together, and prospective patrons. Parental preferences for each patron 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.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

223. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a building project for a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46654/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** As the Deputy is aware, a building project for the school to which he refers is included in my Department's 6 Year Construction Programme. The building project will be devolved to Waterford Wexford Education Training Board (WWETB) for delivery and it is my Department's intention to engage with WWETB shortly in this regard.

### **Schools Inspections**

224. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when an inspection at a school (details supplied) will be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46657/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The Department's priority in initiating structural assessments of school buildings constructed by Western Building Systems

(WBS) and implementing precautionary measures, where required, has been to ensure the safe occupancy of the school buildings, while minimising disruption to education provision.

The structural assessment at the school in question was focused on the extension constructed by WBS, which comprises the GP hall. The school opened in full after the mid-term break, following external precautionary measures in the form of a fence around the GP hall extension and protective decking.

Now that precautionary measures are in place, the Department will move quickly to initiate the next phase of more detailed structural investigations on all 42 schools constructed by WBS. These investigations will determine the nature and scope of the permanent remediation measures required. At that point, it will be possible to give a projected timeline for each school.

I wish to assure the Deputy that the safety of school students and staff has been, and will continue to be, the Department's overriding priority during this process.

### School Staff

225. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the provision of an ancillary grant to replace a retired secretary in a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46667/18]

**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.

### School Accommodation

226. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the fact that a school (details supplied) will not have enough classrooms in September 2019 if it takes in a new junior infant class at that stage; if he has made preparations for the provision of new prefabricated classrooms to be operational for September 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46671/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** Officials at my Department are aware of the accommodation requirements of the school to which the Deputy refers and all the necessary arrangements will be put in place to insure that there is sufficient suitable addi-

tional accommodation available to the school for September 2019.

### **DEIS Scheme**

227. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has given consideration to the provision of an extra payment or allowance for teachers who remain teaching in DEIS schools for more than a five-year period in order to encourage the retention of experienced teachers in such schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46672/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** As the Deputy is aware, DEIS is my Department's main policy initiative to tackle educational disadvantage. DEIS Plan 2017 has as its third goal - To improve the capacity of school leaders and teachers to engage, plan and deploy resources to their best advantage. Schools who have been designated as DEIS are provided with a range of additional supports under the School Support Programme (SSP) including lower class sizes for those schools with the highest levels of disadvantage. Administrative principals are also allocated on a lower enrolment and staffing figures than apply in primary schools generally and post primary schools have an enhanced guidance allocation. Teachers in DEIS schools also have priority access to CPD and the Centre for School Leadership.

Success in education is built inter alia on the quality of leadership and ingenuity in teaching and we are fortunate in Ireland to attract high calibre people to the fields of teaching and training who deliver to high standards. As Minister for Education and Skills, I acknowledge the commitment shown by all teachers, in particular those in DEIS schools. However, I wish to advise the Deputy that at the present time, my Department is not considering the provision of an extra allowance for teachers in DEIS schools.

### **Student Grant Scheme Eligibility**

228. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on whether it is equitable that a mature student seeking to return to education to undergo a level 8 degree should be denied financial support towards the student's fees in the event that this person already has a level 8 degree obtained at a private university in another EU member state and the student did not have recourse to the free fees scheme operating here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46673/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** Under the terms of the Student Grant Scheme, grant assistance is awarded to students attending an approved course in an approved institution who meet the prescribed conditions of funding, including those relating to nationality, residency, previous academic attainment and means.

To satisfy the terms and conditions of the student grant scheme in relation to progression, a student must be moving from year to year within a course, having successfully completed the previous year or be transferring from one course to another where the award for the subsequent course is of a higher level than the previous course.

Under the progression/previous academic attainment criteria of the scheme, a grant will not be paid to a student for a repeat period of study on the same course, or for a different course at the same level, irrespective of whether or not a grant was paid previously. The objective of this policy is to help as many students as possible to obtain one qualification at each level of study.

If the person to whom the Deputy refers is ineligible for a SUSI grant, there are some other

options which could be pursued.

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 college 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, including approved postgraduate courses in EU Member States and in non-EU countries. Further information on this tax relief is available from the Revenue Commissioners on [www.revenue.ie](http://www.revenue.ie).

### **Minor Works Scheme Payments**

229. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the minor works grant 2018 will issue to schools; if it will issue before the end of 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46707/18]

**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.

### **Special Educational Needs**

230. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of negotiations on the issue of SNA training being funded by the State as opposed to by individual SNAs; if the recommendation for this change by the National Council for Special Education is being considered; if same will be supported same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46712/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The current entry level qualification for Special Needs Assistants is set out in my Department's circular 0021/2011 which requires a FETAC level 3 major qualification on the National Framework of Qualifications, OR a minimum of three grade Ds in the Junior Certificate, OR the equivalent.

The Comprehensive Review of the Special Needs Assistant Scheme which set out to ensure that the Scheme is achieving the best outcomes possible for children with special educational needs was published by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) in May this year.

The Review recommends the development of a national training programme at FETAC level 5 on the National Framework of Qualifications for existing and new SNAs, recognising the fundamental importance of building schools' capacity to meet students' additional care needs.

In response to the Review, I have undertaken to develop proposals for the implementation of the NCSE's recommendations and to return to Government following engagement with the Departments of Public Expenditure and Reform and Health, with a proposed implementation plan to include governance and accountability framework and detailed costings of proposals.

## **Speech and Language Therapy Provision**

231. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if extra funding to facilitate extra hours of speech and language therapy at a school (details supplied) will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46740/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I wish to advise the Deputy that Speech and Language Therapy Services are under the remit of the Minister for Health and the service is provided by the Health Service Executive (HSE). The Deputy's question regarding the provision of speech therapy is therefore a matter for the Health Service Executive (HSE) and should be referred to the Department of Health for direct reply.

I can advise, however, that a demonstration project to provide in-school and pre-school therapy services will take place over the 2018/19 school year.

## **Schools Building Projects**

232. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to appeal the decision to refuse planning for a new primary school building (details supplied) and a physical education hall for two schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46765/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** My Department's officials are reviewing this decision in consultation with planning advisers and technical team and assessing all options including the consideration of an appeal to An Bord Pleanála.

The schools in question have been notified of the decision and my officials will continue to update the schools on this matter.

## **Pupil-Teacher Ratio**

233. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will reconsider a decision to cut a teacher from a school (details supplied); the reason for the loss of this teacher; his views regarding class sizes in this school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46787/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September. However, the staffing arrangements for primary schools includes the provision whereby schools experiencing rapid increases in enrolment can apply for additional permanent mainstream posts on developing grounds, using projected enrolment for the following September, in this case September 2018.

The school referred to by the Deputy applied for a developing post for the 2018/19 school year and was approved the post on the basis of projected enrolments. The actual enrolment of the school on 30 September 2018 was insufficient to retain the post and so the school was informed that the post was to be suppressed with effect from Friday, 26 October 2018. An appeals process is available to schools such as the one referred to by the Deputy. The last meeting of the Primary Staffing Appeals Board was held in October. The school did not submit a staffing appeal to that meeting.

### **Third Level Funding**

234. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to fund the third level education sector; the way in which he will address the recent years of serious underfunding of the sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46853/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** My Department is working to continue re-investment in Higher Education building on the progress made in Budgets 2017 and 2018. Current expenditure on higher education, excluding pay restoration and pension provision, will increase by 10% in 2019 compared to 2016. We are adopting a number of measures to address the financial challenges in higher education and to ensure that higher education investment is responsive to key strategic priorities.

Budget 2019 continued the Government's prioritisation of reinvestment in higher education. Through the budget, we have provided €57 million in additional current funding for the higher education sector. This is in addition to separate funding that has been provided for pay deals and pensions, amounting to an additional €41 million in 2019.

This new current funding will be used to fund the following measures:

- provision for 3,500 additional places in our higher education institutions
- initiatives to support innovation and reward excellence
- investment in teaching and learning capacity, and management and leadership
- 1,000 additional places on Springboard+,
- a new research fund for Institutes of Technology/TUs, and
- an expansion of part-time and flexible learning opportunities.

Budget 2019 also announced a new Human Capital Initiative that will involve investment of €300 million in higher education over the 5 year period from 2020 to 2024, with €60 million being made available in each of those years. This investment will be funded by the National Training Fund surplus. A major objective of the Initiative is to incentivise continued reform and innovation drawing on international best practice through such mechanisms as graduate conversion, accelerated course completion, flexible and blended learning, intensified focus on employability and strengthened linkages and relationships with enterprise. It represents a significant response to projected demographic pressures impacting on the HE sector over the next five years, as highlighted in the Expert Group Report on Future Funding.

The National Training Fund is being reformed to make it more labour market focused, responsive to skills needs and providing additional investment in Further and Higher Education. Progress in implementing reforms has enabled an increase in the NTF levy by 0.1% respectively in both 2018 and 2019, with a commitment to a further 0.1% increase in 2020.

In order to build a political consensus regarding a future approach to funding the higher Education Sector the Minister for Education and Skills referred the expert group report to the Parliamentary Committee on Education for their consideration. After a period of 18 months, the Committee wrote back to the Minister in January 2018 requesting that the Ministry of Education and Skills undertake an economic examination of the three policy options proposed by the expert group to assist the Committee in forming its view of the most appropriate option.

The Department has applied for the support of the Structural Reform Support Programme

2017-2020 in undertaking this economic analysis of the three policy options identified by the expert group. The closing date for applications was 31 October 2018. A decision is awaited on the outcome of the application. Successful projects are expected to proceed in early 2019. Having this evaluation undertaken through the Commission's Structural Reform Support Programme will provide the type of international expertise, analysis, and objectivity that would be beneficial to a major evaluation of this nature.

In addition, the Department and the HEA are currently reforming the model by which funding is allocated to our higher education institutions. The independent panel's review provides a roadmap for transitioning towards a reformed funding model that is more transparent, consistent across higher education institutions, that incentivises actions in key strategic areas such as research and STEM provision, and supports improved accountability while also respecting institutional autonomy. This will ensure that the additional funding that has been made available for higher education is targeted effectively and that institutions are held accountable for how they use public resources.

### **Schools Building Regulations**

**235. Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a clerk of works was appointed for the construction of a school (details supplied); if the clerk conducted inspections of the building; if those inspections included issues relating to fire safety and-or structural issues; if these issues were raised with the company contracted to build the school; if the company committed to addressing these concerns as part of a snag list; if a clerk of works or another company acting on behalf of his Department signed off on the snag list as complete; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46932/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I wish to advise the Deputy that since 2017 the Department has adopted a policy of appointing Clerks of Works to projects under construction. However, the school in question was completed prior to this and did not have a Clerk of Works.

It should be noted that the responsibility to provide the detailed design, to obtain fire certification and to erect and certify the buildings rests with the Design and Build Contractor and his design team. The contractor and his Design Team are wholly responsible for the construction and certification of the building.

Prior to final close out of contracts the Department's consultants carry out an inspection of the building which was effected in this case in the company of the School Principal, the Contractor and his Architects who confirmed that all defects had been satisfactorily completed.

*Question No. 236 answered with Question No. 210.*

### **Schools Establishment**

**237. Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 314 of 12 June 2018, if he has identified a short list of suitable sites in Leixlip, Maynooth and Naas for the proposed eight-classroom primary schools that will be established; the process that will deliver the schools; the timeline for their delivery; the estimated time for enrolment of pupils; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46946/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** As the Deputy is aware, my

Department recently announced plans for the establishment of 42 new schools over the next 4 years (2019 to 2022), including:

- a new 8-classroom primary school to be established in 2019 to serve the Leixlip school planning area,
- a new 8-classroom primary school to be established in 2019 to serve the Maynooth school planning area, and
- a new 8-classrooms primary school to be established in 2021 to serve the Naas school planning area.

An initial phased start-up is envisaged for the new schools, which typically involves the use of interim accommodation. However, this is the first time the requirement for new schools is set out over a 4-year horizon and this will provide a better lead-in period for the planning and delivery of permanent accommodation solutions.

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

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

Taking into account all of the above, decisions will then be made as part of the site acquisition process in relation to appropriate sites for all the schools announced and will be confirmed at a later date.

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

The schools will open in September 2019 in the case of those to serve the Leixlip and Maynooth school planning areas and in September 2021 in the case of that to serve the Naas school planning area.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

238. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the timeframe for the appointment of contractors for a school building project (details supplied) that has received approval to progress the project to stage 2B; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46951/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The major building project for the school referred to by the Deputy is at an advanced stage of Architectural Planning – Stage 2b (Detailed Design) which includes the application for statutory approvals and the preparation of tender documents. All statutory approvals have been secured.

A revised Brief Change Request has recently been reviewed and approved by the Department. Dublin Dún Laoghaire Educational and Training Board has been advised by the Department to instruct its Design Team to incorporate the approved Brief Change Request into the Stage 2(b) submission. The Design Team is currently proceeding to complete work on the

Stage 2(b) report.

Upon receipt and review of the Stage 2(b) submission, my Department will revert to Dublin Dún Laoghaire Educational and Training Board with regard to the further progression of this project at that time.

### **Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Board**

239. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 320 of 6 November 2018, the measures in place at Caranua to deal with the influx of applications since the announcement of the cessation date pursuant to note 4, Caranua board minutes of 9 August 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46956/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** My understanding is that, despite the wording used in the Board minutes, there has been no major spike in the number of incoming applications to Caranua. However, because Caranua is an independent statutory body, I have no role in relation to its day to day operations. There is an appropriate agreed channel which members of the Oireachtas may use in order to seek direct responses from Caranua to specific queries. In this instance, I have asked that Caranua respond directly to your query.

### **Special Educational Needs Staff**

240. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a review being undertaken by a SENO for additional SNA support in a school (details supplied) will be completed; if the case will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46980/18]

**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 the Department's website at [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie), in order that students who have care needs can access SNA support as and when it is needed.

My Department's policy is to ensure that every child who is assessed as needing SNA support will receive access to such support.

As this question relates to a particular school, I have referred the question to the NCSE for their direct reply. I do not have a role in making determinations in individual cases.

### **Departmental Staff Data**

241. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of senior positions held by both men and women, respectively, in his Department. [46998/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the following tabular format:

Grade	Male	Female
Secretary General	1	0
Assistant Secretary General	7	2
Chief Inspector	1	0
Principal Officer	24	21
Principal Officer equivalent	38	79
Assistant Principal Officer	41	68
Assistant Principal Officer equivalent	48	201

### School Patronage

242. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the patronage process for the new second level school in the Drumcondra, Marino and Dublin 1 areas; if access to a non-denominational second level school for the Cabra, Phibsborough and Dublin 7 areas will be provided in view of the increasing population in the area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47037/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** As the Deputy will be aware, in April this year the Government announced plans for the establishment of 42 new schools over the next four years (2019 to 2022). This announcement followed 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.

While the announcement did not include a new post-primary school for the Drumcondra-Marino-Dublin 1 and Cabra- Phibsboro-D7 school planning areas, the requirement for new schools will be kept under on-going review and in particular would have regard for the increased roll-out of housing provision as outlined in Project Ireland 2040.

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

### Fire Safety Regulations

243. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the representative sample of up to 25 schools (details supplied) that were being inspected after September 2017; and the nature and extent of inspections carried out in each. [47087/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** My Department initiated a programme of fire safety assessments in 55 schools in Q4 2017. This involved 30 schools constructed by the company referred to by the Deputy under Design and Build contracts and a representative sample of 25 other schools constructed over the last 20 years.

Fire Safety Consultants have visited all 55 schools and to date 51 initial Fire Safety Assessment reports have been received in my Department with the remaining 4 reports due in the coming weeks. The Fire Safety Consultants have engaged directly with the fire officers in their

respective local authorities to advise of remedial works planned and under way.

### School Enrolments

244. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the criteria applicable to schools admissions following the enactment of the Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018 with particular emphasis on family and sibling connections to schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47088/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018 was signed into law by the President on the 18th July 2018. The overall objective of the Act is to provide a new framework for school enrolment that is designed to ensure that every child is treated fairly and that the way in which schools decide on applications for admission is structured, fair and transparent.

The Act does not prohibit schools from having a criteria that provides a priority to siblings in their school admission policy. The Act does however contain a provision that places a cap of 25% on the number of places that can be reserved by a school for children of a parent or grandparent having previously attended the school.

On the 3rd October 2018, a number of sections of the Act were commenced and take effect from that date. The remaining sections of the Act, which have not yet been commenced, including the section relating to admission policies for schools, will require regulations and procedures to be drafted following consultation with the Education Partners prior to commencement.

It is planned to have these new arrangements in place for the 2020/21 school year.

### School Curriculum

245. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47113/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** A number of requests to undertake the Senior Cycle (Leaving Certificate) programme over a one-year period are received each year, the Department under its rules does not provide for this option. This is because the programme, both in breadth and depth, was purposely designed to be covered over two academic years and not one. The Department has a responsibility to all students to ensure that sufficient time is given to them to fully cover the Leaving Certificate programme and to allow them prepare for the terminal examinations.

The Department also has a duty to ensure that the *Rules and Programmes for Secondary Schools* are implemented correctly and that all students are treated in a fair and equitable manner. Section VI – Certificates and Examinations - Rule 35 of the Rules sets out the eligibility criteria for admission to the Leaving Certificate examination. This rule requires all candidates to have completed a Leaving Certificate course as a recognised senior pupil in a second-level school for not less than two years.

### Pupil-Teacher Ratio

246. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason the issue

of class sizes in primary schools was not addressed in the Budget Statement 2019; his plans to address this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47130/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** 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.

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 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 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.

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.

### Proposed Legislation

247. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress of the publication of the education (parent and student charter) Bill; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47131/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** In January of this year the Government approved the formal drafting of an Education (Parent and Student Charter) Bill. Since then, my Department has been working on the formal drafting of the Bill in conjunction with Office of the Parliamentary Counsel and it is expected that this process will be completed shortly.

As soon as the drafting process is complete, it is my intention to seek Government approval for the publication of the Bill and the presentation of the Bill to the Dáil.

### Residential Institutions

248. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the outcomes from the recent meeting of the interdepartmental committee to examine the way in which existing State services can best meet the residential institutions survivors into the future; and the publication date agreed by the committee for its final report. [47133/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The first meeting of the inter-Departmental committee was held on 5th November. The committee comprises representatives from Departments of Education and Skills, Children and Youth Affairs, Employment Affairs and Social Protection, Housing, Planning and Local Government, Foreign Affairs and Trade, Justice and Equality, Health and Public Expenditure and Reform.

Survivors have always been able to avail of existing mainstream services. People availing of these services don't self identify as survivors of institutional abuse. There was a general discussion on how mainstream services could be signposted so that people who are particularly marginalised as a result of their traumatic childhoods could be reached.

It is anticipated that the committee will report by mid 2019.

### **An Chomhairle Mhúinteoireachta**

249. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna cén uair a chuirfidh an Chomhairle Mhúinteoireachta uimhir mhúinteora ar fáil do mhúinteoir (sonraí curtha ar fáil) a rinne iarratas ar a leithéid i mí Lúnasa; cén chúis atá leis an moill í a eisiúint; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [47190/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** Faoi Achtanna na Comhairle Múinteoireachta 2001-2015, is í an Chomhairle Mhúinteoireachta an comhlacht a bhfuil údarás agus freagracht reachtúil aici as gairm na múinteoireachta in Éirinn a rialáil lena n-áirítear oidí a chlárú.

Cláraíonn an Chomhairle Mhúinteoireachta oidí de réir Rialachán na Comhairle Múinteoireachta [Clárú] 2016, Ionstraim Reachtúil 444/2016, arna leasú, lena ndéantar foráil maidir le bealaí éagsúla clárúcháin, lena n-áirítear bunoidreachas, oideachas iarbhunscoile agus breisoideachas.

Faoi alt 30 de na hAchtanna Comhairle Mhúinteoireachta, ní mór d'iarratasóir ar phost múinteoireachta atá á mhaoiniú ag an Oireachtas a bheith cláraithe leis an gComhairle Mhúinteoireachta.

Tá sé tábhachtach go leanann iarratasóir ar chlárú a bheith ag plé go díreach leis an gComhairle Mhúinteoireachta lena n-iarratas ar chlárú mar oide in Éirinn a chur chun cinn.

### **Apprenticeship Programmes**

250. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which efforts continue to be made to create apprenticeship opportunities under various trades; the degree to which shortages have been identified; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47207/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):** Apprenticeship is a demand driven educational and training programme, which aims to develop the skills of an apprentice in order to meet the needs of industry and the labour market. Consequently, the number of apprentices being registered is determined by employers within each sector. My Department is committed to supporting the increased registration of apprentices across all sectors. New apprenticeship registrations have risen from 2,698 in 2014 to 4,843 in 2017, which represents an increase of almost 80%.

As the Deputy is aware, the Government is currently expanding the range of apprenticeships on offer to meet the identified skill needs of industry. To date 17 new apprenticeship programmes are now operational following the Apprenticeship Council's two calls for apprenticeship proposals in 2015 and 2017. These new programmes span a variety of sectors ranging from financial services, biopharma, ICT to hospitality. Further new apprenticeships will get underway in 2018 and 2019 in various sectors including construction, engineering, horticulture

and agriculture. Over the lifetime of the Action Plan to Expand Apprenticeship and Traineeships 2016-2020 we will see over 40 new apprenticeships being delivered.

### **Proposed Legislation**

251. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to introduce legislation in which a commercial property owner is restricted from asking tenants to leave if the owner is selling the property. [46708/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** There are no legislative provisions dealing with the particular circumstances described by the Deputy.

Section 16 of the Landlord and Tenant (Amendment) Act 1980 provides for the general rule that a tenant shall be entitled to a new tenancy beginning on the termination of the previous tenancy. The new tenancy shall be on such terms as may be agreed between the landlord and the tenant or, where no such agreement can be reached, the Court may fix the terms.

Section 17 of the 1980 Act specifies a number of restrictions relating to the right to a new tenancy. Under the section, a tenant is not entitled to a new tenancy where:

- an existing tenancy has been terminated due to non-payment of rent;
- an existing tenancy has been terminated due to a breach by the tenant of a covenant of the tenancy;
- the tenant has terminated his or her previous tenancy by notice of surrender;
- the tenancy has been terminated by notice to quit given by the landlord for good and sufficient reason;
- the landlord intends or has agreed to demolish and rebuild the premises and has planning permission for the work;
- the landlord requires vacant possession for the purpose of carrying out a scheme of development of property which includes the premises;
- for any reason the creation of a new tenancy would not be consistent with good estate management.

In addition, section 17 provides for certain restrictions on the granting of a new tenancy where the landlord is a local authority.

Government approval for the drafting of a Landlord and Tenant Law Reform Bill was granted in September 2011. The objective of the draft Bill, which is broadly based on recommendations in a 2007 Report of the Law Reform Commission, is to update and streamline the general law relating to landlord and tenant. This will involve repealing the Landlord and Tenant Law Amendment Act Ireland 1860 (more commonly known as Deasy's Act) and various other obsolete and inappropriate pre-1922 statutes, together with some statutory provisions of more recent origin, and replacing them with a statutory framework more suited to modern conditions.

Due to pressure of other legislative priorities drafting of the Bill remains at a very early stage in the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel.

252. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when primary legislation will be introduced in order to extend the medical card and other health-related supports to the surviving women of the Magdalen laundries who have previously been excluded from the redress scheme due to the fact that they were recorded as being admitted to a different institution closely associated with their respective laundries within which they worked unpaid. [46952/18]

253. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the benefits and entitlements that his Department will now provide to the surviving women of the Magdalen laundries who have previously been excluded from the redress scheme due to the fact that they were recorded as being admitted to a different institution that was closely associated with their respective laundries within which they worked unpaid. [46964/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 252 and 253 together.

Arising from a recommendation made by the Ombudsman in his report on the operation of the 2013 Magdalen Restorative Justice *ex gratia* Scheme, the Government decided in May 2018 to apply the scheme to women who worked in the laundries of the 12 'Magdalen' Institutions but who were resident in one of 14 adjoining institutions. To put this decision into effect, an Addendum to the scheme was drafted and has been approved by the Attorney General. This Addendum is published on the website of my Department - [www.justice.ie](http://www.justice.ie) - and lists the applicable institutions. Letters to the women potentially covered by the Addendum are issuing this week.

Although there is a difference in the way awards are calculated as between those women who are covered under the original 2013 scheme and those covered by the Government decision of May 2018, it is Government policy that benefits should accrue to both cohorts in the same way. This necessitates changes to two primary pieces of legislation - covering tax exemption in respect of awards made and the provision of certain health services. To this end, a specific provision in respect of tax exemption has been made in the Finance Bill 2018. Further, the Government has recently approved the drafting of an amendment to the Redress for Women Resident in Certain Institutions Act 2015 to ensure that same health benefits that apply to the women covered by the original 2013 scheme also apply to those women covered by the Addendum. Both legislative amendments will be progressed through the Oireachtas as quickly as possible.

### **Garda Districts**

254. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda by rank and location in the Louth Garda division and Ashbourne, Meath division; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46466/18]

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

The Garda strength by Station for the Louth Division and the Meath Division, as provided by the Garda Commissioner from 2009 is available on my Department's website through the link below.

Gardaí by rank and location

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

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

### **Ministerial Meetings**

255. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the policy on the need for note taking when Ministers and-or Ministers of State meet business and other leaders; the way in which this policy is outlined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46495/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** My Department's "Minister and Secretary General Decisions and Record Keeping Policy", last updated in January 2017, formalises best practice principles for the timely and accurate recording of decisions of the Minister, Ministers of State, Secretary General and Management Board, as well as the recording of key discussion points and decisions taken at meetings with the Minister, Ministers of State and/or Secretary General.

The policy also provides for the nomination or designation of a note taker at such meetings.

A reminder issued to all staff in August of this year, reiterating the importance of proper record-keeping in the context of informing future-decision making and complying with statutory requirements.

### **Anti-Social Behaviour**

256. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to establish a Garda transport division to deal with the increasing levels of anti-social behaviour and criminality on the public transport systems; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46512/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Deputy will appreciate that the allocation of all Garda resources, including personnel, is solely a matter for the Garda Commissioner and his management team and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. This would include the establishment of a dedicated Garda Transport Division for our public transport systems.

However, I can advise the Deputy that on foot of representations received from my colleague, the Minister for Tourism, Trade and Sport and the National Bus and Rail Union (NBRU) in relation to this issue as well as incidents of anti-social behaviour on the rail network, the views of the Garda Commissioner have been sought. I look forward to examining any suggestions the Commissioner might have in this regard.

More generally, I am advised that An Garda Síochána has a close working relationship with transport operators and together they are tackling any instances of anti-social behaviour head-on. A range of regional and local operations have been put in place to address incidents and issues that have arisen at specific locations. There is ongoing communication between Gardaí and the respective control centres, and access to good quality CCTV helps provide assistance to Gardaí when investigating serious incidents.

I am further advised that An Garda Síochána already employs a wide range of operational measures aimed at tackling public-order offences and anti-social behaviour. Close contact is being maintained with local and senior management with Irish Rail and other transport providers. Gardaí have a good working relationship with the public transport services providers within the District and patrols of uniformed and plain-clothes Gardaí, including personnel on foot patrols and other community engagement duties are maintained in the vicinity of the area where such incidents occur.

### **Drugs Crime**

**257. Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his attention has been drawn to the serious concerns regarding drug-related crime in Drogheda and east County Meath, such as the recent discharge of five bullets from a firearm into a dwelling house in a residential area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46513/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am very much aware of the impact that this type of criminal activity can have on communities, and I want to assure the Deputy that the Government remains absolutely 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.

It is important to note that it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for the distribution of Garda resources, including personnel, among the various Garda Divisions and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. However, I am advised that Garda management keeps the 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 in East Meath.

I understand that An Garda Síochána are conducting full investigation into the firearm incident highlighted by the Deputy and as such it would be inappropriate for me to comment any further at this time.

I am further advised by the Garda authorities that every effort will continue to be made to disrupt the activities of any groups who may be involved in these incidents and to arrest and prosecute offenders.

In relation to drug related crime, it is important to say that An Garda Síochána remains resolute in its determination to act against those within society who pose a significant threat to the welfare and well-being of our citizens and the communities they serve. A core focus of the work carried out by An Garda Síochána is aimed at tackling drugs and organised crime. The continued disruption of the supply of all illicit drugs remains a priority for An Garda Síochána and the other state agencies tasked with responsibilities in this regard.

The Deputy will be aware that the Programme for Government underlines the need for close engagement between An Garda Síochána and local communities. This is an essential feature of the strong community policing ethos which has long been central to policing in this jurisdiction. Community policing is at the heart of An Garda Síochána as it recognises that every community, either urban or rural, has its own concerns and expectations. The role of a community Garda is not a specialist role in An Garda Síochána; rather it is the case that all Gardaí have a role to play in community policing in carrying out their duties. The official categorisation of Community Garda simply refers to those who are exclusively assigned to building relationships with local communities and civil society including giving talks to schools, community groups and others.

I am advised by the Commissioner that since the reopening of the Garda College in Septem-

ber 2014 almost 2,200 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide, of whom 35 have been assigned to Drogheda Garda station. Garda numbers, taking account of projected retirements, increased to 13,551 at the end of 2017 - a net increase of over 600 since the end of 2016. This year a further 800 new Garda Recruits will enter the Garda College and we are on track to reach 14,000 by the end of 2018.

I strongly welcome the funding provided in Budget 2019 for the recruitment of up to 800 Garda recruits next year, along with necessary civilian Garda staff. This ongoing recruitment will provide the Commissioner with the resources both in terms of the increase in new Gardaí and the redeployment of Gardaí to frontline policing duties following civilianisation of their roles. The net benefit of this is the increased Garda visibility and greater response to the policing needs of communities in every Garda Division.

### **Naturalisation Applications**

258. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason an application for naturalisation by a person (details supplied) has not been expedited in view of the fact that the person's residency permit will expire in January 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46527/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person referred to by the Deputy is due to be invited to attend the next citizenship ceremony which will take place on 26 November 2018 in The Killarney Convention Centre, Gleneagle Hotel, Killarney, Co. Kerry, and to receive her certificate of naturalisation there. That invitation is due to issue in the coming week.

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 Station Opening Hours**

259. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to extend the opening hours of Kilcock Garda station with particular reference to enhanced community policing in the area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46544/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is primarily responsible for the effective and efficient use of resources available to An Garda Síochána, including operational matters such as the opening hours of Garda stations. As Minister, I have no role in relation to that matter.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that Kilcock Garda Station, located in the Leixlip District which forms part of Kildare Division, is open Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 7pm to 9pm and Tuesday from 1pm to 4pm (man power permitting).

I am advised by the Garda authorities that the strength of the Kildare Division was 379 on the 30 September 2018, the latest date for which figures are readily available. Of these, I am

informed that 106 members are assigned to the Leixlip District and 9 members are assigned to Killock Garda Station. Where appropriate, the work of local Gardaí is also supported by a number of Garda national units such as the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation, the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau and the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau.

It should be noted that community policing is at the heart of An Garda Síochána, in recognition of the fact that every community, either urban or rural, has its own concerns and expectations. The role of a community Garda is not a specialist role in An Garda Síochána; rather it is the case that all Gardaí have a role to play in community policing in carrying out their duties.

I understand from the Garda authorities that the allocation of Garda resources is subject to constant review in light of crime trends and policing needs arising, to ensure optimum use of resources and that the best possible policing service continues to be provided to the public.

### **Commencement of Legislation**

260. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the provisions of the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 will be implemented in full; the progress made to date in implementing same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46563/18]

261. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when Part 7 of the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 will be commenced and implemented; the progress made to date in implementing same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46564/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 260 and 261 together.

The Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 provides a modern statutory framework to support decision-making by adults with capacity difficulties. The Act was signed into law on 30 December 2015.

New administrative processes and support measures, including the setting up of the Decision Support Service within the Mental Health Commission (a body under the Department of Health), must be put in place before the substantive provisions of the Act, including Part 7, can be commenced.

A high-level Steering Group comprised of senior officials from the Department of Justice and Equality, the Department of Health, the Mental Health Commission (MHC) and the Courts Service, together with the Director of the Decision Support Service, is overseeing the establishment and commissioning of the Decision Support Service (DSS) and this work is ongoing. The Steering Group meets approximately once a month to monitor progress.

The Director of the DSS is working in a very determined way to get the necessary staff resources, processes, IT system, expert panels, codes of practice and regulations in place in order that the DSS can be up and running as quickly as possible. There are many complex strands to this work, including involvement of multiple organisations.

Every effort is underway to ensure that the DSS has all necessary capacity to open for business as soon as possible. While the DSS has been working towards being operational and ready for the commencement of the main provisions of the Act in early 2020, the situation will be kept under review as the preparatory work on implementation moves forward.

In April 2018, the MHC engaged the consultancy firm BearingPoint to support the development of a detailed, costed plan to establish a fully operational Decision Support Service. The contract also includes ongoing project management support for the design and establishment of the organisation, business processes, IT systems and risk management framework.

The MHC has in recent weeks received sanction for the recruitment of a number of staff for the DSS and also a number of staff to provide shared services for the MHC and DSS. The MHC proposes to recruit these staff on a phased basis between now and 1 January 2020.

The National Disability Authority is currently finalising its work on the suite of draft codes of practice in relation to non-healthcare matters which are required to be prepared under section 103 of the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015.

In June 2018, my Department recruited an external legal expert to assist in the preparation of draft regulations in relation to decision-making assistance agreements, co-decision-making agreements, certain matters relating to decision-making representatives, and enduring powers of attorney. These regulation-making powers are provided for in sections 10(4), 31, 45(3), 45(4), 46(3) and 79 of the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015. Work on the draft regulations is ongoing.

The 2019 Budget provides for an allocation of €3 million in the Justice and Equality Vote for the establishment of the Decision Support Service.

The commencement of Part 8 of the Act, which provides for a legislative framework for advance healthcare directives, is a matter for the Minister for Health.

### **Direct Provision System**

262. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the date on which the current extension of the direct provision contract at a location (details supplied) expires in 2019; and if no decision regarding the future of the current residents will be made until the current tendering process is completed and new contracts are awarded in early 2019. [46574/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):** Following extensive discussions with the contractor for the Accommodation Centre at the Towers Hotel, Clondalkin, Dublin 22, an agreement has been reached to extend the current contract until mid 2019.

Quite separate to that extension, a public procurement competition is currently ongoing for premises within 40km of Newbridge. It is a matter entirely for the contractor in that premises to make a decision as to whether to enter that competition.

It is anticipated that the competition will be concluded no later than January 2019.

No decision can be made regarding the current residents until that process is complete.

### **Residency Permits**

263. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason a person (details supplied) appears to continue to be unqualified for regularisation of the person's residency status including entitlement to stamp 4, which the person held previously; if provision will be made for the person's child, who is a holder of a medical card and in respect of

whom an issue has been raised by the educational authorities regarding entitlement to a specific fee consideration; if it is recognised that other members of the person's family have received favourable consideration in respect of residency status; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46598/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned had permission to remain in the State until 22 November 2016, at which stage permission lapsed. The person has not engaged with INIS in relation to a renewal of permission, or otherwise, since then. The Deputy will appreciate that, under the relevant provisions of the Immigration Act, 2004, a non-national may not be in the State other than within the terms of a permission from the Minister for Justice and Equality.

I am further informed that it is open to the person to concerned to apply for permission to remain in the State on the basis of their parentage of an Irish citizen child. Any such application must be submitted on the Irish Citizen Child Application Form which is available on the INIS website [www.inis.gov.ie](http://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.

### **Courts Service**

264. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if compensation is available for persons who incur expenses (details supplied) in cases in which a court case is cancelled at the last minute through no fault of their own; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46661/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy will be 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. Furthermore, the scheduling of court cases and the allocation of court business is a matter for the Presidents of the Courts and the presiding judges who are, under the Constitution, independent in the exercise of their judicial functions.

However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has informed me that the legal costs and allowable expenses of litigants in courts, including, depending on the circumstances, costs and expenses of scheduled hearings which may not have proceeded, are generally awarded at the end of Court proceedings.

The Courts service has advised that costs and expenses are awardable at the discretion of the Court, but generally are awarded to the successful litigant. If a litigant is legally aided their legal expenses would generally be covered by Legal Aid.

Under the Criminal Legal Aid Scheme, a solicitor can engage an expert witness to assist in matters associated with the defence of their client. Where an expert witness has incurred expenses for a cancelled court date and makes a claim, the claim is assessed by my Department, and the claim is paid where warranted. Under the Criminal Legal Aid Scheme there is no entitlement for barristers to claim travel and subsistence expenses.

## Residency Permits

265. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in updating stamp 4 in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46679/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned has applied for the renewal of their permission to remain which expired on 01 November 2018. That application is under consideration at present. Such applications are examined having regard to, among other things, the relevant applicant's compliance with the conditions attaching to their earlier permission to remain which include: that they have obeyed the laws of the State; that they have not become involved in criminal activity; that they have made every effort to gain employment and not be a burden on the State and that they have resided continuously in the State, allowing for reasonable periods of absence from the State for holidays, exceptional family circumstances or commitments outside the State arising from business or employment carried on within the State. Such factors will also be considered in the context of the case of the person concerned.

Once a decision has been made on this application – to renew or to refuse to renew their permission to remain – this decision will be conveyed in writing.

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.

## Asylum Seeker Accommodation

266. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he has approved a contract to a company (details supplied) to accommodate up to 80 refugees at a hotel; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46704/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):** In January and again in September of this year, the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) of my Department published a call for expressions of interest in the national press for premises to meet the increasing demand for accommodation for persons in the protection process. It is worth noting that refugees are persons who have already been granted international protection status in Ireland. This accommodation is for those seeking international protection, namely asylum seekers.

This call sought expressions of interest from parties who would be interested in providing accommodation and related services on an urgent and emergency basis. This was issued in response to the urgent and unforeseen demand for accommodation and related services from those persons arriving in the state seeking international protection.

The criteria against which the Department assessed the offers of accommodation were availability, standard of property, ability to provide communal social spaces for residents, ability to cater at mealtimes and proximity to required various services.

It should be noted that these premises were offered to the Department by individual contractors across the country. The Department did not randomly choose any one location over another location.

Following on-site assessments carried out by staff in the Department, the offer of the Shannon Key West Hotel in Rooskey was deemed to be suitable premises for the needs of the Department. The premises is available, decorated to a high standard, capable of providing meals to residents and has scope to provide the required communal social areas required by residents.

My Department has reached agreement with Abbey Castle Accommodation Limited to provide accommodation and ancillary services at the Shannon Key West Hotel for up to 81 persons for one year, pending the completion of all necessary works.

### **Commencement of Legislation**

267. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the likely date that Part 9 of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 will be commenced. [46722/18]

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

Sections 92, 93, 95 and 99 of the 2015 Act provide for the registration and re-registration of the birth of a donor-conceived child. These sections cannot be commenced until Parts 2 and 3 of the 2015 Act are brought into operation by the Minister for Health. The Children and Family Relationships (Amendment) Bill 2018 was enacted on 24 July 2018. This Act was introduced to correct typographical and technical errors in the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015, which will facilitate the subsequent commencement of Parts 2 and 3 of the 2015 Act. It is the Minister for Health's intention that Parts 2 and 3 of the 2015 Act will be commenced as soon as possible.

Officials from my Department, the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, and the Department of Health are working to coordinate the scheduling of the commencement of sections 92, 93, 95 and 99 of the 2015 Act once Parts 2 and 3 of the Act have been commenced and the appropriate regulatory and operational mechanisms are in place to allow for birth registration of donor-conceived children.

The commencement of the other sections of Part 9 of the 2015 Act (unrelated to birth registration of donor-conceived children) is dependent on provisions of the Civil Registration (Amendment) Act 2014 being commenced by the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection. These sections may be commenced separately and do not affect the bringing into force of the provisions on birth registration of donor-conceived children.

### **Legislative Programme**

268. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to revise harassment laws here taking into consideration the impact of cyberbullying on the mental health of a person; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46770/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I can assure the Deputy that work is underway to progress legislation to reform the law in the area of harassment, with a particular focus on harmful communications online in light of growing concerns in relation to

the impact of such behaviours. The Law Reform Commission published a comprehensive report on Harmful Communications and Digital Safety in September 2016. This report contained a number of recommendations to further strengthen the criminal justice and regulatory response to harm perpetrated online.

In December 2016, the Government approved the preparation of the general scheme of a Bill to address the criminal law elements of the Commission's report. Subsequently, as the Deputy will be aware, Deputy Brendan Howlin published a Private Member's Bill entitled the *Harassment, Harmful Communications and Related Offences Bill 2017* which completed second stage in the Dáil in January 2018 and was not opposed by Government. The main provisions of the Bill as published include extending the existing offence of sending threatening or indecent messages to apply to all threatening, false, indecent and obscene messages using any form of online or traditional method of communications. The Bill creates new offences to deal with the distribution of intimate images without consent. The Bill also proposes extending the existing offence of harassment as contained in section 10 of the Non-Fatal Offences Against the Person Act, 1997 to include all forms of communication, including through online or digital communications, and including communication about a person, which is most relevant to this question.

Cabinet agreed in May this year to cease work on the Government Bill and to support Deputy Howlin's Bill to ensure that legislation can be enacted as swiftly as possible. Officials in my Department have met with Labour Party officials with the intention of identifying and bringing forward any necessary Government amendments to ensure the Bill can be as effective as possible. I am currently awaiting legal advice from the Office of the Attorney General in relation to these proposed amendments and I am committed to enacting this legislation at the earliest possible opportunity.

### **Garda Transport Data**

269. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of vehicles allocated to Coolock and Raheny Garda districts as of 1 January 2018 and 2 November 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46774/18]

**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.

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 Coolock and Raheny Garda Districts are part

of the DMR North Division. Between 1 January and 8 November 2018, 6 vehicles were allocated to the DMR North Division, of which two were allocated to Coolock and one to Raheny.

I am further informed by the Garda authorities that the following table outlines the total vehicles allocated to the Garda districts which comprise DMR North Division as of 8 November 2018.

District	2018
Balbriggan	11
Ballymun	55
Coolock	24
Raheny	20
DMR North Division Total	110

### Garda Training

270. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí who successfully completed the Garda van driving course in 2017 and to date in 2018; when this course will run again; the maximum number of gardaí per course; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46775/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As you will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for managing the business of An Garda Síochána including the training of the Garda members and staff of An Garda Síochána and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter.

I am informed by the Commissioner that there is a five level suite of competency based driving (CBD) courses, with each level specifically catering for the required knowledge base, skill set and operational requirements of members undergoing the relevant training.

The five level suite covers an initial driving assessment at CBD 1 to advanced driving including the highest level of road craft and all competency areas necessary to drive high powered vehicles at CBD 4 and the training of Garda driving instructors at CBD 5.

I am further informed by the Commissioner that CBD 2 which is the standard course and is delivered on a continual basis with a maximum of 12 participants on each course. Where scheduling allows, a category B van module is delivered during this course which, on completion, entitles successful participants to drive vans requiring a category B driving licence.

I am advised that van personnel training courses are delivered subject to the operational needs of the organisation with a maximum of 3 participants on each course. On successful completion participants are allowed to drive vans which require a category D1 driving licence.

For the Deputy's information I have set out below the information requested as provided by the Commissioner.

YEAR	COURSE	
2017	CBD2 Training with category B Van Driving Module	373
	Van/Personnel Carrier Training Course (category D1)	187

YEAR	COURSE	
2018*	CBD2 Training with category B Van Driving Module	151
	Van/Personnel Carrier Training Course (category D1)	92

\*As of 13 November 2018

### Garda Warrants

271. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of warrants issued in the past six months that were executed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46776/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I have requested a report from the Garda authorities in relation to this matter and I will contact the Deputy directly when the report is to hand.

### Deportation Orders

272. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the basis on which a deportation order was revoked and by whom in the case of a person (details supplied); the way in which the case will now be processed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46777/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that there is currently a deportation order in effect for this person. A previous deportation order was revoked by senior management in the INIS, acting on my behalf, in circumstances where the person had an application for international protection accepted by the International Protection Office. In such circumstances, a Deportation Order ceases to have legal effect, and as such, must be revoked.

That application for international protection was subsequently refused, in accordance with the provisions of the European Union (Subsidiary Protection) Regulations 2013 and a notification of intention to deport, under section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), was issued to the person concerned by letter dated 20th July, 2018. That communication advised the person concerned of the options open to them as a result. I am advised that the person concerned has submitted written representations in response to that notification. These representations, together with all other information and documentation on file, will be fully considered, under section 3(6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), and all other applicable legislation, before a final decision is taken. Once such a decision has been made, this decision will be notified in writing.

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.

## **Asylum Seeker Accommodation**

273. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will clarify the plans in relation to the creation of a centre for refugees in Rooskey, County Leitrim; the details of the contract; the date for the arrival of the refugees; the number of refugees; the timeframe of the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46866/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):** In January and again in September of this year, the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) of my Department published a call for expressions of interest in the national press for premises to meet the increasing demand for accommodation for persons in the protection process (asylum seekers).

This call sought expressions of interest from parties who may be interested in providing accommodation and related services on an urgent and emergency basis. This was issued in response to the urgent and unforeseen demand for accommodation and related services from those persons arriving in the state seeking international protection.

The criteria against which the Department assessed the offers of accommodation were availability, standard of property, ability to provide communal social spaces for residents, ability to cater at mealtimes and proximity to various other services.

It should be noted that these premises were offered to the Department by individual contractors across the country. The Department did not randomly choose any one location over another location.

Following on-site assessments carried out by staff in the Department, the Shannon Key West Hotel in Rooskey was, subject to refurbishment work being completed, deemed to be a suitable premises for the needs of the Department. The premises is available, capable of providing meals to residents, has scope to provide the required communal social areas required by residents and is located close to other services.

My Department has engaged with the Chief Executive of Leitrim County Council and has provided the elected members of Leitrim County Council with information regarding the opening of the new accommodation centre.

As with every other accommodation centre in the country, my Department works closely with the HSE, the Departments of Education & Skills and Employment Affairs and Social Protection and all other relevant Government Departments and Agencies to coordinate the delivery of State services to residents.

The Shannon Key West Hotel is contracted to provide accommodation and ancillary services for up to 81 asylum seekers for one year, pending the completion of all necessary works and compliance with all regulatory requirements. The current timeframe for the completion of those works (which are the responsibility of the contractor) would mean that the centre would open at the earliest in mid-December.

As I have indicated, this centre is opening on an emergency and time-limited basis. In order to meet the accommodation needs in the longer term, the Department has recently commenced a public procurement exercise under which public tenders for the provision of accommodation and ancillary services by way of the independent living model, to persons in the protection process, will be advertised. This process is scheduled to continue throughout 2019 and for completion in 2020. This will be delivered via a series of regional competitions to cover the entire State.

## **Asylum Seeker Accommodation**

274. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the supports and capacities that will be made available to Leitrim and Roscommon county councils to support the integration of refugees to the proposed refugee centre in Rooskey, County Leitrim; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46867/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):** In January and again in September of this year, the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) of my Department published a call for expressions of interest in the national press for premises to meet the increasing demand for accommodation for persons in the protection process (asylum seekers). It is worth noting that refugees are persons who have already been granted international protection status in Ireland. This accommodation is for those seeking international protection.

This call sought expressions of interest from parties who may be interested in providing accommodation and related services on an urgent and emergency basis. This was issued in response to the urgent and unforeseen demand for accommodation and related services from those persons arriving in the state seeking international protection.

Following on-site assessments carried out by staff in the Department, the Shannon Key West Hotel in Rooskey was, subject to refurbishment work being completed, deemed to be suitable premises for the needs of the Department.

It should be noted that these premises were offered to the Department by individual contractors across the country. The Department did not randomly choose any one location over another location.

The Contractor will be required to set up a 'Friends of the Centre' group as recommended by the McMahon report to facilitate linkages between the residents and the local community to encourage integration. In addition, my Department has granted funding in the order of €43,033 to a number of groups in Roscommon and Leitrim under the Communities Integration fund in 2017 and 2018. In addition, a number of national programmes are funded through the Asylum Migration and Integration Fund that focus on integration measures including funding granted to the Football Association of Ireland, The Immigrant Council of Ireland and the Migrant Rights Centre of Ireland.

With specific regard to both Leitrim and Roscommon County Councils, both local authorities run Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programmes (SICAP). SICAP is co-funded by the Irish Government, through the Department of Rural and Community Development and the European Union's European Social Fund Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning 2014-2020.

My Department will work closely with both local authorities to identify programmes and initiatives to encourage integration measures for the residents of the accommodation centre in Rooskey as appropriate.

## **Asylum Seeker Accommodation**

275. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the level of supports which will be available to local integration and community building projects in conjunction with the provision of a refugee centre in Rooskey, County Leitrim. [46868/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):**

In January and again in September of this year, the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) of my Department published a call for expressions of interest in the national press for premises to meet the increasing demand for accommodation for persons in the protection process (asylum seekers). It is worth noting that refugees are persons who have already been granted international protection status in Ireland. This accommodation is for those seeking international protection.

This call sought expressions of interest from parties who may be interested in providing accommodation and related services on an urgent and emergency basis. This was issued in response to the urgent and unforeseen demand for accommodation and related services from those persons arriving in the state seeking international protection.

Following on-site assessments carried out by staff in the Department, the Shannon Key West Hotel in Roosky was, subject to refurbishment work being completed, deemed to be suitable premises for the needs of the Department.

It should be noted that these premises were offered to the Department by individual contractors across the country. The Department did not randomly choose any one location over another location.

The Contractor will be required to set up a 'Friends of the Centre' group as recommended by the McMahon report to facilitate linkages between the residents and the local community to encourage integration. In addition, my Department has granted funding in the order of €43,033 to a number of groups in Roscommon and Leitrim under the Communities Integration fund in 2017 and 2018. In addition, a number of national programmes are funded through the Asylum Migration and Integration Fund that focus on integration measures including funding granted to the Football Association of Ireland, The Immigrant Council of Ireland and the Migrant Rights Centre of Ireland.

The Department intends to issue a further call for proposals under the Communities integration Fund in 2019 and would welcome submissions from community and voluntary groups interested in assisting in the integration of residents in the accommodation centre in Roosky. In the interim, my Department will work closely with interested community groups to identify programmes and initiatives to encourage integration measures for those residents.

**Direct Provision System**

276. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of direct provision centres operational here; the respective locations of each; and the number of households living in each centre in tabular form. [46959/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):**

There are currently 38 centres located in 17 counties throughout the state. The name and location of all our contracted accommodation centres are shown below:-

COUNTY	CENTRE	ADDRESS	Number of family units
Clare	Knockalisheen	Meelick	25
	King Thomond*	The Bog Road, Lisdoonvarna	
Cork	Ashbourne Hse	Glounthaune	29

COUNTY	CENTRE	ADDRESS	Number of family units
	Kinsale Road	Cork	24
	Glenvera	Wellington Road	0
	Millstreet	Millstreet	53
	Clonakilty Lodge	Clonakilty, Co. Cork	31
	Davis Lane*	73-75 Davis Street, Mallow, Co. Cork.	
Dublin	The Towers	The Ninth Lock, Clondalkin, D.22	41
	Hatch Hall	28 Lower Hatch Street, Dublin 2	13
Galway	Eglinton	The Proms, Salthill	45
	Great Western House	Eyre Square	0
Kerry	Atlas House (Killarney)	Killarney	15
	Atlas House (Tralee)	Tralee	0
	Johnston Marina	Tralee	19
	Linden House	New Road, Killarney	0
	Park Lodge	Killarney	0
	Atlantic Lodge*	Kenmare	
Kildare	Hazel Hotel*	Dublin Road, Monasterevin	
	Eyrepowell	Newbridge	5
Laois	Hibernian Hotel*	Main Street Abbey-leix	
	Montague	Emo, Portlaoise	17
Limerick	Hanratty's*	Glentworth Street, Limerick	0
	Mount Trenchard	Foynes,	0
Longford	Richmond Court	Richmond Street, Longford	0
Mayo	The Old Convent	Ballyhaunis	51
Meath	Mosney	Mosney	173
Monaghan	St. Patricks	Monaghan	26
Sligo	Globe House	Chapel Hill	19
Tipperary	Bridgewater House*	Carrick-on-Suir, Co. Tipperary	0
Waterford	Atlantic House	Tramore,	0
	Ocean View	Tramore,	22
	Birchwood	Ballytruckle Road	28
	Viking House	Coffee House Lane	0
Westmeath	Temple Accommodation*	Horseleap, Moate,	
	Athlone Accommodation Centre	Lissywoollen, Athlone	45

COUNTY	CENTRE	ADDRESS	Number of family units
Dublin	Balseskin (Initial Reception Centre)	St. Margarets, Finglas, Dublin 11	29
Louth	Carroll Village	Dundalk	8

The number of family households in each centre is collated annually and the position at the end of last year is shown above. Centres marked with an asterisk are either single persons only centres or were not opened at the end of 2017.

### Crime Data

277. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of stabbings or knife crimes recorded from January 2015 to date in 2018; and the number of fatalities recorded. [46967/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy will be aware, the Central Statistics Office (CSO), as the national statistical agency, is responsible for the compilation and publication of all crime statistics.

However, it is my understanding that the information being sought by the Deputy in relation to this particular crime category is not available through the CSO at this time. To be of assistance, I have requested that the CSO forward the relevant statistics to the Deputy as soon as they become available.

### Crime Data

278. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 282 of 18 September 2018, if he will provide a full reply and-or instruct An Garda Síochána to issue a full response in view of the fact that other State bodies can provide Parliamentary Question replies in ten days or less; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46987/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** It is regrettable that it has not been possible to provide the information sought in relation to the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017 as quickly as might be desired.

The Deputy will appreciate that this information is not compiled in my Department which must request the relevant data from An Garda Síochána. However, I hope that the Deputy can appreciate that every effort is made to provide a comprehensive and informative response as quickly as possible.

I have asked that the matter be raised at a senior level with Garda management and will revert to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### Departmental Staff Data

279. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of senior positions held by both men and women, respectively, in his Department. [47004/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The number of senior positions held by men and women in my Department's employment at 5 November 2018 is outlined in the table below:

Grade	Male	Female
Secretary General	1	
Deputy Secretary*	1	3
Assistant Secretary*	14	5
Principal Officer*	69	43
Assistant Principal*	142	172
<b>Total</b>	<b>227</b>	<b>223</b>

\* Technical/professional posts have been included with the general Civil Service grade for which they are analogous.

### Immigration Status

280. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if early GNIB appointments to obtain an appropriate stamp can be facilitated in the case of persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47014/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that passengers at the port of entry, are granted a 90 day permission by the Immigration Officers to facilitate registration at the local immigration office relevant to where the person will be residing. In the case of residents of the greater Dublin area the registration office is located at INIS, 13/14 Burgh Quay, Dublin 2.

I am further advised that due to the large volume of registrations processed by the Burgh Quay office all registrations are by appointment only. These appointments are available on the website [www.burghquayregistrationoffice.gov.ie](http://www.burghquayregistrationoffice.gov.ie). The appointments issue on a rolling 7 week cycle and I would advise that the appointments for early January have not yet been issued. Additional appointments are issued daily. Full details of the registration and appointment system can be found on the website [www.inis.gov.ie](http://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.

### Citizenship Applications

281. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in the determination of an application for citizenship in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47015/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the processing of the ap-

plication for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy is on-going. If the Deputy can supply information related to Ms Muhammed's medical status I will arrange to have it forwarded to Citizenship Division. On completion of the necessary processing the application will be submitted to me for decision as expeditiously as possible.

As the Deputy will appreciate, the granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation is a privilege and an honour which confers certain rights and entitlements, not only within the State but also at European Union level, and it is important that appropriate procedures are in place to preserve the integrity of the process.

It is recognised that all applicants for citizenship would wish to have a decision on their application without delay. While most straightforward cases are now processed within six months, the nature of the naturalisation process is such that, for a broad range of reasons, some cases will take longer than others to process. In some instances, completing the necessary checks can take a considerable period of time.

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.

### **Commissions of Inquiry**

282. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the steps he has taken to set up a public inquiry into the death of a person (details supplied) following the vote in Dáil Éireann on 14 June 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47074/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy is aware, an investigation was undertaken by the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission into certain matters related to the circumstances surrounding the tragic death of Shane O'Farrell. The purpose of the investigation was to assess whether the conduct of any Garda member would constitute an offence. GSOC's investigation found that, while no such conduct occurred which would require criminal sanction, certain aspects were identified as requiring further investigation which may lead to disciplinary proceedings against one or more members. That further investigation by GSOC is on-going and I do not propose to comment on that matter while the investigation is proceeding.

As I have made clear to the House, both in response to the motion calling for an investigation and subsequently in response to various Parliamentary Questions, it is imperative that the independence of the Ombudsman Commission be respected and any further action be deferred until the current investigation is completed. I reiterate the point that the question of what further action might be taken will be fully considered by Government as soon as the disciplinary investigation is completed.

### **Cumas Gaeilge sa Gharda Síochána**

283. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** den Aire Dlí agus Cirt agus Comhionannais conas nach raibh an Ghaeilge luaite chor ar bith i dtuarascáil an Choimisiúin ar Thodhchaí na Póilíneachta cé go bhfuil na Gardaí luaite sa Straitéis 20 bliain. [47110/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** Bunaíodh an Coimisiún um Thodhchaí na Póilíneachta in Éirinn i mBealtaine 2017 chun athbhreithniú cuimsitheach a dhéanamh ar gach gné den phóilíneacht in Éirinn. Ag teacht leis an gcinneadh a rinne an Rialtas in Aibreán 2017 an Coimisiún a bhunú, bhí an Coimisiún um Thodhchaí na Póilíneachta iomlán neamhspleách ar an Roinn Dlí agus Cirt agus Comhionannais. Ba faoin gCoimisiún é ábhar na tuarascála foilsithe, agus ní raibh aon ról agamsa, mar Aire, maidir lena hábhar a chinneadh.

Cur chuige iomlánaíoch comhtháite i leith na Gaeilge a chuirtear chun cinn sa *Straitéis 20-Bliain don Ghaeilge*. Tá na gníomhaíochtaí iomchuí faoin Straitéis á gcur i bhfeidhm ag na páirtithe leasmhara éagsúla, lena n-áirítear mo Roinnse. Ceann de chuspóirí na Straitéise ná go *‘Leantar agus déantar forbairt ar úsáid na Gaeilge sa Gharda Síochána’*. Nótáiltear sa Straitéis go bhfuil sé tábhachtach an Ghaeilge a chothabháil agus a fhorbairt sa Gharda Síochána toisc thábhacht shiombalach na heagraíochta inár saol náisiúnta agus toisc na seirbhísí a shóláthraíonn an Garda Síochána don phobal. Is féidir breathnú, ar líne, ar Phlean Forfheidhmithe na Roinne Dlí agus Cirt agus Comhionannais faoin Straitéis, chomh maith leis an Tuarascáil is déanaí ar Dhul chun Cinn an fhorfheidhmithe, lena n-áirítear nuashonruithe ar dhul chun cinn atá déanta ag an nGarda Síochána, ar líne ag [www.justice.ie](http://www.justice.ie) (faoi ‘Fúinn’, ansin ‘An Ghaeilge’).

### Cumas Gaeilge sa Gharda Síochána

284. D’fhiafraigh **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** den Aire Dlí agus Cirt agus Comhionannais an bhfuil mórán Gardaí le Gaeilge á n-earcú nó earcaithe le deanai, an bhfuil painéal ag feidhmú agus conas a ndéantar meastoireacht ar inniúlacht na Gaeilge ag Gardaí. [47111/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** Faoi mar is eol don Teachta, is ar Choimisinéir an Gharda Síochána atá freagracht ó thaobh riarachán agus gnó an Gharda Síochána a bhainistiú agus a rialú i gcoitinne, lena n-áirítear trí shocrú a dhéanamh maidir le comhaltaí agus foireann shibhialtach an Gharda Síochána a earcú, a oiliúint agus a cheapadh, agus níl aon bhaint dhíreach agamsa, mar Aire, leis an ábhar.

Déantar earcaíocht don Gharda Síochána a sheoladh faoin *Acht um Bainistíocht na Seirbhíse Poiblí (Earcaíocht agus Ceapacháin), 2004*. Déanann an tSeirbhís um Cheapacháin Phoiblí (PAS), thar ceann Choimisinéir na nGardaí, na céimeanna earcaíochta tosaigh a bhaineann le roghnú Gardaí faoi oiliúint a bhainistiú. Is é nó í an Coimisinéir a bhainistíonn na céimeanna deiridh den phróiseas earcaíochta, ina ndéantar iarrthóirí a ghrinnfhiosrú, agus ina ndéanann siad tástáil inniúlachta fisiciúla maille le scrúdú liachta.

Is féidir le hiarratasóirí incháilithe ar an nGarda Síochána, ar cainteoirí líofa Gaeilge iad, roghnú go ndéanfaí iad a bhreithniú lena gcur i sain-sruth Gaeilge laistigh den chomórtas foriomlán earcaíochta.

Ceanglaítear ar iarrthóirí sa sruth seo a n-éiríonn leo fad leis na céimeanna deiridh den phróiseas roghnúcháin gnéithe áirithe den phróiseas a dhéanamh trí Ghaeilge, m.sh. agallamh atá bunaithe ar inniúlacht, maille le tástáil Gaeilge scríofa.

Bítear ag súil go ndéanfar iarrthóirí a cheaptar ón sruth Gaeilge réimse iomlán seirbhísí i nGaeilge a sholáthar. Sanntar iarrthóirí a n-éiríonn leo do limistéir Ghaeltachta ar feadh tréimhse ama arna cinneadh ag an gCoimisinéir.

Sa tábla seo a leanas taispeántar miondealú ar an líon iarratasóirí ón Sruth Gaeilge ar éirigh leo agus ar cuireadh tús lena n-oiliúint i gColáiste na Gardaí i leith gach bliana ó 2104 i Leith.

Bliain	An líon iarratasóirí ar éirigh leo agus ar cuireadh tús lena n-oiliúint
2014	21
2015	9
2016	8
2017	6
2018	5
Iomlán	49

Níl aon Phainéal bunaithe faoi láthair ós rud é go bhfuil torthaí agallamh a reáchtáladh sa tSeirbhís um Cheapacháin Phoiblí ó chomórtas earcaíochta 2018, ar tháinig deireadh leis i Meitheamh, le heisiúint fós.

### Prison Accommodation Standards

285. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 288 of 18 September 2018, when the requested data will be supplied regarding the number of prisoners sleeping on floors throughout prisons during the months of April, May, June and July 2018. [47194/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I regret the delay in providing the information requested by the Deputy in Parliamentary Question No. 288 of 18 September 2018 (37331/18). The Irish Prison Service has advised that it was due to the requirement for the Governor of each prison to check the records with regard to the relevant institution.

I am advised that the attached table reflects the number of instances of prisoners sleeping on mattresses on cell floors in Cloverhill, Midlands, Castlerea, Cork and Limerick prisons each night during the period in question. I am further advised that in the remaining 7 prisons, no prisoner slept on the floor.

It should be noted that the Prison Service must accept all prisoners committed by the Courts and does not have the option of refusing to take prisoners into custody. While increases in prisoner population numbers result in challenges within certain committal prisons, the Prison Service takes all possible steps to alleviate the situation through a combination of inter-prison transfers and other contingency measures.

Officials in the Prison Service work closely with Governors of affected prisons to alleviate capacity issues, by identifying prisoners who may be suitable for transfer to other prisons or prisoners who may be suitable for structured early release.

Prison refurbishment, which includes the provision of extra prison spaces, has placed additional pressure on prison capacity during the period in question. Relevant projects included refurbishment at D1 Landing at Cloverhill Prison, two Units at Wheatfield Place of Detention, the construction of the Violence Reduction Unit at Midlands Prison, and renovation and refurbishment works at Castlerea Prison. These projects, while an essential element of modernisation, result in unavoidable temporary bed closures - and consequential reductions in capacity - while the works are undertaken.

I would also like to inform the Deputy that with regard to a similar question asked by her in July 2018 (Dáil Questions 673, 737, 738 and 748) I have been informed by my officials in the Irish Prison Service that, due to a methodological error, the figures provided on that occasion were not accurate. A revised methodology has now been implemented to ensure that the correct

figures will be provided in future. This is very much regretted and the information provided in the table attached now includes the correct figures.

## Cloverhill Remand Prison

	Apr-18	May-18	Jun-18	Jul-18
1st	0	4	23	1
2nd	9	2	31	1
3rd	17	2	30	0
4th	13	1	31	0
5th	6	7	24	0
6th	6	8	19	0
7th	9	13	14	0
8th	7	16	13	1
9th	8	16	15	1
10th	5	10	15	1
11th	2	8	14	1
12th	7	18	13	0
13th	12	20	10	0
14th	15	18	10	0
15th	18	11	7	0
16th	12	12	10	1
17th	15	9	10	1
18th	12	9	6	1
19th	2	11	4	3
20th	1	17	4	2
21st	7	17	2	0
22nd	12	14	2	0
23rd	15	16	2	1
24th	13	16	4	0
25th	7	20	3	2
26th	7	24	4	1
27th	5	27	3	0
28th	3	17	1	0
29th	4	24	1	0
30th	2	22	1	4
31st	N/A	20	N/A	0
Totals	251	429	326	22

## Midlands Prison

	Apr-18	May-18	Jun-18	Jul-18
1st	5	5	10	17
2nd	1	10	10	17
3rd	7	3	10	12
4th	1	2	10	17
5th	1	7	10	15

*Questions - Written Answers*

	Apr-18	May-18	Jun-18	Jul-18
6th	1	7	8	22
7th	0	8	10	21
8th	0	8	10	19
9th	1	3	7	13
10th	1	6	10	21
11th	1	6	9	24
12th	1	6	8	27
13th	1	6	8	27
14th	5	3	6	25
15th	5	8	4	28
16th	7	7	6	27
17th	7	8	6	28
18th	6	12	6	18
19th	8	15	12	23
20th	9	13	11	25
21st	6	17	12	19
22nd	11	15	12	22
23rd	4	17	15	25
24th	6	15	10	22
25th	8	15	15	26
26th	10	11	5	22
27th	10	14	5	26
28th	4	14	10	21
29th	4	6	14	23
30th	5	11	17	21
31st	N/A	12	N/A	21
Totals	136	290	286	674

Castlereia Prison

	Apr-18	May-18	Jun-18	Jul-18
1st	0	0	3	4
2nd	2	0	2	0
3rd	2	0	3	0
4th	0	0	3	1
5th	0	3	3	1
6th	2	2	4	0
7th	2	3	4	0
8th	3	3	6	1
9th	2	3	5	5
10th	2	3	6	5
11th	0	3	5	3
12th	0	3	6	5
13th	0	3	5	4

	Apr-18	May-18	Jun-18	Jul-18
14th	0	2	6	4
15th	1	2	7	4
16th	1	2	7	3
17th	1	2	7	3
18th	0	1	7	5
19th	0	2	7	5
20th	0	2	7	5
21st	0	2	7	5
22nd	0	2	2	5
23rd	0	0	1	5
24th	0	0	1	5
25th	0	2	1	5
26th	0	0	1	6
27th	0	0	0	5
28th	0	0	0	5
29th	0	2	0	5
30th	0	2	0	4
31st	N/A	3	N/A	7
Totals	18	52	116	115

## Cork Prison

	Apr-18	May-18	Jun-18	Jul-18
1st	0	0	0	14
2nd	0	0	0	20
3rd	0	0	0	21
4th	0	0	0	21
5th	0	0	0	7
6th	0	0	0	6
7th	0	0	0	0
8th	0	0	0	0
9th	0	0	0	0
10th	0	0	4	0
11th	0	4	5	0
12th	0	4	0	0
13th	0	3	0	3
14th	0	2	1	0
15th	0	1	0	0
16th	0	1	0	0
17th	0	5	1	10
18th	0	0	1	7
19th	0	0	0	0
20th	0	0	0	0
21st	0	0	3	0

Questions - Written Answers

	Apr-18	May-18	Jun-18	Jul-18
22nd	0	0	0	0
23rd	0	0	0	0
24th	0	0	1	3
25th	0	0	1	4
26th	0	0	0	3
27th	0	0	0	0
28th	0	0	14	0
29th	0	0	16	0
30th	0	0	14	0
31st	N/A	0	N/A	0
Totals	0	20	61	119

Limerick Prison

MALE PRISONERS	Apr-18	May-18	Jun-18	Jul-18
1st	10	10	9	13
2nd	14	10	8	13
3rd	12	10	8	13
4th	12	10	9	14
5th	14	12	10	12
6th	14	11	11	14
7th	14	9	11	14
8th	13	10	10	14
9th	15	11	10	10
10th	23	11	13	9
11th	21	9	9	8
12th	21	9	11	8
13th	14	13	12	7
14th	14	14	9	9
15th	11	11	9	5
16th	8	10	9	11
17th	11	11	8	13
18th	6	7	8	9
19th	6	6	9	11
20th	10	7	9	10
21st	6	8	9	13
22nd	8	8	7	14
23rd	15	10	7	11
24th	15	14	9	19
25th	13	10	9	21
26th	14	11	10	20
27th	11	11	10	22
28th	10	6	11	14

MALE PRISONERS	Apr-18	May-18	Jun-18	Jul-18
29th	10	6	15	17
30th	10	6	10	17
31st	N/A	6	N/A	19
Totals	375	297	289	404

## Limerick Prison

FEMALE PRISONERS	Apr-18	May-18	Jun-18	Jul-18
1st	4	4	7	8
2nd	3	5	6	9
3rd	2	3	6	4
4th	2	3	7	2
5th	4	6	7	2
6th	3	6	5	3
7th	6	6	7	0
8th	4	7	7	0
9th	5	6	7	0
10th	6	6	7	0
11th	6	5	8	0
12th	5	5	5	0
13th	6	5	5	0
14th	4	5	5	0
15th	6	5	5	0
16th	4	2	4	0
17th	2	4	4	0
18th	2	3	4	0
19th	0	4	4	0
20th	0	6	2	0
21st	0	6	2	0
22nd	0	7	2	0
23rd	1	7	2	0
24th	1	8	2	0
25th	0	7	5	0
26th	1	6	6	0
27th	1	6	6	0
28th	3	6	6	0
29th	4	6	8	0
30th	2	6	5	0
31st	N/A	7	N/A	0
Totals	87	168	156	28

## Local Enterprise Offices Data

286. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the annual funding that each LEO has received per year in the past five years, in tabular form. [46752/18]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The LEOs are the ‘first-stop-shop’ for advice and guidance, financial assistance and other supports if you intend to start or grow your own business.

The LEOs will continue to support and promote micro-enterprises throughout the country. The table below details of the annual funding that each LEO has received per year in the past five years in tabular form.

Local Enterprise Office Funding received 2014 -9th November 2018

LEO	2014 €	2015 €	2016 €	2017 €	1st Jan. -9th Nov.2018 €
Carlow	495,473	717,092	666,475	861,427	491,808
Cavan	420,158	616,135	549,102	730,514	563,586
Clare	651,550	639,191	747,588	893,088	975,313
Cork City	582,557	680,719	725,875	973,218	742,357
Cork North/ West	949,942	1,185,717	1,217,417	1,325,749	1,165,927
Cork South	778,459	1,158,914	1,175,469	1,172,997	862,106
Donegal	687,976	710,835	765,603	1,115,856	822,750
Dublin City	1,010,194	1,143,267	1,363,523	1,540,035	1,172,934
Dublin South	593,411	814,131	925,626	1,108,350	921,118
Dún Laoghaire/ Rathdown	825,551	813,914	876,944	1,142,494	490,000
Fingal	676,824	980,820	1,025,685	1,126,022	1,223,861
Galway	671,993	823,759	765,615	1,106,768	1,170,422
Kerry	714,963	926,618	789,160	875,971	867,891
Kildare	574,392	683,709	805,095	1,024,136	915,115
Kilkenny	624,372	777,715	760,681	942,151	787,972
Laois	549,290	649,010	583,423	730,242	537,488
Leitrim	524,972	696,595	672,792	723,228	720,242
Limerick	1,142,519	1,329,407	1,163,392	1,382,699	1,265,063
Longford	540,383	651,914	541,507	668,046	730,034
Louth	522,921	668,247	656,200	717,899	576,916
Mayo	689,383	775,072	864,405	913,068	389,229
Meath	527,292	456,292	743,898	933,897	979,120
Monaghan	553,177	711,201	667,022	800,801	617,872
Offaly	559,612	630,408	671,587	764,993	801,285
Roscommon	520,858	623,381	587,251	720,005	730,385
Sligo	602,287	744,976	814,352	841,987	656,391
Tipperary	1,010,981	1,113,205	1,198,741	1,199,797	1,079,870
Waterford	909,273	1,000,666	1,037,795	1,170,033	1,076,570

LEO	2014 €	2015 €	2016 €	2017 €	1st Jan. -9th Nov.2018 €
Westmeath	791,494	806,009	951,990	1,088,840	748,004
Wexford	670,664	729,246	769,403	661,802	498,090
Wicklow	745,229	835,882	687,457	788,620	684,966

## Notes

1. The Local Enterprise Office funding received 2014-2018 includes Administration (pay and non-pay) and Capital monies funded by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation.
2. It does not include funding received by LEOs for the Trading Online Voucher Scheme, European Globalisation Fund, and LEO Competitive Fund which are respectively funded by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment, Department of Education and Skills and Enterprise Ireland

This table does not include funding received by LEOs to procure services or run programmes on behalf of the network of LEOs.

## Brexit Staff

287. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of staff in her Department that are involved in co-ordinating and ensuring that businesses are prepared for Brexit. [46802/18]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** My Department is committed to supporting Brexit impacted businesses, and works with our enterprise agencies and regulatory bodies to provide a range of advisory and financial supports, and tool-kits to help businesses in Ireland prepare for Brexit.

In 2016, my Department established a dedicated Brexit Unit. This Unit is led at Assistant Secretary level within the EU Affairs and Trade Policy Division, and its key function is to coordinate and represent the Departmental and Agencies response to Brexit and to support me in my position at the Cabinet Committee dealing with Brexit. The designated official, at Assistant Secretary level, is supported by a staff complement of seven (one Principal Officer, three Assistant Principal Officers, two Higher Executive Officers and one Clerical Officer). The Unit also leads on engagement with a broad range of stakeholders to inform and validate our response to Brexit.

Also within this Division, two officials (Assistant Principal Officer and Administrative Officer) working in the Trade Policy Unit are assigned to Brexit related trade matters as part of their portfolios.

In the Division with responsibility for Indigenous Enterprise, there are two officials (Assistant Principal Officer and Administrative Officer) working solely on Brexit mitigation measures to support business impacted by Brexit. This team also has a strong relationship with the Stra-

tegric Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) and earlier this year launched a new Brexit Loan Scheme for businesses in response to Brexit. Other officials across this Division have Brexit related responsibility attached to their roles, and work closely with the Department's enterprise agencies to prepare businesses in Ireland for Brexit.

The UK's decision to leave the European Union continues to impact significantly on all policy fields across my Department as well as our family of agencies. In this regard, staff in the Agency Liaison Units of the Department, work closely with the agencies under its remit to support those agencies in providing specific advice and guidance to businesses in Ireland.

Such supports include the SME Scorecard online tool, which was developed by Enterprise Ireland in conjunction with the staff in the Enterprise Liaison Unit. This scorecard stimulates thinking about the key areas that may be impacted by Brexit and provides a self-assessment tool to ascertain a business level of preparedness. Officials in the Inward Investment area of my Department work directly with IDA Ireland to provide practical assistance and advice on Brexit risks and opportunities, including financial assistance across R&D, training, employment and capital investment. InterTrade Ireland, which provides a Brexit Advisory Service to help businesses with practical advice and support likely tariffs, currency management, regulatory customs issues and movement of labour, goods and services, is also supported by officials in my Department. Staff in the LEO Liaison Unit in my Department work closely with the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs). The LEOs have a presence in every county and provide vital Brexit supports to micro businesses in Ireland and assist in identifying key Brexit exposures and develop robust strategies to address issues and maximise potential.

Given the wide mission of my Department, staff across a number of other Divisions and business units, are involved in a range of business preparedness supports and Brexit related matters, as it relates to their policy area. The staff in the Health and Safety Liaison Unit, work with the Health and Safety Authority to support Irish chemical companies. Support is also provided to the National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI) by officials in my Department to ensure businesses are certified to appropriate standards to access markets.

My Department is continually prioritising the Brexit challenges and actively keep the staffing requirements under review.

### **Local Enterprise Offices Data**

288. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of persons or businesses that availed of the mentor programme run by each local enterprise office in 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46467/18]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) are the *first-stop-shop* for providing advice and guidance, financial assistance and soft supports such as training and mentoring to anyone wishing to start or grow a business.

The number of persons or businesses that availed of the mentor programme run by each Local Enterprise Office in 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018 are shown in the table below:

**Local Enterprise Office Mentoring Participants 2016, 2017 and Q1-Q3 2018**

Local Enterprise Office	2016	2017	1st Jan - 30th Sept 2018
Carlow	147	218	171
Cavan	98	91	109
Clare	43	73	76
Cork City	203	241	157
Cork North & West	543	576	530
Cork South	66	168	83
Donegal	26	38	45
Dublin City	1,154	994	766
Dublin South	420	322	325
Dún Laoghaire/Rathdown	389	456	280
Fingal	748	697	531
Galway	69	82	268
Kerry	138	153	103
Kildare	344	432	319
Kilkenny	303	384	344
Laois	218	186	123
Leitrim	107	101	60
Limerick	232	138	111
Longford	67	77	27
Louth	124	261	218
Mayo	191	258	166
Meath	229	160	147
Monaghan	71	31	50
Offaly	140	124	101
Roscommon	265	306	220
Sligo	163	195	232
Tipperary	143	319	267
Waterford	180	230	194
Westmeath	105	378	196
Wexford	132	216	97
Wicklow	436	488	267
Total	7,494	8,393	6,583

**Local Enterprise Offices Data**

289. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the cost of the mentor programme run by each local enterprise office in each of the years 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018. [46468/18]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) are the *first-stop-shop* for providing advice and guidance, financial assistance and soft supports such as training and mentoring to anyone wishing to start

or grow a business.

The cost of the mentor programme run by each Local Enterprise Office in each of the years 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018 are shown in the table below:

Local Enterprise Office Mentor Expenditure 2016, 2017 and Q1-Q3 2018

Local Enterprise Office	2016	2017	1st Jan - 30th Sept 2018
Carlow	€41,869	€42,425	€26,433
Cavan	€45,917	€34,500	€25,063
Clare	€24,590	€21,742	€24,191
Cork City	€47,507	€42,166	€27,976
Cork North & West	€91,200	€88,394	€80,074
Cork South	€45,487	€53,748	€34,001
Donegal	€17,208	€22,930	€11,180
Dublin City	€178,109	€183,405	€116,473
Dublin South	€65,265	€57,876	€46,475
Dún Laoghaire/ Rathdown	€60,701	€51,976	€32,794
Fingal	€80,339	€74,713	€55,251
Galway	€58,249	€76,412	€45,418
Kerry	€37,728	€45,005	€35,263
Kildare	€49,669	€61,827	€27,074
Kilkenny	€59,924	€79,094	€50,316
Laois	€29,676	€29,743	€22,979
Leitrim	€34,198	€33,309	€17,367
Limerick	€71,987	€52,895	€25,032
Longford	€19,377	€24,731	€13,514
Louth	€42,177	€61,104	€28,349
Mayo	€34,326	€55,221	€28,303
Meath	€46,687	€59,454	€40,771
Monaghan	€26,883	€22,761	€11,442
Offaly	€32,187	€41,612	€28,433
Roscommon	€30,707	€43,337	€32,599
Sligo	€85,212	€112,280	€45,087
Tipperary	€63,426	€66,814	€46,418
Waterford	€62,570	€77,270	€51,099
Westmeath	€24,278	€60,436	€26,285
Wexford	€69,366	€66,059	€32,682
Wicklow	€70,201	€58,301	€40,986
TOTAL	€1,647,019	€1,801,539	€1,129,326

### Ministerial Meetings

290. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the policy relating to the need for note taking when Ministers and-or Ministers of State meet business and other leaders; the way in which this policy is outlined; and if she will make a state-

ment on the matter. [46484/18]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The policy in my Department is that notes are taken at meetings which have formal agendas, and which are attended by Departmental officials.

On occasions when meetings are of a short ‘meet-and-greet’ nature without formal agendas, notes are not always taken.

While this policy is not formally written down, it is understood and applied in the Department.

### **Bord na Móna**

291. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the actions she has taken to protect jobs at Bord na Móna and put supports in place for employees that will be made redundant on a voluntary basis; if she has spoken with the management of the company regarding these job losses; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46517/18]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I appreciate how difficult the recent announcement by Bord na Móna is for the workers affected, their families and their communities.

As the Deputy is aware, Bord na Móna is a commercial State company with a mandate to develop the midlands region. The company are taking these steps now to set out a strategy that takes into account its obligation to operate in a decarbonised economy.

I welcome that the redundancies are being sought on a voluntary basis and that extensive consultation will take place with the workers in the coming weeks. I also welcome that the Board and Management of Bord na Móna in outlining their plans are committed to ensuring that the company will be able to provide long-term, sustainable employment for the Midlands, including up to 500 new jobs in new areas of the business.

I want to assure the Deputy that all relevant State supports are being made available to the workers impacted by the announcement. Bord na Móna will provide additional supports to workers who opt for redundancy, including reskilling opportunities.

My Department together with its agencies, Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland and the Local Enterprise Offices, will also step up their own work in seeking to support entrepreneurship and new investment in the Midlands. Specifically, they are engaging with the Bord na Móna Transition Team set up by Offaly County Council. All agencies are involved in this initiative.

The Midlands has had strong employment growth in recent years, with 15,300 extra people at work since 2015. Specifically, in 2017, 819 client companies of the Local Enterprise Offices added 387 new employees, making a total of 4,214 employees. There have been a series of very positive job creation announcements in the Midlands in recent years and we expect these trends to continue.

Recent announcements include: Leetha Industries (100 jobs), Center Parcs (1,000 jobs plus 750 jobs during construction), Neudea Technologies (200 jobs) and Glanbia with its US partner Leprino (78 jobs plus 250 jobs during construction). I was also pleased to launch a new Irish Manufacturing Research CLG project located in Mullingar in December last year as one of the significant funding recipients under the first call of the Regional Enterprise Development Fund,

which will be an important support to manufacturing activity in the Midlands region.

My Department is also actively collaborating with the Midlands Regional Action Plan for Jobs Committee in refreshing its Action Plan. I understand the Committee is actively considering the impact of the recent announcement and the potential opportunities in the green economy that could be included in the work of the Committee as part of its forthcoming Action Plan.

### Motor Insurance Costs

292. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the progress to date for each of the 71 action points made in the cost of insurance working group report on motor insurance published in January 2017, in which her Department or the Personal Injuries Assessment Board, PIAB, had lead responsibility for implementation, in tabular form; if each such action point has been completed, not completed or is ongoing; and the revised deadlines for action points not delivered by original timelines committed. [46553/18]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Cost of Insurance Working Group Report (CIWG) on the Cost of Motor Insurance was published in January 2017 following approval by Government.

This CIWG Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance makes 33 recommendations with 71 associated actions to be carried out. The recommendations and actions are detailed in an action plan contained in the Report with agreed timelines for implementation.

Minister of State with special responsibility for Financial Services and Insurance, Michael D'Arcy T.D., currently chairs the Working Group on the Cost of Insurance and officials from my Department along with other Departments and Agencies are members of the Group.

The Sixth Progress Update published by Minister D'Arcy in August 2018 sets out detailed progress on each recommendation. I understand that the Seventh Progress Report will be published shortly.

The Table below sets out the progress on implementation of recommendations relevant to my Department and PIAB.

Recommendations	Lead responsibility	Deadline	Update
Rec 14 – Establish the Personal Injuries Commission (PIC) Action Point 30 Establish a PIC Action Point 31 PIC to investigate and make recommendations on processes in other jurisdictions which could enhance the claims process in Ireland Action point 32 PIC to benchmark international PI awards with those in Ireland and to report on alternative compensation and resolution models. Action Point 33 PIC to deliver their third report.	DBEI	Q 2 2018	Personal Injuries Commission (PIC) established in January 2017. First Report of the PIC published December 2017. The PIC's second and third reports were produced as a combined document and submitted to Ministers Humphreys, Donohoe and D'Arcy in July 2018. This Second and Final Report was published following consideration by Government in September 2018. This Report deals predominately with the benchmarking of Irish awards against international awards. Q3

Recommendations	Lead responsibility	Deadline	Update
Rec 15. - Assess, within the current review of the PIAB legislation, cases of non-cooperation such as non-attendance at medicals and refusal to provide details of special damages. Action Point 34 Review cases of non-attendance at medicals and refusal to provide details of special damages. Action Point 35 Publish Heads of Bill to enhance powers of PIAB	DBEI	Q 2 2017	The General Scheme of the Personal Injuries Assessment Board (Amendment) Bill 2017 was approved by Government on 27 June 2017 and subsequently published. The General Scheme of the Bill included measures on non-cooperation with the PIAB process.
Rec. 16 - Ascertain and set out the measures necessary to implement Pre- Action Protocols (PAPs) for Personal Injury Cases. Action Point 36 Ascertain and set out the necessary measures to implement pre-action protocols in personal injury cases. Action Point 37 Publish Heads of Bill to extend pre-action protocols to personal injury cases.	DBEI/DJE	Q4 2017	Following further legal advice, DJE are finalising the draft regulations on PAPs for medical negligence actions and are expected to be ready for the Minister for JE in Q4 2018. PAPs in relation to Personal Injury claims are the subject of further discussions with DJE and the Department of Finance including the possibility of a separate legislative treatment for claims that have been assessed by PIAB and those that have not.
Rec. 17 - Fully assess viable options for referring rejected PIAB assessments into a judicial process on an appeal basis so that the facts established relating to a personal injury in the PIAB process do not require to be re-established. Action Point 38 Review potential legal and constitutional constraints to the appeal style system	DBEI/DJE	Q4 2017	Officials of DBEI and DJE examined the issue during the considerations for the CIWG Report and expressed concern that it could introduce an additional legal layer with associated costs and would not prevent a person from taking a de novo case if they wished. The implementation of Rec 15 to address cases of non-cooperation with PIAB through legislation is intended to strengthen the role of PIAB in the assessment of damages.
Rec. 18 - Explore with the judiciary how future reviews of the Book of Quantum/Guidelines might involve appropriate judicial involvement in its compilation or adoption Action Point 39 Consultation with the Judiciary	PIAB/DBEI/DJE	Ongoing	This recommendation has effectively been superseded by the recommendations in the Second and Final Report of the PIC (Sept 2018). The PIC recommends that the Judicial Council (JC), when established, should be requested by the Minister for Justice and Equality to compile guidelines for general damages for various types of personal injury (with potential assistance from PIAB). Such guidelines would be along the lines of the Judicial Studies Board guidelines published in England & Wales and would replace the current Book of Quantum which PIAB currently has a legislative function to produce. The PIC report anticipated enactment at year end for the legislation to establish the JC and that in the event of a delay to the establishment of the JC that, as a contingency arrangement, the Executive should establish a formal framework, inclusive of PIAB, to enable the judiciary to complete guidelines in advance of the renewal deadlines for the next Book of Quantum. PIAB has written to Mr Charlie Flanagan T.D. Minister for Justice and Equality offering its assistance either in the compilation of any guidelines or in the event of a requirement to produce such "interim" guidelines.

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Recommendations	Lead responsibility	Deadline	Update
Rec. 19 - Examine the frequency of future Book of Quantum updates in terms of any future changes to its production. Action Point 40 Implement the outcome of the PIAB legislative review.	PIAB	Q2 2017	As per Recommendation 18 this recommendation has effectively been superseded by the recommendations contained in the Second and Final Report of the PIC. (related to Rec 20)
Rec. 20 Introduce more granularity into the Book of Quantum Action point 41 Consult with the PIC and implement any recommendations arising from their report. Action point 42 Enhance the BOQ upon each publication.	PIAB	Ongoing	As per Recommendation 18 this recommendation has effectively been superseded by the recommendations contained in the Second and Final Report of the PIC. It is anticipated that any new judicial guidelines will also have regard to the First Report of the PIC, published in December 2017, which contains a specific recommendation relating to the potential inclusion of new reporting categories/ scales of soft-tissue (whiplash) based on the Quebec Task Force's WAD scale. PIAB data relating to personal injury claims that they have assessed may be useful in this context.

**Insurance Costs**

293. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the progress to date for each of the 29 action points made in the cost of insurance working group report on the cost of employer and public liability insurance published in January 2018, in which her Department or the PIAB has lead responsibility for implementation, in tabular form; if each such action point has been completed, not completed or is ongoing; and the revised deadlines for action points not delivered by original timelines committed. [46554/18]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Minister of State for Financial Services and Insurance at the Department of Finance, Mr Michael D'Arcy T.D., published the Cost of Insurance Working Group Report (CIWG) on the Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance on the 23rd January 2018 following approval by Government. Minister D'Arcy chairs the Working Group on the Cost of Insurance and officials from my Department along with other Departments and Agencies are members of the Group.

This Report makes 15 recommendations with 29 associated actions to be carried out. The recommendations and actions are detailed in an action plan contained in the Report with agreed timelines for implementation.

My Department in conjunction with the Personal Injuries Assessment Board has lead responsibility for Recommendation 9 in the Report, which relates to a review of the operation of the six-month standstill period provided for under Section 50 of the Personal Injuries Assessment Board Act 2003, with a timeline of completion by Quarter 2 of 2019.

The Table below sets out the progress on the implementation of this recommendation.

Progress on implementation of Recommendation 9 from the CIWG Report on the Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance

Recommendation 9: Review of the operation of the six-month standstill period provided for under Section 50 of the PIAB Act 2003	Lead Responsibility	Deadline	Update
Action Points			
Action Point 16:PIAB to report to DBEI on its findings on the basis of data received from relevant stakeholders in relation to the time period from the issuing of PIAB authorisations (section 32 rejected cases) to the initiation of proceedings, to the settling of the case.	PIAB	Q4 2018	PIAB wrote to the main insurance companies seeking relevant information in relation to rejected PIAB cases. The data received is currently being analysed by PIAB who will report to the Department once the analysis is complete.
Action Point 17:On receipt of the report from PIAB, DBEI to review the operation of the six-month standstill period under section 50 of the Personal Injuries Assessment Board Act 2003	DBEI	Q2 2019	

### Jobs Data

294. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of jobs lost or created in County Kildare on an annual basis in the past six years to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46644/18]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The CSO does not report on jobs gains or losses per county, rather it reports on the change in the standing stock of employees. The latest available results of the CSO Business Demography Survey, provided in table 1 below, show the number of employees working in enterprises in Kildare since 2012.

Table 1. Number of Employees Working in Enterprises in Kildare as Reported by the Business Demography Survey.

County	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Kildare	38,359	39,722	41,338	45,360	46,516

The Business Demography is based purely on administrative data received by the CSO from Revenue on an annual basis. The geographical breakdown for enterprises in this survey is an approximation. The county breakdown is based on the address at which an enterprise is registered for revenue purposes, rather than where the business actually operates from, because no comprehensive administrative source is currently available for business locations.

However, my Department conducts an Employment Survey each year which records the employment in Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland and Údarás na Gaeltachta assisted companies. The table below shows the gains and losses in total jobs in agency assisted companies in Kildare over the last 6 years as measured by the Annual Employment Survey (AES) 2017. The AES is based on the actual location of the jobs and includes permanent, temporary, full-time and part-time jobs. 2017 is the latest year available; the 2018 survey is currently in the field.

Table 2. Gains and Losses in Total Jobs (Permanent, Full Time + Temporary, Part-time and Other) in Agency Assisted Companies in Kildare as measured by the Annual Employment Survey (AES 2017)

Year	Gains in Total Jobs	Losses in Total Jobs	Total Jobs
2012	1,130	-850	16,602
2013	1,220	-754	17,068
2014	1,605	-713	17,960
2015	1,738	-812	18,886
2016	1,124	-1,068	18,942
2017	888	-1,414	18,416

### Construction Industry

295. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if she will review the workings and effectiveness of the Construction Contracts Act 2013; if she is satisfied that subcontractors are aware of and proactive in enforcing their entitlements with a contractor for payments that are due; her plans to increase awareness of this provision in the Act; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46977/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen):** The Construction Contracts Act, 2013 came into force for certain construction contracts entered into after the 25th July 2016. In advance of commencement, the Department engaged in a national information campaign. The Act applies to both written and oral construction contracts, although some do not fall within its remit, for example, if the value of a contract is not more than €10,000. It also introduced a statutory entitlement to adjudication for parties to a relevant construction contract in circumstances where a payment dispute subsequently arises.

The Act provides important statutory protections for subcontractors in the construction industry. It imposes minimum contractual provisions in relation to payments, particularly the timing of payments and the parties to a relevant construction contract cannot opt out of the provisions of the legislation.

Comprehensive information on the Act is available on the website of the Department at [www.dbei.gov.ie](http://www.dbei.gov.ie). It is important that subcontractors exercise their rights under the legislation to ensure that payment is received for work carried out under a construction contract. Due to the private nature of such contractual arrangements however, it is not possible to accurately assess the extent to which subcontractors are exercising their rights under the legislation.

The Department will continue both to monitor the effectiveness of the legislation and to consult with key construction sector stakeholders as to its ongoing impact.

### Departmental Staff Data

296. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of senior positions held by both men and women, respectively, in her Department. [46993/18]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Staffing resources are an ongoing priority to ensure my Department's continued ability to facilitate the wide mission and volume of work in a range of challenging policy areas. This will continue with ongoing day-to-day review of the appropriate staffing mix across my Department in response to known and probable priority areas.

My Department liaises directly with the Public Appointments Service (PAS) and Top-Level Appointments Committee (TLAC) in relation to the filling of posts.

The Secretary General of my Department is one of four Secretaries General leading the delivery of Action 8.5 of the Civil Service Renewal Plan – "To improve gender balance at each level by reviewing supports and policies to ensure these measures are impactful and measurable".

The Civil Service has set an ambitious target to achieve 50/50 gender balance in appointments at senior levels. This is essential to ensure that the Civil Service is reflective of society.

My Department operates an equal opportunity policy to ensure that an equal share of both women and men can compete for and be awarded high visibility positions across the Department and its Offices. In this regard, the Department operates a best fit for the job policy.

The ratio of Male to Female at senior grades in the Department are set out in the table below.

Grade	Male	Female	Total
Secretary General	0	1	1
Deputy Secretary (equivalent)	1	0	1
Assistant Secretary	4	3	7
Assistant Secretary (equivalent)	3	2	5
Principal Officer	25	15	40
Principal Officer (equivalent)	10	11	21
Assistant Principal Officer	64	57	121
Assistant Principal Officer (equivalents)	12	5	17
Total	119	94	213

### Science Foundation Ireland Expenditure

297. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the reason funds via Science Foundation Ireland have been withdrawn from a centre (details

supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47019/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy John Halligan):** Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) is an agency of the Department which supports excellent and impactful research aligned to enterprise needs. As part of its portfolio of programmes, it funds a number of Research Centres which link scientists and engineers in partnerships across academia and industry to address crucial research questions.

The first seven of SFI's Research Centres were established in 2013. SFI undertook a pre-planned international review process at the four-year stage of these centres. As part of this, the seven Research Centres were invited to submit proposals for future funding from mid-2019 (i.e. the end of their first phase of funding).

The Board of Science Foundation Ireland followed the recommendation of an International Oversight Review Panel not to provide a new term of funding for the INFANT Research Centre at this time. Instead, it is to be invited to submit a new application for funding to the next open competition for SFI Research Centre funding, likely in 2020. The reasons underpinning the recommendation of the International Oversight Review Panel have been shared with the INFANT Research Centre.

### IDA Ireland Data

298. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the status of regional IDA site visits up to the third quarter of 2018, by county; and the vacant IDA properties by county in tabular form. [47034/18]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** As Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, regional development is a key priority of mine and I am focused on maintaining existing jobs while also increasing the level of employment and investment in every county in Ireland. IDA Ireland continues to highlight the benefits of expanding or locating in regional areas to its client base. It is important to remember, however, that the final decision as to where to invest always rests with the company concerned. It is also the case that site visit activity does not necessarily reflect investment potential, as almost 70% of all new foreign direct investment (FDI) comes from existing IDA client companies.

Site visits nevertheless do represent an important tool through which investors can be encouraged to invest in regional areas and the IDA always does its utmost to ensure that investors consider all potential locations when visiting Ireland.

The availability of an adequate supply of marketable serviced land and buildings in advance of demand is a key element in the IDA's ability to compete for mobile FDI. The availability of property solutions allows projects to begin at an earlier date by diminishing much of the difficulties associated with land acquisition, planning and construction. It is, therefore, an important means by which the IDA can encourage and attract new investors to the country and especially to regional Ireland.

The tables below respectively set out the total number of site visits by county for the first three quarters of 2018 and details on available IDA properties countrywide.

**Table A: IDA Ireland site visits by County Qs 1-3, 2018**

County	Q1 2018	Q2 2018	Q3 2018
Dublin	69	72	68

County	Q1 2018	Q2 2018	Q3 2018
Kildare	4	0	1
Meath	1	3	1
Wicklow	0	1	0
Laois	4	2	1
Longford	0	0	2
Offaly	0	1	3
Westmeath	3	9	6
Clare	4	3	2
Limerick	8	7	10
Tipperary	1	1	2
Cavan	0	1	0
Louth	6	6	3
Monaghan	0	1	0
Donegal	0	3	3
Leitrim	2	3	0
Sligo	5	3	4
Carlow	1	2	0
Kilkenny	0	2	1
Waterford	5	9	5
Wexford	0	1	2
Cork	10	14	21
Kerry	0	5	3
Galway	10	20	12
Mayo	2	2	3
Roscommon	0	1	1
Total	135	172	154

**Table B: List of IDA Properties by county**

County	Town	Private	Private	Private	IDA	IDA	IDA
		finance	finance	finance	Owned	Owned	Owned
		Occupied	Marketable	Total	Occupied	Marketable	Total
Cork	Ballygallan	0	0	0	0	3	3
Cork	Kilbarry	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cork	Wilton	1	0	1	0	0	0
Cork	Skibbereen	1	2	3	0	0	0
Dublin	Clon-shaugh	0	0	0	2	0	2
Dublin	Tallaght	0	0	0	1	0	1
Dublin	Poppintree	0	0	0	0	0	0
Galway	Loughrea	0	0	0	1	0	1
Galway	Mervue	0	0	0	1	0	1
Galway	Round-stone	0	0	0	1	2	3
Galway	Parkmore	0	0	0	0	0	0
Galway	Tuam	0	0	0	0	0	0

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		Private finance	Private finance	Private finance	IDA Owned	IDA Owned	IDA Owned
County	Town	Occupied	Marketable	Total	Occupied	Marketable	Total
Kerry	Killarney	0	0	0	3	2	5
Kerry	Tralelee	0	0	0	0	1	1
Kildare	Newbridge	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mayo	Ballina	0	0	0	0	1	1
Mayo	Castlebar	0	0	0	1	0	1
Offaly	Tullamore	0	0	0	1	0	1
Sligo	Finisklin	0	0	0	1	1	2
Tipperary	Nenagh	0	0	0	1	0	1
Waterford	Johnstown	0	0	0	0	0	0
Waterford	Waterford	0	0	0	0	3	3
Westmeath	Athlone	0	0	0	1	1	2
Westmeath	Mullingar	0	0	0	0	0	0
Wexford	Enniscorthy	1	1	2	0	0	0
Wexford	Whitemills	0	0	0	0	0	0
Wicklow	Arklow	0	0	0	0	2	2
	Total	3	3	6	14	16	30

### Local Enterprise Offices Data

299. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the local enterprise offices located in each county; the number of staff that work in each office in 2018, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47128/18]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The LEOs are the ‘first-stop-shop’ for advice and guidance, financial assistance and other supports if you intend to start or grow your own business.

The LEOs can offer direct grant aid to microenterprises (10 employees or fewer) in the manufacturing and internationally traded services sectors which, over time, have the potential to develop into strong export entities. Subject to certain eligibility criteria, the LEOs can provide financial assistance within three main categories: Feasibility Grants; Priming Grants and Business Development Grants for existing businesses that want to expand.. In addition, there is a Technical Assistance Grant available for eligible micro-exporter applicants who are seeking to explore alternative markets for their product or service.

For anyone interested in starting or growing a business, the LEOs may be able to offer ‘soft’ support in the form of training (e.g. a Start Your Own Business course); a mentor to work with the business proposer; or targeted programmes such as Lean for Micro (to help boost business productivity and competitiveness).

The LEOs will continue to support and promote micro-enterprises throughout the country, the number of staff that work in each office in 2018 is detailed below:

### Local Enterprise Office Staffing 2018

-	No. of LEO Staff (note 1)	DBEI/EI Funded Graduates (note 2)	Total LEO Staff Complement
Carlow	4	0	4

-	No. of LEO Staff (note 1)	DBEI/EI Funded Graduates (note 2)	Total LEO Staff Complement
Cavan	4	1	5
Clare	5	1	6
Cork City	7	1	8
Cork North & West	8	0	8
Cork South	6	1	7
Donegal	5	1	6
Dublin City	10	1	11
Dublin South	8	0	8
Dún Laoghaire/Rath- down	7	0	7
Fingal	8	1	9
Galway	7	1	8
Kerry	5	1	6
Kildare	7	0	7
Kilkenny	5	0	5
Laois	4	1	5
Leitrim	4	1	5
Limerick	8	1	9
Longford	4	1	5
Louth	5	0	5
Mayo	5	1	6
Meath	7	0	7
Monaghan	4	0	4
Offaly	4	1	5
Roscommon	4	1	5
Sligo	4	1	5
Tipperary	7	0	7
Waterford	7	0	7
Westmeath	5	1	6
Wexford	5	0	5
Wicklow	5	0	5
Total	178	18	196

### Note

1. This is the staff complement as agreed between the County and City Managers Association, the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government and Enterprise Ireland.

2. Graduates funded by Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation/Enterprise Ireland that started a 3-year contract in the LEOs in mid-2018.

### Local Enterprise Offices Data

300. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innova-

tion the budget allocation for each individual local enterprise office; the value of grants provided by each office in 2017, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47129/18]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The LEOs are the ‘first-stop-shop’ for advice and guidance, financial assistance and other supports if you intend to start or grow your own business.

The LEOs can offer direct grant aid to microenterprises (10 employees or fewer) in the manufacturing and internationally traded services sectors which, over time, have the potential to develop into strong export entities. Subject to certain eligibility criteria, the LEOs can provide financial assistance within three main categories: Feasibility Grants; Priming Grants and Business Development Grants for existing businesses that want to expand. In addition, there is a Technical Assistance Grant available for eligible micro-exporter applicants who are seeking to explore alternative markets for their product or service.

For anyone interested in starting or growing a business, the LEOs may be able to offer ‘soft’ support in the form of training (e.g. a Start Your Own Business course); a mentor to work with the business proposer; or targeted programmes such as Lean for Micro (to help boost business productivity and competitiveness).

The LEOs will continue to support and promote micro-enterprises throughout the country the table below details the budget allocation for each individual local enterprise office; the value of grants provided by each office in 2017

**Local Enterprise Office Budget 2017 & Grants Approved 2017**

LEO	2017 Budget Allocation € (notes 1-4)	2017 Grant Approved Amount €(note 5)
Carlow	861,927	449,411
Cavan	741,251	473,225
Clare	882,971	664,008
Cork City	1,011,136	519,562
Cork North & West	1,372,223	783,770
Cork South	1,197,217	403,500
Donegal	1,092,856	683,462
Dublin City	1,517,035	966,896
Dublin South	1,114,094	648,368
Dún Laoghaire/Rathdown	1,055,007	821,122
Fingal	1,129,795	886,440
Galway	1,211,286	680,371
Kerry	877,972	361,464
Kildare	1,063,287	934,625
Kilkenny	965,151	452,576
Laois	746,012	390,634
Leitrim	739,808	252,296
Limerick	1,504,573	891,103
Longford	714,419	294,585
Louth	779,899	453,200
Mayo	883,450	387,343

LEO	2017 Budget Allocation € (notes 1-4)	2017 Grant Approved Amount €(note 5)
Meath	944,242	526,799
Monaghan	814,752	432,105
Offaly	765,869	368,827
Roscommon	742,070	548,214
Sligo	825,987	533,466
Tipperary	1,166,190	969,581
Waterford	1,265,667	596,165
Westmeath	1,079,804	456,720
Wexford	815,849	411,723
Wicklow	779,370	598,781
Totals	30,661,168	17,840,342

**Notes:**

The Local Enterprise Office Budget allocation was collated based on the formal allocations of funding offered to each Local Authority i.e. where a funding letter of offer was issued to a Local Authority.

It does not include allocations to LEOs to procure services or run programmes on behalf of the network of LEOs

The Local Enterprise Office Budget allocation includes the Administration (pay and non-pay) allocation.

It does not include the LEO Innovation Investment Fund as this was a competitive scheme which did not include a specific allocation to each LEO.

The 2017 Grants Approved Amount includes the LEO Innovation Investment Fund approved amount.

### **Pharmaceutical Sector**

301. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her views on proposed changes to Regulation (EC) No. 469/2009 to allow for a SPC manufacturing waiver; her views on this initiative; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47188/18]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Supplementary Protection Certificates (SPCs) are an intellectual property right that serve as an extension to a patent right. They apply to specific pharmaceutical and plant protection products that have been authorised for use in the market by regulatory authorities.

Medicinal products require market authorisation before they can be sold commercially and this process can take a number of years. SPCs compensate the patentee for this loss of time, by extending the protection conferred by the patent beyond its 20-year term for a period of up to five years.

In its 2015 Single Market Strategy (SMS), the Commission indicated it would explore a recalibration of certain aspects of patent and SPC protection to remove any unintended consequences which make the EU pharmaceutical sector less competitive compared to non-EU pharmaceutical manufacturers.

The proposal will allow EU based manufacturers of generics and bio-similars to produce medicines for export purposes only to non-EU countries where SPC protection never existed or has expired.

Studies carried out by the Commission indicate that an SPC manufacturing waiver could allow the European generic and biosimilar medicines industries to create thousands of high-tech jobs in the EU.

Officials of my Department are actively engaged in ongoing discussions on this matter at working party level in Brussels.

### **Hospital Consultant Remuneration**

302. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health his plans to review the policy on the reduced pay level that applies to medical consultants recruited since 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46565/18]

**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 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.

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.

### **Medicinal Products Availability**

303. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health his plans to make Free-Style Libre available to persons over 21 years of age with type 1 diabetes (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46936/18]

**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.

### **Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Data**

304. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the number on waiting lists for CAMHS by county in tabular form; the number waiting zero to three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12, 12 to 18 and more than 18 months, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46954/18]

**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

305. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied) in order that a clinical and medical assessment be carried out [47028/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** My officials have been in contact with the Deputy's office seeking further details in order to respond to the question raised.

On receipt of this clarification I will refer the query to the HSE, as this is a service matter, and ask the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

### Garda Recruitment

306. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE-funded community alert development officer position in the western Garda region that has been vacant since July 2017 has been filled; if full funding has been provided to an organisation (details supplied) for this post in 2017; if full funding has been provided to the organisation for this post in 2018; if so, the steps he will take to ensure that the post is filled or recoup the funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46475/18]

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

### Qualifications Recognition

307. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Health the timeframe for bringing forward amendments to section 38(2)(b) of the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005, as amended, to accept qualification recognition decisions made here under directives which preceded Directive 2005/36/EC, that is, Directives 89/48 and-or 92/51; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46482/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Health and Social Care Professionals (Amendment) Bill 2018 (No. 106 of 2018), which provides for the amendment of Section 38 of the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005, was initiated in the Seanad on 27 September 2018 and completed its passage through the House on 7 November 2018. It is expected to begin its passage through Dáil Éireann in the coming weeks.

When enacted, applicants for registration who have evidence that their qualification has been recognised by the Minister or by a body acting on behalf of the State prior to the introduction of statutory registration for the relevant profession, will be considered to hold an "approved qualification" under the Act. This will mean that there will be no requirement for reassessment of the qualification.

### Departmental Meetings

308. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health the policy in relation to the need for note taking when Ministers and-or Ministers of State meet business and other leaders; the way in which this policy is outlined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46493/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** It is custom and practice for meetings attended by my officials in the Department to be noted as a matter of course.

### **Primary Care Centres Provision**

309. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health the progress of a project (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46500/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As the HSE has responsibility for the provision, along with the maintenance and operation of Primary Care Centres and other Primary Care facilities, the Executive has been asked to reply directly to the Deputy.

### **Home Help Service**

310. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if additional home help hours will be allocated to a person (details supplied) in view of the person's deteriorating health; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46501/18]

**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 Support Services**

311. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46507/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** I wish to draw the Deputy's attention to the report of the Task Force on Personalised Budgets, which I published on 17 July 2018. The report is available on the Department of Health's website. The report sets out how personalised budgets could work as a funding mechanism for people with a disability, providing them with greater choice and control over the services and supports they receive.

Having reviewed the national and international research evidence and consulted with service users and their families, the report of the Task Force advocates three different models of how personalised budgets might be accessed by people with disabilities:

1. Person-managed fund, often referred to as Direct payments;
2. Co managed with the service provider; and
3. Broker managed fund.

The rationale for several models is a recognition of the fact that no two people are the same and therefore, 'one size does not fit all'. The Task Force recommended that the Department of

Health and the HSE should establish demonstration projects to test the delivery of personalised budgets. These demonstration projects will test the three models with a view to identifying the best approach to the wider roll-out of these payment models following the initial demonstration phase.

The Department of Health, NDA and the HSE are in the process of designing the demonstration projects, and the Department's website will be kept updated with information on the roll out of the demonstration projects as it becomes available.

### **Home Care Packages Administration**

312. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health when a home care package will be approved for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46510/18]

**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 Procedures**

313. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the continuing under-reporting of University Hospital Waterford cardiac catheterisation activity due to the manual translation of data from the University Hospital Waterford cardiac dashboard TOMCAT system to the national HIPE data system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46520/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this is an operational issue, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to you directly as soon as possible.

### **Hospital Staff Recruitment**

314. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health his plans to recruit an interventional cardiologist as a matter of urgency in order to commence interventional cardiac catheterisation activity at the relocatable laboratory at University Hospital Waterford in the interest of patient safety (details supplied). [46521/18]

315. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health the reason the relocatable modular laboratory which arrived at University Hospital Waterford in September 2018 was disabled by the removal of equipment prior to its arrival here thus preventing it from providing an emergency backup service to the permanent catheterisation laboratory at UHW (details supplied). [46522/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 314 and 315 together.

As the Deputy is aware, a mobile cath lab has been deployed at University Hospital Waterford (UHW) since October 2017 to conduct diagnostic cardiac procedures. In August, it was replaced by the provider with a relocatable cath lab, operating on the same basis as the mobile cath lab, i.e. it is managed by three diagnostic cardiologists, operates three days per week, and carries out diagnostic cardiology procedures only. The contractual arrangements in place at UHW are for the provision of a unit capable of carrying out diagnostic cardiac procedures only. There are no plans to provide interventional services in the relocatable cath lab.

As the Deputy is also aware that 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, which provides interventional services, should be extended. 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/relocatable cath lab has been in place since October 2017 which has improved access and reduced waiting times for patients.

While the hospital group experienced difficulties recruiting the necessary staff to facilitate the expansion in hours of operation, I am pleased to note that five staff (Grade IV Admin, Porter, Senior Cardiac Physiologist, Senior Radiographer and Staff Nurse) have now been recruited on an 8am to 8pm working day basis. Documentation is also being finalised for the recruitment of a 1 WTE consultant cardiologist required to facilitate the provision of additional operating hours.

### **Mental Health Services Provision**

316. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if therapy will be provided for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46526/18]

**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.

### **Long-Term Illness Scheme Coverage**

317. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health his plans to extend the availability of the FreeStyle Libre on the long-term illness scheme to include those aged over 21 years of age with type 1 diabetes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46539/18]

**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.

### **Long-Term Illness Scheme Coverage**

318. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the reason the availability of the FreeStyle Libre on the long term illness scheme did not include those aged over 21 years of age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46540/18]

**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.

### **Long-Term Illness Scheme Coverage**

319. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if he will meet with organisers of the campaign to extend the availability of FreeStyle Libre to those aged over 21 years of age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46541/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As requests for meetings are dealt with by my office, the organisers may wish to contact my office directly on this matter.

### **Ambulance Service Data**

320. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health the number of calls responded to in each ambulance base in County Mayo in 2017 and the first six months of 2018; the average response time in each month in each base; the number of occasions an ambulance was used from outside the base to respond to calls in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46542/18]

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

### **Air Ambulance Service Data**

321. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health the number of occasions by month in 2017 and in the first six months of 2018, that an air ambulance was used to respond to calls in County Mayo in tabular form. [46543/18]

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

### **Rural Practice Allowance Scheme**

322. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the timeframe in respect of a review of documentation (details supplied) already submitted to the National Contracts Office; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46556/18]

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

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

323. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) can expect to receive an appointment at University Hospital Kerry; and if he will make a state-

ment on the matter. [46570/18]

**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.

### **Mental Health Services Staff**

324. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health when the registration board for counselling and psychotherapy under the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005 will be operational; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46579/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Earlier this year I signed the regulations to designate the professions of counsellor and psychotherapist under the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005. The next step will be the appointment of the 13 members of the registration board. The Public Appointments Service carried out a recruitment campaign to identify suitable candidates for my consideration. Twenty seven candidates have been identified through this process which concluded in late September. I will be considering the panel of applicants shortly with the intention of appointing the 13 members of the registration board before the end of the year.

Once appointed, the registration board will begin the substantial programme of work to draft the various bye-laws to allow the board to establish its registers. The board will also be requested to advise myself and the Health and Social Care Professionals Council on a range of issues pertaining to the regulation of the professions, including minimum standards of education and training and the titles to be protected.

### **Health Services**

325. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health the criteria that need to be met in order for a child to qualify for a rebate for bifocal glasses; if the percentage rebate awarded is equal across the board for all children; if not, if there is a varying rate; if so, the factors that determine the varying rate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46585/18]

**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.

### **Home Care Packages Administration**

326. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health the status of a home care application by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46594/18]

**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.

### **Industrial Relations**

327. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health if he will engage with an organisation (details supplied) which recently commenced phased industrial action; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46595/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** SIPTU is recognised by the HSE and has negotiating rights for ambulance grades employed by the Executive. As a result, the HSE deducts subscriptions at source for those ambulance staff that are members of that union. However, the National Ambulance Service Representative Association (NASRA) is not recognised by the HSE and, therefore, does not have negotiating rights.

Whilst individuals have a right to membership of any trade union, if they choose to join an association which is not recognised by their employer, such membership is not facilitated by their employer. This means that the HSE does not facilitate deduction of union subscriptions for this particular Association.

In relation to the phased industrial action, I can confirm that the National Ambulance Service are monitoring the situation closely and have put contingency plans in place to mitigate the risk of any potential disruption to service.

### **Health Services Provision**

328. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the support facilities available in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46599/18]

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

### **Hospital Services**

329. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if Letterkenny University Hospital is party to a contract with a company with respect to the provision of laundry services; if so, the name of the company; the value of the contract; the duration of the contract; the sum paid to the company in respect of the services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46603/18]

**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.

## **Medicinal Products Availability**

330. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Health if the case of a person (details supplied) in County Sligo will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46604/18]

**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 drug 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 to the MMP, making a clear clinical case for the patient. Information for patients and practitioners is on the HSE MMP website at: [hse.ie/yourmedicines](http://hse.ie/yourmedicines).

The outcome of an application or an appeal for reimbursement of lidocaine patches is a matter between the MMP and the treating clinician. The Deputy will appreciate that, as Minister for Health, I cannot intervene in individual cases.

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.

## **Autism Support Services**

331. **Deputy Michael Lowry** asked the Minister for Health if specialist autism specific respite support services will be developed in 2019 for persons in County Tipperary (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46613/18]

**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.

### **Drug and Alcohol Task Forces**

332. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide a report from the Minister for State with responsibility for the drugs and alcohol strategy on actions proposed in respect of his commitment to support the continuation of community action on alcohol projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46614/18]

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

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

The national drugs strategy, *Reducing Harm Supporting Recovery*, commits to the establishment of an initiative to deliver an integrated public health approach to drugs and alcohol including the promotion of evidence based approaches to mobilising community action on alcohol.

In June, I announced funding of €1 million to support and enhance services addressing drug and alcohol misuse. This money will be allocated in quarter four of 2018.

Implementing the health-led national drugs strategy continues to be a Government priority. Within the increased envelope of resources available in Budget 2019 for health services, my intention is to prioritise funding for community drug and alcohol projects in task force areas of greatest need, additional drug and alcohol midwives working with vulnerable mothers-to-be and enhanced treatment services to address existing and emerging needs.

The Department of Health is working with the Health Service Executive to finalise the 2019 National Service Plan. Drug and Alcohol Task Forces will be notified of their 2019 funding allocations once the service plan has been approved by the Minister for Health.

### **HSE Incident Management**

333. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE 2018 incident management framework document designed to provide health and social care services with a practical and proportionate approach to the management of incidents is mandatory for all staff across all HSE community health organisation, CHO, areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46615/18]

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

## **Assisted Human Reproduction**

334. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Health the legislative provisions in place in the area of surrogacy here. [46616/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** At present, there are no specific legislative provisions dealing with surrogacy in Ireland. However, as you will be aware, the Government approved the drafting of a Bill on assisted human reproduction (AHR) and associated areas of research in October last year, which includes provisions for surrogacy.

The specific provisions relating to surrogacy are outlined in Part 6 of the General Scheme of the Assisted Human Reproduction Bill 2017. These provisions outline the specific conditions under which surrogacy in Ireland will be permitted, including a requirement for all surrogacy agreements to be pre-authorised by the AHR Regulatory Authority. The Scheme also sets out a court-based mechanism through which the parentage of a child born through surrogacy may be transferred from the surrogate (and her husband, if applicable) to the intending parent(s).

The General Scheme is published on my Department's website. The Joint Committee on Health is currently conducting a review of the General Scheme of the Assisted Human Reproduction Bill 2017 as part of the pre-legislative scrutiny process, which began in January of this year. The review is on-going and the Committee intends to publish its report early in 2019.

The introduction of legislation in relation to AHR and associated research is a priority for me and the process of drafting this Bill will be completed in conjunction with the Office of the Attorney General. However, it is not possible at this time to give a definitive timeline for the completion of the draft Bill and its subsequent passage through the Houses of the Oireachtas.

The aim of the AHR legislation is to promote and ensure the health and safety of parents, others involved in the process (such as donors and surrogate mothers) and, most importantly, the children who will be born as a result of AHR. Consideration of the welfare and best interests of children born through AHR is a key principle underpinning the Scheme.

## **Alcohol Advertising**

335. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if half-time matches involving minors at sports grounds will be impacted by the Public Health (Alcohol) Act 2018 being enacted (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46621/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Public Health (Alcohol) Act prohibits alcohol advertising in or on a sports area during sports events. The sports area, under the legislation includes a playing pitch or area, a swimming pool, an athletics or dog or horse racing track or a motor racing track. The Act also prohibits alcohol advertising at an event aimed particularly at children or at an event at which the majority of participants or competitors are children.

Those provisions will apply from 12 November 2021. As a breach of those provisions is a criminal offence under the Act it would not be appropriate to comment on individual examples.

## **Nursing Staff Recruitment**

336. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health if funding is in place and if the recruitment process has commenced for the position of a multiple sclerosis clinical nurse spe-

cialist in University Hospital Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46623/18]

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

### **Services for People with Disabilities**

337. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if a review will be carried out on the request to secure independent living for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46629/18]

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

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

### **HSE Planning**

338. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the details of the winter initiative plan in place for Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda in order to cope with projected surge in persons accessing acute and step-down services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46632/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** My Department is working with the HSE to ensure the most effective response to the winter challenges to unscheduled care provision and I expect to be in a position to outline the details of the Winter Plan 2018/19 very shortly.

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 Overcrowding**

339. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the additional measures being put in place in each community health organisation, CHO, area further to recent comments by a union (details supplied) warning that 2018 is forecast to be the worst year ever for hospital patient overcrowding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46633/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** My Department is working closely with the HSE to ensure the most effective response to this winter within current capacity and resources. As part of this process, the HSE requested singular integrated winter plans from Hospital Groups and Community Health Organisations in June 2018.

€10 million in additional funding has been allocated in 2018 primarily for provision of supports to get patients home from hospital, where appropriate, before the end of the year. My

Department sanctioned the release of €5 million of this additional funding to support the deployment of social and primary care measures to support this transition in October.

In addition, I have requested, in the context of the National Service Plan, that the HSE plan activity in 2019 to manage critical demand pressures, most particularly in respect of increased attendance at emergency departments. This planning will include activity in hospitals, primary care and community care to ensure that the system is working at full capacity throughout busy periods.

Winter Planning is at an advanced stage and once completed, my Department and the HSE will be in a position to outline the integrated plans by Hospital Group and CHO.

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**

340. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons awaiting appointments in respect of cataract treatment in County Louth; and the number waiting for six, 12, 24 and in excess of 24 months, respectively, in tabular form. [46634/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Reducing waiting time for patients for hospital operations and procedures is a key priority for the Government and €50 million was provided to the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) in 2018 to secure treatment for patients. The Inpatient/Day Case Action Plan, published last April outlines the combined impact of HSE and NTPF activity in 2018.

The Action Plan places a particular focus on cataract surgery and includes a commitment that the NTPF will provide 5,000 cataract procedures to patients. In addition, the NTPF commits to offer treatment to all clinically suitable patients waiting more than 9 months for a cataract procedure.

The NTPF advise that as of the end of October there were 2 patients waiting for a cataract procedure in Louth County Hospital and Our Lady's of Lourdes Hospital. There is a standard care pathway for patients attending for cataract treatment within the Louth and Drogheda area whereby the patient is assessed by the Community Ophthalmologist, and following assessment, and if deemed to require surgery, are placed directly onto the inpatient/daycase waiting list for cataract surgery at the Mater Misericordiae Hospital, Dublin.

### **Cross-Border Health Initiatives**

341. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons that have accessed cataract treatment from County Louth under the cross-border healthcare directive scheme in each year since 2016. [46635/18]

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

### **Psychological Services Waiting Lists**

342. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of children waiting to access psychology services for community health organisation, CHO, area 8 and specifically for County Louth; the number of these children who have been waiting three to six months, six to 12 months and 12 to 15 months, respectively, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46636/18]

**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.

### **Cannabis for Medicinal Use**

343. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the process a person must follow to access cannabis oil in circumstances in which the person suffers with epilepsy. [46639/18]

344. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the timeline for cannabis oil to be allowed for persons with epilepsy. [46640/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 343 and 344 together.

Under the Misuse of Drugs legal framework, it is open to a medical practitioner to apply for a Ministerial licence for medical cannabis for the treatment of a patient under his or her care.

I would strongly advise that the Deputy and any persons interested in the use of cannabis for medical purposes to consult the Department of Health website which contains detailed information on the matter, including information on the types of cannabis products and the specified medical conditions for which they may be used to treat, as well as clinical guidance on its use. This information can be found at the following website address:

[health.gov.ie/blog/publications/cannabis-for-medical-use](http://health.gov.ie/blog/publications/cannabis-for-medical-use).

Details of who may apply for a Ministerial licence and how to apply can also be found on this section of the Department's website at: [health.gov.ie](http://health.gov.ie).

Having consulted the website, patients, healthcare professionals or others who require further details or clarifications are invited to contact my Department directly for further assistance.

### **Transport Support Scheme**

345. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** 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. [46642/18]

**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.

### **Long-Term Illness Scheme**

346. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health his plans to expand the long-term illness scheme to include mental illness beyond 16 years of age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46646/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Long Term Illness (LTI) Scheme was established under Section 59(3) of the Health Act, 1970 (as amended). Regulations were made in 1971, 1973 and 1975 specifying the conditions covered by the LTI Scheme, including mental illness in a person under 16 years of age.

There are no plans at present to amend these regulations.

### **Health Services**

347. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for a person (details supplied) will be scheduled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46655/18]

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

### **Home Help Service Provision**

348. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Health when home help hours will be pro-

vided for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46656/18]

**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.

### **Medical Aids and Appliances Provision**

349. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Health if he will make FreeStyle Libre available under the long term illness scheme for all type 1 diabetics; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46668/18]

**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.

### **General Practitioner Services Provision**

350. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the appointment of a general practitioner to a surgery (details supplied) in County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46669/18]

**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.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

351. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a cataract operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46670/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

### **Orthodontic Services Provision**

352. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the status of the case of a person (details supplied); and when this person can expect an appointment for orthodontic treatment under the Health Service Executive. [46681/18]

**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 Appointments Status**

353. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) has been waiting so long for an appointment in the Mater Misericordiae University Hospital; the reason many of the person's appointments have been cancelled in the past; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46682/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

354. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be seen at University Hospital Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46705/18]

**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.

## Hospitals Data

355. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health the number of places available for day care services per day in the Sacred Heart Hospital, Roscommon; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46713/18]

356. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons attending the day care services on a daily basis that are available in the Sacred Heart Hospital, Roscommon; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46714/18]

357. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons who attended the Sacred Heart Hospital, Roscommon on a daily basis in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46715/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 355 to 357, inclusive, together.

As these are service matters I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

## Hospital Staff Data

358. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Health the service location of each neuro-radiologist positions occupied or vacant across the State, in tabular form. [46716/18]

359. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Health the service location of each radiologist position occupied or vacant across the State, in tabular form. [46717/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 358 and 359 together.

I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy on this matter.

## Health Services

360. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a matter (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46721/18]

**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.

## HSE Staff Data

361. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health the number of social workers appointed to cover the Connemara south and west regions; the number of vacancies; the number of persons awaiting allocation to a social worker in the region by the priority of the case and waiting time, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46725/18]

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

## **Health Services**

362. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment will be expedited with an organisation for a person (details supplied) who has been on the waiting list for two years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46741/18]

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

## **Nursing Home Services**

363. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) can expect to receive a bed in a nursing home or a community hospital. [46742/18]

**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.

## **Long-Term Illness Scheme Eligibility**

364. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Health if he will make FreeStyle Libre available under the long-term illness scheme for all type 1 diabetics; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46758/18]

**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.

## **HSE Planning**

365. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health to outline the winter plan that has been put in place to deal with the expected winter vomiting bug at University Hospital Waterford; and the expected demand for extra capacity for winter 2018. [46759/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** My Department is working with the HSE to ensure the most effective response to the winter challenges to unscheduled care provision and I expect to be in a position to outline the details of the Winter Plan 2018/19 very shortly.

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 Services**

366. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health to outline his plans for extra bed capacity in the short term at University Hospital Waterford. [46760/18]

367. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health to outline his plans for extra bed

capacity in the long term at University Hospital Waterford. [46761/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 366 and 367 together.

Increasing capacity is a priority for the Government. Over the past 12 months, an additional 240 beds have been opened, including 18 beds at University Hospital Waterford (UHW).

As a first step towards the implementation of the Capacity Plan, €10 million in funding is being made available in 2019 to increase bed capacity. My Department is currently in discussion 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.

The selection and opening of beds on specific sites in 2019 and future years will be considered as part of the annual estimates and service planning process, and subject to financial, operation, human resource and policy considerations and priorities.

### Hospital Services

368. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health to outline his plans to expedite discharge from acute hospitals due to the fact that 136,239 delayed discharges were registered at various hospitals in 2018; his views on whether delayed discharges are caused in some instances due to the lack of home care supports being provided in community home settings; and his further views on the fact that the waiting list has now reached 6,000 persons waiting for home care supports. [46762/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** In recent years there has been a sustained focus on reducing delayed discharges and enabling patients to be discharged from hospital as soon as possible after the acute phase of their treatment has been completed. The additional funding provision received has made a significant impact on delayed discharges, reducing them from a high of 832 in October 2014 to a low of 436 in 2016. At the end of 2017 there were 471 delayed discharges. The HSE has reported that, as of 6 November 2018, there are 618 cases of delayed discharges. Following Budget 2019, an additional €10 million has been provided in 2018 to anticipate and manage critical demand pressures on the health service. The HSE has been requested to prioritise social care measures, with a focus on measures to support older people to transition from acute care to the most appropriate setting.

Over the past number of years, improving access to home support has been a priority for Government, this can be seen by the way that the home support budget has grown from €306 million in 2015 to €418 million in 2018. Overall, the 2018 HSE National Service Plan provides for over 17 million home support hours to be delivered to 50,500 people at any time. In addition, a further 156,000 hours, relating to adverse weather funding, were provided from Spring 2018. Intensive Home Care Packages will be delivered to approximately 235 people at any time and will deliver approximately a further 360,000 hours in the full year. Despite this significant level of service provision demand continues to rise. All those waiting are assessed and provided with a service if appropriate, as soon as possible having regard to their assessed needs. Transitional Care, if appropriate, is arranged through utilising patient and family choice of provider. The total number of transitional care approvals to date in 2018 is 9,595.

In relation to delayed discharges, I established a working group to undertake an independent expert review of delayed discharges in acute hospitals. This review was requested to focus on the effectiveness and consistency of current data collection, collation and reporting and consider how the measurement and management of delayed discharges could be improved. The report

was provided to me on 1st November, and I and my officials will now consider the content of same.

Discussions between the Department and the Health Service Executive in relation to National Service Planning for next year are well underway.

### **Cyberbullying Issues**

369. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health if he has been in contact with the Minister for Justice and Equality with regard to the mental health impact from cyberbullying on the Internet; his plans to bring forward legislation regarding the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46771/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** The Action Plan on Online Safety, launched by An Taoiseach on 11 July last, recognises that online safety is not the responsibility of any one Department, but that many Departments have a role to play. The Action Plan sets out 25 Actions and Departments responsible for their respective delivery. A Sponsors Group has recently been established to drive implementation of the Action Plan. This is chaired by the Department of Education & Skills and comprise five other key Government Departments; Children and Youth Affairs, Justice and Equality; Communications, Climate Action and Environment; Business, Enterprise and Innovation; and Health.

I have made my views and concerns know to several other Ministers and the Taoiseach in relation the effects of cyber bullying and social media generally on mental health. It is a matter for each Department to consider recommendations in the context of the implementation of the Action Plan over 2018-19, and their wider policy remits. Issues collectively relating to tackling posting and removal of harmful material online, possible legislation, or any other relevant issues will be progressed in the context of the work of the Sponsorship Group over the next eighteen months or so.

The Department of Health and the HSE recognises the importance of Internet Safety, with several initiatives within the health sector supporting this wider objective. These include Connecting for Life, the National Taskforce on Youth Mental Health, and various other Health and Well-Being actions generally, including promoting positive mental health.

Connecting for Life, Ireland's National Strategy to reduce suicide, commits to engaging with online platforms to encourage best practice in reporting around suicidal behaviour, so as to encourage a safer online environment in this area.

The Programme for Partnership Government (2016) committed to the establishment of a National Taskforce on Youth Mental Health "to consider how best to introduce and teach resilience, coping mechanisms, greater awareness to children and young people, and how to access support services voluntarily at a young age."

The Task Force process came to a conclusion last summer and its final set of recommendations were published in December. The recommendations include actions in areas such as consultation and advocacy; awareness and training; accessibility and alignment of mental health services; and improving knowledge through research online youth mental health supports.

Work in this area is further informed by good practice guidelines for the safe delivery of online mental health information and support commissioned by the National Office for Suicide Prevention in 2015.

## Emergency Departments Waiting Times

370. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health to set down the emergency department waiting times greater than 24 hours for persons over 75 years of age in 2018; if the targets were met; if not, the number of persons over 75 years of age who have had a wait of more than 24 hours in an emergency department to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46784/18]

371. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health to set out the number of persons aged 75 years of age or over who experienced an emergency department waiting time of more than 24 hours in 2017 and to date in 2018; the hospital in which this occurred by month; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46785/18]

372. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE target of eliminating emergency department waiting times of greater than 24 hours for persons over 75 years of age was met to date in 2018; the number of persons over 75 years of age who have had to wait for more than 24 hours in an emergency department to date 2018; the hospital in which the wait occurred in each case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46786/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 370 to 372, inclusive, together.

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 have 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.

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

## Disability Services Provision

373. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health to outline the therapy intervention services that will be provided to a child (details supplied) in County Cork who has received a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46789/18]

**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**

374. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health to set out the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46815/18]

**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.

### **Long-Term Illness Scheme Eligibility**

375. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health when the FreeStyle Libre sensor will be made available on the long-term illness scheme for type 1 diabetics; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46818/18]

**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.

### **Medical Card Eligibility**

376. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Health to outline his plans to review the provision of medical cards to those on the long-term illness scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46819/18]

**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.

Medical card provision is based on financial assessment. In accordance with the provisions of the Health Act 1970 (as amended), eligibility for a medical card is determined by the HSE. The Act obliges the HSE to assess whether a person is unable, without due hardship, to arrange general practitioner services for himself or herself and his or her family, having regard to his or her overall financial position and reasonable expenditure and every application must be assessed on that basis. Under the legislation, having a particular illness, in itself, does not establish eligibility for a medical card and therefore the medical conditions of applicants for this scheme are not monitored on that basis. Where the applicant's income is within the income guidelines, a medical card or GP visit card will be awarded.

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. It should be noted, in certain circumstances, the HSE may exercise discretion and grant a medical card, even though an applicant exceeds his or her income threshold, where he or she faces difficult financial circumstances, such as extra costs arising from an illness. Social and medical issues are considered when determining whether undue hardship exists for an individual accessing general practitioner or other medical services. The HSE affords applicants the opportunity to furnish supporting information documentation to fully take account of all the relevant circumstances that may benefit them in the assessment, including medical evidence of cost and necessary expenses.

### **Hospital Equipment**

377. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health when the HSE will fund a replacement thrombectomy machine in Beaumont Hospital (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46821/18]

**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.

### **Vaccination Programme**

378. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health to set out the dates he formally approved each of the human papillomavirus vaccination campaigns in 2017 and 2018, including the Armed for Life and Protect our Future campaigns. [46830/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Immunisation is regarded as one of the safest and most cost-effective of all health care interventions and one of the most effective ways a parent can protect the health of their child. In recent years, the spread of inaccurate information on social media concerning the safety and effectiveness of the HPV vaccine has had an impact on uptake rates. Misinformation has led to a significant drop in uptake rates of the HPV vaccine from 87% in 2014/15; 72% in 2015/16 to 51% in 2016/17.

One of the most important things that can be done is to provide accurate and credible information to enable parents to make a fully informed decision concerning HPV vaccination. The HSE National Immunisation Office has developed a comprehensive range of materials for parents, schools and medical practitioners as part of the immunisation programme.

Each year, at the start of the school term, the HSE runs an awareness campaign for parents to help them access trusted sources of information to encourage them to get their daughters

vaccinated with the HPV vaccine. The HPV vaccine information campaign recommends that parents access trusted sources of information such as the HPV website (hpv.ie) which has been endorsed by the World Health Organization. The information campaign is supported by social and digital media activity as well as local and national radio advertisements. I personally spoke at the launch of the 2017 and 2018 HPV vaccine information campaigns and am fully supportive of the valuable work undertaken by the HSE. From time to time, other HPV campaigns are organised by the HSE using social media (for example, the 2016/17 campaign 'Armed for Life' and 2017/18 campaign 'Protect our Future', both of which were promoted on YouTube).

Figures provided by the HSE indicate that HPV vaccine uptake rates increased in 2017/18 to 65%. This increase is mainly due to a comprehensive communications campaign for parents with support from a large number of key stakeholders, e.g. the HPV alliance which currently has 37 organisations working together (such as the Irish Cancer Society and the Marie Keating Foundation).

While this increase is very welcome, we must continue to work together to get back to where we were once before. As recently as the 2014/15 academic year the uptake rate for HPV was at 87%. The HSE vaccination programme for 2018/19 started in September 2018.

The Government fully supports the HPV immunisation programme and recognises its benefits. We must continue to focus on increasing uptake rates as the best way of reducing cervical cancer. I encourage the parents of all eligible girls to ensure that their daughters receive this important life-saving vaccine.

### **Vaccination Programme**

**379. Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health to identify the person who authorised the HSE not to include the vaccine manufacturers package leaflets in school packs instead substituting these leaflets with the HSE vaccine information leaflets and booklets. [46831/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Health Service Executive is committed to providing accurate information for parents about diseases, the vaccines to prevent them and potential side effects to allow them to choose whether or not to give consent to vaccination.

The HSE's National Immunisation Office has developed a comprehensive range of materials for parents, schools and medical practitioners as part of the immunisation programme. All the information provided to parents about vaccination takes account of the available licensed documentation for each vaccine, the Summary of Product Characteristics and Patient Information Leaflet.

The information is presented in clear and simple language which has been approved by the National Adult Literacy Agency, ensuring that it can be understood by all adults. The Health Information and Quality Authority guide 'Communicating in plain English' (2015), developed in partnership with NALA, states that "one in six people find reading and understanding everyday texts difficult: for example, reading a health leaflet, bus timetable or medicine instructions". Therefore, like other countries providing school immunisation programmes, the Patient Information Leaflet was replaced by an information leaflet which provides the same information on the potential side effects of the vaccine in a manner that ensures that it is easily understood.

Prior to all school immunisation, parents receive an information pack in a sealed package with an information leaflet, consent form and cover letter. The information packs for all immunisations are standardised nationally. The information booklets include information on all the known potential side effects that can occur after each vaccination (as was the case with the

HPV vaccine, Gardasil). Parents are also given contact details for their local immunisation office and advised to speak to a member of the school immunisation team if they have any further questions.

It is not the case that parents are being denied the information on the Patient Information Leaflet. In fact, the HSE parent information leaflet refers parents to the website [hpv.ie](http://hpv.ie) where links to additional information including the licensing documentation, the Summary of Products Characteristics and the Patient Information Leaflet for each vaccine can be found. The HPV website has been endorsed by the World Health Organisation.

### **Dental Services**

380. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the reason HSE funding for dental treatment for all special needs children and adults in south County Dublin has been withdrawn; the way in which special needs children and adults in south County Dublin are expected to receive necessary treatment; if this is a national policy; if the funding will be returned for the 2019 budgetary year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46839/18]

**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 Appointments Status**

381. **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. [46840/18]

**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 Services**

382. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the provision of a second cath lab at University Hospital Waterford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46849/18]

412. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the provision of 24/7 cardiac services at University Hospital Waterford; and if he will make a statement

on the matter. [46968/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 382 and 412 together.

I believe there is merit in the proposal for a modular cath laboratory at University Hospital Waterford (UHW) in order to address waiting times at the hospital and to provide a better service for the people of Waterford and the South East. In July, I requested the HSE to proceed with next steps on the provision of a modular cath lab at UHW, and to revert to my Department with proposed timescales and costings.

In early September, the HSE submitted an options appraisal to the Department setting out alternative options for the location and operation of a second cath lab at UHW. Following this, at a meeting with Oireachtas members from the South East, I announced that a second cath lab would be provided at UHW. In late September, upon further examination of the building and service delivery options, the HSE submitted revised costings and a recommended option to the Department.

The HSE has advised that the project will be reviewed at the next HSE National Capital and Property Steering Committee meeting scheduled for the 13 November 2018.

The Herity report recommended that the current 9 to 5 provision of emergency pPCI services should cease in UHW to allow the hospital focus on the much larger volume of planned work. I asked the Department to address the implications of this recommendation by undertaking a National Review of Specialist Cardiac Services. The aim of this Review is to achieve 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 cath labs and other cardiac services infrastructure nationally will be informed by the outcome of the National Review, which is expected to be complete by June 2019.

### **Hospitals Data**

383. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health when the 60-bed modular unit for University Hospital Limerick will be operational; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46850/18]

384. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health the amount the 60-bed modular unit for University Hospital Limerick will cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46851/18]

385. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health the number of new staff that will be hired to work in the new 60-bed modular unit for University Hospital Limerick; when the recruitment process will start; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46852/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 383 to 385, inclusive, together.

Increasing capacity is a priority for this Government.

My Department is currently in discussion 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.

The selection and opening of beds on specific sites in 2019 and future years will be considered as part of the annual estimates and service planning process, and subject to financial, operation, human resource and policy considerations and priorities.

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

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

386. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal will be called for an operation in Letterkenny University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46869/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

387. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for a person (details supplied) will be expedited. [46870/18]

**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.

## **Rare Diseases**

388. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the creation of the rare disease technology review committee; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46871/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** In June 2018, the HSE Leadership agreed to the appointment of a Technology Review Committee for Rare Diseases which is now operational and has already completed work in relation to orphan products.

The Technology Review Committee for Rare Diseases is responsible for:

1. reviewing proposals received from industry or expert groups in Ireland for funding of new products for rare diseases, or expanded indications for existing products for rare diseases and making recommendations as to the implementation of the relevant recommendations from the National Rare Diseases Plan 2011-2018; and

2. providing contributions to the development of clinical guidelines for relevant Orphan Medicinal Products (OMPs) and supporting the implementation of guidelines in conjunction with the National Drugs Management Programme Office where applicable.

The Committee's recommendations for reimbursement of Orphan Medicinal Products are not intended to replace any part of the existing medicines appraisal or reimbursement process. The recommendations will be informed by a Health Technology Assessment (HTA) submission, or similar, by the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomic Evaluation (NCPE) or other body, Committee discussion, and guidelines developed by the relevant clinical group/Clinical Lead of Centre of Expertise.

The recommendations of this Committee will be based on the degree of unmet clinical need, clinical effectiveness, alternative therapies available, toxicity (where relevant) and the cost effectiveness of the proposed technology. These criteria are based on Schedule 3, Part 3 of the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013.

The creation of the Technology Review Committee for Rare Diseases is intended to provide a greater balance and transparency to the assessment process. The inclusion of two public/patient representatives from a selected panel of three is in recognition of the concept that there is a value of opportunity to have representation on the Committee from this cohort. As well as examining the methodologies for assessing orphan drugs, it will also consider the views of patients, caregivers and at the wider issues that go into health technology assessments.

## **Medicinal Products Reimbursement**

389. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health his plans to change the assessment criteria of orphan drugs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46872/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Oireachtas has put in place a robust legal framework in the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, which gives full statutory powers to the HSE to assess and make decisions on the reimbursement of medicines. The Act specifies the criteria for decisions on the reimbursement of medicines.

The 2013 Act requires the HSE to have regard to both the clinical benefits and cost effectiveness but it does not include provision for a different ruleset when assessing orphan drugs. It would take an act of the Oireachtas to change the current assessment process for medicines.

However, both the National Centre of Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE) and the HSE are mindful of the differences and challenges in terms of patient numbers when assessing this type of medicine.

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

There has been substantial engagement between the Department, the HSE and the NCPE over the last number of months which has resulted in a number of key changes in the HSE assessment process of medicines within the confines of the 2013 Health Act.

#### Technology Review Committee for Rare Diseases

In June 2018, the HSE leadership appointed a Technology Review Committee for Rare Diseases which is responsible for:

1) reviewing proposals received from industry or expert groups in Ireland for funding of new products for rare diseases, or expanded indications for existing products for rare diseases and making recommendations as to the implementation of the relevant recommendations from the National Rare Diseases Plan 2011-2018; and

2) providing contributions to the development of clinical guidelines for relevant Orphan Medicinal Products (OMPs) and supporting the implementation of guidelines in conjunction with the National Drugs Management Programme Office where applicable.

The Committee's recommendations for reimbursement of OMPs are not intended to replace any part of the existing medicines appraisal or reimbursement process but rather complement it.

The creation of the Technology Review Committee for Rare Diseases is intended to provide a greater balance and transparency to the assessment process. The inclusion of two public/patient representatives from a selected panel of three is in recognition of the concept that there is a value of opportunity to have patient representation on the Committee. As well as examining the methodologies for assessing orphan drugs, it will also consider the views of patients, caregivers and the wider issues that go into health technology assessments.

This Committee is operational and has already completed work in relation to orphan products.

#### HSE Drugs Group

The composition of the HSE Drugs Group has recently been expanded to include two representatives from the National Patients Forum and more clinical expertise in the area of rare diseases.

In all of the above circumstances, I do not purpose to bring forward proposals to change the assessment criteria for orphan drugs, which would require the approval of the Oireachtas.

### **Disability Services Data**

390. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health the number of residential care places available for adults with an intellectual disability in County Wexford. [46906/18]

**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.

### **Disability Services Data**

391. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health the number of residential respite beds for adults with an intellectual disability available in County Wexford. [46907/18]

392. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on the waiting list for residential care for adults with an intellectual disability in County Wexford; and the estimated waiting time for such care. [46908/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 391 and 392 together.

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.

### **Disability Services Data**

393. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health the number of residential care places available for children with an intellectual disability in County Wexford. [46909/18]

394. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health the number of residential respite beds for children with an intellectual disability available in County Wexford. [46910/18]

395. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health the waiting list for residential care for children with an intellectual disability in County Wexford. [46911/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 393 to 395, inclusive, together.

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.

### **Disability Services Data**

396. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on the waiting list for residential respite care for children with an intellectual disability; and the estimated waiting time for such care. [46912/18]

**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.

### **Care of the Elderly Provision**

397. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health the number of residential care places available for elderly persons in County Wexford. [46913/18]

**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.

### **Care of the Elderly Provision**

398. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health the number of residential respite beds for elderly persons available in County Wexford. [46914/18]

**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.

### **Care of the Elderly Provision**

399. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on the waiting list for residential care for elderly persons in County Wexford; and the estimated waiting time for such care. [46915/18]

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

### **Psychological Services**

400. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that no replacement has been provided to cover maternity leave for the clinical psychologist in the HSE early intervention team in Churchtown, Dublin 14; the efforts being made to find a replacement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46937/18]

**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.

### **Mental Health Services Provision**

401. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health if he will report on the development of adult and child mental health intellectual disability teams in 2018; and the number of additional new staff appointed to date in 2018. [46942/18]

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

### **Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Data**

402. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the number of vacant posts in whole-time equivalent terms in the CAMHS for each CHO in tabular form. [46943/18]

**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.

### **Sign Language and Deaf Services**

403. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the supports available to the deaf community in accessing mental health supports, including the provision of mental health professionals fluent in sign language; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46944/18]

**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.

### **Proposed Legislation**

404. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Health when the assisted human reproduction Bill will be introduced; if it will include a clause prohibiting donor tourism whereby a clinic based here facilitates couples attending clinics in other jurisdictions to access anonymous gametes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46949/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As the Deputy will be aware, the Government approved the drafting of a Bill on assisted human reproduction (AHR) and associated areas of research in October last year. The General Scheme is published on my Department's website. This comprehensive piece of legislation encompasses the regulation of a range of practices, including gamete (sperm or egg) and embryo donation for AHR and research.

The Joint Committee on Health is currently conducting a review of the General Scheme of the Assisted Human Reproduction Bill 2017 as part of the pre-legislative scrutiny process, which began in January of this year. The review is ongoing, and the Committee intends to publish its report early in 2019. The introduction of legislation in relation to AHR and associated research is a priority for me and the process of drafting this Bill will be completed in conjunction with the Office of the Attorney General. However, it is not possible at this time to give a definitive timeline for the completion of the draft Bill and its subsequent passage through the Houses of the Oireachtas.

The General Scheme of the Assisted Human Reproduction Bill 2017 only encompasses activities which occur in Ireland. The state can only regulate activities that occur in this jurisdiction and cannot regulate people availing of AHR treatment that is legally provided in another country.

### **Services for People with Disabilities**

405. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delay in publishing value for money and client fund reviews of a service (details supplied); the further reason for the delay in the appointment of the family liaison person and for the non-availability of the cultural audits that took place with families; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46950/18]

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

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

### **Services for People with Disabilities**

406. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to reduce the waiting list for early intervention services in north County Dublin; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that children have been waiting up to 26 months to be assessed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46953/18]

**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.

### **Cannabis for Medicinal Use**

407. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Health the status of an application by a person (details supplied) for reimbursement of the cost of medicinal cannabis to treat severe epilepsy. [46957/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Clarification was sought from the Deputy's office in relation to this PQ. Once a reply has been received, I will arrange for a response to issue to the Deputy.

### **Services for People with Disabilities**

408. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health the plans the Health Service Executive has to re-open a walkway bridge (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46960/18]

**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 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**

409. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive a hospital appointment. [46961/18]

**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 be-

half, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

410. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in Dublin 3 will receive an appointment to see an orthopaedic surgeon in St. James's Hospital. [46963/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

### **Disability Support Services Expenditure**

411. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health the breakdown of spending on disability services in each of the years 2014 to 2017, inclusive, and to date in 2018, by county; and the spending as a percentage of population by county in tabular form. [46965/18]

**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. 412 answered with Question No. 382.

### **Cannabis for Medicinal Use**

413. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Health the status of an application by a person (details supplied) for a licence to access medicinal cannabis to treat severe epilepsy; and, if the licence has been granted, the status of the application for the reimbursement of the cost of the medicinal cannabis. [46972/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Department is not in a position to comment on individual cases. However, if the patient or their medical practitioner wishes to contact the Department of Health directly to discuss their application they are welcome to do so.

Furthermore, the Department of Health website contains detailed clinical guidance on the use of medical cannabis and details on how a medical practitioner may apply for a Ministerial licence. This information can be found at:

[health.gov.ie/blog/publications/cannabis-for-medical-use/](http://health.gov.ie/blog/publications/cannabis-for-medical-use/) It is important to note that the decision to prescribe or not prescribe any treatment, including cannabis treatment, for an individual patient is strictly a decision for the treating clinician, in consultation with their patient. The Minister for Health has no role in this clinical decision-making process.

The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicinal products under the community drug schemes, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013. Prescribers and patients may contact the HSE directly by phone at 353 1 864 7100 and by e-mail at [pcrs@hse.ie](mailto:pcrs@hse.ie).

### **Drugs Payment Scheme Coverage**

414. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health if an access programme will be established for the drug Spinraza for children with spinal muscular atrophy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46979/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this is a clinical and operational matter, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy on this issue.

### **Community Development Projects**

415. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the way in which he plans to maintain the commitment to support the continuation of community action on alcohol projects; the funding plans for the continued work of the alcohol development worker in the Tallaght area after January 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46983/18]

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

The Community Action on Alcohol Project (CAAP) was set up in 2014 to assist Task Forces

to develop strategies to change behaviour around alcohol and to raise awareness of alcohol related harm. CAAP training for Task Forces is funded by the HSE and is delivered by the Alcohol Forum. A Steering Group chaired by the Drugs Policy Unit in the Department of Health oversees the work of CAAP. By the end of 2017, 16 of the 24 Task Forces had participated on the training programme.

The national drugs strategy, *Reducing Harm Supporting Recovery*, commits to the establishment of an initiative to deliver an integrated public health approach to drugs and alcohol including the promotion of evidence based approaches to mobilising community action on alcohol.

In June, I announced funding of €1 million to support and enhance services addressing drug and alcohol misuse. This money will be allocated in quarter four of 2018.

Implementing the health-led national drugs strategy continues to be a Government priority. Within the increased envelope of resources available in Budget 2019 for health services, my intention is to prioritise funding for community drug and alcohol projects in task force areas of greatest need, additional drug and alcohol midwives working with vulnerable mothers-to-be and enhanced treatment services to address existing and emerging needs.

The Department of Health is working with the Health Service Executive to finalise the 2019 National Service Plan. Drug and Alcohol Task Forces will be notified of their 2019 funding allocations once the service plan has been approved by the Minister for Health.

### **Drugs Payment Scheme**

416. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to expedite the availability of new medicines to persons with multiple sclerosis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46985/18]

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

In line with the 2013 Act, if a company would like a medicine to be reimbursed by the HSE through the community drugs schemes, it must first submit an application to the HSE to have the new medicine added to the reimbursement list.

As outlined in the 2016 Framework Agreement with the Irish Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association (IPHA), and in line with the 2013 Act, the HSE will decide, within 180 days of receiving the application (or a longer period if further information is sought from the company), whether to add the medicine to the reimbursement list, agree to reimburse it as a hospital medicine, or refuse to reimburse it.

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

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

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

### Departmental Staff Data

417. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health the number of senior positions held by men and women, respectively, in his Department. [47002/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The information requested by the Deputy is detailed in the table following.

GRADE	MALE Whole-time equivalents	FEMALE Whole-time equivalents
Secretary General	1	0
Deputy Secretary	3	1
Assistant Secretary	3	3
Director	1	0
Adviser	3	3
Principal Officer	19	29.36
TOTAL	30	36.36

### Hospital Admissions

418. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be admitted to Letterkenny University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47010/18]

**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 Consultant Recruitment

419. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for Health when the post of consultant in pain management at the South Infirmity Victoria Hospital, Cork, which has been vacant since

the end of August 2018, will be filled either on a permanent or temporary basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47012/18]

**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.

### **Medicinal Products**

420. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health his plans to introduce free nicotine patches for persons with nicotine addiction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47018/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Tobacco consumption is the largest avoidable health threat in Ireland; 1 in 2 smokers will die from a tobacco related disease. The *Tobacco Free Ireland* (2013) policy document contains a number of recommendations to assist smokers in quitting tobacco use. In relation to Nicotine Replacement Therapy ('NRT') the recommendation is that NRT should be more widely available, including in outlets where tobacco products are sold. In 2014 the Health Products Regulatory Authority announced that they have licensed some Nicotine Replacement Therapies to be sold in non-pharmacy outlets.

Nicotine replacement therapies are already available free of charge to medical card holders. This approach has been taken on the basis of evidence showing that those in lower income groups have a higher prevalence of smoking than those in higher income groups. There are no plans at present to make NRT available free of charge to the general population.

### **Hospital Equipment**

421. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health when a new thrombectomy machine will be in place at Beaumont Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47021/18]

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

### **Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Data**

422. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the numbers on child and adolescent mental health services, CAMHS, waiting lists by county for specific periods (details supplied) in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47030/18]

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

### **Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Data**

423. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the number of children in State care on child and adolescent mental health services, CAMHS, waiting lists by county for specific periods (details supplied) in tabular form; the other mental health supports available

to children in the care of the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47031/18]

**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.

#### **Health Services Staff Data**

424. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health the recommended number of healthcare professionals, by category, operating in community-based services, per 1,000 of user based population. [47033/18]

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

#### **Health Services Staff Data**

425. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff working in the health service in each of the years 2008 to 2017 and to date in 2018, by occupation. [47038/18]

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

#### **Health Services Staff Data**

426. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of assaults that have been recorded against front-line staff, including nurses, doctors, social workers, ambulance staff and other health professionals, in each of the years 2008 to 2017 and to date in 2018, by hospital, geographic location and profession in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47039/18]

427. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of work days that have been lost as a result of assaults on staff in the health service; the cost of such enforced absences; the number of staff that have not returned to duties as a result in each of the years 2008 to 2017 and to date in 2018, by hospital and profession in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47040/18]

429. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of assaults on healthcare staff in hospitals in each of the years 2008 to 2017, by number of assaults and the hospital in which the assault took place, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47042/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to answer Questions Nos. 426, 427 and 429 together.

I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy on this matter.

#### **Health Services Expenditure**

428. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the spend on agency staff in the health service in each of the years 2010 to 2017 and to date in 2018, by occupation and hospital in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47041/18]

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

*Question No. 429 answered with Question No. 426.*

### **Health Services Staff Data**

430. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of agency locum staff working in the health service or that are employed directly or indirectly by the HSE; the locations in which they are based, that is, hospital, health facility and so on; the profession and speciality of each in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47043/18]

431. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of agency and locum consultants in the health service; the locations in which they are based; the speciality of each in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47044/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to answer Questions Nos. 430 and 431 together.

I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy on this matter.

### **Hospital Services**

432. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of times surgeries have been cancelled or disrupted due to a lack of theatre staff in each year since 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47045/18]

**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.

### **Cross-Border Health Initiatives**

433. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the amount of funding provided for procedures carried out under the cross-border directive by procedure and location in which the procedure was carried out for each year of the existence of the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47053/18]

434. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the procedures carried out under the cross-border directive by the number that took place in private hospitals or clinics and those carried out in public hospitals or clinics; the amount of funding provided for treatment in public and private settings by procedure and location; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47054/18]

435. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the amount of funding available for procedures carried out under the cross-border directive in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47055/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 433 to 435, inclusive, together.

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

### **Motorised Transport Grant Closure**

436. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Health when he plans to reinstate the motorised transport grant which was suspended in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47057/18]

**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.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

437. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a rheumatology appointment in University Hospital Kerry, UHK, for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47058/18]

**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 be-

half, 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 Services Provision**

438. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health if primary care services can be provided for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47061/18]

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

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

439. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47077/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

### **Medicinal Products Reimbursement**

440. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health the length of time it takes to approve new MS drugs here; the MS drugs in the approval process; the length of time they

have been undergoing approval; and the steps he is taking to reduce that time and improve access for persons with MS [47086/18]

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

In line with the 2013 Act, if a company would like a medicine to be reimbursed by the HSE pursuant to the community drugs schemes, the company must first submit an application to the HSE to have the new medicine added to the reimbursement list.

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

HSE decisions on which medicines are reimbursed by the taxpayer are made on objective, scientific and economic grounds, on the advice of the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE). The NCPE conducts health technology assessments (HTAs) for the HSE and makes recommendations on reimbursement to assist HSE decisions. The NCPE uses a decision framework to systematically assess whether a drug is cost-effective as a health intervention.

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

There are currently three indications going through the reimbursement system. All had applications made in 2018.

The NCPE completed a health technology assessment on 29 August 2018 for Ocrelizumab (Ocrevus) for the treatment of adult patients with relapsing forms of multiple sclerosis (RMS). They recommended that Ocrelizumab (Ocrevus) not be considered for reimbursement unless cost-effectiveness can be improved relative to existing treatments.

On 4 October 2018 the NCPE completed their assessment for Ocrelizumab (Ocrevus) indicated for the treatment of adult patients with early primary progressive multiple sclerosis (PPMS). They did not recommend that Ocrelizumab (Ocrevus) be reimbursed for this indication.

The HSE is the statutory decision-making body for medicine reimbursement. It will make the final decision on whether Ocrelizumab (Ocrevus) will be reimbursed for each of these indications, taking into consideration the statutory criteria in the 2013 Act.

The HSE has also commissioned a HTA of Delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol/Cannabidiol, THC/CBD (Sativex) which is indicated as treatment for symptom improvement in adult patients with moderate to severe spasticity due to multiple sclerosis (MS) who have not responded adequately to other anti-spasticity medication and who demonstrate clinically significant improvement in spasticity related symptoms during an initial trial of therapy. A full pharmacoeconomic assessment is currently underway by the NCPE.

## **Disability Support Services**

441. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health the reason the hourly rate for disability services home support is paid at a lower rate than that for older persons home support; his plans to review same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47090/18]

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

## **Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Data**

442. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of beds provided to the public inpatient CAMHS units nationwide; if any of the beds have been closed at any stage during the year; if so, the details of same; and the number of bed days lost in 2018 from such closures. [47093/18]

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

## **Mental Health Services Data**

443. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of acute psychiatric beds available for persons over 65 years of age; and the number required to meet the recommendation for same made in A Vision for Change taking account of demographic changes since 2006. [47094/18]

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

## **Mental Health Services Data**

444. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of children admitted to adult mental health units to date in 2018. [47095/18]

**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.

## **Hospitals Policy**

445. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Health if the decision of January 2016 regarding hospitals (details supplied) made by the former Minister of State for older people has been officially rescinded and is no longer HSE or his Department's policy; his new policy on these two community hospitals in County Donegal; his plans being proposed; the timeline for the upgrading of community hospitals within the context of the existing capital plan 2016 to 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47112/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** The policy position adopted in 2015 to replace the two hospitals referred to by the Deputy has been officially revised and is no longer HSE or Government policy relating to these hospitals, as I advised the Deputy at a meeting on the 7th of November last. The HSE's Social Care Directorate and its National Capital and Property Steering Group have accepted recommendations from HSE CHO 1 to retain and upgrade St Joseph's Community Hospital, Stranorlar and Ramelton Community Nursing Unit. This revises the original decision to replace the existing long stay residential beds on both sites as part of the Capital Investment Programme for Public Residential Care Centres for Older People 2016-2021. It further revises the scale of the proposed new unit at Letterkenny from the original 130 beds to 110 beds. Importantly, I understand that the decision to revise the proposals was informed not just by the technical and feasibility studies in relation to the physical infrastructure in these two sites but also on the basis of a broader analysis of population projections and National Planning norms carried out by the HSE.

I understand that the matter will now proceed through the HSE's capital planning process with design work on the Stranorlar and Ramelton units expected to commence in 2019. The Department has requested to be kept up-to-date on progress and projected timelines in relation to these projects.

### **Cancer Screening Programmes**

446. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address matters (details supplied) regarding the signing of a contract with a laboratory to examine cervical smears; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47134/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The issues the Deputy is raising emerged at the outset of issues relating to CervicalCheck. Many women were very concerned and it was vital to examine the facts. That is why the Scoping Inquiry was established, led by Dr Gabriel Scally as an independent expert. The Terms of Reference of the Scoping Inquiry were agreed following cross party engagement and included an examination of the tendering, contracting, operation, conflict of interest arrangements, performance information and performance management, accreditation and quality assurance of contracted cytology laboratory services by CervicalCheck from initiation of the programme.

Dr Scally provided the Final Report of his Scoping Inquiry in September. His report provided welcome reassurance about the laboratories currently contracted by Cervical Check. He is satisfied with the quality management processes in these labs.

It is very important to say that Dr Scally confirmed that he found no reason why the existing contracts for laboratory services should not continue until the new HPV regime is introduced. He also stated that continuation of screening in the coming months is of crucial importance. The Government fully agrees with this - screening saves lives. CervicalCheck has been successful in reducing cervical cancer rates in Ireland. As stated in the Scally report, the lifetime risk of a woman getting cervical cancer was 1 in 135 in 2015, significantly lower than the lifetime risk in 2007 of 1 in 96. This represents a substantial improvement.

I therefore very much welcome the fact that Heads of Agreement have been signed between the HSE and the contracted labs 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. This follows on from detailed and complex negotiations undertaken by the HSE.

Agreement on the extension of these contracts was reached on the 13th of October. How-

ever, this is subject to formal conclusion of the contract, so it would not be appropriate to give any further detail until this process is complete.

In all of this, it is important to be very clear that false negative results are an inherent part of any cervical screening programme, and do not automatically amount to negligence. Cervical screening will not prevent all screened women from getting cervical cancer although it is important to say that since 2008, 1,200 invasive cancers have been detected by CervicalCheck. More than 50,000 women with high grade abnormalities (CIN 2 & 3) have been diagnosed and treated, considerably reducing their risk of developing cervical cancer.

### **Cannabis for Medicinal Use**

447. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the number of medicinal cannabis licences that have been issued to date in 2018. [47139/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Eighteen Ministerial licences for medical cannabis-based treatment have been issued during 2018, in relation to twelve individual patients.

Medical practitioners and patients are encouraged to consult the Department of Health website which contains information on medical cannabis, including clinical guidance on the use of medical cannabis and details on how a medical practitioner may apply for a Ministerial licence for medical cannabis. This information can be found on the Department of Health's website.

It is important to note that the decision to prescribe or not prescribe any treatment, including cannabis treatment, for an individual patient is strictly a decision for the treating clinician, in consultation with their patient. The Minister for Health has no role in this clinical decision-making process.

### **Cannabis for Medicinal Use**

448. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if medicinal cannabis licences have been issued to women affected by the CervicalCheck scandal or for the treatment of cervical cancer or related illnesses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47140/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** To date Ministerial licences have been granted for medical cannabis-based treatments for twelve individual patients.

The Department can not disclose the clinical circumstances of individual patients who are the subject of Ministerial licences.

### **Home Help Service Provision**

449. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if weekend home support, including newly approved support, will continue and include all cover according to days and times in their care plan for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47141/18]

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

possible.

### **Home Help Service Provision**

450. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health his plans to commence recruitment of home support staff in County Donegal to replace staff who have made it known they are due to and will retire, ensuring the continuation of home support; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47142/18]

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

### **Nursing Staff Data**

451. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the fall in the number of staff nurses employed in the health services from April to September 2018 with 245 fewer employed over the course of those months. [47144/18]

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

### **Long-Term Illness Scheme Data**

452. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons under 21 years of age who have access to the FreeStyle Libre under the long-term illness scheme; the number of persons over 21 years of age who now have access to the FreeStyle Libre under the long-term illness scheme in tabular form by CHO and county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47152/18]

**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.

### **Budget 2019**

453. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 511 of 16 October 2018, if the additional superannuation contribution, ASC, is netted off pension costs only and not netted against pay for the 2019 health Vote on page 217 of the budget 2019 expenditure report. [47172/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Up to and including 2018, pension related deductions (PRD) were netted against pay. As published each year in the REV, the net pay figure was gross pay less PRD, and the net pensions figure was gross pensions less superannuation contributions.

In 2019, as part of the Public Service Stability Agreement, PRD will convert to Additional Superannuation Contributions (ASC). As a result, the net pay figure is effectively the gross pay figure as there is no deduction to be taken. The ASC is netted off pensions costs instead of pay

for the 2019 Health Vote, along with the existing superannuation contributions.

This explains why the pay figure is significantly increased, and the pension figure significantly decreased for the 2019 Health Vote as laid out on page 2017 of the Budget Expenditure Report.

### **Services for People with Disabilities**

454. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health his views on whether it is acceptable that an organisation (details supplied) is considering closing down its office in Dún Laoghaire leaving the visually impaired community of CHO area 6 without a local office and without the services it provides; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47174/18]

**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**

455. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the role of a person (details supplied) in the implementation of the proposed delivery of abortion services; the length of time the person is contracted for in that role; the level of remuneration for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47183/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I referred this question to the HSE as it is within their remit.

### **Commencement of Legislation**

456. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health when the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 will be fully implemented; the reason for the delay for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47193/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Commencement of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 requires the completion of a number of interrelated tasks in order to ensure the new legislative framework is coherent at all stages for individuals.

The Children and Family Relationships (Amendment) Bill 2018 was enacted on 24 July 2018. This Act was introduced to correct typographical and technical errors in the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015, which will facilitate the subsequent commencement of Parts 2 & 3 of the Act. Parts 2 & 3 of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 contain provisions relating to the regulation of donor-assisted human reproduction (DAHR) procedures carried out in the State, including dealing with the rights of children born as a result of those

procedures. There are important administrative and operational arrangements to be put in place to facilitate the implementation of Parts 2 & 3, including the establishment of the National Donor-Conceived Person Register and the appointment of authorised persons under the Act. It is my intention that Parts 2 & 3 of the Act will be commenced as soon as possible.

A number of sections of Part 9 of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 provide for the registration and re-registration of the birth of a donor-conceived child. Commencement of Part 9 of the Act is the responsibility of the Minister for Justice and Equality in consultation with the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection. However, a number of these sections have to be amended and have yet to be commenced. Commencement of these provisions is also dependent on commencement of Parts 2 & 3 of the Act.

Officials from the General Register Office, the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, the Department of Justice and Equality, and the Department of Health are working together to ensure that the appropriate regulatory and operational mechanisms are in place to allow for the earliest possible commencement of all of the relevant legislation that will allow for birth registration of donor-conceived children.

### **Ministerial Meetings**

457. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the policy regarding the need for note taking when Ministers and-or Ministers of State meet business and other leaders; the way in which this policy is outlined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46483/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** In general, Minister of State Doyle and I are accompanied to such meetings by Departmental Officials, who take notes and minute the proceedings.

### **GLAS Payments**

458. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if an outstanding GLAS payment for 2017 will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46518/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** A Commonage Management Plan (CMP) remains outstanding for this applicant. Further payments cannot issue until the CMP is submitted. Both the participant and their advisor have been advised of the requirement to submit the Plan.

### **Animal Identification Schemes**

459. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the efforts and work being undertaken to ensure all horses are microchipped and allocated passports; and if the use of scanners being available to An Garda Síochána to assist it in ensuring the law is being complied with in respect of this issue will be considered. [46643/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The rules governing the identification of equines are determined at EU level. Commission Implementing Regulation 262/2015 (CR 262/2015), which came into effect on 1 January 2016, lays down the

current rules in this regard. This legislation was transposed into national legislation in Ireland via the European Union (Identification of Equidae) Regulations (S.I. 62 of 2016)(as amended).

CR 262/2015 revoked and replaced Commission Regulation 504/2008, which came into effect on 1st July 2009 and which introduced the requirement for equines to be implanted with a microchip by a veterinary practitioner at the time of initial identification.

Article 12(1) of CR 262/2015 provides that all equine animals must be identified with a passport no later than 12 months from the date of birth of the animal, and in any event, before moving permanently from the holding of origin. The passport must generally accompany the equine on movement.

Under EU rules, equines for which passports were issued with effect from 1st July 2009 must be implanted with a microchip by a veterinary practitioner and the number of that microchip must be recorded in the passport of the animal, thereby establishing a link between the animal and its identification document. This information must also be recorded on the database of the Passport Issuing Organisation (PIO) that issued the equine identification document, in conjunction with the Unique Equine Identification Number (UELN) allocated to that equine for its lifetime. All relevant PIO registration data are also recorded in my Department's central equine database.

Equines identified with a passport prior to 1st July 2009 are not required by EU law to be implanted with a microchip. Accordingly, the absence of a microchip in an equine does not necessarily mean that the animal is not identified properly.

Equine passports are issued by Passport Issuing Organisations (PIOs) approved by my Department. Information available from these organisations suggest that high rates of compliance with the identification rules are being achieved.

Enforcement of equine identification legislation is primarily undertaken by authorised officers in my Department who liaise with authorised officers in the Local Authorities and other organisations including members of An Garda Síochána and officers of the Revenue Commissioners, as required. Authorised officers from my Department engage in checks at sales venues including marts and fairs, as well as at horse slaughter plants and at export points including ports and airports. These compliance checks are on-going and will continue to be undertaken.

The presence of a microchip in an equine cannot be established visually. When checking for the presence of a microchip in an equine, it is necessary to physically handle and scan the animal. From a health and safety perspective, this action should only be undertaken by personnel who are competent in the handling of equines. In that regard, where a member of An Garda Síochána requires an equine to be scanned, s/he should liaise with veterinary staff in the relevant Regional Veterinary Offices (RVO) of my Department who will assist in the scanning of the equine. All of the RVOs have sufficient supplies of scanners.

### **Young Farmer Capital Investment Scheme Applications**

460. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if an application by a farmer (details supplied) has been approved for payment; and if so, when payment will issue. [46709/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The applicant in question has received approval for Animal Housing and a mass concrete tank under the Young Farmer Capital Investment Scheme of TAMS II.

The applicant has until 18 September 2019 to submit a payment claim for the completed approved works. A claim has not yet been submitted. Officials from my Department have been in direct contact with the applicant in relation to this case.

### **Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme**

461. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a decision has been made on the inspectorate review of a penalty applied to a TAMS grant in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46751/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** A review in this case will be carried out by my Department. This review will be undertaken shortly and the applicant will be advised of the outcome in writing.

### **Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme**

462. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a decision has been made on a TAMS II application by a farmer (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46783/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** An application for a Tank and Animal Housing under the Animal Welfare, Safety and Nutrient Storage System of TAMS II has been submitted by the person named. The application has passed the initial administrative checks and is currently undergoing the technical checks required before approval can issue.

### **Transfer of Entitlements**

463. **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. [46842/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The person named submitted a 2018 Transfer of Entitlements application to my Department seeking the transfer of Basic Payment Scheme entitlements by way of gift as transferee. The transferor under the application used a temporary transfer number made available by my Department to facilitate the transfer. The Department is currently finalising such transfer applications to facilitate payment under the Basic Payment Scheme as soon as possible.

### **Basic Payment Scheme Payments**

464. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a BPS payment in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46973/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The 2018 Basic Payment/Areas of Natural Constraints Application in respect of the person named was

received on 17 April 2018. Processing of this application has recently been completed and payment will issue to the nominated bank account in the coming days.

### Departmental Staff Data

465. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of senior positions held by men and women, respectively, in his Department. [46992/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** One of the goals outlined in my Department's current *Statement of Strategy* is to continue to develop a highly skilled, diverse and gender-balanced workforce. My Department is committed to supporting a positive working environment for all staff, one that provides equality of opportunity and supports work-life balance. My Department has had an active gender balance initiative in place since 2010, which has conducted a number of reviews and developed an action plan to address the issue through its HR Strategy and in consultation with staff. In addition, gender balance is a key commitment of the Civil Service Renewal Plan (Action 8.5) and my Department has been active in progressing initiatives in this area on a whole of Government basis.

Staff in my Department work in various locations around the country and the workforce is made up of over 100 grades, including specialist grades in addition to the standard civil service grades.

The number of senior positions held by both men and women in my Department is shown in the table below. The numbers are shown by Civil Service "Job Code Equivalent" which gives relative comparators with standard civil service grades.

Job Code Equivalent	Female	Male	Grand Total
Secretary General		1	1
Assistant Secretary(Including Directors)	3	11	14
Principal Officer(Including those on equivalent pay scales)	35	81	116
Grand Total	38	93	131

### Pesticide Use

466. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if it is Coillte policy to test groundwater on and near its lands regularly in order to determine if unsafe levels of the pesticides used by Coillte are contained in same; and if so, the regularity with which such tests are carried out. [47051/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Coillte was established as a private commercial company under the Forestry Act, 1988 and day-to-day operational matters, such as its policy in relation to the usage of pesticides, are the responsibility of the company.

I have referred the Deputy's question to Coillte and have requested that a response issue to you within 10 days.

## **Pesticide Use**

467. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 769 of 6 November 2018, if Coillte is a commercial semi-State company rather than a private commercial company and if the chairman and board of Coillte are ultimately answerable to him. [47082/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Coillte was formed and registered, pursuant to Section 9 of the Forestry Act 1988, as a private company under the Companies Acts. It has been re-registered, as required under the Companies Act 2014, as a Designated Activity Company (limited by shares), with the name of the company now ‘Coillte Cuideachta Ghníomhaíochta Ainmnithe’. The shareholders are the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform and the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine and, as I have statutory responsibility for certain consent functions under the Forestry Act 1988, it may be defined as a State Body. One of Coillte’s principal objectives, under the Forestry Act 1988, is to carry on the business of forestry and related activities on a commercial basis and it is therefore appropriate, in view of the legislative provisions, to refer to Coillte as a commercial semi-state company. In this regard, it operates independently from my Department, though I have a number of statutory functions.

The Chairperson and other directors of the Board of Coillte are appointed by me with the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

Coillte is required, under Section 31 of the Forestry Act 1988, to make a report to me of its activities each year, copies of which are then laid before both Houses of the Oireachtas. The company shall, if so required, furnish to me any additional information in respect of that report or in relation to the policy and operations of the company other than day-to-day operations. As a shareholder, I am also represented at the company’s Annual General Meeting.

Coillte is required to confirm to me that it complies with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies in their governance practices and procedures. The Governance Framework outlined in the Code states that the Chairperson and Board are ultimately responsible to me for the operation and proper functioning of the State Body. It should be clarified that this refers to its operations in line with overall Government policy and not day to day operational matters.

In terms of regulation of its forestry activities, the company is subject to the provisions of the Forestry Act 2014, in the same way as any landowner in the State.

## **Energy Efficiency**

468. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of households cutting turf on special areas of conservation, SACs, that have availed of a retrofit of their houses to be more energy efficient and to use renewable fuel; and the amount the agreed retrofits will cost. [46696/18]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Government grants for improving the energy efficiency of homes are administered by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) on behalf of my Department.

The grants provide funding to people who want to upgrade the energy efficiency of their home and switch to renewable heating systems. Funding is provided for a range of energy sav-

ing measures, and for installing heat pumps. Meanwhile, people in receipt of certain payments from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection can avail of free upgrades to their properties, helping them to heat their homes to an adequate level.

Additionally, a 50% grant is available for a deep energy retrofit. This entails a significant upgrade of a building towards nearly zero energy requirements where it is practically feasible and achievable, including replacing their fossil fuel heating with a renewable system. To receive this grant an A3 Building Energy Rating post retrofit must be met.

Over the past two years my Department has, together with the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, worked to further highlight the benefits of energy efficiency and fuel switching to homeowners who are primarily using turf and other fossil fuels for their heating needs. Extensive community engagement was undertaken, with the assistance of Irish Rural Link, to promote the grants in areas that have high prevalence of properties reliant on those fuels.

Whether an applicant to an SEAI scheme is cutting turf on an SAC is not a piece of data that is collected as part of their application and it is not possible therefore to state how many households in SACs have historically availed of the grant assistance. However, if there are particular counties for which the Deputy would wish to have data on grant payments, this information can be made available.

The average Government investment per home in 2018 to date is as follows:

- Better Energy Homes (approx. 30% grant towards specific measures): €1,200
- Better Energy Warmer Homes (100% Exchequer funded, measures based on building survey): €6,000
- Deep Retrofit Pilot (50% grant for achieving BER A3 post retrofit): €25,000 - €30,000.

### **Broadband Service Provision**

469. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when broadband will be supplied in an area (details supplied). [46471/18]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The premises referred to by the Deputy is in the BLUE area on the High Speed Broadband Map which is available on my Department's website at [www.broadband.gov.ie](http://www.broadband.gov.ie). The BLUE areas are where commercial providers are either currently delivering or have plans to deliver high speed broadband services.

Where a citizen living in a Blue area is unable to obtain a high speed broadband service, I would encourage them to email my Department at [broadband@dccae.gov.ie](mailto:broadband@dccae.gov.ie) with their eircode, details of the service providers they have contacted and the issues encountered in respect of accessing high speed broadband.

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.

### Ministerial Meetings

470. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the policy in regard to the need for note taking when Ministers and-or Ministers of State meet business and other leaders; the way in which this policy is outlined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46486/18]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** When Ministers and or Ministers of State meet outside stakeholders, the need for note taking is established based on the level of importance of the meeting and the subject being discussed.

### Broadband Service Provision

471. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when broadband will be supplied to an area (details supplied). [46532/18]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The area referred to by the Deputy is in the BLUE area on the High Speed Broadband Map which is available on my Department's website at [www.broadband.gov.ie](http://www.broadband.gov.ie). The BLUE areas are where commercial providers are either currently delivering or have plans to deliver high speed broadband services.

Where a citizen living in a Blue area is unable to obtain a high speed broadband service, I would encourage them to email my Department at [broadband@dccae.gov.ie](mailto:broadband@dccae.gov.ie) with their eircode, details of the service providers they have contacted and the issues encountered in respect of accessing high speed broadband.

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.

### Broadband Service Provision

472. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when broadband will be supplied to an area (details supplied). [46533/18]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The premises referred to by the Deputy is in the AMBER area on the High Speed

Broadband Map which is available on my Department's website at *www.broadband.gov.ie*. 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 procurement process to appoint a bidder for the State intervention network is now at the final stage, with evaluation ongoing of the final tender submission 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. This review is taking place in parallel with the evaluation being carried out by the Department's procurement team on the final tender.

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.

### **Freedom of Information Requests**

473. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of staff in his Department qualified to process freedom of information, FoI, requests; if his attention has been drawn to the large number of FoI requests regarding the national broadband plan, NBP, and the delays that FoI requesters are now encountering due to the demand on his departmental and advisory staff in handling the FoI requests; if he will redeploy other staff to assist with FoI requests; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46649/18]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Under the FOI act, the determination of an FOI request is a matter for the deciding officer.

The number of FOI requests received by my Department is increasing, with an 82% increase on the same period last year. The processing of FOI requests is undertaken by officials at Higher Executive Officer level and higher, and this responsibility is undertaken in conjunction with their normal day-to-day duties.

In the year to end October, my Department had received 41 FOI requests in connection with the NBP and related matters. This number includes 19 NBP related FOI requests received during the month of October.

Of the total number of 41 NBP related FOI requests, 27 have been replied to within the statutory deadline, 1 is recorded as "deemed refused" in accordance with Section 19 (1) of the Act, the decision having issued 1 day after the statutory deadline, while 13 of the recently received NBP requests are currently being processed.

Section 14 (1) of the FOI Act provides for the extension of the decision-making timeline

providing that certain criteria are met. Extensions have been sought in respect of 5 of the 13 NBP related requests currently on hand, in line with this statutory provision.

### **National Broadband Plan**

474. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the progress a person (details supplied) has made to date in carrying out an examination of the national broadband plan, NBP, tendering process; if he has been provided with interim or draft reports by the person; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46650/18]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Taoiseach has asked Mr Peter Smyth, the independent process auditor to the National Broadband Plan procurement to prepare a report which will:

- take account of his ongoing work as Process Auditor, and his detailed knowledge of the procurement process to date;

- consider any implications for the procurement process of the meetings between the former Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, and representatives of the remaining tendering consortium, and

- allow the Government to assess whether or not the integrity of the procurement process has been undermined by these meetings.

I understand that Mr Smyth is in the process of preparing that report and I have not been provided with interim or draft reports.

### **Electric Vehicles**

475. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he has given consideration to the provision of funding for the trial roll-out of dual public light post e-car charge points in a number of management company operated residential estates (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46674/18]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Home charging is the primary method of charging for the majority of electric vehicles both internationally and in Ireland. Charging at home at night is the most cost-effective and eco-friendly way to charge an electric vehicle. Given the high proportion of homes with driveways and dedicated parking spaces, Ireland has greater capacity for home charging than many other countries. From January of this year, the Government has made funding available for a grant of up to €600 to support the installation of home charging points; the grant is administered by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland. This is available to the purchasers of new and second-hand electric vehicles.

Some local authorities have already taken the initiative to provide on street charging infrastructure, and to accelerate this, my Department, in conjunction with the SEAI, is working on how best to support the provision of greater levels of on-street public charging for owners of electric vehicles who rely on on-street parking near their homes.

The Low Emission Vehicle Taskforce Progress Report, which is available on my Department's website, acknowledges the provision of charging to electric vehicle owners living in

apartment blocks or similar residential areas is challenging. This issue will form part of the Working Group 3 work programme of the Taskforce which includes consideration of planning legislation and building regulations. The output of this work will determine how best to support the installation of charging in private residential areas where homes do not have dedicated parking adjacent to their dwelling.

### **Interdepartmental Working Groups**

476. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the terms of reference of the interdepartmental working group on climate action in regard to wetlands; and if he will provide the minutes of meetings of that group. [46700/18]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** In accordance with Regulation (EU) 2018/841 on the inclusion of greenhouse gas emissions and removals from land use, land use change and forestry in the 2030 climate and energy framework (the LULUCF Regulation), mandatory accounting of managed wetlands in the national greenhouse gas emissions inventories of EU Member States is to commence from 2026. It is, therefore, important that robust systems, including assurance on the availability of accurate information on wetlands in Ireland, are in place well in advance of that date.

In light of this requirement, the National Mitigation Plan, published in July 2017, included an action for a cross-Departmental working group, chaired by my Department, to undertake further analysis of the necessary technical steps to prepare for the requirements of the LULUCF Regulation as well as considering any policy implications arising. The working group has met twice to date and also comprises officials from the Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, and the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

The minutes of the working group are not published by my Department. The Deputy may request these records under the Freedom of Information Acts.

### **Metropolitan Area Networks Programme**

477. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if a review of the performance of the operation of the MANs by an organisation (details supplied) will be published without further delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46710/18]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I refer the Deputy to the reply to Question No. 528 of 23 October 2018. The position remains unchanged.

### **Waste Management**

478. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will take immediate steps to restrict single-use plastic products here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46978/18]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard**

**Bruton):** I am very cognisant of the problems created by single-use plastics and I am working both at a national and European level to tackle the problem.

In January 2018, the European Commission published the European Strategy for Plastics in the Circular Economy. The strategy focuses on plastic production and use and sets a goal of ensuring all plastic placed on the EU market will be recyclable by 2030.

One of the first key legislative proposals to emerge on foot of the EU Plastics Strategy is the “Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the reduction of the impact of certain plastic products on the environment”, which was published on 28 May 2018. This draft legislation proposes new EU-wide rules to target the 10 most prevalent single-use plastic (SUP) products found on Europe’s beaches and seas, as well as lost and abandoned fishing gear, which together account for 70% of all marine litter. The proposal includes:

- Proposed bans on certain SUP products, e.g. cotton buds, plastic cutlery and straws;
- Obligations on Member States to reduce the use of certain SUPs and for the collection of others; and
- Obligations on producers of SUP items to cover the costs of waste management and clean up through the establishment of extended producer responsibility (EPR) schemes.

Ireland has supported the ambition of this proposal throughout and the Council of Ministers recently agreed an ambitious text to bring to negotiations with the European Parliament. I urge all parties to these negotiations to reach agreement as soon as possible in order to give Member States the ability to introduce this important legislation.

I intend to commission a comprehensive national study to identify the means to achieve the higher proposed targets, complementary to the existing, successful collection system that we could implement to reduce the use of plastics and increase the level of plastic recycling.

### **Departmental Staff Data**

479. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of senior positions held by men and women, respectively, in his Department. [46995/18]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** There are 30 males and 14 females employed in senior positions in my Department. This covers Principal Officer and Principal Officer equivalent, Assistant Secretary and Secretary General.

### **Waste Disposal Charges**

480. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the provision of an annual support towards the cost of pay-by-weight charges for households that have a person with long-term medical incontinence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47011/18]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** My Department is continuing the work of developing a mechanism to provide a €75 support for vulnerable persons with a condition such as lifelong or long-term medical inconti-

nence to help meet the average annual cost of disposing of their domestic waste. I am informed that this process has taken longer than envisaged, due to a number of issues, including data protection issues that have arisen since the introduction of GDPR. However, I can assure the Deputy that I am committed to introducing an annual support as soon as practically possible in conjunction with relevant agencies and stakeholders.

### **Inland Fisheries**

481. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if, in the context of his recent announcement concerning the eel fisherpersons support scheme and in particular in respect of the criteria outlined therein, it is the intention of the scheme to exclude fishermen who were fishing during the appropriate period and had prepared audited accounts for taxation return purposes; the criteria that are applicable; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47184/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Canney):** A Support Fund of €3 million has been established by the Government to address the hardship experienced by commercial eel fishermen and women in the light of the closure of the commercial eel fishery for conservation reasons. The fund is administered by Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI). My department has received written advice from the Revenue Commissioners in relation to the support fund.

The fund is available to all persons who were the holder of a commercial public eel licence or an eel fishing permit from the ESB in the 2007 season (the base year). The 5 reckonable years for payments under the scheme are 2003-2007.

In respect of former fishermen and women who were the holder of a licence or permit in the base year, payment will involve a tax free element for each of the 5 reckonable years for which the applicant was a licence or permit holder.

A further taxable element will be based on the average annual catch, as declared by the applicant, during the reckonable years.

Based on the scheme criteria, the eligibility of an applicant can be definitively established on receipt of an application and the submission of supporting documents.

The scheme is currently open for applications which must be received by 5.00pm 30 November 2018. An application form and detailed information on the scheme can be obtained from any IFI Office or by downloading the relevant documentation from the IFI website *www.fisheriesireland.ie*.

### **Departmental Correspondence**

482. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will address a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46586/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I refer the Deputy to Dáil question 153 of 6th November 2018 on the same matter. I am happy to report that this matter is now resolved.

### **Driver Test Data**

483. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of persons awaiting driver tests by county; the average and longest wait time in each county; the number of persons that do not turn up for their driver tests each year; if new provisional licences are issued to drivers that do not turn up; the number of such cases that exist each year; the number of persons that achieve multiple licences in this manner; and his plans to close this loophole. [46478/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As driver testing comes under the responsibility of 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. In the meantime I would direct the Deputy to the relevant section of the RSA website at <http://www.rsa.ie/en/RSA/Learner-Drivers/The-Driving-Test/Test-Waiting-Times/>, which lists both the average and longest waiting time for every test centre in the country. This information is updated weekly.

The administration of driver licensing is also a matter for the Road Safety Authority and it would not be appropriate to stop those who have a genuine reason for not turning up for their test from renewing their learner permit. However, the new amendment to the Road Traffic Act 1961 to discourage unaccompanied learner driving is also likely to encourage repeat holders of learner permits to sit their driving test and thereafter obtain a full driving licence.

*A referred reply was forwarded to the Deputy under Standing Order 42A*

### **Ministerial Meetings**

484. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the policy on the need for note taking when Ministers and-or Ministers of State meet business and other leaders; the way in which this policy is outlined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46499/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I understand that the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform has a primary role in relation to provision of policy and guidance on records management and has the power to make regulations on these matters under the National Archives Act 1986.

In relation to Ministerial meetings with business leaders, the Deputy will be aware that the Regulation of Lobbying Act 2015 places the obligation on the lobbyist to register details of relevant communications with Designated Public Officials including Ministers, where such communications come within the scope of the Act. The Act does not place any requirements on Ministers in relation to record keeping. However, the Guidance for Designated Public Officials as published on the Lobbying Regulator's website recommends the maintenance of good record keeping practices.

There is not, however, at present, a department wide policy or direction on the need for officials to take notes in all meetings. My Department intends to review its record management arrangements in 2019 and will consider the development of a policy on record keeping practices as part of this review."

### **Dublin Bus**

485. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the

number of Dublin Bus drivers that have transferred their services in the context of job role, pay and conditions to a company (details supplied); the way in which the company will honour the transferred staff's historical contracts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46519/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The issue raised is a matter for Dublin Bus 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.

*A referred reply was forwarded to the Deputy under Standing Order 42A*

### **Bus Services**

486. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 284 of 24 October 2018, the number of 2018 registered vehicles the NTA has acquired for use by a company (details supplied) and Dublin Bus in the context of fleet numbers; the number proposed for 2019 and 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46523/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the development and implementation of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area including the purchase of bus fleet.

Noting their responsibility in relation to this matter, I have forwarded your query to the NTA for their consideration and direct reply. Please notify my office if you have not received a reply within 10 working days.

*A referred reply was forwarded to the Deputy under Standing Order 42A*

### **Rail Services Provision**

487. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the disruption caused to rail passengers by the recent changes (details supplied) on the Maynooth to Dublin city line; the reason the changes were made; the engagement that occurred with rail passengers prior to the changes; the steps being taken to address the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46531/18]

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

*A referred reply was forwarded to the Deputy under Standing Order 42A*

### **Taxi Regulations**

488. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to allow increased capacity and to tackle rising insurance costs in the taxi industry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46545/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The regulation of the small public service vehicle (SPSV) industry is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the provisions of the Taxi Regulation Act 2013.

The NTA is continuing with its efforts to increase the number of taxi, hackney and limousine (SPSV) drivers in Ireland. NTA reported at the end of October 2018 that there were 26,310 SPSV drivers licensed to provide hire and reward services nationwide. 2018 sees a reversal of the decline in numbers of drivers in the fleet experienced for many years, with October showing the eighth consecutive monthly increase in those numbers.

In the last year, there has been an increase of 59% per month in the average number of new SPSV Driver Licences granted. This increase is linked, in particular, with NTA bringing in changes to the SPSV Driver Entry Test, launching a national taxi driver recruitment campaign earlier this year, and continuing to assist prospective drivers and licensed rental companies with grants towards the cost of wheelchair accessible vehicles

As you may know, the pricing of insurance products is a commercial issue for insurance companies, based on an assessment of the risks that they are willing to accept. This position is reinforced by the EU framework for insurance which expressly prohibits Member States from adopting rules which require insurance companies to obtain prior approval of the pricing or terms and conditions of insurance products. Following the publication of the Department of Finance Working Group's Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance last year, the Advisory Committee on SPSVs met with Insurance Ireland and both parties have agreed that there should be ongoing engagement between them. I believe that this will be an important channel to ensure that the concerns of taxi drivers can be articulated and addressed.

### **Driver Test Waiting Lists**

489. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the waiting times for a first driver test in each driving test centre in County Mayo; the number of days in each week on which tests are being carried out in each centre; his plans to review the situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46555/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As 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.

I would further direct the Deputy to the relevant section of the RSA website at <http://www.rsa.ie/en/RSA/Learner-Driver/The-Driving-Test/Test-Waiting-Times/> , which lists the average waiting times at every test centre in the country, including those in Ballina and Castlebar.

*A referred reply was forwarded to the Deputy under Standing Order 42A*

### **Public Service Obligation Data**

490. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount of subvention granted to a company (details supplied) in the context of operating the public service obligation routes it operates on; the percentage amount that the company is due to return to the NTA by way of dividend from fares collected on a yearly basis for the duration of its contract; if there are optional extensions built into the contract; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46605/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The award of Public Service Obligation (PSO) funding falls under the independent statutory remit of the National Transport Authority (NTA) along with all issues relating to individual contracts with transport operators including Go Ahead. As is normal, the allocations to transport operators are decided by the NTA in exercise of its statutory mandate and in accordance with the various contract arrangements that it has in place with PSO service providers. I have therefore referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

*A referred reply was forwarded to the Deputy under Standing Order 42A*

### **Sports Capital Programme**

491. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when a capital sports grant will issue to a club (details supplied); the measures the club must take in order to expedite the payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46626/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin):** It is a requirement for larger Sports Capital Programme grants that the State's investment is protected and that facilities continue to be used for the purposes for which grants are made. The State endeavours to ensure that this is the case by placing charges on the facilities that it has funded. Before formal approval of the grant referred to by the Deputy can issue and payment made, the Department must receive confirmation from the Chief State Solicitor's Office that the legal formalities are complete. The Chief State Solicitor's Office have confirmed that they wrote to the club's Solicitor on the 8th of November 2018 in relation to the outstanding required documentation. Once the legal formalities are complete, there will be no undue delay from my Department's perspective in relation to processing any grant drawdown requests from the club.

### **Transport Infrastructure Ireland Projects**

492. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a copy of the terms of reference for the feasibility assessment of possible routes for the potential N3 to N4 link road project being carried out by the NTA and TII will be provided (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46675/18]

**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. I understand that the feasibility report referred to by the Deputy was commissioned by TII.

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.

*A referred reply was forwarded to the Deputy under Standing Order 42A*

### **Road Safety Authority**

493. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the health and safety concerns that led to the closure of Road Safety Authority, RSA, motorcycle testing at the Tipperary driving test centre with immediate effect and which applicants were notified of by letter in August 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46676/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As 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 ten days.

*A referred reply was forwarded to the Deputy under Standing Order 42A*

### **Cycling Facilities Provision**

494. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if local authorities and other road designers are required to implement the national cycle manual on all roads other than motorways; and if those roads have been identified in the greater Dublin area cycle network plan. [46691/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As the Deputy is aware, the National Transport Authority (NTA) has *inter alia* statutory responsibility for the provision of cycling infrastructure in relation to cycling facilities and schemes to promote cycling.

In line with that statutory responsibility, the NTA prepared the National Cycle Manual in order to guide planners and engineers in their work in so far as it relates to cycling. The NTA requires cycling infrastructure proposals in receipt of funding under an NTA scheme to adhere to the Manual's specifications.

Separately, the Deputy may also be aware of the Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets (DMURS) which was jointly published by my Department and the then Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government in 2013. Preparation and publication of DMURS was one of the actions recommended within the National Cycle Policy Framework.

DMURS complements the National Cycle Manual and integrates elements of the Manual within DMURS requirements. Use of DMURS is mandatory for both the design of new urban roads and street schemes as well as in instances where significant upgrades are being designed.

The Deputy might wish to know that in relation to Greenways and rural cycling infrastructure, local authorities receiving funding from my Department are instructed to follow TII Standard DN-GEO-03047 where applicable and to notify my Department where any deviations to the standard are necessary.

Noting the NTA's responsibility in the matter generally, and in relation to the development of the GDA Cycle Network Plan specifically, 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.

*A referred reply was forwarded to the Deputy under Standing Order 42A*

### **Road Network**

495. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the posi-

tion regarding the weight restrictions on roads that previously had a 3 tonne weight restriction and but have recently increased to 3.5 tonnes (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46703/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As the deputy will be aware the establishment of weight restrictions on local roads is a matter for local authorities and in this case Fingal County Council are the authority responsible. Enforcement is a matter for the Garda Síochána.

### **National Transport Authority**

496. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the sanctions in place if the charter is not adhered to in view of the fact that Bus Éireann's customer charter states that it will operate a minimum of 98% of scheduled departures [46720/18]

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

*A referred reply was forwarded to the Deputy under Standing Order 42A*

### **Cycling Policy**

497. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the development of an enhanced cycling infrastructure in terms of the creation of a national cycling office; and if there are no plans for the creation of a national cycling office, the reason therefor. [46781/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I refer the Deputy to my previous reply to Parliamentary Question Number 472 dated 26 June 2018 on this matter. As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public and sustainable transport. As the Deputy may be aware that over the period 2018 to 2021 I have secured significantly improved funding allocations which will benefit both cycling and walking.

These improved allocations over the 2018 to 2021 period include:

- €110 million specifically dedicated to cycling and walking infrastructure in our major urban areas;
- €135 million for sustainable urban transport measures; and
- €750 million towards the BusConnects programme in Dublin which will include delivery of around 200 kilometres of segregated cycling lanes where possible.

We also have €53 million to support the development of new Greenways in more rural areas, in line with the recently published Greenways Strategy.

As can be seen from the above, these are multi-annual capital expenditure programmes which will positively assist with the better development and provision of cycling and walking infrastructure across the State.

In addition to these infrastructure measures, my Department also provides funding to the NTA in relation to behavioural change programmes and to Cycling Ireland to develop a new national cycle training standard - "Cycle Right" – which was rolled out in January 2017 and expected to train approximately 20,000 primary school students this year.

In the context of the work underway reviewing Public Transport Policy as committed to in the Programme for Government, my Department is considering the effectiveness of institutional arrangements in this area into the future, including those that apply to cycling, and having regard to the importance of ensuring strong outcomes with the budgetary increases that have been secured for the provision of enhanced cycling infrastructure and through training programmes.

### **Road Traffic Legislation**

498. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the statutory instrument for the minimum passing distance. [46782/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As I have indicated before, the Attorney General has raised issues in relation to the proposed legislation on a minimum passing distance. Currently, my Department is engaging with the Attorney General's Office with a view to implementing alternative solutions which are legally robust. I expect this legislation to be in place before the end of the year.

### **Haulage Industry Regulation**

499. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a matter in regard to truck weight (details supplied) will be examined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46814/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Under the Road Traffic (Construction and Use of Vehicles) Regulations 2003 (S.I. No. 5 of 2003), the upper weight limit for 5 axle (2 axle tractor unit towing a 3 axle semi-trailer) articulated vehicle is 40 tonnes, provided that the tractor unit is equipped with an air suspension system or an equivalent system on the driving axle, ABS brakes and a plate complying with the requirements of the Regulations.

A 6 axle (3 axle tractor unit towing a 3 axle semi-trailer) articulated vehicle can operate over 40 tonnes under the following conditions:

1. A maximum laden weight of 44 tonnes (5.5 tonnes/metre) for a 3-axle tractor unit with twin tyres, air suspension or an equivalent suspension on each driving axle and ABS brakes, in combination with a 3-axle semi-trailer that has air suspension or an equivalent suspension and ABS brakes. The vehicle combination must also be fitted with plates complying with the requirements of the Regulations.

2. Since 1st April 2013 a 3-axle tractor unit towing a 3-axle semi-trailer may operate at a gross combination weight of 46 tonnes (5.75 tonnes/metre). However, in addition to satisfying the requirements of point (1) above; they must also satisfy the following additional criteria in order to be allowed to operate as part of a 46 tonne combination:

1. Tractor units and semi-trailers already in service on 1st April 2013 require Electronic Braking Systems (EBS). Anti-lock Braking Systems (ABS) are not sufficient;

2. New tractor units first registered on or after 1st April 2013 in addition to requiring EBS need Vehicle Stability Function (VSF) which is more commonly known as Electronic Stability Control (ESC); and

3. Semi-trailers first licensed on or after 1st April 2013 in addition to requiring EBS require roll stability control.

### Driver Test

500. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to waive the cost of a driver test in cases in which an applicant needs to repeat this test and needs the licence for work or study purposes (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46820/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** While I appreciate that the process of obtaining a driving licence has a cost, I believe that this cost is not particularly high when measured against the cost to the authorities of providing such a service. The driving test is the means to determine the competency of a driver and to test his or her ability to operate a vehicle and manoeuvre it safely on our roads. It would, therefore, not be appropriate to offer a reduced fee to a driver if they have failed to meet the criteria and have to take the test again.

### Irish Coast Guard Issues

501. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if emergency calls to the Irish Coast Guard are recorded; the chronology setting out the sequence of events involving the Irish Coast Guard relating to an incident (details supplied); and if all recordings and documents in connection with the incident will be made available to the family. [46981/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** This tragic incident is under investigation by An Garda Síochána and the Marine Casualty Investigation Board. The IRCG is assisting with these investigations. While these investigations are on-going, I am not in a position to comment further on this incident other than to express my sympathy to the families in question.

### Departmental Staff Data

502. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of senior positions held by both men and women, respectively, in his Department. [47007/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The information requested by the Deputy is outlined in the table and is the position as of 31.10.2018.

Grade	Male	Female
Secretary General	1	0
Assistant Secretary	3	3
Principal Officer	13	8

Grade	Male	Female
Assistant Principal	28	36
Professional & Technical (Principal Officer)	16	1
Professional & Technical (Assistant Principal)	41	2

### Air Quality

503. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on recent reports regarding emission levels from diesel vehicle imports from the United Kingdom; if these imports meet Ireland's standards on particulate and other noxious emissions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47029/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The number of imported cars in Ireland has grown significantly in recent years. As the Deputy is no doubt aware, under EU legislation there are provisions to permit the free movement of goods between Member States. This free movement allows European citizens greater consumer choice. Construction standards for vehicles are also set at EU level and on an EU-wide basis.

Without commenting on the emissions profile of any individual imported vehicle or class of vehicles; the progressive 'dieselisation' of our national car fleet over the past decade and its impact on air quality is a matter for concern. There are a range of incentives in place, many of which were introduced by this Government, to encourage consumers to transition away from all conventionally fuelled vehicles towards lower-emitting alternatives.

Furthermore, the Minister for Finance announced in Budget 2019 that from 1st January 2019 a new 1% surcharge on VRT will be levied on all newly registered diesel cars, including those imported into Ireland.

Furthermore, there is an important role to be played by improving efficiency standards for vehicles at European level. Ireland continues to push strongly for better EU vehicle standards, seeking greater ambition in regulations that ensure vehicles registered in Europe are increasingly more efficient and less emitting. It is through better technology and improved efficiency that carbon emissions generated by vehicles can be decoupled from increased economic activity and population growth.

### Rail Services Provision

504. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to increase the frequency of the southbound Dundalk train between 6.30 a.m. and 7.30 a.m. in view of the fact that changes to the DART timetable have had a knock-on effect on the commuter line and have increased the journey time (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47052/18]

**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. However, I am not involved in the day-to-day operations of public transport, nor decisions on the scheduling and timetabling of services.

The issue raised is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA), in conjunction with

Iarnród Éireann, and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

*A referred reply was forwarded to the Deputy under Standing Order 42A*

### **Road Safety**

505. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if national guidelines will be provided for the installation of cattle grids on roads in view of safety concerns raised by some local authorities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47059/18]

**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.

I understand that TII provide a Standards Construction Detail (CC-SCD-02755) for a Cattle Grid to be used on a local road as part of a National Road scheme. The SCD is available on the TII Publications website at <http://tiipublications.ie/library/CC-SCD-02755-01.pdf>.

Noting the above position, I have referred the question to TII for a more detailed and direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

*A referred reply was forwarded to the Deputy under Standing Order 42A*

### **Park and Ride Facilities**

506. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated cost of constructing park and ride facilities (details supplied). [47083/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I wish to advise the Deputy that the National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure and services in the Greater Dublin Area and undertakes a support role for the relevant local authorities, on a non-statutory basis, in the regional cities of Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford.

Noting the NTA's responsibility in the matter, 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.

*A referred reply was forwarded to the Deputy under Standing Order 42A*

### **Public Transport**

507. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated cost of conducting feasibility studies for transport projects (details supplied). [47084/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to

public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has responsibility for the development and implementation of all public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area and bus infrastructure in other cities.

Noting their responsibility in relation to this matter, I have forwarded your query to the NTA for their consideration and direct reply. Please notify my office if you have not received a reply within 10 working days.

*A referred reply was forwarded to the Deputy under Standing Order 42A*

### **Bus Éireann**

508. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent of Bus Éireann's financial losses in 2017; and the accumulated deficit of the company. [47135/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The information sought by the Deputy is contained in the Financial Statements of Bus Éireann which are published annually. According to the company's most recently published financial statements, the company incurred a deficit of €23.7 million in that year, and the accumulated losses as at 31 December 2017 were €46.1 million.

### **Rail Services Data**

509. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent of Iarnród Éireann's financial losses in 2017; and the accumulated deficit of this company. [47136/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The information sought by the Deputy is contained in the Financial Statements of Iarnród Éireann which are published annually. According to the company's most recently published financial statements, the company incurred a deficit of €1.1 million in 2017, which was lower than the deficit of €2.9 million that was incurred in the previous year. The continued recovery of our national economy has resulted in increased passenger journeys and consequent growth in passenger revenue for Irish Rail. The company's accumulated deficit as at 31 December 2017 was €154.2 million.

### **National Transport Authority Remit**

510. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he is considering changes to the National Transport Authority's route licensing powers. [47137/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As previously explained to the Deputy in my reply to PQ Ref No 43816/18 on 23 October 2018, the licensing of public bus passenger services is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the provisions of the Public Transport Regulation Act 2009. The NTA has completed a formal review of Part 2 of the 2009 Act which is under consideration by my Department.

Following that review I have published a proposal as part of the General Scheme of the Railway Safety Amendment Bill which brings certain commercial school bus services back within the scope of the regulatory framework applied by the NTA for private operators. No decisions have yet been taken regarding any further changes to the NTA's route licensing powers.

*A referred reply was forwarded to the Deputy under Standing Order 42A*

### **Driver Test Regulations**

511. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 1305 of 2 May 2017, if his officials have completed their review of the requirement to undergo a programme of 12 essential driver training lessons to examine whether a more limited programme can be tailored for persons with full licences from non-exchange countries, particularly those persons who have previously held a full Irish driver's licence; his plans to publish this review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47173/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I am happy to be able to tell the Deputy that I have signed regulations into effect to deal with this matter.

As the Deputy will be aware, people who take up residence in this jurisdiction and who have a driving licence which is not eligible for exchange for an Irish licence are required to go through the driver learning process in order to obtain an Irish driving licence. The reason for this is public safety - where licences are exchangeable, it is because we are satisfied that they are based on testing to a standard comparable to our own, either because they are EU driving licences or because they are licences issued by a jurisdiction with which we have an agreement on licence exchange based on detailed study which shows that the two regimes are comparable.

I am aware that many who take up residence here with non-exchange driving licences find this system lengthy, costly, and frustrating. The principal source of both cost and time is the requirement to undertake 12 Essential Driver Training (EDT) lessons. Following discussions with the Road Safety Authority and with my colleague Minister Ciaran Cannon, Minister for the Diaspora, I decided that people in this situation should be offered a reduced EDT of only 6 lessons. I have now signed into law the necessary regulations. As there will need to be a lead-in time for the RSA and driving instructors, the new measures will come into effect from 21 January 2019.

### **Ministerial Meetings**

512. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the policy on the need for note taking when Ministers and-or Ministers of State meet business and other leaders; the way in which this policy is outlined; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46485/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** It is generally the practice of my Department, in the case of meetings involving myself and third parties, for officials to attend and minute same.

There are no Ministers of State in my Department.

### **Community Childcare Subvention Programme**

513. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the reason a person (details supplied) cannot access community childcare subvention and community childcare subvention plus schemes; the steps that can be taken to alleviate the person's situation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46537/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The Community Childcare Subvention (CCS) and Community Childcare Subvention Plus (CCSP) Programmes provide support for parents/guardians on a low income to avail of reduced childcare costs at participating privately owned childcare services and at community not-for-profit childcare services.

The eligibility of the applying parent/guardian is determined by their status with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP). The level of the subvention is determined by the parent's DEASP status and also by the level of childcare required. If a parent/guardian or child has a medical card this is also an eligibility criteria.

Please see the table attached which outlines the eligibility criteria and level of subvention for the CCS and CCSP schemes.

If the person named is in receipt of any of the DEASP payments listed in the table below and does not have a medical card, this may qualify them for childcare subvention under Band B of the CCS/CCSP schemes, this would mean a subsidy of up to €70 per week off their childcare costs.

If the person named were eligible for a medical card, then this along with the relevant DEASP payment may qualify them for Band A which would mean a subsidy of up to €145 per week off their childcare costs.

In the specific case raised by the Deputy, the individual in question does not currently meet these criteria. In the event that the person's circumstances change and she meets the requirements as set out she should again contact her chosen provider who can process an application on her behalf. Individuals might also contact their local City and County Childcare Committee who will be able to assist in matters of childcare scheme eligibility.

### **Early Years Strategy Implementation**

514. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of baby boxes being delivered to parents under the national early years strategy announced in April 2018. [46587/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families has recently been approved by Government and will be published on 19th November. The Strategy sets out a vision for early childhood and a roadmap for the coming decade.

One of the actions in the Strategy is to pilot the introduction of baby boxes and Dormant Accounts funding has been secured for this project.

Baby boxes will contain a range of practical and useful items and information resources to support the transition to and early stages of parenthood. The project will pilot and test the design, items for inclusion, procurement, registration and distribution of Baby Boxes in a selected geographic area. The pilot phase of the project will also include the development of accompanying information resources and training of staff involved in roll out.

It is anticipated that the pilot will allow for approximately 5,000 baby boxes to be developed and delivered.

There will be a significant emphasis in the pilot on evaluation of impact of the measure with a view to determining whether it is suitable for wider roll out.

## Ministerial Correspondence

515. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if a request from a service provider (details supplied) to meet with her has been received; if so, if this request will be facilitated; when a response will be issued to the provider; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46593/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I can inform the Deputy that a request was received to meet with the service provider referred to. However, following consideration of the request, it was my view that the subject was more appropriate to my colleague the Minister for Health. Accordingly, my Office wrote back to the service provider and suggested that they contact Minister Harris.

### Child and Family Agency Staff

516. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if a national training needs analysis has ever been carried out by Tusla; and if so, if she will provide a copy of the results of same. [46600/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** As training is an operational matter for the Tusla, I do not have sight of the documents referenced by the Deputy. I am advised by Tusla that its training needs analysis is managed in line with the Tusla Strategy for Continual Professional Development. The strategy calls for a three yearly agency wide training needs analysis to be coordinated by Tusla Workforce Learning and Development. I understand that the most recent training needs analysis commenced in late 2017.

### Child and Family Agency Staff

517. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the follow-up that will be carried out to ensure that an assessment is completed (details supplied). [46601/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I am aware that Tusla is currently developing a Multi-Annual Strategic Workforce Plan and this will be finalised before the end of this year.

Strategic workforce planning is central to ensuring that Tusla can meet its needs by reconfiguring the workforce to deliver better care outcomes in the future.

I am informed that the plan will include actions to improve access to potential talent pools, review the appropriate skills mix of staff and examining what this will mean for Tusla and how it will operate. This work will be done in conjunction with HIQA recommendations regarding the review of the area and team structures.

### Child and Family Agency Staff

518. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of joint specialist interview training sessions in interviewing persons alleging child sexual abuse that have been completed by Tusla staff in 2018. [46602/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** Currently 12

Social Workers are trained and operating as specialist interviewers. An additional 5 are trained but need refresher training before they can recommence conducting interviews. Refresher training is being organised by Templemore for later this year. Tusla has 12 places on specialist interviewing training courses being organised before the end of December 2018.

Assuming the 12 social workers training later this year complete successfully and the 5 social workers requiring refresher training also complete, there should be 29 social work specialist interviewers available from the start of 2019.

### **Early Childhood Care and Education Funding**

519. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the reason there has been a delay in capitation payments to childcare providers; and when they can expect to be paid. [46653/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** Thank you for your question which I believe relates specifically to Early Years' service providers' capitation payments under two of my Department's programme strands: ECCE Higher Capitation payments and LINC (Leadership for Inclusion) payments made under AIM (Access and Inclusion Model).

Administration of the ECCE programme, including all payments, is carried out by Pobal acting as an agent of my department. Until recently, one exception existed within this arrangement, namely ECCE Higher Capitation, a 'top-up' capitation fee within the ECCE programme, providing additional funding to Early Years services which are led by graduates of Early Childhood Education and Care degrees. While payments were processed by Pobal, the application and processing of ECCE Higher Capitation was still carried out by this Department. While my officials endeavoured to make this process as straightforward as possible, it was considered that this two-stage process, involving two administrative entities, was cumbersome for Early Years' service providers. It had long been the intention of this department to transfer administration of the ECCE programme as a whole to Pobal, allowing for an improvement in efficiency.

On 30 July 2018 an official announcement was made that Pobal would be the administrator of ECCE Higher Capitation payments on behalf of the Department of Children and Youth (DCYA) with effect from the commencement of the 2018/2019 programme year.

Pobal opened the application process for the ECCE Higher Capitation 2018/2019 on 28 September 2018, via Pobal's online portal system.

The date of payments of the ECCE Higher Capitation rate will be individual to each service on approval of a fully completed application. Once an application has been approved by Pobal, they will pay services the ECCE Higher Capitation rate and any arrears due to them on the next available payment date.

In migrating ECCE Higher Capitation to Pobal, the DCYA completed the process of transitioning full administration of the ECCE programme to Pobal. Early Years providers are also now able to conduct all business relating to the ECCE programme with one agent, using the same system already in place to conduct all of their business relating to DCYA Early Years programmes, and have the full benefit of the resources that Pobal already bring to the Early Years sector.

Pobal endeavour to have applications processed within one month of receiving a Higher Capitation application. A delay may occur if more information is required from the service

provider to fully process the application. Pobal has received an unprecedented number of applications for ECCE Higher Capitation so far in this programme year. I am very pleased to see that more Early Years' services are becoming eligible for ECCE Higher Capitation, and my officials anticipate that this will represent over half of all Early Years' services by the end of the programme year.

Officials from the DCYA and Pobal are already in dialogue around ensuring efficient roll out of the Higher Capitation payments in the 2019/2020 programme year, including opening ECCE Higher Capitation for applications in advance of September 2019.

In relation to the LINC (AIM Level 1) payments, Pobal has received 1,225 applications to date for the increased Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) capitation in relation to LINC. Of the applications received 92% have been processed with 89% of the total successfully awarded funding so far. Of these, 97% have received a payment in relation to LINC for this programme year to date.

### Child and Family Agency Data

520. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of social workers appointed to cover the Connemara south and west regions; the number of vacancies; the number of children awaiting allocation to a social worker in the region by the priority of the case and waiting time in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46706/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I am advised by Tusla that there are six Social Workers currently in the Connemara South and West Regions. There is one vacancy due to retirement; that has now been filled and the successful applicant will commence employment on the 26th November 2018. This will bring the number of Social Workers to seven. I am also informed there is 1.5 whole time equivalent Team Leader/Manager for the region.

Tusla have also provided the following data:

Number of cases awaiting allocation to a social worker in Galway/Roscommon by priority level and waiting time, based on August 2018 data.

Priority of Cases Waiting Allocation	Number of Cases Awaiting Allocation	Waiting Time <1 Month	Waiting time <1-3 Months	Waiting Time > 3 Months
Low	59	42	11	6
Medium	118	68	33	17
High	51	22	19	10
Total	228	132	63	33

### Tribunals of Inquiry Reports

521. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if there has been a formal response from the board of Tusla following the publication of the third interim report of the disclosures tribunal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46767/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I met with the

Board of Tusla on 25th October regarding the implications of the Disclosures Tribunal (Charleton) Report for the agency. At the meeting I expressed serious concern about a number of conclusions and findings of the Tribunal. Among the issues I raised were the:

- Serious practice issues at local level
- Failure to follow national procedures and policy
- Attempt at local level to conceal the extent of the errors made
- Breakdown between local, regional and national level in relation to roles and responsibilities
- Questions about organisational culture at local level in allowing so serious an error to go uncorrected.

I asked the Board to consider very carefully if there were any issues that had been identified by the Tribunal which would not already be addressed in the planned response to the HIQA report published last June, including the agreed Action Plan that is now in the process of implementation. I also asked the Board to examine carefully how Tusla as an organisation scrutinises itself.

I wrote to the chair of Tusla's Board on 6 November 2018. In the letter, I noted the failures in the management of the referral made in respect of Garda Sergeant Maurice McCabe, now retired. I have requested additional information with respect to performance management and the supports to address adherence to policies and future cooperation with any public enquiry process. I have asked the Board to respond to me as soon as possible.

### **Child Abuse Reports**

522. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if the expert quality assurance and oversight group to support and advise Tusla on the implementation of the recommendations of the HIQA statutory investigation into the way in which Tusla manages allegations of child sexual abuse has been established by her Department; when such a group was established; if it has not been established, the reason for the delay; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46768/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The Expert Assurance Group has been established. I appointed the chair of the group on the 29th of June and the full membership on the 23rd of August.

The group held its first meeting on 30th of August and has met three times so far. The membership of the group has expertise in governance, law, HR and child protection and comprises:

- Dr Moling Ryan, Chair
- Dr Helen Buckley, Fellow Emeritus at the School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin
- Mr Gerry Verschoyle, HR Consultant
- Mr Andrew Lowe, Public Policy Consultant
- Dr Conor O'Mahony, Lecturer in Law, University College Cork

- Ms Michele Clarke, Chief Social Worker, Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

The group will report to me each quarter, and these reports will be published. I expect the first such report at the end of November.

### **Child and Family Agency Services**

523. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of the action plan that is to be published on the Tusla website with timelines of the measures it plans to take to implement the recommendations of the HIQA report published in June 2018 on the way in which Tusla manages allegations of child sexual abuse; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46769/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The Action Plan can be accessed on the Tusla website at [https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/HIQA\\_strategic\\_action\\_plan.pdf](https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/HIQA_strategic_action_plan.pdf)

The Tusla Strategic Action Plan arising from the HIQA investigation into the management of allegations of child sexual abuse against adults of concern by the Child and Family Agency has been approved by the Tusla Board. The plan has been submitted to my Department and to the Expert Assurance Group I have established to monitor the implementation of the recommendations, and advise Tusla and my Department. The Action Plan is built around nine themes, and a named member of the senior management team is identified as the lead under each one. Each action in the plan has a timeframe for completion.

### **Child and Family Agency Staff**

524. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if the human resources section of Tusla has received a grievance that 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. [46834/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** It would not be appropriate for me to comment on an operational matter 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.

### **Departmental Strategies**

525. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to introduce a baby box for children; the steps she has taken in regard to the matter to date; the estimated annual cost of this proposal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46916/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families has recently been approved by Government and will be published on 19th November. The Strategy sets out a vision for early childhood and a roadmap for the coming decade.

One of the actions in the Strategy is to pilot the introduction of baby boxes and Dormant Accounts funding has been secured for this project.

Baby boxes will contain a range of practical and useful items and information resources to support the transition to and early stages of parenthood. The project will pilot and test the design, items for inclusion, procurement, registration and distribution of Baby Boxes in a selected geographic area. The pilot phase of the project will also include the development of accompanying information resources and training of staff involved in roll out.

Background scoping has been undertaken for this project in order to prepare the proposal for funding from Dormant Accounts. Following the publication of the Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families the project will be further advanced. €700,000 has been secured for the first phase of the pilot. It is envisaged that this will be a multi-year project which will seek a further allocation from the Dormant Accounts Fund in a future Action Plan to conclude its rollout.

There will be a significant emphasis in the pilot on evaluation of impact of the measure with a view to determining whether it is suitable for wider roll out.

### **Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Data**

526. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of children in State care on waiting lists for CAMHS by county in tabular form; the number waiting up to three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12, 12 to 18 and more than 18 months, respectively; the mental health supports available to children in the care of the State; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46955/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I refer the Deputy to Parliamentary Question 45727/18, of 7th November 2018 where I outlined the mental health supports available for children in care. Tusla does not collate information at area or national level regarding referrals made on behalf of children in care to any specialist health service. This information is known to the child's social worker, carer, GP and, where appropriate, family members. The information should be kept on file and on the child's individual care plan.

I also advised the Deputy that CAMHS is a function of the Health Services Executive, which comes under the remit of the Department of Health.

As data on the waiting times for CAMHS is not reported to my Department, I would suggest that questions on waiting lists are better directed to my cabinet colleague, the Minister for Health.

### **Domestic Violence Refuges Provision**

527. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of beds available in a given night in all Tusla-funded domestic violence emergency and step-down accommodation. [46958/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** As this is an operational matter for Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, I have asked Tusla to respond to the Deputy directly.

### **Children in Care**

528. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of children in full-time residential care. [46966/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** According to Tusla published data for the end of August 2018, there were 367 children in residential care.

#### **Child and Family Agency Data**

529. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of children who have been referred by Tusla to an organisation (details supplied) since 2013. [46974/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I can inform the Deputy that this information is not collated centrally by Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. Prior to the establishment of Tusla in 2014, the functions of child welfare and protection were carried out by the Health Services Executive.

#### **Child and Family Agency Data**

530. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of cases referred by Tusla to an organisation (details supplied) since 2013 that have given rise to criminal charges being brought against the person against whom the allegation was made. [46975/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I can inform the Deputy that this information is not collated by Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. Prior to the establishment of Tusla in 2014, the functions of child welfare and protection were carried out by the Health Services Executive.

I must apologise to the Deputy that I do not have the information she requests in answer to this Parliamentary Question and PQ 46974/18 and PQ 46976/18. I appreciate she has sought this information from both the Department of Health and from my Department without success. I will ask my officials to write to the Deputy with a more detailed explanation.

#### **Child and Family Agency Data**

531. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of children who have been referred by Tusla to an organisation (details supplied) since 2013 at the same time as family law proceedings involving the child's family were before the courts. [46976/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I can inform the Deputy that this information is not collated by Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. Prior to the establishment of Tusla in 2014, the functions of child welfare and protection were carried out by the Health Services Executive. I would note that family law proceedings are held *in camera* and it may not be possible to collate such information as a result.

#### **Departmental Staff Data**

532. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of senior positions held by both men and women, respectively, in her Department. [46994/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** For the purposes of this answer, I take “senior positions” as comprising all civil servants at Secretary General, Assistant Secretary and Director levels in this Department. At 1 November 2018 the breakdown of these positions in my department is as follows:

Position	Gender
Assistant Secretary	F
Assistant Secretary	F
Assistant Secretary	M
Director	F
Secretary General	M

Total Senior Positions	Female	Male
5	3	2

### CLÁR Programme

533. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development his views on a matter in respect of a CLÁR grant (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46479/18]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** The CLÁR programme provides funding for small scale infrastructural projects in disadvantaged rural areas that have experienced significant levels of depopulation.

The 2018 CLÁR programme provided funding under the following measures:

Measure 1: Support for Schools/Community Safety Measures

Measure 2: Play Areas/Multi-Use Games Areas

Measure 3: First Response Support Measure

Measure 4: Mobility and Cancer Care Transport Measure

The project referred to by the Deputy was awarded funding under Measure 2 of the CLÁR programme for a school play area. An email issued on 16th May 2018 to all the relevant County Councils clarifying that in order to be eligible under the scheme this year, the Play Areas/MU-GAs on school grounds must be available to the general community outside of normal school hours and during school holidays.

On 17th May 2018, my Department received a reply from the relevant County Council stating that the play area for the project referred to by the Deputy was available for use by the wider community. Eligibility under the scheme remains dependent on this requirement being met, and there have been no derogations given in relation to the requirement.

If the school is not now in a position to open the play area to the public outside of normal school hours, it will not qualify for funding under the scheme criteria. A derogation cannot be considered in this case.

## Ministerial Meetings

534. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the policy on the need for note taking when Ministers and-or Ministers of State meet business and other leaders; the way in which this policy is outlined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46497/18]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** In general, when such meetings relate to any business areas of my Department, the Minister of State and I are accompanied to those meetings by officials from my Department, as appropriate. The officials take notes and provide appropriate minutes of the meetings.

## Rural Regeneration and Development Fund

535. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the position regarding applications for grant aid for projects (details supplied); when projects under these schemes will be finalised and approved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46791/18]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** The first call for applications for the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund closed at the end of September with almost 300 applications received. The assessment of applications for the Fund is being overseen by a Project Advisory Board, comprised of representatives from key Government Departments and external experts. Assessment of Category 1 applications is currently underway with funding of €55 million allocated in Budget 2019 for this round. Successful applicants for the first round of funding will be notified following an announcement by the Minister due by the end of November.

The Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme is part of the Government's Action Plan for Rural Development and provides funding for the development of new outdoor recreational infrastructure or the necessary maintenance, enhancement or promotion of existing outdoor recreation infrastructure in Ireland.

On 28th May last, I launched the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme for 2018, under three separate measures:

- Measure 1: Small maintenance/promotion of existing infrastructure (maximum grant €20,000)
- Measure 2: Medium scale repair/upgrade and development of new small/medium infrastructure (maximum grant €200,000), and
- Measure 3: Repair/upgrade and development of larger more strategic projects (grant of between €200,001 and €500,000).

I recently announced the allocation of €1.8 million in respect of 128 projects under Measure 1.

I expect to announce successful projects under Measure 3 shortly, and will subsequently announce successful projects under Measure 2.

## Local Improvement Scheme Expenditure

536. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if the timescale for the spending of local improvement scheme, LIS, funding can be postponed to March 2019 in order to allow county councils to allocate funding in view of the fact that he has not yet issued direction to councils (details supplied) in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46948/18]

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

I announced details of the 2018 Local Improvement Scheme on 27th February last when I allocated an initial sum of €10.8 million to Local Authorities across the country. At the time, I asked Local Authorities to provide a secondary list of roads which could be completed before the end of the year if further funding became available under the LIS.

On 26th October, I allocated an additional €10 million in funding to Local Authorities under the scheme, based on their secondary lists of priority roads.

A letter issued to all relevant Local Authorities on 2nd November 2018, advising them of their allocations and that works should be commenced immediately with a view to having all works substantially completed by the end of the year. Details regarding payment draw-down arrangements will follow shortly, but this should not in any way delay the commencement of the works.

In 2017, I also allocated LIS funding in two separate tranches. The second round of LIS funding last year was notified to Local Authorities on 16th November 2017 and the Authorities were able to substantially complete the LIS works by the end of the year. I have no reason to believe, therefore, that the Local Authorities will not be in a position to substantially complete their 2018 works before the end of this year.

### Departmental Staff Data

537. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of senior positions held by both men and women, respectively, in his Department. [47006/18]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** The number of senior positions held by both men and women, respectively in the Department of Rural and Community Development, as at 9th November, 2018, are set out in the table below:

Grade/Title	Male	Female	Total
Secretary General	1	0	1
Assistant Secretary	1	2	3
Principal Officer	6	4	10
Assistant Principal	16	15	31
Total Senior Positions	24	21	45

### Social Welfare Schemes

538. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the perceived inequality that prohibits persons who are not in receipt of a social protection payment from applying for community employment schemes or back to education courses will be addressed. [46464/18]

545. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the inequality that prohibits persons who are not in receipt of a social welfare payment from applying for community employment schemes or back to education courses will be addressed. [46534/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 538 and 545 together.

The Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) is a second-chance education opportunity scheme designed to remove barriers to participate in second and third level education by enabling those who fulfil the eligibility criteria to continue to receive a payment while pursuing an approved full-time education course.

Community Employment (CE) is an active labour market programme with the emphasis on progression into employment and/or further education and training. It is designed to break the cycle of unemployment and maintain work readiness, thereby improving a person's opportunities of returning to the open labour market.

In order to qualify for either BTEA or CE, a number of conditions including age and being in receipt of a qualifying social welfare payment for a specific period must be met.

My Department also provides a range of services to unemployed persons who are not in receipt of a qualifying social welfare payment. These include advice on job-search activities, the use of online job search tools in Intreo Centres nationally, upskilling opportunities through Educational Training Boards (ETBs), Springboard and Skillnet courses. Persons signing for credits for six months or more can also participate on ETB-run VTOS courses, subject to availability. In the case of VTOS courses, participants do not receive a training allowance but may receive travel and lunch allowances.

My Department and the Government is committed to supporting as many people as possible to participate more fully in employment and to become more self-sufficient by providing supports that address barriers they may encounter in finding and sustaining employment.

As the Deputy will be aware, the key objective of activation policy and labour market initiatives is to offer assistance to those most in need of support in securing work and achieving financial self-sufficiency. This policy objective prioritises scarce resources to those in receipt of qualifying welfare payments.

Accordingly, the employment services and schemes provided by my Department are focused, in the first instance, on this cohort of unemployed people who are in receipt of a qualifying payment and I have no plans to change the existing criteria.

If the Deputy has a particular case in mind perhaps he would contact my Department with details.

I hope this clarifies the matter.

## **Illness Benefit Applications**

539. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when an application for illness benefit by a person (details supplied) will be processed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46469/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Illness Benefit claim for the person concerned is certified and paid up until 13th November 2018.

If she remains ill and unfit for work, a further medical certificate should be submitted to the Department as soon as possible in order for further payments to issue.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Illness Benefit Payments**

540. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason a person (details supplied) is receiving reduced and varying rates of illness benefit payments over the past number of weeks; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46472/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Occupational Injury Benefit claim for the person concerned is both certified and paid up to 14th November 2018.

If he remains ill and unfit for work, a further medical certificate should be submitted to the Department as soon as possible to enable further payments to continue to issue.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Fuel Allowance Payments**

541. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her views on a matter (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46480/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The fuel allowance is a payment of €22.50 per week for 28 weeks per year (a total of €630 per annum) 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.

It has been and remains the case that 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 overall budgetary negotiations.

I would again highlight payments available under the supplementary welfare allowance scheme. Payments include a heating supplement payment, 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 this payment. There is no standard rate for a heating supplement. Each case is ex-

amined 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.

An exceptional needs payment may also be made under the supplementary welfare allowance scheme. This payment can be made to help meet an essential, once-off cost which customers are unable to meet out of their own resources and this may include exceptional heating costs.

If the Deputy or anyone else is aware of someone who does not qualify for Fuel Allowance as a result of short-term unemployment, but whose financial position is that they require such assistance, he should advise that person to contact their Community Welfare Officer.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Ministerial Meetings**

542. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the policy on the need for note taking when Ministers and-or Ministers of State meet business and other leaders; the way in which this policy is outlined; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46490/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The requirement for note taking is dependent on the nature, subject and brevity or otherwise of any of my meetings. Where a formal meeting on a specific issue is convened, it is the normal practice for a note of the principal issues raised to be taken and any action points arising from the meeting. This practice is understood and applied by my Department.

### **Illness Benefit Payments**

543. **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 of changes to the system that have resulted in delayed or irregular payments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46508/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Illness Benefit claim for the person concerned is paid up to 15th November 2018 and she is certified up until 2nd December 2018. Normalised IB payments should now resume up until the certified date.

If the customer remains ill and unfit for work, a further medical certificate should be submitted to the Department as soon as possible in order for further payments to issue.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Legislative Programme**

544. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when the Social Welfare, Pensions and Civil Registration Bill 2017 will be progressed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46528/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The

Social Welfare, Pensions and Civil Registration Bill 2017 was published in May 2017. It contained a number of measures to amend the Social Welfare (Consolidation) Act 2005, a number of specific measures relating to defined benefit pension schemes and amendments to the Civil Registration Act 2004.

In July 2018, Government approval was obtained to draft additional provisions to be included in the Bill at Committee Stage, including provisions relating to defined benefit pension schemes. A key priority for the Government is to provide additional protections for scheme members' pension benefits. However, it is essential that any new measures recognise the current pension landscape in Ireland so that a balanced, proportionate approach is developed and that unintended negative consequences do not arise.

The defined benefit pensions provisions are very technical and involved complex policy issues. In order to achieve a resilient solution it has been necessary to consult with and obtain numerous legal advices from the Office of the Attorney General on various aspects of this policy. When these matters have been resolved and amendments approved by Government, an early date for Committee Stage will be requested.

In the meantime two largely technical elements of that were published as part of the 2017 Bill are now being brought forward as part of the Social Welfare, Pensions and Civil Registration Bill 2018. These provisions provide for the implementation of administrative efficiencies. The first is a measure is to allow positive decisions i.e. decisions to award a social welfare benefit or payment to a claimant, to be made by an automated information system. The second is a measure to dispense with the practice of asking General Practitioners to distinguish between employment of a rehabilitative nature and work more generally for the purposed of Disability Allowance, Blind Pension and certain supplements under Supplementary Welfare Allowance.

There is also a technical amendment to the Civil Registration Act 2004 which was to be part of the 2017 Bill. This is now being brought forward as part of the 2018 Bill. This is a technical provision concerning the terms of office of an tÁrd Chláraitheoir (Registrar General) and an tÁrd Chláraitheoir Cunta (Deputy Registrar General).

I hope this clarifies matters for the Deputy.

*Question No. 545 answered with Question No. 538.*

### **Social Welfare Appeals**

546. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 522 of 3 July 2018, if her attention has been drawn to inconsistencies regarding the way in which appeal outcomes are worded and-or communicated to appellants; her views in respect of the social protection payment of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46538/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that, in light of the appellant's contentions, the appeal file is being recalled from the Department. An Appeals Officer will consider the matter and the appellant will be advised of the outcome as soon as possible.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Jobseeker's Benefit**

547. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason expenditure on jobseeker's benefit is expected to rise in 2019 when compared to 2018 as outlined in the budget 2019 expenditure report; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46546/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The 2019 Budget Estimate for Jobseekers Benefit is €346.5m. This is an increase of €14.8m on the 2018 REV estimate which is €331.7m. This is due to a number of factors including the 2019 rate increase announced in the Budget, the carryover cost of the previous year's rate increase and the cost of extending Jobseeker's Benefit to the self-employed in late 2019.

There has been a significant decline in Jobseekers Benefit expenditure from a peak of over €2.4 billion in 2009.

### **Invalidity Pension Applications**

548. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application for an invalidity pension by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46549/18]

**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 from the lady referred to on 25 June 2018. Her claim was disallowed on the grounds that the medical conditions for the scheme were not satisfied. She was notified on the 07 November 2018 of this decision, the reasons for it and of her right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Community Employment Schemes Data**

549. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of vacancies on employment schemes nationally in view of the reliance on these schemes to carry out essential work and repairs (details supplied); the steps she will take to address concerns of scheme providers that expect to face much greater difficulties in hiring participants for schemes due to a return to full employment; if she has given consideration to changing the rules of schemes to allow greater flexibility including longer participation times; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46561/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Work schemes such as Tús and Community Employment (CE) are positive initiatives that enable the long-term unemployed to make a contribution to their communities whilst up-skilling themselves for prospective future employment. These schemes help to break the cycle of un-

employment and improve a person's chances of returning to the labour market. The rural social scheme (RSS) provides farmers and fishermen with income support while they also make a contribution to their communities.

The CE scheme has a budget to support approximately 21,900 participant places in 2018 and 21,500 places in 2019. At the end of October, there was a total of 21,243 participants on the scheme. This leaves a total of 657 budgeted vacancies this year.

CE schemes are typically sponsored by groups (known as sponsors) wishing to benefit the local community. My Department agrees participant numbers annually with each CE sponsor organisation who are responsible for the recruitment of participants and for identifying suitable work placements. CE sponsors can promote their scheme vacancies within their local communities.

At a local level, various methods of promoting CE have been arranged between my Department and local schemes, including targeting potentially eligible jobseekers to attend a CE Job-fair, where details of CE vacancies and employment opportunities are provided.

In addition, CE sponsors can advertise their vacancies free of charge on the Department's JobsIreland website, [www.jobsireland.ie](http://www.jobsireland.ie). The process of posting vacancies is relatively straightforward and a tailored video is available online to assist sponsors.

The Deputy will appreciate that the welcome increase in the number of people at work and the continued reduction in Live Register numbers is a factor in recruitment to all work programmes. While participation on CE and Tús is a stepping stone back to employment, these positions are not full-time sustainable jobs.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that I have implemented a number of changes to the terms and conditions of participation on CE. The main purpose of these changes is to broaden the availability to a greater number of people on the Live Register and to standardise other conditions around the length of time a person can participate on a programme.

The general qualifying age for CE for those on the Live Register was reduced from 25 to 21 years. It is now easier for previous participants, who have exhausted their CE entitlement, to re-qualify as participation prior to the year 2007 is disregarded. There is an overall limit of 6 years participation from 2007 (7 years if on a disability payment). While participants between 21 and 55 years on CE are entitled to one year on the programme, this can be extended by up to 2 more years if they are engaged in a recognised training or education award that is helping them progress towards employment. All CE participants age 55 and over can avail of 3 consecutive years on a CE scheme. Since 1st June, I am also facilitating persons to take up a placement on CE or Tús while also attending their JobPath provider.

Participants over age 62 are allowed to participate on a continuous basis up to the State Pension age on the CE Service Support Stream (SSS), subject to availability of places on the SSS, satisfactory performance on the scheme and to annual approval by the Department. The places allocated for these participants within each individual CE scheme are subject to limitation criteria.

There are no plans to change the standard duration of participation on work schemes and it is considered that the existing durations are adequate to meet the programmes objectives.

Any IB or sponsor organisation who has any recruitment concerns should contact their nearest Intreo Centre who will provide assistance.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Disability Allowance Payments**

550. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a disability allowance becomes payable in the case of a person (details supplied) who was previously in receipt of a domiciliary care allowance, DCA; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46566/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** I can confirm that my department received an application for disability allowance (DA) from the person concerned on 21 August 2018.

On 06 November 2018 they were asked to supply supporting documentation required by the deciding officer in order to make a decision on their eligibility. On receipt of this information a decision will be made and they will be notified of the outcome.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility**

551. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the changes being applied to a practice (details supplied); her plans to make changes to this practice in the forthcoming social welfare Bill; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46571/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The provisions for a continued payment after death, for customers with a spouse/civil partner/cohabitant, are set out in Section 248(2)(a) of the Social Welfare (Consolidation) Act 2005 (as amended). To qualify for a continued payment, the spouse/partner must be either a qualified adult on the deceased person's payment or a customer in receipt of a payment in his/her own right. Regulations (Article 208(1) of Statutory Instrument 142 of 2007) define a "related person" i.e. a person to whom such a payment may be made.

My Department issued internal guidelines to staff on 3 August 2018 to clarify the interpretation of the legal provisions on this entitlement, and to ensure consistent application of prescribed conditions, where relevant. The subsequent implementation of the rules highlighted an anomaly in the legislation which is being examined by my officials as a matter of urgency.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Illness Benefit Payments**

552. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal will receive regular illness benefit payments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46590/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Occupational Injury claim for the person concerned is both certified and paid up to 14th November 2018.

If he remains ill and unfit for work, he should submit a further medical certificate to the

Department as soon as possible to enable further payments to be made.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility

553. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to exclude a payment (details supplied) from the means test for social welfare payments in view of the nature of the payment involved; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46622/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** My Department operates a range of means-tested social assistance payments. Social welfare legislation provides that the means test takes account of the income and assets of the person (and spouse/partner, if applicable) applying for the relevant scheme. Social welfare legislation also provides that certain forms of income are disregarded in this means assessment. In this regard, a number of compensation and other payments are currently disregarded for means-testing purposes. These include payments made by the Hepatitis C and HIV Compensation Tribunal, the Residential Institutions Statutory Board, and the Symphysiotomy Payment Scheme, among others.

The Northern Ireland Victims and Survivors Service delivers funding and support to survivors of the Conflict/Troubles on behalf of the Executive Office of Northern Ireland. They have remit to assist all victims and survivors identified in the *Victims and Survivors (Northern Ireland) Order 2006*, providing support to those who have been injured (physically or psychologically), those who care for people who have been injured, and those who have been bereaved by the Conflict/Troubles.

I have recently approved the introduction of a disregard for payments from Northern Ireland Victims & Survivors Service for social welfare means testing purposes. My officials have received sanction from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to progress this. Regulations to implement this disregard are currently being drafted and will be signed in due course.

### Illness Benefit Waiting Times

554. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons awaiting payment for illness benefit in County Louth; the length of time these persons have been waiting; and when they can expect to receive payment of same. [46630/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The information requested by the Deputy is not currently available in the manner requested.

However, the average processing time for individual Illness Benefit (IB) claims, dependent on the complexity of the claim application, is one week.

The Deputy should also note that IB payment volumes were restored to normal levels last week and my officials are monitoring them on a daily basis to ensure that they remain at this level. Any further issues that may arise will be dealt with as they are identified.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Illness Benefit Waiting Times**

555. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the details of the difficulties with the new illness benefit scheme forms that she has identified since July and August 2018; the measures she has taken to resolve each of these difficulties; and the status of the outstanding difficulties that still remain in place. [46631/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** My Department transferred administration of the Illness Benefit scheme to its core Business Objects IT platform in August 2018. Although the system change has worked effectively for over 80% of IB customers, significant difficulties arose following implementation for a number of customers.

My Department is taking three main steps to resolve the issues impacting on payments. First, we have deployed additional staff to process the tasks and respond to the customer enquiries. Second, we have developed some new IT routines or ‘workarounds’ that address the payment gap issues and to ensure a faster flow-through to payments. Third, we are reviewing the design rules in the system to afford greater flexibility in processing of claims and certificates.

Payment volumes were restored to normal levels last week and my officials are monitoring them on a daily basis to ensure that they remain at this level. Any further issues that may arise will be dealt with as they are identified. In addition to these system issues, the Department acknowledges that it did not communicate effectively with customers.

In order to ensure that we learn from the lessons of this experience, I have arranged for an independent review into how the changes to IB were planned, implemented and – importantly – communicated to customers. I expect this work to be completed by the end of the year.

Finally, I would like to sincerely apologise again for the difficulties and frustration experienced by customers who did not receive the correct IB payment or who experienced delays in their payments over the last few weeks.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Illness Benefit Payments**

556. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal can expect to receive an illness benefit payment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46711/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Illness Benefit claim for the person concerned has been processed and all arrears due to her have been paid. She is certified up to 26th November 2018.

If she remains ill and unfit for work, further medical certificates should be submitted to the Department to ensure that continued payments can be made.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Carer’s Allowance Payments**

557. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection

if a full carer's allowance will be paid to a person (details supplied). [46719/18]

**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.

CA was in payment to the person concerned at half-rate while her husband was claiming for her as a qualified adult on his jobseeker's allowance payment. When this stopped, the person concerned sought an increase in her CA.

Following a review the person concerned has been awarded full rate CA from 26 July 2018 at the weekly rate of €214.00.

Arrears of allowance due from 26 July 2018 less any other payments made for the period in question have issued to the person concerned on 9 August 2018.

The person concerned was notified on 1 August 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.

### **Commencement of Legislation**

558. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the date for the commencement of the relevant provisions of the Civil Registration (Amendment) Act 2014 such that Part 9 of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 can be commenced. [46726/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Sections 92, 93, 95 and 99 of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 provide for the registration and re-registration of the birth of a donor-conceived child but these sections have to be amended and have yet to be commenced. Commencement of these provisions is dependent on commencement of Parts 2 & 3 of the Act, which is the responsibility of the Minister for Health.

The Children and Family Relationships (Amendment) Bill 2018 was enacted on 24 July 2018. This Act was introduced to correct typographical and technical errors in the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015, which will facilitate the subsequent commencement of Parts 2 & 3 of the Act. It is Minister for Health's intention that Parts 2 & 3 of the Act will be commenced as soon as possible.

Officials from the General Register Office, the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, and the Department of Health are working together to ensure that the appropriate regulatory and operational mechanisms are in place to allow for the earliest possible commencement of all of the relevant legislation that will allow for birth registration of donor-conceived children.

It is not possible, at this point, to be definitive about a date for commencement, or when registrations or re-registrations will be available, but all efforts are being made to bring this about as early as possible.

The commencement of other sections of Part 9 of the Act (unrelated to birth registration of donor-conceived children) is dependent on provisions of the Civil Registration (Amendment) Act 2014 being commenced. These sections may be commenced separately and do not affect

bringing into force of legislation to provide for birth registration of donor-conceived children.

### **Fuel Allowance Applications**

559. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a person (details supplied) in County Kildare will receive a fuel allowance. [46766/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** Fuel allowance (FF) is a means tested payment, payable to people who either live alone or only with certain other qualified people. The second named person submitted an application for FF on 31 August 2017.

Based on the information provided to the Department, the person concerned did not qualify for this allowance as their household included people who were not in a qualifying category. They were notified of this decision in writing on 16 September 2017.

To date no further application or request for a review has been received from the person concerned regarding their FF allowance.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **State Pensions**

560. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of plans to reinstate the State pension (transition) to prevent persons forced to retire at 65 years of age having to apply for jobseeker's for one year until they reach the State pensionable age of 66 years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46778/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2011 provided that State pension age will be increased gradually to 68 years. This began in January 2014 with the abolition of the State pension (transition) which was available to people aged 65 who satisfied the qualifying conditions. This measure standardised the State pension age for all at 66 years (previously it was 65 for those qualified for a contributory pension, and 66 for those who were paid a non-contributory pension). This will increase to 67 in 2021 and to 68 in 2028.

In most cases, it is hoped that workers will continue to work up to State pension age. Where this is not possible, there are specific measures which apply to someone claiming Jobseeker's Benefit from a date after their 65th birthday. Where qualified, these recipients may continue to be eligible for that payment until reaching pension age.

It is well known that people are living for much longer. Life expectancy at birth has increased significantly over the years – and is now at 78.4 years for men and 82.8 years for women. This is very positive. As a result of this demographic change, the number of State pension recipients is increasing year on year. This has significant implications for the future costs of State pension provision which are currently increasing by close to €1 billion every 5 years. The purpose of changes to the State pension age is to make the pension system more sustainable in the context of increasing life expectancy. This sustainability is vital, if the current workers, who fund State pension payments through their PRSI, are to receive a pension themselves when they reach retirement age.

The Deputy should note that there is no legally mandated retirement age in the State, and

the age at which employees retire is a matter for the contract of employment between them and their employers. While such a contract may have been entered into with a retirement date of 65, in the context of the previous State pension arrangements, there is no legal impediment to the employer and employee agreeing to increase the duration of employment for one or more years, if both parties wish to do so. In this regard, the Workplace Relations Commission has produced a Code of Practice on Longer Working and the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) has published guidance material for employers on the use of fixed-term contracts beyond normal retirement age.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Partial Capacity Benefit Scheme Applications**

561. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a decision will be reached on a partial capacity benefit for a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46788/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** With regard to the application for Partial Capacity Benefit (PCB) for the person concerned, a Medical Assessor is currently reviewing the medical report. Upon receipt of the MA's findings, the PCB claim will be processed as a matter of urgency.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Social Welfare Appeals**

562. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an appeal by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46816/18]

**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 11th 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 4th October 2018 and the case will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Illness Benefit Applications**

563. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when an application for illness benefit will be processed in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46844/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The person concerned is currently a qualified adult on her partner's social welfare claim. This means that her partner is currently in receipt of a payment for her.

Once this overlap issue has been resolved, her IB claim will be processed and any arrears due to her will be paid as quickly as possible.

If she has an urgent financial need, she should contact the Community Welfare Service through the local Intreo Centre.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Social Welfare Benefits Payments**

564. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the criteria in place when it comes to awarding the Christmas bonus in to the long-term unemployed in circumstances in which, after much time unemployed, a person takes up a course or a scheme and is then disqualified from receiving the Christmas bonus; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46845/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I was pleased to announce on Budget Day that a 100% Christmas Bonus will be paid to some 1.2 million long-term social welfare recipients, including pensioners, people with disabilities, carers and the long-term unemployed, in recognition of their long-term financial dependence on their social welfare payments for all or most of their income. This is an increase from the 85% Bonus paid in 2017 and 2016.

As with previous years, jobseekers qualify for the Christmas bonus after 15 months duration on their payment.

Where a long-term unemployed jobseeker takes up a course through the Back to Education Allowance scheme, it is possible to fulfil the 15 months duration criteria and qualify for a Bonus payment through the combined time on the jobseeker's payment and Back to Education Allowance.

While the payment of a Bonus for those in receipt of a training allowance is the responsibility of my colleague, the Minister of Education and Skills, the same principle applies for long-term jobseekers who take up an education or training course and are in receipt of a training allowance.

Furthermore, all participants of employment programmes such as Community Employment, the Rural Social Scheme and Tús qualify for the Bonus. Accordingly, jobseekers who take part in these programmes will all receive the Bonus payment.

If the Deputy is aware of any particular case that he is concerned about, I would encourage him to bring it to the attention of my Department.

### **Carer's Allowance Payments**

565. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason carer's contributions for a person (details supplied) do not count towards contributions in order to avail of dental treatment benefit. [46848/18]

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

While the person concerned has more than the necessary 260 PRSI contributions paid in total since starting work, they do not have 39 contributions paid or credited in any year between 2014 and 2016, the relevant tax years on which the entitlement would be based.

The person concerned is not entitled to credits on her carers allowance claim of 14th March 2013 as she did not have any paid or credited contributions from 1995 to 2012. A minimum of 26 paid contributions are needed prior to the award of carers allowance. In this case, only 11 contributions were paid before the person concerned went onto carers allowance in 2013. Accordingly, they do not qualify for dental benefit at this time.

If the person concerned has a Medical Card, they should contact their local HSE office, who will be able to advise on entitlement under the HSE dental scheme.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Child Benefit Data**

566. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated full-year cost of issuing a double child benefit payment to parents on the birth of a child; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46917/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The estimated full year cost of issuing a double child benefit payment to parents on the birth of a child is €8,668,240.

This estimate is based on the number of child benefit claims (61,303) received in respect of first and additional children in 2017. It assumes the payment of €140, representing an additional months payment in respect of these children. As multiple births, accounting for 1,226 of this number already receive child benefit at one and a half times of the normal rate this has to be factored into the cost.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities**

567. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the programmes and schemes in place to assist persons with a disability to enter or stay in employment in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46918/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** My department is committed to helping more people with disabilities take up and sustain employment where there is a capacity and desire to do so.

To this end, the Department provides a range of employment related supports. These supports include:

- The Wage Subsidy Scheme, which is targeted at private sector employers, to encourage the employment of people with disabilities through the provision of financial incentives.

- The EmployAbility service, which is a specialist service (delivered under a contract arrangement in 23 locations around the country on behalf of the department) that works with the Department's Intreo service. The service supports people with disabilities through the provision of dedicated job coach support. This service provides both pre-employment and in-employment supports and assistance.

- The 'Ability' programme provides funding (via Pobal) to 27 organisations being funded to support young people (aged 15-29) with disabilities to move closer to the labour market through the provision of a range of person-centred supports. The programme will see some 2,600 young people with disabilities being supported over the next three years.

- A range of other employment support grants for people with disabilities are also provided, under the Reasonable Accommodation Fund. The reasonable accommodation fund is a demand-led scheme, expenditure arises in response to applications received. The fund is comprised of the Workplace Equipment Adaptation Grant, the Personal Reader Grant, the Job Interview Interpreter Grant and the Employee Retention Grant.

- The department also funds two AHEAD (Association for Higher Education Access and Disability) programmes 1) the Willing Able Mentoring (WAM) programme and 2) the 'Get Ahead' programme which are designed as employment support programmes for graduates with disabilities.

- The Department also provides the Partial Capacity Benefit payment for those with a reduced capacity to work.

Under the Comprehensive Employment Strategy, the Department is progressively developing and improving its Intreo service for people with disabilities who wish to avail of the service on a voluntary basis. In such cases, the Jobseeker (person with a disability) who seeks support from their local Intreo Centre will have a meeting arranged with a case officer with a view to agreeing a suitable personal progression plan and in order to access the full range of supports available.

Expenditure in 2017 on these schemes and supports are set out in tabular form, below.

Support/Scheme	Expenditure (estimate, 2017 unless otherwise stated)
Wage Subsidy Scheme	€25.9 million
EmployAbility Service	€9.8 million
Partial Capacity Benefit	€14.5 million
Reasonable Accommodation Fund	€0.1 million
Ability Programme	€16 million (from 2018, over three years)
AHEAD (Association for Higher Education Access and Disability) incl. the Get Ahead and Willing Able Mentoring (WAM) programmes	€0.3 million

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Invalidity Pension Applications**

568. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a decision will be made on an invalidity pension claim by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46931/18]

**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 from this lady on 19 April 2018. Her claim was disallowed on the grounds that the medical conditions for the scheme were not satisfied. She was notified on 19 July 2018 of this decision, the reasons for it and of her right of review and appeal.

She requested a review of this decision and submitted further medical evidence on 25 July 2018 in support of her request. Following a review of all the information available it has been decided that there is no change to the original decision. She was notified on 9 November 2018 of the outcome of the review.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Invalidity Pension Appeals**

569. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an invalidity pension appeal by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46962/18]

**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.

Following an appeal to the Social Welfare Appeals Office, the person concerned has been awarded invalidity pension with effect from 2 February 2017 and payment will issue to her nominated bank account on 29 November 2018.

Any arrears due from 2 February 2017 to 28 November 2018 (less any overlapping social welfare payment) will issue in due course.

The person concerned was notified of this decision on 12 November 2018.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Departmental Staff Data**

570. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of senior positions held by both men and women, respectively, in her Department. [46999/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The table below sets out the number of senior positions held in my Department by both men and

women at the end of October, 2018.

Gender	Grade	FTE	Staff
Male	Secretary General	1.00	1
	Assistant Secretary	5.00	5
	Principal Officer	37.60	38
	Medical Assessor	9.00	10
	Assistant Principal	155.35	156
Female	Deputy Secretary	1.00	1
	Assistant Secretary	5.00	5
	Principal Officer	18.80	19
	Medical Assessor	18.10	20
	Assistant Principal	121.03	125

### Illness Benefit Payments

571. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when arrears for a person (details supplied) will issue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47013/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Illness Benefit claim for the person concerned is now paid up to 10th November and certified up to 11th November 2018.

If the customer remains ill and unfit for work, a further medical certificate should be submitted to the Department as soon as possible in order for further payments to issue.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility

572. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a person who does not require fuel allowance can apply for telephone allowance separately; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47017/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Telephone Support Allowance (TSA) is a weekly payment of €2.50. People who are in receipt of a Living Alone Allowance (increasing their main DEASP payment) and a Fuel Allowance automatically qualify for the TSA. Approximately 128,000 customers are in receipt of the TSA payment. The estimated full year cost of the scheme is €16.14 million.

The primary objective of the TSA is to allow the most vulnerable people access to personal alarms or phones for security. The allowance will also encourage social contact and assist in the prevention of social isolation for those living alone.

Customers who qualify for the TSA automatically receive the payment. There is no application form and they do not have to apply to my Department to receive it. It cannot be claimed in isolation of the other qualifying payments.

If the Deputy is aware of anyone who would be entitled to the Fuel Allowance but who does

not claim it, and who wishes to be paid the TSA, I would ask him to advise that person that they should claim the Fuel Allowance they are entitled to, in order to receive both payments. If, however, the person would not qualify for a Fuel Allowance (or if they do not qualify for a Living Alone Allowance), they will not have an entitlement to TSA.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Youth Employment Initiative**

573. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 1149 of 6 November 2018, the date on which the review of YESS will begin; the timeframe in which it will be complete; the terms of reference of the review; the number of staff responsible for the review; and if the evaluations will be made available upon completion. [47035/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Youth Employment Support Scheme (YESS) commenced on Monday 1st October 2018 and is only open to applications since that date.

The scheme is specifically targeted at young jobseekers aged 18-24 years of age who are long-term unemployed or who face barriers to employment.

The YESS aims to provide jobseekers with the opportunity to learn basic work and social skills in a supportive environment while on a work placement. The scheme will provide a supportive structure for participants, including case worker support for both placement hosts and jobseekers.

The YESS will be subject to a review 12 months after its commencement to determine the scheme's effectiveness, and the full details of this review will be determined closer to that date.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Labour Activation Programmes**

574. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 1149 of 6 November 2018, the date on which the evaluations of JobPath, JobsPlus and JobsPlus youth began; the date on which the evaluations will be completed; and if the evaluations will be made available upon completion. [47036/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** My Department is currently undertaking an econometric review of the JobPath activation service and JobsPlus (which incorporates JobsPlus youth).

Preliminary data gathering commenced for JobsPlus in December 2017 and for JobPath in March this year.

Completion of these reviews is provisionally scheduled for the end of 2018. The findings of the reviews will be released as they become available.

### **Invalidity Pension Applications**

575. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the progress to date in the determination of an entitlement to an invalidity pension following the submission of further medical evidence in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47056/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The person concerned has been awarded invalidity pension with effect from 31 May 2018 and payment will issue to her nominated bank account on 29 November 2018.

Any arrears due from 31 May 2018 to 28 November 2018 (less any overlapping social welfare payment) will issue in due course.

The person concerned was notified of this decision on 12 November 2018.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Illness Benefit Payments**

576. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a regular payment of illness benefit will issue to a person (details supplied). [47064/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Illness Benefit claim for the person concerned is certified and paid up to 15th November 2018.

If the customer remains ill and unfit for work, a further medical certificate should be submitted to the Department as soon as possible in order for further payments to issue.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Illness Benefit Payments**

577. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a regular payment of illness benefit will issue to a person (details supplied). [47065/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Illness Benefit claim for the person concerned is now certified and paid up until 17th November 2018.

If the customer remains ill and unfit for work, a further medical certificate should be submitted to the Department as soon as possible in order for further payments to issue.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Partial Capacity Benefit Scheme Eligibility**

578. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a decision will issue on a partial capacity benefit application by a person (details supplied). [47066/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The person concerned exhausted her entitlement to Illness Benefit (IB) on 28th April 2018. IB is paid for a maximum of 2 years (624 paid days).

She must have a minimum of 13 reckonable PRSI contributions paid after the date her benefit exhausted to re-qualify for IB and thus re-qualify for Partial Capacity Benefit.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Pensions Data**

579. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the pension ages and available projected pension age increases in the EU. [47068/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Deputy will understand that my Department does not have responsibility for collation and dissemination of the data or projections requested.

The European Commission publishes a Pensions Adequacy Report on a regular basis, available on its website ( the specific address is <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=8084&furtherPubs=yes> ) which provides information on the current State pension age in each Member State, and how it has increased over recent years. The most recent edition of this report was published in 2018, and it contained information on the position in 2017, and also contains details of some future changes that have already been announced, although this does not include likely changes that have not been decided upon or announced.

The Deputy will understand that it is not possible to state with certainty what the State pension age will be in any country in significant periods into the future, as in each state it is subject to a number of factors, including Government decisions and/or formal and informal links those countries have made between the State pension age and future changes in life expectancy. However, there is significant data in both the 2018 report, and in the 2015 edition, for someone to track the rate of change in various countries to date, and to make their own projections, based upon the trajectory to date.

I hope this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

### **Disability Allowance Appeals**

580. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a disability allowance application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47076/18]

**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 4 October 2018.

This lady requested a review of the decision by a deciding officer (DO) and submitted additional medical evidence for consideration on 31 October 2018. The person concerned will be notified directly in writing once this review is complete.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Illness Benefit Payments**

581. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an illness benefit claim by a person (details supplied); when payment and arrears will issue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47143/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Illness Benefit claim for the person concerned is certified and paid up to 13th November 2018 and any arrears due have been paid.

If he remains ill and unfit for work, a further medical certificate should be submitted to the Department as soon as possible in order for further payments to issue.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Illness Benefit Payments**

582. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the steps she will take to ensure that a person (details supplied) will receive the correct and appropriate rate of illness benefit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47185/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Illness Benefit (IB) claim for the person concerned is now paid up until 17th November 2018 and any arrears due have been processed.

IB is paid for a maximum of 2 years (624 paid days). The person concerned has already been paid for 622 days so she only has two days of payment remaining.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Illness Benefit Payments**

583. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when illness benefit arrears owing to a person (details supplied) will issue; the reason these arrears arose in view of the fact that all medical certificates were submitted; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47192/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Illness Benefit claim for the person concerned is now certified and paid up to 12th November 2018 and any arrears due will issue to him shortly.

If the customer remains ill and unfit for work, a further medical certificate should be submitted to the Department as soon as possible in order for further payments to issue.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Partial Capacity Benefit Scheme Applications**

584. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 1103 of 6 November 2018, if her Department will advise a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47196/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** My officials have reviewed the person's claim and associated files. To date, no application for Partial Capacity Benefit (PCB) has been received. Correspondence between my officials and the Community Welfare Service staff in August stated that on receipt of the application form, it would be prioritised as urgent.

My officials will contact the customer and on receipt of the application, it will be dealt with immediately.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Social Welfare Benefits Reviews**

585. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the extent to which she continues to ensure that undue hardship is not caused to recipients of social welfare payments in cases in which payments have been suspended while under review; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47197/18]

592. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if, in the course of a review of entitlement to a social welfare payment, provision is made for a basic payment until the outcome is determined in view of the fact that in the past some applicants have become homeless due to failure to meet their rent; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47204/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 585 and 592 together.

As advised to the Deputy in response to a parliamentary question he raised in September about this issue, basic weekly supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) may be paid to customers awaiting the outcome of a claim or an appeal for a primary social welfare payment. In certain circumstances, if a person is not eligible for other social welfare payments and their weekly income is below the SWA rate for their family size, a payment may be made to bring their income up to the appropriate SWA rate. The Community Welfare Service (CWS) officer will engage with a claimant to establish eligibility as quickly as possible and limit any delay to payments. If there is a specific risk of homelessness, this should be communicated to the CWS officer at the earliest opportunity.

Staff in the Department are engaged with customers throughout the entire lifecycle of their claim, including on regular reviews for all schemes on an ongoing basis. A person's entitlement to a social welfare payment is reviewed on a continuing basis to ensure that they continue to satisfy the conditions of the scheme. A person's means may also be reviewed from time to time. A customer may also request a review of their means in the light of changed circumstances at any time.

Review decisions are not delayed unnecessarily once all the information requested from the customer at the time of review is made available to my Department. Payments are not suspended unless there is a valid reason for doing so, for example the provision of insufficient information by the customer in response to a query, or no reply from the customer. Undue hard-

ship for customers should not arise if there is ongoing co-operation from the customer with the Deciding Officer/Designated Person in my Department.

Continued entitlement to a rent supplement payment from the Department is not linked to entitlement to other social welfare schemes. However, the rent supplement claim may be reviewed following a decision to suspend or disallow a primary social welfare payment as there may be a change to the claimant's circumstances that could affect eligibility. During a review of a rent supplement claim, the CWS officers will engage with a claimant to establish continued eligibility as quickly as possible and limit any delay to payments.

Any person in this situation is encouraged to contact the Department's CWS office responsible for their rent supplement claim to discuss their circumstances. Any persons who consider that they have an entitlement to a basic weekly SWA payment should contact the CWS at their local Intreo centre.

If the Deputy has concerns in respect of a particular case, he should bring the details to the attention of the Department and my officials will follow up on them.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### State Pensions

586. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to address the issue of persons, including the self-employed, who have made contributions towards their pension but do not qualify for a payment due to qualification restrictions; if a pro rata pension can be considered in such cases or failing that, a refund of contributions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47198/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** There are a number of payments and pensions paid by my department to people over State pension age. One of these is the State pension (contributory), qualification for which is based on a number of criteria, including that a minimum of 520 qualifying contributions have been paid into the Social Insurance Fund. For those who have paid the required contributions at a reckonable rate – including Class S (self-employed) - they will be used in the calculation of their entitlements.

I believe that it is reasonable to require people who seek a contributory pension to have made at least 10 years paid contributions into the Social Insurance Fund which finances it.

Where a person aged 66 or over does not satisfy the conditions to qualify for a State pension (contributory), or qualifies for less than the maximum rate, they may instead qualify for one the following -

The means-tested State Pension (non-contributory) which is a means-tested payment (based on their share of household means) with a maximum payment of 95% of the SPC; or

An increase for a qualified adult (based on their own means), amounting up to 90% of a full rate SPC pension where their spouse has a contributory pension; or

Where their spouse/civil partner is deceased, a widow's/widower's/civil partner's contributory pension, which they may claim either based on their spouse's or their own social insurance record. The qualifying conditions for this require fewer contributions paid (260) than the State pension (contributory), and the maximum personal rate for those aged 66 or over is €243.30,

i.e. the same as the maximum rate of the SPC, with allowances (notably the Living Alone Allowance) payable where applicable.

Refunds of PRSI arise when contributions from employers and employees have been paid in error. There are a number of reasons why a person might be paying the wrong PRSI rate, the most common of which is where an employee over 66 working and continuing to pay PRSI, where there is no requirement to do so.

Another case is contributors, who enter insurable employment, either as employees or self-employed, after they have attained the age of 56. If they have no entitlement to a State Pension (Contributory or Non Contributory) then the pension element of the contributions paid by both employed and self-employed contributors may be refunded.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### Carer's Allowance Data

587. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of recipients of carer's allowance receiving a payment in each of the past three years to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47199/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The information requested by the Deputy in relation to the years 2015, 2016 and 2017 is published in the Department's Annual Statistical Report, available at <http://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Annual-SWS-Statistical-Information-Report.aspx>.

I have reproduced the figures for those years in the attached tabular statement, which also includes the equivalent figure for October 2018.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance recipients at the 31st of December in each of the years 2015 - 2017 and at the 31st of October 2018.

Date	Recipients
31 October 2018	78,681
31 December 2017	75,264
31 December 2016	70,459
31 December 2015	63,003

### Carer's Allowance Data

588. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of applications for carer's allowance received in each of the past four years to date; the number approved and rejected; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47200/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The information requested by the Deputy in relation to the years 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017 is published in the Department's Annual Statistical Report, available at <http://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Annual-SWS-Statistical-Information-Report.aspx>.

I have reproduced the figures for those years in the attached tabular statement, which also includes the equivalent figure for January-October 2018.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

**Carer's Assistance claims processed (annual totals for years 2014 - 2017 and January-October total for 2018)**

Date	Registered	Approved	Disallowed
Jan-Oct 2018	17,401	14,125	7,648
2017	23,800	17,290	8,599
2016	22,722	19,308	11,144
2015	18,929	14,378	7,920
2014	17,759	12,560	7,078

**State Pension (Non-Contributory) Data**

589. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of applications for a State pension (non-contributory) received in each of the past four years to date; the number approved and rejected; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47201/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The information requested by the Deputy in relation to the years 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017 is published in the Department's Annual Statistical Report, available at <http://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Annual-SWS-Statistical-Information-Report.aspx>.

I have reproduced the figures for those years in the attached tabular statement, which also includes the equivalent figure for January-October 2018.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

**State Pension (non-contributory) claims processed annually 2014-2017 and January-October 2018**

Date	Registered	Approved	Disallowed
Jan-Oct 2018	7,656	6,790	1,875
2017	9,187	7,577	2,139
2016	9,213	8,132	2,332
2015	9,732	7,675	2,188
2014	8,998	7,750	2,350

**Jobseeker's Allowance Data**

590. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of applications for jobseeker's allowance received in each of the past four years to date; the number approved and rejected; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47202/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The information requested by the Deputy in relation to the years 2015, 2016 and 2017 is published in the Department's Annual Statistical Report, available at <http://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/An->

nual-SWS-Statistical-Information-Report.aspx.

I have reproduced the figures for those years in the attached tabular statement, which also includes the equivalent figure for January-October 2018.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

**Jobseeker's Assistance claims processed annually 2014-2017 and January-October 2018**

Year	Registered	Awarded	Disallowed
Jan-Oct 2018	117,499	94,021	8,009
2017	155,854	124,790	10,238
2016	171,243	136,003	11,979
2015	191,781	152,807	13,225
2014	209,444	166,048	16,185

**Domiciliary Care Allowance Data**

591. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of applications received for a domiciliary care allowance in each of the past five years to date; the number approved and rejected in each year; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47203/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath) (Deputy Finian McGrath):** Domiciliary Care Allowance (DCA) is a monthly payment for a child aged under 16 years with a severe disability, who requires on-going care and attention, substantially over and above the care and attention usually required by a child of the same age. The payment of €309.50 per month is not means tested. Currently the allowance is paid to over 38,000 parents/guardians in respect of some 42,000 children.

The total expenditure for DCA in 2017 was €152m and a further €61m was paid to customers in June as a Carer's Support Grant at a rate of €1,700 per eligible child.

The number of applications received, allowed and disallowed over the past 5 years and to date in 2018, are

Year	Applications received in year	Applications allowed	Disallowed
2013	4,464	3,252 (73%)	2,442
2014	5,743	4,445 (86%)	2,062
2015	6,422	5,080 (80%)	2,102
2016	7,434	5,610 (84%)	1,683
2017	8,197	7,473 (83%)	2,187
2018 (to 31/10/18)	7,408	6,315	1,915

Please note that the number of claims processed in any one year will include claims received towards the end of the previous year and may also include repeat claims in respect of the same child.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

*Question No. 592 answered with Question No. 585.*

## Social Welfare Benefits Reviews

593. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the extent to which due process and natural justice remains paramount in the context of dealing with social welfare recipients whose cases come under review; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47205/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** My Department is committed to ensuring that the principles of due process and natural justice are followed in all claim decisions. This applies equally to decisions at initial claim stage and when claims are subsequently reviewed. The Department's guidelines on Decision Making and Natural Justice are published on the website - [www.welfare.ie](http://www.welfare.ie). This message is reinforced through guidelines, bulletins and staff training.

As part of the process of finalising a decision, the deciding officer or designated person (in the case of the administration of payments under the Supplementary Welfare Allowance provisions), is required to engage with the person concerned and offer them the opportunity to provide additional information in support of their claim. In addition, the customer may seek a review or may appeal any decision made under the Social Welfare Acts to the independent Social Welfare Appeals Office.

I understand from my Department that the current processes meet the needs of members of the public and the administration of the social welfare system.

If there is a particular case that the Deputy is concerned about, he should bring it to my attention and I will ask my officials to examine it.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

## State Pensions

594. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the degree to which efforts are being made to award State pensions to those men and women whose contribution record was interrupted for family or other reasons; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47208/18]

**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 last, the Government agreed to allow pensioners, born on or after the 1st September 1946, affected by the 2012 changes in rate bands, to have their state pension (contributory) entitlement calculated under an interim "Total Contributions Approach" (TCA). The changes also provide for up to 20 years of home caring periods in the calculation of that entitlement, for those who took time out of the workplace for parenting children under age 12, or individuals who needed increased levels of care.

The changes apply to those who reached pension age on or after 1st September 2012 who were awarded less than maximum rate, on post Budget 2012 rate bands. The changes do not apply to anyone already entitled to maximum rate state pension (contributory).

Currently there are approximately 79,000 pensioners in this category and my Department is now in the process of issuing Information Letters to them.

Work on examination of the social insurance records of the pensioners concerned commenced in September. As social insurance records are unique to individual pensioners, this manual examination phase is expected to continue to the end of the year. To date, over sixty temporary staff members have been recruited to work on this phase. Further recruitment will take place in January 2019 when the first pension reviews are expected to get under way and it is anticipated that the first review outcomes will be notified to pensioners during Quarter 1 2019.

Payment of increases, where awarded, will be made immediately after an individual's review is completed. If a pensioner does not qualify for an increased rate, they will continue to receive their existing rate of entitlement.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Social Welfare Code**

595. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the extent to which her Department has direct contact with other jurisdictions with which a bilateral arrangement for social welfare exists with particular reference to the need to ensure a smooth and expeditious process in dealing with claims particularly in which contributions in two or more jurisdictions arise; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47209/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Ireland has negotiated Bilateral Social Security Agreements with a number of countries. The main purpose of these Agreements is to protect the pension rights of people who have worked and paid social security contributions in Ireland and the countries with which Ireland has such agreements. This is achieved by allowing reckonable social security contributions paid in one or more of these countries to be aggregated with Irish full-rate social insurance contributions for the purposes of qualifying for certain contributory payments in Ireland or in these countries.

Liaison arrangements are in place with the relevant authorities of the countries with which Ireland has Social Security Agreements, for the transmission or request of information, in order to compile the full extent of a claimant's insurance record.

If the Deputy is referring to a particular case and provides my office with details of it, I will have the matter examined.

### **Social Welfare Benefits Payments**

596. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when the Christmas bonus will be paid; the categories of social welfare recipients which will receive same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47210/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I was pleased to announce on Budget Day that a 100% Christmas Bonus will be paid to some 1.2 million long-term social welfare recipients, including pensioners, people with disabilities, carers, lone parents and the long-term unemployed jobseekers, in recognition of their long-term financial dependence on their social welfare payments for all or most of their income.

The Christmas bonus will be paid in the first week of December 2018 to the same categories of recipients as was the case in previous years. The following table lists the schemes that are

eligible for the Christmas bonus.

State Pension Non-Contributory
Jobseeker's Allowance*
One Parent Family Payment
Widow(er)s' Pension (non-con)
Deserted Wife's Allowance
Supplementary Welfare Allowance*
Daily Expenses Allowance (formerly Direct Provision Allowance)*
Farm Assist
Community Employment
Rural Social Scheme
Tús
Job Initiative
Back to Work Enterprise Allowance
Back to Education Allowance*
Gateway
Back to Work Family Dividend
Disability Allowance
Blind Pension
Carer's Allowance
Domiciliary Care Allowance
Guardian's Payment (non-con)
Magdalen Commission Scheme
State Pension (Contributory)
Widow(er)s' Surviving Civil Partners Pension (Con)
Occupational Injuries Death Benefit
Deserted Wife's Benefit
Partial Capacity Benefit
Invalidity Pension
Disablement Benefit
Carer's Benefit
Guardian's Payment (Contributory)

\*15 months duration on eligible social welfare payment or scheme is required in order to be eligible for Bonus.

### Social Welfare Benefits Data

597. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of applications in respect of various payments awaiting a decision for more than two months; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47211/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I regret that the information requested is not readily available in my Department. However, figures for (a) the number of claims pending decision, and (b) the average processing time for claims, are shown in the following tabular statement (where available) in respect of my Department's principal schemes.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Total number of claims pending decision at 31 October 2018 and the average processing time for claims processed in October 2018, by scheme.

Scheme	Total number of claims pending at 31 October 2018	Average weeks to award
State Pension (Contributory) - Irish	5,349	7
Widow(er)'s Contributory Pension	371	2
State Pension (Non-Contributory)	1,634	11
Jobseeker's Allowance	4,322	2
Jobseeker's Benefit	1,562	1
One-Parent Family Payment	791	4
Supplementary Welfare Allowance Basic	638	1
Maternity Benefit	3,112	6
Paternity Benefit	1,630	6
Carer's Allowance	5,644	17
Carer's Benefit	1,039	16
Disability Allowance	4,989	11
Invalidity Pension	2,098	6
Child Benefit	1,480	3
Working Family Payment	4,118	6
Domiciliary Care Allowance	1,578	10
Household Benefits	935	1
Free Travel	47	2

### Social and Affordable Housing Provision

598. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will report on the housing project launched in Ballymun on 5 November 2018; and if there are other projects similar to this in the greater Dublin area. [46611/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** It is presumed that the Deputy is referring to a housing project comprising 42 high-quality homes for social housing use that have been delivered by an approved housing body (AHB), Oaklee Housing, working in partnership with Dublin City Council (DCC). The project was made possible using an innovative combination of capital loan financing provided by my Department through the Capital Advance Leasing Facility (CALF) and private finance from the Housing Finance Agency (HFA).

The site at Stormanstown, Ballymun, was privately owned and the AHB engaged the developer on a turnkey basis with full ownership of the site and units transferring to Oaklee Housing on completion. The developer went onsite in February 2017 and the AHB commenced snagging of the scheme at the start of August 2018.

My Department provides a variety of funding programmes available to local authorities and AHBs to deliver social housing. CALF supported construction activity sits in parallel with local authority direct construction and other mechanisms, including leasing. There are other projects similar to this CALF funded scheme in the greater Dublin area. My Department publishes

a quarterly Social Housing Construction Projects Status Report, which sets out the continuing progress being made in advancing the national local authority and AHB new-build pipeline. The latest report, setting out the position at end Q2 2018, can be accessed at the following weblink: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/install/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Final-Full-Construction-Status-report-Q2-2018.pdf>.

### Home Loan Scheme

599. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of applications submitted to date under the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme; the number of applications that have been approved to date; the number and value of mortgages that have been drawn down to date by local authorities; the average length of time from the point of application to approval; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47023/18]

636. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the lengthy waiting times for applications to be completed under the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme; if his attention has been further drawn to the growing concern amongst many applicants that such delays could jeopardise the sale of a property to them; and the resources that will be made available to local authorities to expedite the process. [47024/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 599 and 636 together.

My Department publishes information on the overall number and value of (i) local authority loan approvals and (ii) local authority loan drawdowns. Information up to Q2 2018, including in relation to number and value of mortgage drawdowns, is available on the Department’s website at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/house-prices-loans-and-profile-borrowers/local-authority-loan-activity>, and this information will be updated on a quarterly basis as additional data is compiled.

The Housing Agency provide a central support service which assesses loan applications that are made to the local authorities for the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan (RIHL) 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 received since the scheme began and also the number of applications it has assessed and recommended for approval. The most recent figures, as at the end of October, indicate that the Agency has received a total of 3,309 applications for assessment since the scheme launched in February. Of these, 619 were deemed invalid, while the assessment of 107 other applications was still in progress. Of the remainder, 1,317 applications have been recommended for approval by the Housing Agency.

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

Regarding timeframes from the point of application to approval under the scheme, recent requests to local authorities for initial data on timeframes for application processing within their area has found that it takes an average time of *circa* seven weeks from submitting a completed application to a local authority to receiving approval under the scheme, which is in line with the expected timeframe of 6-8 weeks as set out on the RIHL website. Approvals are valid for six

months to allow applicants time to source a property to purchase.

### **Tenant Purchase Scheme Review**

600. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when he plans to publish the tenant purchase scheme review report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47251/18]

602. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the review of the tenant purchase scheme will be finalised and published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46481/18]

639. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if amendments to the tenant purchase scheme will be introduced to enable tenants who were awarded council houses through Part V regulations to avail of the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47091/18]

640. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the conditions of the tenant purchase scheme will be amended to enable tenants whose principal source of income is a payment from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection and who are in a position to purchase their home through their own resources or with family support; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47092/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 600, 602, 639 and 640 together.

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

The minimum reckonable income for eligibility under the scheme is determined by the relevant local authority in accordance with the detailed provisions of the Ministerial Direction issued under Sections 24(3) and (4) of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014. In the determination of the minimum reckonable income, local authorities include income from a number of different sources and classes, such as from employment, private pensions, maintenance payments and certain social welfare payments, including pensions, where the social welfare payment is secondary to employment income.

In determining reckonable income, the income of all tenants of the house, including adult children that are joint tenants, is included, as is the income of the spouse, civil partner or other partner/co-habitant of a tenant who lives in the house with them, thus ensuring the appropriate level of discount is applied to the purchase price.

The minimum income criterion was introduced in order to ensure the sustainability of the scheme. Applicants must demonstrate that they have an income that is long-term and sustainable in nature. This ensures that the tenant purchasing the house is in a financial position, as the owner, to maintain and insure the property for the duration of the charged period, in compliance with the conditions of the order transferring the ownership of, and responsibility for, the house from the local authority to the tenant.

The provisions of Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, are de-

signed to enable the development of mixed tenure sustainable communities. Part V units are excluded from the Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme 2016 to ensure that units delivered under this mechanism will remain available for people in need of social housing support and that the original policy goals of the legislation are not eroded over time. The continued development of mixed tenure communities remains central in promoting social integration.

Local authorities may also, within the provisions of the Regulations, exclude certain houses which, in the opinion of the authority, should not be sold for reasons such as proper stock or estate management. It is a matter for each individual local authority to administer the Scheme in its operational area in line with the overarching provisions of the governing legislation for the scheme, and in a manner appropriate to its housing requirements.

In line with the commitment given in Rebuilding Ireland, a review of the first 12 months of the Scheme's operation, including the issues referred to, has been undertaken. The review is now complete and a full report has been prepared setting out findings and recommendations. I hope to be in a position to publish the review shortly, following completion of consideration of a number of implementation issues arising.

### **Local Electoral Area Boundary Committee Report**

601. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to sign off on the report of the local electoral area boundary committee; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46465/18]

612. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when he plans to sign off on the recommendations of the boundary commission in advance of the 2019 local elections. [46660/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 601 and 612 together.

I established two independent Local Electoral Area Boundary Committees on 13 December 2017 to review and make recommendations on local electoral areas having regard to, among other things, the results of Census 2016 as well as the commitment to consider reducing the size of territorially large local electoral areas as set out in A Programme for Partnership Government (May 2016). The two Committees reported to me on 12 June 2018 and now stand dissolved.

On foot of the two reports, orders are currently being prepared within my Department under section 23 of the Local Government Act 2001 to give effect to the Committees' recommendations in relation to local electoral areas. It is anticipated that these orders will be signed later this year. The local electoral areas to be specified in these orders, and the number of members to be elected for each electoral area, will apply at the next local elections which are due to be held in late May 2019 in tandem with the elections for the 2019-2024 European Parliament.

*Question No. 602 answered with Question No. 600.*

### **Ministerial Meetings**

603. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the policy on the need for note taking when Ministers and-or Ministers of State meet business and other leaders; the way in which this policy is outlined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46494/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** It is standard procedure within my Department (and in line with good practice as set out in the Register of Lobbying's published Guidance for Designated Public Officials) to maintain good record keeping habits and to note important communications regarding official business and to take notes of meetings.

Notes of meetings held by me or my Department's Ministers of State with persons who may come within the definition of lobbyist under the Regulation of Lobbying Act 2015 are to be taken using an agreed template. An Office Notice was issued to all officials and Designated Public Officials in my Department outlining the arrangements in relation to recording Ministers' meetings with lobbyists and is readily available to all staff on my Department's intranet.

### **Planning Investigations**

604. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when he plans to publish the findings of the Mulcahy report. [46502/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** The Review Into Certain Planning Matters In Respect Of Donegal County Council, by Mr. Rory Mulcahy S.C., was received by my Department in June, 2017.

Following initial analysis and assessment of the report's findings and recommendations, including interaction with the Department's own legal advisers and the Attorney General's Office, a comprehensive set of queries and a request for advice in relation to certain matters, including potential dissemination or publication of the report, was submitted to the Attorney General's Office.

Following the receipt of the Attorney's advice on 31 July 2018, officials in my Department have considered the matter further and prepared a submission for my consideration in respect of, inter alia, the issue of publication or dissemination of the report. Once I have concluded my deliberations, I will be in a position to make a further statement.

### **Social and Affordable Housing**

605. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when he plans to commence the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 to allow purchasers under the new affordable dwelling purchase arrangements to remortgage or top-up their mortgages without triggering the clawback; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46515/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** I refer to the reply to Questions Nos 2716 and 2719 of 24 July 2018, which sets out the position on this matter.

### **Social and Affordable Housing**

606. **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. [46525/18]

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

The broad programme of social housing delivery being undertaken by local authorities includes a limited number of challenging projects to meet specific and often unique needs relating to family and other personal circumstances. In such difficult and specific projects, notwithstanding efforts to contain costs, higher level of costs can arise, which are considerably above the level of costs ordinarily encountered for new social housing delivery.

**Social and Affordable Housing Data**

607. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of persons on housing waiting lists in each of the years 2014 to 2017, by local authority and by household size, that is, the number of bedrooms required; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46529/18]

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

Details on the number of households qualified for social housing support in each local authority area are provided in the statutory Summary of Social Housing Assessments (SSHA). The most recently conducted SSHA, carried out in June 2018, details the number of households on all local authority waiting lists as at 11 June 2018 (the count date).

The SSHA has been conducted on an annual basis since 2016 prior to which it was carried out on a tri-annual basis with the last of the tri-annual exercises being conducted in 2013. My Department does not hold records for 2014 or 2015 as requested by the Deputy.

It should be noted that the SSHA is a point in time exercise and does not necessarily reflect the dynamic nature of entry to and exit from the list. The relevant reports for 2016 and 2017 are set out in the following links. Also included is the most up to date report, which was published in September 2018.

2016 Report:

[https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/summary\\_of\\_social\\_housing\\_assessments\\_2016.pdf](https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/summary_of_social_housing_assessments_2016.pdf) .

2017 Report:

[https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/sha\\_summary\\_2017.pdf](https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/sha_summary_2017.pdf).

2018 Report:

[https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/summary\\_of\\_social\\_housing\\_assessments\\_2018\\_-\\_key\\_findings.pdf](https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/summary_of_social_housing_assessments_2018_-_key_findings.pdf).

The SSHA captures details of household composition and can be found in Table A1.4 in these reports. It should be noted that the allocation of social housing support is a matter for the relevant local authority, in accordance with the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009, and associated regulations. Section 22 of the 2009 Act requires all local authorities, as a reserved function, to make an allocation scheme determining the order of priority to be accorded in the allocation of dwellings to households qualified for social housing support, the allocation of which would, in the opinion of the authority, meet the accommodation needs and requirements of the households.

The manner in which the allocation process is managed is a matter for the relevant local authority concerned.

## **Local Authority Housing Provision**

608. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the one-stage approval process for local authority social housing is now available for developments up to the value of €7 million; and the way in which this process works. [46573/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** A single-stage approval process continues to apply to local authority social housing construction projects with a budget up to €2m or up to 15 homes. This encompasses a significant proportion of the social housing construction programme of local authorities, representing approximately 40% of construction projects, 10% of the value and 11% of the units across capital funded schemes.

While the uptake to date by the local authorities has not been as strong as expected, my Department is working with the local government sector to encourage and increase the submission of suitable projects through this process, albeit that the time saving arising through using the single stage approval process is modest, as most of the time in advancing a new social housing construction project arises from activities (including design, the Part 8 planning process and procurement) that apply equally to projects under the single or four stage processes.

The issue of increasing the financial threshold for projects that can avail of the one stage approval process is currently being considered as part of the review of the Public Spending Code, which is being led by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

## **Homelessness Strategy**

609. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if legislation will be introduced to place an upper time limit on the use of family hubs or unsuitable emergency accommodation for families in view of the fact that prolonged exposure to homelessness increases a person's chance of experiencing it again in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46588/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** The Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness provides for measures to address the high number of households and families in emergency accommodation. These include the delivery of increased social housing supply through new-build, acquisition and refurbishment schemes and independent tenancies for homeless households in the private rented sector through housing supports such as Housing Assistance Payment.

As part of the response to the commitment contained in Rebuilding Ireland that commercial hotels and B&B's would only be used as emergency accommodation for homeless families in limited circumstances, housing authorities are delivering a number of family-focused, supported temporary accommodation facilities, or family hubs. This type of emergency accommodation provides a more secure and stable placement for families than is possible in hotels and B&B's. They are not a long term housing solution and families are progressed into homes provided under longer term social housing supports, as these are secured. Services such as hubs, where on-site supports are provided, have higher rates of moves to tenancies than other forms of emergency accommodation.

As part of their Service Level Agreements with local authorities, service providers must work actively with families to support them in accessing long term housing via the private rented sector (HAP), local authority housing or an Approved Housing Body tenancy.

In relation to the Deputy's specific query, I do not intend to introduce legislation mandating an upper term limit for families in family hubs. Housing authorities will, however, continue to work hard to ensure the progression of homeless families into independent tenancies, as quickly as possible.

### **Water Charges**

610. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if categories of properties (details supplied) are liable for commercial water charges. [46592/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Since 1 January 2014, Irish Water has been assigned statutory responsibility for all aspects of water services planning, delivery and operation at national, regional and local levels. The Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 provides that Irish Water shall collect charges from its non-domestic customers in receipt of water services provided by it in accordance with a Water Charges Plan, to be approved by the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU). Water customers are broadly classified as domestic and non-domestic customers. Water charges no longer apply to domestic customers of Irish Water with the exception of legal provision for charges in respect of excessive use. In relation to non-domestic customers, the Water Charges Plan currently in operation states that a non-domestic premises, "means a Premises in which Water Services are used for Non-Domestic Purposes, defined in the Water Services Act 2007 as (a) agriculture or horticulture, (b) any trade, industry or business, (c) any purpose incidental to a household or private garden if the water is drawn otherwise than from a tap inside the household or if a hosepipe or other similar apparatus is used, (d) central heating other than the central heating of a household; (e) apparatus depending while in use upon a supply of continuously running water, not being an apparatus used solely for heating water." In accordance with the Water Services Acts 2007 to 2017, therefore, all water services supplied by Irish Water to non-domestic premises used for the provision of short term accommodation, such as B&Bs, hotels and self-catering accommodation, may be subject to a charge in line with the current Water Charges Plan applied by Irish Water.

### **Social and Affordable Housing Data**

611. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of social homes to be delivered per year from 2022 up to the end of the National Development Plan 2018-2027 by build, acquired and leased, respectively. [46628/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Details of social housing targets, broken down by individual local authority, across build, acquisition and leasing, for the period 2018 to 2021 are available on the Rebuilding Ireland website at the following link:

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

The breakdown of social housing targets for the period beyond 2021 is not yet available but the targets will reflect the blend of delivery methods and approaches required to deliver on the targets set out in the National Development Plan 2018-2027, which provides for the delivery of 112,000 new social homes over the next decade. These 112,000 new social homes will be delivered through a range of mechanisms, including build, long term leasing and acquisitions.

It should be noted that the delivery of the 112,000 new social housing homes over the next decade does not include housing supports that will be provided to households under the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) Scheme or the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS), which will continue to offer additional flexible solutions to meet housing need.

*Question No. 612 answered with Question No. 601.*

### **Social and Affordable Housing Funding**

613. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if finance (details supplied) is available for Dublin City Council to develop the Poolbeg strategic development zone, SDZ, fully without entering into a public-private development partnership. [46662/18]

615. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of affordable housing units to be built that will be for purchase; and the number that will be affordable cost-rental properties for rent in view of the comments made by the Minister of State with special responsibility for local government and electoral reform during a Topical Issue debate on 24 October 2018 (details supplied). [46664/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 613 and 615 together.

In May 2016, the Government designated Poolbeg West as a Strategic Development Zone (SDZ) because of its potential to deliver a large proportion of the extra homes needed in the centre of Dublin. This was followed by the publication for consultation by Dublin City Council of a detailed planning scheme for the area. The Council prepared a draft planning scheme which was considered by the elected members of the Council in May 2017. As a statutory consultee for that process, my Department highlighted the importance of the planning scheme, addressing a variety of housing needs and relevant matters.

I and my Department remain committed to working with the City Council, any relevant approved housing bodies (AHBs) and either the receiver and/or developers of the SDZ area in order to secure additional social and affordable housing from this site over and above Part V obligations and of the order of magnitude laid out in the adopted planning scheme, but subject to agreement on all the normal and relevant terms, including value for money aspects.

It is my Department's understanding that the receiver is engaging with Dublin City Council with a view to advancing an approach that would both better enable the orderly development of this strategic but complex city location and to assist in delivering much needed additional social housing. My Department stands ready to support such initiatives, subject to observance of all the normal value-for-money, procurement and wider legal aspects.

It should be noted that there is currently an appeal to An Bord Pleanála in relation to the Poolbeg SDZ planning scheme. The progress of development of the site will be dependent significantly on the nature and timing of the decision of the Board. Accordingly, I am not in a position to comment on the matter at this time.

### **Social and Affordable Housing**

614. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the decision making process from inception to delivery for the development by public-

private partnership of new housing in instances (details supplied); and the decisions taken by him, the local housing authority chief executive or his officials and by the elected councillors. [46663/18]

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

The specific development referred to is being undertaken by South Dublin County Council as a joint venture development of 975 homes on 72 acres of council lands.

The plan to develop the site, including the selection of the preferred bidder, was discussed at a Council meeting in early October and the Section 183 motion to dispose of the land to the approved bidder was agreed. The successful bid was by Adwood Ltd, a consortium of established Dublin builders Adroit and Maplewood. Adwood Ltd. will make a financial payment to the Council and deliver 294 social housing units at competitive rates over four years.

As much of the master planning and pre-planning studies have been completed, Adwood Ltd. has committed to securing planning and being on site by early summer of 2019. This project is being led by South Dublin County Council directly. State support of €2m is being provided by my Department through the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF), on foot of which the developer has committed to deliver 50 units at prices discounted to the market.

In general, for the Social Housing PPP Programme of 3 Bundles of sites that is currently under procurement by my Department, there are robust governance arrangements put in place to oversee implementation. These follow guidelines as set out by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

For each PPP Programme there is a Sanctioning Authority, and in the case of the Social Housing PPP programme, my Department fulfils that role. The Sanctioning Authority is responsible for approving expenditure on the programme. A Sponsoring Agency is also appointed which prepares the Output Specification, the Public Sector Benchmark, which is an assessment of cost of delivering the project through traditional public sector means and in the initial stages ensures that the project is in line with the budget specified.

In relation to the Social Housing PPP programme the leading local authority with the greatest number of projects in each bundle is given the task of acting as the Sponsoring Agency on behalf of all the local authorities involved. In the case of Bundle 1 the Sponsoring Agency is Dublin City Council (DCC), and for Bundle 2 this role is being undertaken by Cork County Council (CCC). A Sponsoring Agency will be nominated for Bundle 3 once the potential sites for that Bundle are identified.

The National Development Finance Agency acts as financial advisers to the programme and is also responsible for the procurement and administration of the PPP up to completion of the project and handover to the relevant local authority. A Process Auditor is appointed for each Bundle and is responsible for checking that proper procedures and processes have been followed and providing assurance to the Accounting Officer of the Department that the procedures have been adhered to.

As part of the governance arrangements each Bundle has a Project Board which is made up of representatives from the Sanctioning Authority, the Sponsoring Agency, the other relevant local authorities, and the NDFA. It is responsible for providing the leadership to keep the project on track and to maintain governance over what is a complex process. It is also responsible for determining at each stage whether the Project continues to constitute value for money and whether it can proceed to the next stage, subject to the agreement of the Sanctioning Authority.

In addition, councillors in each local authority must agree to grant planning approval for

each PPP development based on the initial designs as drawn up by the project's advisors in conjunction with local authority officials. The Part 8 planning process used for this purpose involves a vote being taken on each individual site by the relevant council, following the publication of the plans by the local authority.

Securing value for money (VfM) is an overarching concern throughout the PPP procurement process and the Central PPP Unit in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform provides guidance in relation to PPP projects to achieve this objective. The guidance sets out four specific VfM tests that are applied in the case of PPPs over the course of the planning and procurement process. These tests focus on assessing whether or not the PPP approach compares favourably with the alternative cost of using traditional procurement to achieve the same result. The purpose, sequence and format of the four VfM tests in the PPP approval process are set out clearly in the central PPP guidelines.

The first VfM test is carried out when the preliminary appraisal of a Programme is being undertaken. This initial analysis assesses whether the programme has potential to deliver through the PPP model and achieve value for money.

The second test includes the preparation of the comprehensive Public Sector Benchmark (PSB) by the NDFA, which represents the full estimated life costs of procuring the project using traditional public sector procurement methods. All inputs used in the compilation of the PSB are reviewed and approved by the Department. The Contracting Authority (DCC or CCC) then compiles the second VfM test, which uses the costings in the PSB to confirm that the project should still proceed as a PPP, and that the additional cost of private finance is justified. This was undertaken and approved by the Department in December 2017 for Bundle 1, and July 2018 for Bundle 2.

The third VfM test involves confirming that the tender that rated highest in the tender evaluation process has the potential to achieve value for money for the State. This is done by comparing the cost of the highest-rated tender to the PSB. This was completed in September 2018 for Bundle 1, which led to the appointment of the Preferred Tenderer, and will be completed for Bundle 2 in due course.

The fourth test is undertaken immediately before financial close and the signing of the PPP contract. This updates the third VfM test with any changes that may have occurred during the Preferred Tender stage of the procurement process, in order to confirm that the winning bid continues to represent Value for Money.

*Question No. 615 answered with Question No. 613.*

### **Regeneration Projects**

616. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if, under the Planning and Development Act 2000, he has given consideration to a strategic development zone in south and west County Tipperary to help tackle deprivation and to attract small-scale job creation in towns such as Tipperary town and Carrick-on-Suir (details supplied); the measures he will implement to help tackle social deprivation in these areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46680/18]

618. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to establish a task force in conjunction with Tipperary County Council to lead a successful regeneration plan for Tipperary town and west County Tipperary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46724/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 616 and 618 together.

The future planning and development of Tipperary town and surrounding areas is a matter primarily for Tipperary County Council. Under the Local Government Act 2014, local authorities have a range of powers in respect of promoting economic development within their administrative areas.

In this regard, I understand that Tipperary County Council formulated and adopted a Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) in February 2016. The Tipperary LECP puts in place policies and actions to tackle both economic and social development issues and was developed in consultation with key stakeholders as well as the broader community and business interests, and has taken into account relevant national, regional and local policies. Separate but complementary to this, Tipperary County Council have established a Local Enterprise Office to support the promotion of small and medium sized firms.

Taking account of the above and in view of the powers conferred on local authorities under the Local Government Act 2014, the establishment of a taskforce, if appropriate, is a matter for Tipperary County Council.

Under Section 165 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), it is a matter for a development agency, generally a local authority, to put forward areas that they consider to be of strategic economic and social importance to the State for designation as a Strategic Development Zone. I have received no proposal in respect of a possible Strategic Development zone in South Tipperary.

### **Housing Estates**

617. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of housing estates that are not taken in charge in County Tipperary; the names of these estates; the number of houses in each estate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46723/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Under Section 180 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) it is a matter for the relevant Planning Authority to take a development in charge. Taking in charge is an iterative process and the number of developments in any given local authority area is subject to ongoing change as new developments commence, while other developments progress and move towards the completion phase, and then become the subject of applications to be taken in charge under Section 180 of the Act.

My Department does not hold current data on a year to year basis regarding developments that are to be taken in charge and such data is a matter for the relevant local authority.

However, an initial national baseline survey carried out in December 2015 indicated that, in respect of County Tipperary, there were 295 developments that were not in the charge of the local authority at that time and that 96 of these were the subject of a valid taking in charge application.

Details of this initial baseline survey are available on my Department's website at the following link:

*[https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/initiative\\_to\\_accelerate\\_](https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/initiative_to_accelerate_)*

*taking\_in\_charge\_of\_residential\_estates\_-\_initial\_list\_0.pdf.*

On foot of this initial survey, my Department launched the National Taking-in-Charge Initiative (NTICI) in April 2016 to trial new approaches and working methods in supporting and accelerating overall national and local action on the process for taking-in-charge housing estates. Under the terms of the NTICI, which was underpinned by €10 million in funding, developments subject to valid taking-in-charge applications were eligible for funding for demonstration projects to inform the development of proposals for streamlining of the taking-in-charge process.

Ultimately, €7.5 million of the allocated funding was paid to local authorities in respect of the taking in charge of 330 developments, containing some 14,930 homes and this funding mechanism is now closed. Tipperary received €521,296 in funding for 15 developments, all of which have since been taken in charge.

Findings and recommendations from the NTICI process will be included in a report, which my Department intends to publish shortly and which I believe will be of considerable value to local authorities and other stakeholders in applying the lessons from the pilot programme in a more general roll-out of a more streamlined approach to taking-in-charge. The report will provide an update of the data for 2018 and it is anticipated that it will demonstrate a substantial reduction in the number of developments remaining to be taken in charge within County Tipperary.

Ultimately, however, progression of individual developments through the taking-in-charge process is a matter for the relevant housing developer, the residents in such developments and the relevant local authorities, following the procedures laid out in Section 180 of the Planning and Development Act.

*Question No. 618 answered with Question No. 616.*

### **Planning Guidelines**

**619. Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if a review of the planning laws will be carried out as they relate to unauthorised developments; if recent assessments have been done into the widespread abuse of planning laws; if consideration has been given to the costs involved in resolving issues including legal, court, administrative costs and the loss of public confidence in the planning system (details supplied); the changes he plans to make in relation to same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46737/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** My role, as Minister, in relation to the planning system is mainly to provide and update the legislative and policy guidance framework. The legislative framework comprises the Planning and Development Act 2000 (the Act), as amended, and the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended.

With regards to policy guidance, my Department has issued a large number of planning guidelines (available on the Department's website, [www.housing.gov.ie](http://www.housing.gov.ie) ) under section 28 of the Act, to which planning authorities and An Bord Pleanála are obliged to have regard in the exercise of their planning functions. The day-to-day operation of the planning system is, however, a matter for the planning authorities.

Under planning legislation, enforcement of planning control is a matter for the relevant planning authority which can take action if a development does not have the required permis-

sion or where the terms of a permission have not been met. Planning authorities have substantial enforcement powers under the Act in this regard. A planning authority may issue an enforcement notice in connection with an unauthorised development, requiring such steps as the authority considers necessary to be taken within a specified period. If an enforcement notice is not complied with, the planning authority may itself take the specified steps and recover the expense incurred in doing so. A planning authority may also seek a court order under section 160 of the Act requiring any particular action to be done or not to be done. Indeed, section 160 of the Act provides that anyone may seek a court order in relation to unauthorised development; such action is not restricted to planning authorities.

While my Department keeps planning legislation under regular review, I am satisfied that planning authorities have sufficient enforcement powers at their disposal under the existing legislation and I have no plans to amend the provisions at this time.

### **Planning Guidelines**

620. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the steps he will take to issue the appropriate order to make the necessary adjustments to the national planning framework in the context of commitments given to an organisation (details supplied) at a meeting on 4 October 2018; and if he will further instruct the regional assemblies to amend their RSES to comply with these adjustments and changes. [46739/18]

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

My Department held an information meeting with key industry stakeholders on 4 October 2018 to discuss practical aspects of the implementation of the NPF in relation to the cascading of its policies to existing local authority development plans and through the forthcoming Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSESs). Such practical aspects included where existing local authority development plans, including the levels of land zoned for development, might be out-of-step with the broad policy framework of the NPF and the RSESs. Technical aspects of such situations have been the subject of ongoing communications and engagement between my Department and the Regional Assemblies, including the provision of the necessary guidance and advices.

The draft RSES for the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly is now on public display until 23 January 2019, and has been submitted to me as Minister as a statutory consultee.

### **Local Authority Functions**

621. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if a decision will be made regarding a person (details supplied) as soon as possible; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46743/18]

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

Section 63(3) of the Local Government Act 2001 provides that, subject to law, a local authority is independent in the performance of its functions. Section 6 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 specifically provides that the Minister's power to issue policy directions and guidelines to housing authorities in relation to their housing functions should not be construed as enabling the Minister to exercise any power or control in relation to any individual case with which a housing authority is or may be concerned. Therefore, I am precluded from intervening in relation to individual cases.

The person concerned should therefore contact the local authority to which the loan application was made for an update in relation to their application.

### **Electoral Register**

622. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will report on the implementation of online voter registration and other reforms of voter registration; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46753/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan):** In March 2017 the Government determined that work should commence on modernisation of the voter registration process in the context of the possible need to register voters resident outside the State in the event that a referendum on extending the franchise in Presidential elections is passed.

The project, which it is estimated will take some two to three years to complete, will also include consideration of wider policy and legislative changes, including initiatives such as online registration. There will be an initial focus on a series of proposals including those made by the Joint Committee on Environment, Culture and the Gaeltacht in its report on the consultation it carried out on the proposed electoral commission in 2016.

Conscious of the importance of the register and its role in our democracy and the need to ensure security and integrity are key priorities for any changes being considered, significant consultation is planned to engage all stakeholders, including registration authorities, the political system at all levels and the public.

An initial technical consultation with franchise teams in local authorities was completed in September 2018 and the constructive inputs received informed the further development of proposals which will now be put to a public consultation, that will offer an opportunity to all relevant stakeholders and the public to contribute. I expect that consultation to be launched in the coming weeks.

### **Local Authority Staff Data**

623. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of staffing requests received from the building control section of each local authority in each of the years 2014 to 2017 and to date in 2018; the number granted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46763/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** My Department receives staffing sanction request applications for specified grades of posts in the local authority rather than by business location. Under section 159 of the Local Government Act 2001, each Chief Executive is responsible for the staffing and organisational arrangements

necessary for carrying out the functions of the local authorities for which he or she is responsible.

Accordingly, the information is not available in my Department but may be available directly from individual local authorities.

### **Local Authority Staff Data**

624. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of engineer position staffing requests under each engineer grade from each local authority in each of the years 2014 to 2017 and to date in 2018; the number granted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46764/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Since, 1 January 2014, my Department has received 933 engineering staffing sanction requests from local authorities, of which 819 have been approved. The status of these requests is set out in the table attached. The posts not approved include:

- 18 requests which are pending, in general awaiting supporting information prior to an informed decision being taken;

- 12 requests refused;

- 38 requests withdrawn by the sector;

- 46 requests marked as 'Closed under Circular E.L. 02-2016', which were closed by my Department following the introduction of agreed numbers under workforce planning (the circular granted delegated sanction to Chief Executives to fill vacancies as needed in the context of the agreed Workforce Plan, and Departmental sanction was no longer therefore required).

[<a href="https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumentation/2018-11-13\_pq624-13-11-18\_en.xlsx">Table</a>]

### **Emergency Accommodation Provision**

625. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the quality standards framework inspection regime for emergency homeless accommodation; and when the framework will be in place. [46790/18]

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

In this regard, the Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE) has been overseeing the development of a quality standards framework, coordinating this work in consultation with an advisory group, which includes representation from various housing authorities, service providers, Tusla, clients and other stakeholders, with a view to having the finalised standards adopted

on a national basis by individual housing authorities. The draft standards have been piloted in a number of selected services across the country and positive feedback has been received.

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

## **Water Quality**

**626. Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the ECJ case against Ireland for failure to meet its obligations under the terms of the urban wastewater treatment directive; if he will report on the recent ECJ court hearing; when the court will make its decision; and the contingency plans in place to cover the cost of possible fines and possible requirements to increase capital investment and or speed up capital investment in addressing those waste water treatment plans that do not meet the requirements of the directive. [46835/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** The European Commission has taken an infringement case against Ireland in relation to the Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive (UWWTD) which sets out requirements for the collection, treatment and discharge of urban waste water. A hearing in the case took place in the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) on 19 September 2018. Ireland made a number of key points including the burden of proof, the use of out of date information by the Commission and the exceptional circumstances arising from the significant contraction in the Irish economy which occurred between 2007 and 2010, all of which were contested by the Commission.

The Court's written judgement is expected within six months of the Court hearing. At that point Ireland will engage comprehensively with the Commission and agree work programmes to ensure full compliance with the Directive within timelines considered satisfactory by the Commission.

The recent EPA report on urban waste water treatment in Ireland has found that, out of the 179 Large Urban Areas in Ireland, 28 areas failed to comply with the EU's legally binding standards for the treatment of urban waste water in 2017. Over the period 2016–2024, capital upgrades and operational improvement works will have been completed or undertaken at all of these urban waste-water treatment plants to ensure that treatment levels and capacity comply with the requirements of the UWWTD. Substantial State funding is being provided for this purpose under the National Development Plan under Project Ireland 2040.

This investment reflects the objectives of the River Basin Management Plan 2018 - 2021 which outlines what Ireland is doing to protect and improve our waters. Among a broad suite of measures the Plan provides for €1.7 billion of investment by Irish Water in 255 urban wastewater projects which are designed to achieve compliance with the UWWTD. Of the urban areas where works are required, the majority will be compliant by end 2021, including Ringsend which is the single largest wastewater treatment plant in the country, accounting for 41% of the total wastewater load.

Irish Water has developed a long term investment perspective in order to strategically address the deficiencies in the public water and wastewater system. It is optimising investment decisions to ensure that they deliver the best possible improvements for the communities concerned.

I approved the Irish Water Strategic Funding Plan 2019-2024, without modification, on 7 November 2018. This sets out Irish Water's multi-annual strategic funding requirement of €11 billion to 2024, comprised of a €6.1 billion investment in infrastructure and assets and €4.9 billion in operating costs. The Strategic Funding Plan outlines the costs and revenue requirements associated with the implementation of Irish Water's Water Services Strategic Plan (WSSP), the first of which was published in 2015 and the first ever Water Services Policy Statement which I published on 21 May 2018. This funding requirement will be met through a combination of non-domestic revenue, excess usage charges, government subvention, non-domestic borrowings and capital contributions. The Plan will be subject to economic regulatory review by the Commission for Regulation of Utilities as part of its third regulatory control period 2020-2024.

### **Planning Guidelines**

627. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the work of the working group of rural planning guidelines; when he expects the work of the group to conclude; and when he expects to be in a position to engage with the Houses of the Oireachtas and local authorities on new guidelines for county development plans post the 2019 local government elections to provide guidance on this issue. [46836/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Following engagement between the European Commission and my Department regarding the 2013 European Court of Justice ruling in the "Flemish Decree" case, a working group was established in May 2017 to review and, where necessary, recommend changes to the 2005 Planning Guidelines on Sustainable Rural Housing, issued under section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended. The objective is to ensure that rural housing policies and objectives contained in local authority development plans comply with the relevant provisions of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

The working group comprised three senior officials from the Planning Division of my Department and six senior officials from the Planning Divisions of local authorities nominated by the Local Government Management Agency. The Group met on three occasions: 18 May, 13 June and 28 June 2017.

Taking account of the working group's analysis and recommended outcome, my Department has been engaging with the European Commission on the matter with a view to issuing to planning authorities, by the end of this year, revisions to the 2005 Rural Housing Guidelines that take account of the relevant ECJ judgment. It may be possible to finalise the Guidelines earlier than that, subject to the completion of outstanding work.

Further, the National Planning Framework (NPF), published under Project Ireland 2040, sits at the top of the planning policy hierarchy in Ireland and provides a structure for future development and investment over the next two decades. This national level planning policy is being implemented at the regional level through preparation of statutory Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES) for the three Regional Assembly areas.

The RSES process formally commenced earlier this year and the draft Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly RSES is now on public display until 23 January 2019. The two other draft RSESs (Northern and Western Regional Assembly and Southern Regional Assembly), subject to Regional Assembly approval, are expected to be put on public display in the coming weeks.

The finalisation of these regional strategies in the first half of 2019 will in turn prompt reviews and updates of individual county and city development plans to ensure strategic co-

ordination and consistency between national, regional and local levels.

It is my intention to publish updated Development Plans: Guidelines for Planning Authorities in 2019 to assist planning authorities in the implementation of the NPF at the regional and local levels. This will include updated Core Strategy guidance which will guide planning authorities in implementing effective and appropriate core strategies within their city/county areas.

### Water Meters

628. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding water allowances; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46863/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Since 1 January 2014, Irish Water has statutory responsibility for all aspects of water services planning, delivery and operation at national, regional and local levels.

Neither I nor my Department have a role in relation to the management of individual customer accounts or the resolution of complaints which are matters for Irish Water in the first instance or, where a satisfactory resolution is not forthcoming, for the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU).

Section 8 of the Water Services Act 2014 (as amended) makes provision for the CRU to provide a dispute resolution service for unresolved complaints of customers of Irish Water. Further information on pursuing complaints with Irish Water or with the CRU is available on the website of the CRU and can be accessed from the following weblink: <https://www.cru.ie/home/complaint-form/water/>.

As Minister, I must respect the independent statutory powers and functions which the Oireachtas has conferred on Irish Water and on the CRU in line with the Water Services Acts 2007-2017 and I cannot involve myself in individual cases.

It may also be helpful to note that 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](mailto:oireachtasmembers@water.ie) or by telephone on a dedicated number, 1890 578 578.

### Construction Industry Register Ireland

629. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the building control (construction industry register Ireland) Bill; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46865/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English):** The Government has committed to placing the Construction Industry Register Ireland, or CIRI, on a statutory footing. CIRI was established on a voluntary basis in 2014 and over 800 building and contracting entities are currently included on the register.

At the end of May 2017, the Government approved the draft heads of a Bill to place the CIRI on a statutory footing and the Bill was referred to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government for pre-legislative scrutiny. The Committee's report was received on 14 December 2017 and its recommendations are being considered. In parallel,

the drafting of the Bill is being progressed and while I am not in a position at this stage to give a precise indication of the timeline for the Bill's publication, my Department is working with the Office of the Attorney General with a view to achieving publication in Q1 2019.

The main objective of the legislation is to develop and promote a culture of competence, good practice and compliance with Building Regulations within the builder community of the construction sector. The establishment of a robust, mandatory, statutory register of builders and specialist contractors is an essential consumer protection measure giving those who engage a registered builder the assurance that they are dealing with a competent and compliant operator. In addition, it will complement the reforms which have been made through the Building Control (Amendment) Regulations 2014 and contribute to the development of an enhanced culture of competence and compliance in the construction sector.

### Traveller Accommodation

630. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the funding allocated for Traveller accommodation to Galway city and county councils in each of the past five years; the funds drawn down by each local authority for each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46919/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English):** In accordance with the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998, housing authorities have statutory responsibility for the assessment of the accommodation needs of Travellers and the preparation, adoption and implementation of multi-annual Traveller Accommodation Programmes (TAPs) in their areas. My Department's role is to ensure that there are adequate structures and supports in place to assist the authorities in providing such accommodation, including a national framework of policy, legislation and funding.

The allocations and recoupment profiles for capital Traveller accommodation projects can vary across local authorities given the local priorities, circumstances and project timelines as set out in the TAPs. Local authorities adopted the fourth and current round of TAPs in April 2014, with the five-year rolling programmes running from 2014 to 2018. These programmes provide a road map for local authority investment priorities over the period. They also form the basis for the allocation of funding from my Department for Traveller accommodation. Preparations are underway for the fifth TAP programme, 2019-2024.

The following tables set out allocations and drawdowns for Galway City and County Councils over the past five years:

#### Galway County Council

Year	Allocation	Drawdown
	€	€
2014	-	-
2015	-	-
2016	117,000	123,816
2017	625,000	-
2018	1,080,100	36,158 (to date)

**Galway City Council**

Year	Allocation	Drawdown
	€	€
2014	75,127	72,241
2015	-	62,150
2016	40,000	-
2017	209,000	95,102
2018	176,996	- (to date)

**Local Authority Services**

631. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he has given consideration to creating a scheme that would allow each local authority to apply for funding in order to enable it to provide live web feeds of council meetings to the public; his views on whether it would be important for persons to be able to access this service; his further views on the fact that it should not be limited to councils that are more financially secure than others and should have the funding to develop these systems; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46930/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** The local government sector receives funding from a number of different sources, including central Government. It is a matter for each elected Council to decide its own spending priorities in the context of the annual budgetary process, having regard to both locally identified needs and available resources.

Section 45(5) of the Local Government Act 2001 states that a local authority may, by standing orders, regulate the right of members of the public and members of the media to be present at meetings. This includes the making of rules in relation to recording or relaying the proceedings as they take place or at a later stage.

It is therefore a matter for the elected members of each local authority to decide in the first instance to webcast local authority meetings and then to allocate sufficient funding from their annual budget for the provision of such facilities.

My Department, however, recognises the potential in the use of technology to strengthen local democracy, leadership and governance. At its meeting of 27 September 2018, the Government approved the policy paper “Local Authority Leadership, Governance and Administration”, prepared as part of the response to the Programme for Partnership Government commitment to report to Government and the Oireachtas on potential measures to boost local government leadership and accountability, which identifies that action in the area of e-Democracy and e-Governance warrants consideration. This policy paper has been forwarded to the Joint Oireachtas Committee for Housing, Planning and Local Government for its consideration.

**Water Services**

632. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when he will seek bids for group sewerage schemes under the three-year Rural Water Programme 2019 to 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46934/18]

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

April 2018, I established a Working Group to conduct a review of the wider investment needs relating to rural water services. The group's aim is to recommend measures to ensure an equality of outcome between those who receive water services from Irish Water and non-Irish Water customers.

The terms of reference of the review provide for a two-strand approach. Strand 1 is considering the composition and distribution of funding for the Multi-Annual Rural Water Programme from 2019 up to 2021. Strand 2 is considering the more complex longer-focus issues surrounding the long-term future resourcing of the Rural Water Sector.

The Working Group is currently finalising a report to me on Strand 1 of its deliberations. This report will make recommendations on the measures to be funded for the next cycle of the Rural Water Programme. Following my consideration of these recommendations, I expect to announce details of the programme priorities and the invitation to submit bids should issue to local authorities before year end.

### **Planning Guidelines**

633. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the 40 sq. m limit for exempt development (details supplied) will be examined with a view to increasing same in order to encourage independent living for elderly persons to live in close proximity to their families; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46935/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Under the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, all development, unless specifically exempted under the Act or associated Regulations, requires planning permission.

Section 4 of the Act and Schedule 2 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended, set out various exemptions from the requirement to obtain planning permission. Any such exemptions are subject to compliance with any general restrictions on exemptions set out in the Act or the Regulations and to the specific conditions set out in each class of exempted development in Schedule 2 of the Regulations.

Class 1 of Schedule 2 of the Regulations provides an exemption from planning permission for the extension of a house, by the construction or erection of an extension (including a conservatory) to the rear of the house or by the conversion for use as part of the house of any garage, store, shed or other similar structure attached to the rear or to the side of the house. This exemption applies where the house has not been extended previously, and where the floor area of any such extension does not exceed 40 square metres. The exemption is subject to compliance with a number of other conditions and limitations and also any general restrictions on exemptions.

There is a balance, in providing for exemptions from planning permission, between streamlining the consent process for minor works and supporting proper planning and sustainable development, including the need to ensure adequate third party participation rights. While all aspects of the existing regime for exempted development are kept under on-going monitoring and review, I have no plans to amend this particular exemption at this time.

### **Housing Assistance Payment**

634. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of tenants in each local authority paying a top-up above the prescribed hous-

ing assistance payment limits; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46945/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** My Department is aware that some Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) recipients are making payments directly to their landlords, beyond the amount of HAP being paid on their behalf. There is no legislative provision precluding HAP supported households contributing towards the monthly rent to their landlord and my Department does not collect data in relation to households in receipt of HAP who are making such additional payments to their landlord.

HAP tenants find their own accommodation in the private rented market and are advised that this accommodation should be within the HAP rent limits provided to them by the local authority. The limits applicable are related to the specific household and the rental market in the area. HAP is a form of social housing support that allows tenants to work full-time and retain their housing support so, in many cases, people may make choices about affordability taking this into consideration.

It should be noted that local authorities have a responsibility to ensure that tenancies are sustainable and are advised not to provide HAP support to tenancies where the household would not be in a position to meet any rental costs beyond their differential rent and the HAP payment made to the landlord on their behalf.

### **Departmental Staff Data**

635. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of senior positions held by both men and women, respectively, in his Department. [47003/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** At 31 October 2018 there were 158.7 full time equivalent (FTE) males and 98.9 FTE females employed in my Department in senior management positions (these being positions at Assistant Principal (and equivalent grades) and above).

*Question No. 636 answered with Question No. 599.*

### **Housing Adaptation Grant Data**

637. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount drawn down and spent in 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018, respectively, by Cork County Council for disability adaptation grants; the amount of separate projects this funded; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47025/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English) (Deputy Damien English):** My Department provides funding to local authorities under the suite of Housing Adaptation Grant Schemes for Older People and People with a Disability, in respect of private housing. The schemes are 80% funded by my Department, with a 20% contribution from the local authorities.

In 2016, funding in the amount of €3,902,496 was provided to Cork County Council and 723 households benefitted under these schemes. For 2017, an amount of €3,603,532 was provided in respect of 703 households. To date in 2018, an amount of €2,477,840 has been provided in respect of 466 households. Further details on the breakdown between the schemes can be found on my Department's website at the following link: <https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/>

My Department also provides funding under the Disabled Persons Grant (DPG) Scheme to local authorities for adaptations and extensions to their stock of social housing. In 2016, works on 90 individual properties in Cork County Council's Social Housing stock were carried out under the scheme, at a cost of €943,078. For 2017, 50 individual properties received funding totalling €845,634. To date in 2018, a total of €794,176 has been spent on works to 69 properties under the Disabled Persons Grant scheme.

### Local Authority Finances

638. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount owed by each local authority in relation to various forms of borrowings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47075/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan) (Deputy John Paul Phelan):** Section 106 of the Local Government Act 2001 sets the framework for borrowing by local authorities. Borrowing by a local authority is a reserved function of the elected members who have direct responsibility in law for all reserved functions of the authority.

The value of total loans outstanding by local authorities at the end of 2016 (the most recent year for which aggregated audited information is available) was €3. 858bn.

The total amount owed by each local authority, under each category of loan, is set out in the table.

**Table detailing Loans payable by Local Authorities 31/12/2016**

	Mortgage loans	Non-Mortgage Loans					
Local Authority		Asset/Grants	Revenue Funding	Bridging Finance	Recoupable	Shared Ownership – Rented Equity	Balance @ 31/12/2016
Carlow Co Co	11,286,450.58	7,029,765.28	0.00	5,300,300.00	15,711,911.22	722,634.07	40,051,061.15
Cavan Co Co	3,486,363.49	11,351,471.26	0.00	0.00	5,853,853.25	1,607,514.57	22,299,202.57
Clare Co Co	7,253,080.78	65,331,829.77	3,218,573.60	-0.48	11,369,462.21	4,292,477.15	91,465,423.03
Cork Co Co	22,388,372.00	43,020,923.00	0.00	28,380,682.00	47,212,691.00	4,238,853.00	145,241,521.00
Cork City Council	53,093,689.48	117,447,691.75	0.00	151,108,242.50	66,578,243.78	19,862,870.14	408,090,737.65
Donegal Co Co	18,344,833.25	58,712,362.90	0.00	1,903,830.51	40,328,169.67	7,813,041.02	127,102,237.35
Dublin City Council	164,804,349.00	8,486,488.00	0.00	73,872,753.00	240,211,083.00	68,615,229.00	555,989,902.00
Dún Laoghaire Rathdown Co Co	9,745,399.39	55,293,763.31	0.00	0.00	67,377,029.06	4,921,706.98	137,337,898.74
Fingal Co Co	121,255,583.70	76,984,387.71	0.00	58,692,968.91	111,194,981.35	6,371,037.99	374,498,959.66
Galway Co Co	12,781,083.40	37,302,261.59	0.00	5,004,809.88	14,757,342.04	661,980.50	70,507,477.41
Galway City Council	19,965,878.22	8,152,466.74	0.00	0.00	18,898,213.40	1,472,820.78	48,489,379.14
Kerry Co Co	8,541,418.00	49,226,814.95	0.00	857,663.98	19,802,973.98	2,753,222.81	81,182,093.72
Kildare Co Co	16,432,505.95	30,195,625.20	0.00	12,041,688.62	37,026,901.40	19,875,221.21	115,571,942.38
Kilkenny Co Co	32,424,055.68	13,735,552.94	182,376.08	0.00	5,362,027.94	3,930,368.40	55,634,381.04
Laois Co Co	46,864,123.99	8,274,370.35	0.00	11,674,867.50	32,419,472.06	11,078,676.54	110,311,510.44
Leitrim Co Co	467,677.83	1,548,563.68	0.00	0.00	5,338,257.55	168,700.02	7,523,199.08
Limerick Co Co	10,667,784.35	49,241,729.31	0.00	0.00	23,804,681.67	4,937,295.41	88,651,490.74
Longford Co Co	6,314,827.13	8,592,977.47	250,357.77	0.00	21,445,633.72	1,889,533.10	38,493,329.19
Louth Co Co	13,794,579.96	77,119,951.13	0.00	5,743,557.90	59,505,484.88	28,684.75	156,192,258.62
Mayo Co Co	36,553,996.83	59,167,902.08	0.00	6,504,480.44	29,445,937.18	993,442.35	132,665,758.88
Meath Co Co	15,350,899.12	53,357,229.90	0.00	0.00	12,014,285.15	3,285,439.19	84,007,853.36

*Questions - Written Answers*

	Mortgage loans	Non-Mortgage Loans					
Local Authority		Asset/Grants	Revenue Funding	Bridging Finance	Recoupable	Shared Ownership – Rented Equity	Balance @ 31/12/2016
Monaghan Co Co	12,067,289.93	2,686,134.43	0.00	0.00	6,710,116.67	711,086.92	22,174,627.95
Offaly Co Co	5,078,585.90	31,944,245.56	0.00	0.00	18,823,531.87	1,058,113.53	56,904,476.86
Roscommon Co Co	1,260,594.98	23,755,738.23	0.00	695,939.00	4,312,678.62	0.00	30,024,950.83
Sligo Co Co	11,561,905.42	59,383,441.00	11,999,999.98	0.00	17,226,456.36	3,733,401.99	103,905,204.75
South Dublin County Council	44,933,512.85	21,578,792.20	0.00	33,997,426.82	103,383,684.49	6,337,321.64	210,230,738.00
Tipperary Co Co	12,201,217.14	28,396,014.09	0.00	3,250,000.00	57,001,787.73	4,755,777.25	105,604,796.21
Waterford Co Co	32,974,286.45	51,533,509.70	8,293,995.86	6,103,513.00	28,798,715.05	10,745,465.86	138,449,485.92
Westmeath Co Co	24,130,014.75	42,595,817.00	0.00	11,558,763.00	892,000.00	1,417,121.99	80,593,716.74
Wexford Co Co	42,883,952.00	70,910,607.00	0.00	0.00	20,902,800.00	0.00	134,697,359.00
Wicklow Co Co	13,272,060.48	51,905,414.96	0.00	9,000,000.00	4,921,932.33	4,731,825.08	83,831,232.85
Total	832,180,372.03	1,224,263,842.49	23,945,303.29	425,691,486.58	1,148,632,338.63	203,010,863.24	3,857,724,206.26

*Questions Nos. 639 and 640 answered with Question No. 600.*

### Local Authority Functions

641. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to encourage or incentivise local authorities to use their compulsory purchase order, CPO, powers to buy up derelict or vacant houses in order to increase their social housing stock; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47132/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** My Department provides funding to local authorities to acquire a range of properties for social housing use, including properties that are vacant and in need of remediation. To ensure a local-led response to such work, responsibility for property acquisitions is delegated to local authorities.

Local authorities are encouraged to adopt a proactive approach in utilising their available legislative powers for compulsory purchase, where necessary, with the aim of bringing the greatest number of recoverable long term vacant dwellings back into the liveable housing stock. In many cases, however, the use of CPO powers is not necessary as agreement to purchase can be reached between the local authority and the property owner. To assist local authorities in pursuing vacant properties, my Department introduced the Buy & Renew Scheme to facilitate them in acquiring and remediating vacant properties that may be suitable for social housing. Through this support mechanism, local authorities have delivered almost 200 social housing units to date and I am keen to see further delivery in this way.

As with standard acquisitions, local authorities have delegated responsibility to utilise the Buy & Renew Scheme, as part of the blend of property acquisitions, as appropriate to their area, given housing need and the availability of properties of different types.

### Homeless Persons Data

642. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of adults and children recorded on the pathway accommodation and support system, PASS, as in own door accommodation. [47189/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** My Department currently publishes data on a monthly basis on the number of homeless persons accommodated in emergency accommodation funded and overseen by housing authorities. These reports are based on data provided by housing authorities, produced through the Pathway Accommodation & Support System (PASS). The reports are collated on a regional basis and are published on my Department's website.

The monthly homelessness report includes details of individuals, families and the dependants of these families who accessed emergency accommodation during the relevant count week of the month in question. This information is further broken down into a number of categories of Adult Accommodation Type, namely Private Emergency Accommodation, Supported Temporary Accommodation, Temporary Emergency Accommodation and Other. My Department does not maintain records on categories of accommodation outside of this list.

### Protected Disclosures

643. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when a detailed and full response will issue to a person (details supplied) who made a protected disclosure to his Department a number of years ago; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47191/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** My Department, in consultation with the Office of the Attorney General, is currently finalising its analysis of the submission made with reference to the Protected Disclosures Act 2014 by the person named with a view to communicating the outcome of the process to that person as soon as possible.

In its analysis, my Department will have regard to the request by the person named for a full and detailed response, as well as the need to comply with the general principles of natural justice and fair procedures, including for third parties named in the submission.

### Built Heritage Investment Scheme

644. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the funding avenues which are available to the owners of protected buildings in order to carry out essential works; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46463/18]

**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 buildings 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.

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. The Structures at Risk Fund will be revamped for 2019 and will become the Historic Structures Fund. The Fund will open

for applications shortly, together with the Built Heritage Investment Scheme for 2019.

Details of these funding schemes are available on my Department's website and on local authority websites. A list of projects approved for funding is also published on the Department's website.

I have also provided funding of €1m in 2018 for the Historic Towns Initiative, which is a joint initiative of my Department and the Heritage Council. This initiative is supporting six historic towns in 2018 who are carrying out significant heritage regeneration projects.

The best advice for owners in relation to individual historic structures is generally to contact the Architectural Conservation Officer in their local authority who is well placed to provide expert advice and assistance.

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](http://www.heritagecouncil.ie).

### Projects funded in Longford and Westmeath

#### The Structures at Risk Fund - 2018

Local Authority	Site Name, Address	Grant
Longford County Council	Clondra Lockhouse, Old Strokestown Road, Clondra, Co. Longford	€15,000
Longford County Council	St. Catherine's Church, Ballymacormack, Co. Longford	€15,000
Longford County Council	Gandon Gates, Porters Lodge, Carrick Estate, Co. Longford	€20,000
Westmeath County Council	Tullynally Castle, Castlepollard, Co. Westmeath	€9,000
Westmeath County Council	Drumcree House, Drumcree, Co. Westmeath	€15,000
Westmeath County Council	Equine Barn, Rathcam House, Gaybrook, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath	€19,000

#### The Structures at Risk Fund - 2017

Local Authority	Site Name, Address	Grant
Longford County Council	Gandon Gate, Carriglass Demesne	€30,000

Local Authority	Site Name, Address	Grant
Longford County Council	Kilglass House, Glebe, Legan, Co Longford	€8,000
Westmeath County Council	Ardnurcher Church, Horse-leap,	€23,000
Westmeath County Council	Tullynally Castle, Castlepollard,	€6,000
Westmeath County Council	Moate Gaol, Main Street, Moate,	€23,000

#### Built Heritage Investment Scheme – 2018

Local Authority	No. of Projects	Grant
Longford County Council	11	€50,000
Westmeath County Council	5	€50,000

#### Built Heritage Investment Scheme – 2017

Local Authority	No. of Projects	Grant
Longford County Council	12	€50,000
Westmeath County Council	7	€60,410

### Ministerial Meetings

645. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the policy regarding the need for note taking when Ministers and-or Ministers of State meet business and other leaders; the way in which this policy is outlined; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46487/18]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** In response to the Deputy's question, it is standard procedure within my Department (and in line with good practice as set out in the Register of Lobbying's published Guidance for Designated Public Officials) to maintain good record keeping habits and to note important communications regarding official business, and to take notes of meetings where appropriate.

### Waterways Ireland

646. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the timeframe for commencing the County Kildare part of the Barrow Blueway; and the timeframe for completion of the blueway in County Kildare and the full blueway, respectively. [46557/18]

647. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the estimated cost of completing the Barrow Blueway; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46558/18]

648. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if there will be further public consultation on the Barrow Blueway in County Kildare. [46559/18]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 646 to 648, inclusive, together.

Waterways Ireland submitted a planning application to Kildare County Council, Laois County Council and Carlow County Council for the development of the Barrow towpath to enable it to become a Blueway. The applications were refused planning permissions in February 2018 for the 'river' elements of the navigation.

Waterways Ireland has subsequently appealed those decisions to An Bord Pleanála and await their outcome. It is not possible to give a timeframe for the development of the Barrow Blueway until An Bord Pleanála determine the appeal.

The estimated capital cost of developing the Barrow Blueway is €11,000,000 but this estimation may vary depending on detailed design.

Waterways Ireland will continue to explore funding options with Fáilte Ireland, the National Transport Authority and local authorities as to how the project will be funded, through possible tourism initiatives, greenway strategy and as part of possible funding of the Outdoor Recreation Plan developed by Waterways Ireland in partnership with Inland Fisheries Ireland, Coillte, Bord na Móna and the National Parks and Wildlife Service of this Department.

Waterways Ireland is not required to undertake any further formal consultation with the public on the Blueway development in County Kildare.

Should An Bord Pleanála uphold the appeal, Waterways Ireland will consult with the Local Authority and those stakeholders who are regarded as being directly impacted by the development, prior to any works commencing.

### **Waterways Ireland**

649. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht when a final decision will issue from An Bord Pleanála on the Barrow Blueway; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46560/18]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** Waterways Ireland submitted a planning application to Kildare County Council, Laois County Council and Carlow County Council for the development of the Barrow towpath to enable it to become a Blueway. The applications were refused planning permissions in February 2018 for the 'river' elements of the navigation.

Waterways Ireland has subsequently appealed those decisions to An Bord Pleanála and await their outcome.

The timeline for a final decision to issue from An Bord Pleanála is a matter for the Bord itself.

### **National Parks and Wildlife Service**

650. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if officials from the National Parks and Wildlife Service will meet with fishermen to discuss the seal population at a location (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46666/18]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht(Deputy Josepha Madigan):** I have asked my officials to arrange a meeting with the fishermen as soon as possible.

### **Ministerial Meetings**

651. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the meetings she has held with environmental organisations since taking office. [46686/18]

652. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the meetings she has held with farming organisations since taking office. [46687/18]

653. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the meetings she has held with business organisations other than farming organisations since taking office. [46688/18]

654. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the meetings she has held with Irish language and Gaeltacht organisations since taking office. [46689/18]

655. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the meetings she has held with cultural and built heritage organisations since taking office. [46690/18]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 651 to 655, inclusive, together.

My Ministerial Diary is published on my Department's Website on a quarterly basis and details of my engagements and meetings up to the end of September this year are available at

*<https://www.chg.gov.ie/about/ministers/ministers-diary/>*.

### **National Raised Bog Management Plan**

656. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the amount spent to date on the proposal to move nine turf cutters from Ballynafagh bog to Coolree bog, County Kildare. [46692/18]

657. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the estimated cost of the proposal to move nine turf cutters from Ballynafagh bog to Coolree bog, County Kildare. [46693/18]

658. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the estimated total direct and indirect greenhouse gas emissions which would result from the proposal to move nine turf cutters from Ballynafagh bog to Coolree bog, County Kildare. [46694/18]

659. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of years the nine turf cutters proposed to be relocated from Ballynafagh bog to Coolree bog, County Kildare, will be able to cut turf at the new location. [46695/18]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 656 to 659, inclusive, together.

The National Raised Bog Special Areas of Conservation Management Plan 2017-2022, published in December 2017, sets out how the raised bog special areas of conservation are to be managed, conserved and restored and how the needs of turf cutters are to be addressed. The relocation of turf cutters from raised bog special areas of conservation to non-designated bogs is one of the options being pursued to address their needs, as set out in the National Plan.

58 applications under the cessation of turf cutting compensation scheme have been received from turf cutters from Ballynafagh Bog special area of conservation, County Kildare. Of these 58 applicants, 9 have expressed an interest in relocation to a non-designated bog.

The process involved in relocating these turf cutters to the non-designated Coolree Bog involves:

- i. An assessment of the site as regards turf quality and quantity;
- ii. Establishing the number that can be accommodated there;
- iii. Engaging in land purchase negotiations and the conclusion of a contract for sale;
- iv. An application for planning permission; and
- v. The completion of infrastructure and drainage works on the site, subject to the securing of planning permission.

Prior to relocation to Coolree Bog, the turf cutters will be required to enter into a legal agreement with myself, as Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. This legal agreement will grant each turf cutter a turbary right on a plot within Coolree Bog on which he or she may exercise the right to cut turf until the turf is exhausted. Each plot of bog will be comprised of not less than 1 acre of high bog together with an area of spread ground.

To date, my Department has spent approximately €103,000 progressing the relocation of cessation of turf cutting compensation scheme applicants from Ballynafagh Bog special area of conservation to the non-designated Coolree Bog.

I am advised that the upper limit of the total quantity of peat that is expected to be removed as a result of turf cutting at Coolree Bog is 175,500m<sup>3</sup>. The estimated carbon loss from the 175,500m<sup>3</sup> of peat to be removed is calculated as 35,398 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (tCO<sub>2</sub>eq).

Over the estimated operational lifetime of the relocation site, total carbon loss equates to 545 tCO<sub>2</sub>eq per annum. That is equivalent to the annual emissions of 43 people in Ireland (based on a per capita emission of 12.57 tCO<sub>2</sub>eq per annum).

Coolree Bog is an already degraded site. The relocation of turf cutters to Coolree Bog is to replace the activity at Ballynafagh Bog special area of conservation, which is a more sensitive site. My Department intends to carry out restoration measures at Ballynafagh Bog special area of conservation and this work will result in improving the carbon sink capabilities within that designated site.

The vast majority of the qualifying cessation of turf cutting compensation applicants from Ballynafagh Bog special area of conservation are being provided with financial compensation under this scheme. My Department is only seeking to relocation a small fraction of these applicants. This is in line with my aim to address the needs of turf cutters as part of an overall raised bog designated network solution, as set out in the National Raised Bog Special Areas of Conservation Management Plan 2017-2022. This involves a balance of protecting traditional

rights, providing compensation where these rights are curtailed and seeking to facilitate feasible alternatives where possible, while working to ensure that Ireland meets its legal obligations, in accordance with the EU Habitats Directive.

### **Turf Cutting Compensation Scheme Data**

660. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of households cutting turf on SACs that have availed of a turf supply in place of their own extraction; and the amount this will cost. [46697/18]

661. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of households cutting turf on SACs that have availed of compensation; and the amount this will cost. [46698/18]

662. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of households cutting turf on SACs that have applied to be relocated to cut turf elsewhere; and the amount this will cost. [46699/18]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 660 to 662, inclusive, together.

The cessation of turf cutting compensation scheme was established in 2011 for active turf cutters arising from the cessation of turf cutting on 53 raised bog special areas of conservation. This scheme is comprised of a payment of €1,500 per annum, index-linked, for 15 years, or relocation, where feasible, to a non-designated bog, together with a once-off incentive payment of €500.

While applicants are waiting for relocation sites to be investigated, prepared and developed, they may, on an interim basis, opt for the annual payment or opt to receive an annual supply of up to 15 tonnes of cut turf delivered to their homes and to the homes of other individuals who had been sourcing turf from the bog plot in question, where applicable.

For certain special area of conservation sites, where applicants have continued to apply for relocation and that has not been feasible, the 15 year compensation (less any interim annual payments or the value of turf deliveries received) has been made available to them in the form of a lump sum to enable them to source and purchase bog plots themselves.

Just over 2,300 qualifying applicants from special areas of conservation have been provided with payments under the cessation of turf cutting compensation scheme amounting to €25.4 million. The estimated cost of the provision of payments over the lifetime of this 15 year scheme is in the region of €54.1 million.

1,075 deliveries of turf have been made at a the cost of just over €2.1 million. The estimated cost of turf deliveries in respect of applicants under the cessation of turf cutting compensation scheme is €3.15 million.

476 applicants have expressed an interest in relocation to a non-designated bog. The process in relocating qualifying applicants to a non-designated bog involves:

- i. An assessment of the site as regards turf quality and quantity;
- ii. Establishing the number that can be accommodated there;
- iii. Engaging in land purchase negotiations and the conclusion of a contract for sale;

iv. An application for planning permission, where required; and

v. The completion of infrastructure and drainage works on the site, subject to the securing of planning permission, where required.

My Department has spent approximately €5.830 million progressing the relocation of qualifying applicants to non-designated bogs. The estimated cost of the relocation process, until it is completed, is €7.630 million.

### **Gender Equality**

663. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will provide the latest report in respect to the gender pay gap in the fields of theatre and culture; the median wage for female and male workers, respectively in theatre, culture and the arts; the average salary of the top 20% of female and male actors, respectively; the average salary of the lower 20% of female and male actors, respectively; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46735/18]

665. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the steps she is taking to support the ongoing work of an organisation (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46895/18]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 663 and 665 together.

I am unsure to which report the Deputy is referring. I can, however, inform the Deputy that I launched a policy document entitled Gender Equality in Practice in Irish Theatre on the 9th July 2018. The policy document was crafted to encompass the individual workings and requirements of ten theatre organisations and were a result of one and half year's work.

Gender Equality in Practice in Irish Theatre began after #WakingTheFeminists drew attention to the gender inequality that then existed within Irish theatre. This cultural phenomenon encouraged the participating theatre organisations to consider their own record in programming and supporting women within the sector and identify processes that would ensure gender parity and dignity at work in the future.

Each gender policy statement has been ratified by the boards of the organisations and each organisation has undertaken to measure their progress against their published targets on an annual basis using the #WakingTheFeminists Gender Counts guidelines.

Included in the list of measures are the following

1. Gender blind readings for plays
2. Unconscious bias training for all staff
3. Achieve equality of gender of board members
4. 50% of new play commissions to be allocated to women writers
5. Gender blind casting
6. Addition of Dignity at Work clauses to employees charter
7. Re-examination of the female canon

8. Work with third level institutions to encourage gender parity in areas that do not reflect equality of gender.

9. To achieve gender balance in programming within a 5 year period.

Up to 10 theatre companies are involved in the working group have come together to demonstrate the power of collaboration within the Cultural sector in Ireland, to share expertise, support and learnings and enhance the possibilities for women in the Irish theatre sector.

I am glad also to be able to advise the Deputy that in 2017, the Arts Council supported research commissioned by Waking the Feminists (Gender Counts – an analysis of gender in Irish theatre 2006-2015), and this work continues to inform the Council's decisions. Separately, the Arts Council is in the final stages of developing a comprehensive Equality, Human Rights and Diversity policy, which considers gender as one of 10 grounds for potential discrimination and inequity. During the course of developing that policy the Arts Council met with several representative groups from civil society and arts gender advocacy groups such as Sounding the Feminists, Fair Plé, and representatives of the former Waking the Feminists movement. I understand that it is the Council's intention to continue to engage in discussion with these bodies and groups to ensure the effective implementation of its policy in this area.

Waking the Feminists has inspired a number of actions aimed at improving issues for female composers. Last March, I was delighted to be in a position recently to announce funding under the Creative Ireland programme to co-fund the National Concert Hall and Sounding the Feminists' five-year initiative to promote creative work by female musicians.

### **National Concert Hall**

664. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the timetable of the reconstruction and development of the National Concert Hall; if it will be closed during the course of the development; if alternative arrangements for the National Concert Hall have been made for the closure period; if she has held discussions with the National Concert Hall on the matter; the timetable and budget for the completion of the works; the anticipated opening date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46736/18]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** Under its plan 'Investing in our Culture, Heritage and Language' the Government intends to invest €460m in a significant number of capital projects in our National Cultural Institutions over the period 2018 to 2027. This includes an amount of €78 million for the re-development of the National Concert Hall.

Investments under this plan will be subject to appraisal and evaluation in line with the Public Spending Code. This includes the consideration of a range of options prior to committing any funding to the project, an evaluation of the financial and economic implications of the project prior to procuring the project, and robust project management arrangements throughout the implementation phase.

The appraisal and planning for the re-development of the National Concert Hall is ongoing between my Department, the Office of Public Works and the National Concert Hall. It is inevitable that the Hall will have to close for a period during the course of the development. However, at this stage it is not possible to say definitively when and for how long the Hall will close.

I look forward to the development of this project which will be an important landmark for music provision in Ireland.

Question No. 665 answered with Question No. 663.

### Commemorative Events

666. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her plans for War of Independence commemorations, particularly in County Wexford; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [46938/18]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** The Government's approach to the remembrance of all of those who lost their lives during the Independence Struggle and the significant events and themes associated with this period, will be informed by the guidance of the Expert Advisory Group on Centenary Commemorations and the core principles set out in its Second Statement, published in October 2017. I would like to acknowledge the very significant work completed by the Advisory Group over the past year in formulating its guidance. I am now considering the recommendations of the Group. I anticipate that the remainder of the period will follow the approach adopted in the first half of the Decade of Centenaries of being respectful, meaningful, proportionate and authentic.

### Departmental Staff Data

667. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of senior positions held by both men and women, respectively, in her Department. [46996/18]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** The following table sets out the number of senior positions held by men and women in my Department.

Grade	Female	Male	Total
Secretary General	1		1
Assistant Secretary *		4	4
Principal Officer	6	15	21
Ministerial Adviser		2	2
Assistant Principal Officer	29	22	51
Assistant Principal Officer equivalents	17	35	52
Total	55	76	131

\* includes An Coimisinéir Teanga

### Arts Centres

668. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the position on the request for additional funding for a project (details supplied); when a final decision will be made; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47085/18]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** The project referred to in the question consists of the design, construction and operation of a new

multifunctional Event Centre in Cork city with a capacity of approximately 6,000 persons. It is envisaged that the Event Centre will be capable of accommodating a range of events including concerts, festivals, family entertainments, arts, cultural, sports, exhibitions, conferences and trade shows.

This is a project led by Cork City Council. In December 2014, the development company BAM was selected by Cork City Council as the preferred tenderer. BAM in turn has engaged international events company Live Nation as the preferred operator. The project is ultimately being developed and managed by Cork City Council. This means that Cork City Council is responsible for its delivery.

In the context of the application for additional funding of €10 million for the project, my Department as sanctioning authority needs to ensure that the project is robust, complies with the Public Spending Code and will deliver value for money for the Exchequer. Due to its size and cost this project has significant procurement, state aid, legal and match funding complexities.

Significant work is taking place by all parties involved in order to develop a sustainable project, culminating in a new cultural centre for Cork. High level meetings are continuing to take place regarding legal and funding requirements in light of the additional €10 million funding request. Cork City Council is also reviewing a number of elements of the project; such as the revised application for planning permission which was submitted in August 2018 and funding of ancillary infrastructure near the event centre. All parties are eager for this project to progress and be delivered in accordance with the relevant Exchequer funding and legal requirements.

My Department is continuing to engage with Cork City Council in relation to additional capital funding for the Event Centre.