

Written Answers.

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

Questions Nos. 1 to 10, inclusive, answered orally.

Departmental Advertising Budgets

11. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on the proposed budget for social media advertising in his Department for 2019. [45715/18]

12. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on the proposed budget for social media advertising in his Department for 2019. [48231/18]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 11 and 12 together.

The cost for any social media advertising undertaken in 2019 will be met from my Department's administrative budget. Costs incurred are expected to be significantly less than the spend on digital advertising in 2018 which is estimated at approximately €450,000.

The expenditure referenced relates to a number of major cross-Government public information campaigns that the Department funded centrally during 2018, for example Healthy Ireland, Global Ireland, Project Ireland 2040 the Self Employed Benefits campaign, aimed at ensuring self employed people are aware of the new and existing benefits available to them. The majority of this expense was incurred prior to July 2018, before changes were made. Public information campaigns in the future will largely be funded by the relevant line Department, as opposed to being funded centrally from this Department.

Communications is ever-evolving. It is important to communicate across a variety of platforms, including social media, to ensure transparent and clarity for all citizens. The Government Information Service is now required to provide a 24/7 service to media organizations, on all topics of public interest, and with short response times. It is also required to generate its own online content, including written, audio and video material, as well as live broadcast on occasion.

Questions No. 13 resubmitted.

Taoiseach's Meetings and Engagements

14. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his recent visit to County Derry. [46989/18]

The Taoiseach: I visited Derry City on Friday 26th October where I had several engage-

ments.

I was pleased to visit the Apprentice Boys Headquarters and Museum where I enjoyed a tour of the Museum. I also had the opportunity to meet the Chair of the Management Committee Mr William Moore and some of his colleagues.

I then visited Creggan Enterprises in the Rath Mór Centre in the Creggan where I spoke with local business people and members of the community. I also got the chance to meet those involved in projects operating from the Centre. During my visit, I also met briefly with the local MP, Ms Elisha McCallion.

Finally, that evening I spoke at the St Columb's College Annual Dinner which this year was in honour of one of St Columb's former students, Mr Mark Durkan.

While my visit to Derry was short, it was a welcome opportunity for engagement with various groups from both sides of the community. I believe that visits like this by me and by other Government Ministers are important in the context of our overall North South relations, particularly at a time when the formal structures of the North South Ministerial Council are not active.

Questions Nos. 15 to 17, inclusive, resubmitted.

Taoiseach's Communications

18. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his telephone conversation with Prime Minister May on 5 November 2018. [46729/18]

24. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his most recent conversation with Prime Minister May. [48229/18]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 18 and 24 together.

I spoke by phone to the British Prime Minister, Theresa May on 5 November, when we discussed 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.

While I had no scheduled bilateral meeting with Prime Minister May at the Special Meeting of the European Council on November 25th, I did of course see her and my other European colleagues at the meeting.

I welcome the endorsement by the European Council of the Agreement on the withdrawal of the UK from the EU, and approval of the Political Declaration setting out the framework for the future relationship.

The Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland provides a guarantee that there will be no hard border on the island of Ireland. We hope that the backstop will never be used and we will continue to work closely with our EU partners during the negotiations on a future agreement

that establishes alternative arrangements.

Question No. 19 to 23, inclusive, resubmitted.

Question No. 24 answered with Question No. 18.

Question No. 25 resubmitted.

Seanad Reform

26. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Taoiseach the status of work of the Seanad Reform Implementation Group. [46731/18]

The Taoiseach: I established an Implementation Group on Seanad Reform to consider the Manning report and develop specific proposals to legislate for Seanad Reform. The Implementation Group comprises Members of the Oireachtas with the assistance of outside experts, as appropriate.

Since its initial meeting on 9th May 2018, the Group has met eleven times. The Group is due to report back in the coming weeks.

Question No. 27 resubmitted.

Taoiseach's Meetings and Engagements

28. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his bilateral meetings with the President of Finland, Mr. Sauli Niinistö and the Prime Minister of Finland, Mr. Juri Sipilä in Helsinki and other meetings he held during his visit. [46991/18]

The Taoiseach: I travelled to Helsinki earlier this month, where I had bilateral meetings with the President of Finland, Sauli Niinistö, and the Prime Minister of Finland, Juha Sipilä.

Finland and Ireland are like-minded on many issues, and both bilateral meetings were very warm and constructive.

In my meeting with Prime Minister Sipilä we discussed Finland's upcoming Presidency of the EU and a range of issues across the EU agenda including Brexit, migration, and economic issues, such as the Multi-Annual Financial Framework and Economic and Monetary Union. We also looked forward to Finland's upcoming Presidency of the Council of Ministers in the second half of 2019.

In meeting with President Niinistö issues raised included security and defence, external relations, including the EU's relations with Russia, an issue which is of particular concern in Finland.

In both my meetings we also discussed bilateral relations between Finland and Ireland, which are excellent, and agreed to continue work to further strengthen our strategic relationship. I also took the opportunity to thank both leaders for their solidarity throughout the Brexit negotiations.

I attended a networking event later that day, hosted by our Ambassador to Finland, where I met with Irish business, cultural and community representatives.

Taoiseach's Meetings and Engagements

29. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his attendance at the Armistice centenary commemoration at the Arc de Triomphe in Paris. [47846/18]

31. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his meeting with the French President, Mr. Emmanuel Macron during Armistice commemorations. [48230/18]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 29 and 31 together.

I travelled to Paris where I was honoured to represent Ireland at the Armistice Day Commemorations on 11 November. I am grateful to President Higgins for offering to delay his inauguration ceremony that day, to enable government and other representatives to attend commemoration ceremonies across Ireland, the U.K. and France. Eighty-four Heads of State and Governments gathered at the Arc de Triomphe to remember those who lost their lives or were wounded in World War One. This solemn occasion served as a stark reminder of the tragedy of war, and the need to focus our efforts on working together at European and international level to ensure that history does not repeat itself. President Macron hosted the event and I had the opportunity to speak with him upon arrival, and in the margins of the ceremonies. I also had informal exchanges with other counterparts including several European and African leaders, as well as Prime Minister Trudeau of Canada, and the heads of international organisations.

Question No. 30 resubmitted.

Question No. 31 answered with Question No. 29.

Questions Nos. 32 to 35, inclusive, resubmitted.

Brexit Issues

36. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Taoiseach the role of his Department in Brexit preparedness. [47847/18]

The Taoiseach: The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, led by the Tánaiste, has overall responsibility for Brexit. That said, Brexit will have implications for each Government Department and Agency. Within my Department, staff across several divisions contribute to the work on Brexit.

The International, European Union and Northern Ireland division covers work on all international, EU and British-Irish and Northern Ireland affairs within the Department, including Brexit matters. The Economic Division advises me on economic policy aimed at sustainable economic growth, with a particular focus on jobs and competitiveness including the possible economic impacts of Brexit.

To augment this work, my Department recently established a unit to work on Brexit preparedness and contingency planning. The unit assists a Secretaries General group, which oversees ongoing work on national Brexit preparedness and contingency planning. It is focussed on cross-Government co-ordination, planning and programme management, and works closely with colleagues in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Preparation and planning for a range of Brexit scenarios, including contingency planning, was initiated well in advance of the UK referendum. Over the last 16 months, the Tánaiste has led efforts to deepen and intensify this planning.

The whole-of-Government response to Brexit is underpinned by a comprehensive set of Government structures, which ensure that all Departments and their agencies are engaging in detailed preparedness and contingency planning, including through the development of sectoral action plans.

Questions Nos. 37 to 40, inclusive, resubmitted.

Departmental Staff Data

41. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Taoiseach the number of staff in his Department that provide supports for Independent Ministers in Government. [48205/18]

The Taoiseach: My Department, as outlined in the Strategy Statement, provides support services for the Taoiseach and the Government, including the Independent Members of Government, through the Government Secretariat, the Parliamentary Liaison Unit, the Programme for Government Office and the Cabinet Committee structure to ensure Government business is managed to the highest standards.

The Chief Strategist for the Independent Alliance and the Political Coordinator for the Independent Ministers in Government are also based in my Department.

The Government Press Secretary acts as a spokesperson for the Taoiseach and the Government and is assisted by the Press Office in his role of co-ordinating the media relations of all Government Departments. The Deputy Press Secretary, who is also based in my Department, is tasked with coordinating communications for all the Independents in Government .

British-Irish Council

42. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his attendance at the British-Irish Council on the Isle of Man on 8 November 2018. [47845/18]

The Taoiseach: I attended the 31st British Irish Council (BIC) Summit in the Isle of Man on Friday 9 November, hosted by Chief Minister Howard Quale. I was accompanied by the Minister for Natural Resources, Community Affairs and Digital Development, Sean Canney TD.

The discussion at the summit covered political developments for Administrations since the last summit in June, including on the implications of Brexit, particularly for relationships across the islands. The Council also discussed the current political situation in Northern Ireland and endorsed plans for a future programme of work for the Council's Digital Inclusion work sector.

I had side meetings with Welsh First Minister Carwyn Jones and Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon in which we exchanged views on issues of mutual interest and continued co-operation. These discussions focused mainly on Brexit and its impacts on business and citizens and on developments in Westminster and Brussels.

I also took the opportunity to speak with UK Cabinet Office Minister David Lidington on Brexit and on the absence of an agreement between the parties on re-establishing the Northern Ireland Executive. I underlined the importance of the restoration of the institutions in the context of full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, and undertook to continue to work with the British government to back the northern parties to achieve this outcome.

Questions Nos. 43, to 55, inclusive, resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 56 to 63, inclusive, answered orally.

Infrastructure and Capital Investment Programme

64. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the levels of capital expenditure which will be allocated for infrastructure projects for County Donegal; the timeframe for these allocations; the projects for which funding will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48996/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As I have informed the Deputy in response to similar previous questions, in my role as Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform I am responsible for setting the overall capital allocations across Departments and for monitoring monthly expenditure at a Departmental level. Decisions on how and where those allocations are invested by Departments are a matter, in the first instance, for my ministerial colleagues.

You will appreciate that the key role in leading development at county level rests with the relevant local authority. Under the umbrella of Project Ireland 2040, Government has allocated capital funding behind the national priorities set out in the National Planning Framework. Hence, all stakeholders have clarity as to the linkage between the increasing capital resource envelope and national policy principles.

That national framework is being converted into coherent regional and local authority plans. This is where those national principles will be turned in practical actions, while applying the principles of the Public Spending Code to ensure that resources are directed to the purposes that will deliver the best outcomes for the citizen.

Under the NPF, the three Regional Assemblies are now responsible for co-ordinating, promoting and supporting the strategic planning and sustainable development of their regions, consistent with the objectives of the NPF, through the preparation of Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES). The strategy for the Northern and Western Region provides the opportunity for the priorities for Donegal, for example the priorities included in the existing County Development Plan, to be integrated into a regional investment plan which is expected to be a major driver of the implementation of the NPF.

I might also add that, as previously advised, my Department publishes a major capital projects tracker on the website of the Department, which sets out details of the key projects and programmes being implemented under the NDP, including the location of the projects where possible. The Tracker includes a number of major projects directly related to Donegal. The tracker currently focuses on projects and programmes with costs greater than €20 million. While it does not provide an exhaustive list of all capital expenditure, the list of projects serves to highlight the diverse range of infrastructural demands competing for the resources of the State.

Finally, I wish to reiterate the point I made at the outset, which is that responsibility for the management and delivery of the individual investment projects, within the allocations agreed under the NDP, rests with the individual sponsoring Department in each case. My Department's role is to set the overall capital allocations for the Departments and to authorize the delegated sanction arrangements under which those Departments make their spending decisions.

The tracker can be found at the following URL:

<https://www.per.gov.ie/en/investment-projects-and-programmes-tracker/>.

Questions Nos. 65 to 68, inclusive, answered orally.

Question No. 69 answered with Question No. 66.

Public Sector Pensions

70. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the efforts that have been made to incorporate retired public servants into the wider public pay discussions; if there are legislative reasons trade unions cannot represent retired public servants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49185/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): There is no formal mechanism to include recipients of public service pensions within the industrial relations framework and pay determination processes in the public service.

However, I can inform the Deputy that the interests and concerns of public service pensioners have been regularly articulated in meetings between the Alliance of Retired Public Servants and my Department. This engagement has also included meetings between the Alliance, myself and my predecessor. Through that process of engagement, I believe that public service pensioners have had, and continue to be afforded, a meaningful and direct means of articulating their concerns in relation to pensions and related issues.

I would point out too that over the past number of years there have been notable pension improvements for many public service pensioners.

First, pensions in payment are benefiting significantly from the substantial reversal of the cuts to public service pensions above specified thresholds which were originally imposed by way of the Public Service Pension Reduction (PSPR) under the FEMPI legislation.

Second, as part of the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018 – 2020, the Government agreed a time-limited, conditions bound, return to the non-statutory, pay-linked method of pension adjustment which prevailed until the onset of the financial emergency. To that end, in January this year, my Department issued DPER Circular 02/2018 authorizing pension increases to qualifying public service pensions of the pay increases covering the 2018 to 2020 period under the PSSA, as legislated for in the Public Service Pay and Pensions Act 2017.

In conclusion, I can assure the Deputy that I and my Department are fully committed to maintaining the well-established dialogue with the Alliance of Retired Public Servants. Through ongoing recourse to that dialogue process, I believe that retired public servants and their representatives can be confident that their pension concerns will receive full and proper consideration as they have done in the past.

Office of Public Works

71. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the plans of the OPW to purchase property for State organisations in counties Cavan and Monaghan; the stages in negotiation for each; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49192/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the question refers to matters which would be commercially sensitive, the Office of Public Works is un-

able to comment on any such plans. Details of properties which are purchased for State organisations are normally made public when purchases have been completed. Generally when OPW is seeking to acquire a property or site it will trawl the market and advertise publicly. However, once negotiations commence on an individual property the details of such negotiation are not made public until the transaction is completed.

Departmental Funding

72. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the projects that will be funded by his Department under the INTERREG and PEACE programmes in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49193/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The 2014-2020 EU-funded PEACE and INTERREG programmes will invest over half a billion euros in the border region of Ireland and Northern Ireland over the course of the programming period.

The programmes are managed by the Special EU Programmes Body, one of the North South implementation bodies established under the Good Friday Agreement. My Department is joint sponsor Department for the Body and the two programmes, along with the Department of Finance in Northern Ireland, while various sectoral Departments, north and south, act as accountable Departments for funding.

The €270 million PEACE IV Programme is now 83% committed, with 88 projects approved for funding, included groups of projects under the Local Authority Peace Action Plans. Projects in the fields of Shared Education, Children and Young People, Shared Spaces and Services, and Building Positive Relations will all be delivering real benefits on the ground in 2019. The SE-UPB is currently assessing funding applications for further Shared Spaces projects.

The €282 million INTERREG Programme is also making good progress, with 87% of funding committed to 32 projects in the fields of research and innovation, environment, sustainable transport and health and social care. In addition, the SEUPB is currently assessing applications under the Sustainable Transport priority.

The Irish Government is firmly committed to the successful implementation of the current PEACE and INTERREG Programme and to a successor programme post-2020. In that regard, I am pleased that the draft Withdrawal Agreement and Political Declaration give effect to last December's Joint Report in which the EU and UK undertook to honour their commitments to the current programmes and to examine favourably the possibilities for future support. I also welcome the Commission's proposal for a special new PEACE PLUS programme post-2020 to build on and continue the work of both PEACE and INTERREG.

Question No. 73 answered with Question No. 63.

Departmental Properties

74. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if an audit of all lands and properties owned by his Department has been undertaken with a view to making suitable properties available for social and affordable housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49200/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Office of Public Works manage owned and leased properties held by the Minister for Public Expendi-

ture and Reform and the Commissioners of Public Works. In accordance with DPER Circular 17/2016 – Policy for Property Acquisition and for the Disposal of Surplus Property the OPW keeps this portfolio of properties under regular review to identify property needs and properties that are now surplus to requirements. Properties identified as surplus are made known to other public sector bodies, including local authorities and more recently the Land Development Agency, using the State Property Register. No property can be disposed of until it is designated as surplus for at least one month on the State Property Register to allow for expressions of interest from other State bodies.

All State bodies that have are involved in the provision of social and affordable housing have access to information on all properties managed by the OPW, be they properties that are used or are surplus. The OPW had a number of engagements with representatives of the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government regarding its property portfolio in the months before the establishment of the Land Development Agency (LDA). Since the establishment of the LDA, the OPW has engaged directly with its officials on property-related matters.

As you are aware, the LDA has a particular focus on securing land for social and affordable housing purposes and are examining the potential use of State held land, whether it is currently in use or designated as surplus. There is therefore a mechanism in place to ensure that property managed by the OPW which is suitable for social and affordable housing can be considered for that purpose.

Cross-Border Projects

75. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the cross-Border co-ordination group established in 2009 by the OPW and the UK Department of Infrastructure has a particular programme of work underway or planned at present; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49201/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The EU ‘Floods’ Directive 2007, requires the Member States to undertake a Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment to identify the areas of potentially significant flood risk within their territories, to prepare maps of the flood hazard and risk for these areas, and then to prepare Flood Risk Management Plans setting out measures aimed at managing and reducing the flood risk within these areas. The ‘Floods’ Directive also requires Member States to exchange information and coordinate in undertaking these steps in cross-border river basins.

In 2009 the Office of Public Works and the Department for Infrastructure, Rivers of Northern Ireland agreed to establish a Cross-Border Coordination Group, supported by a Cross-Border Technical Coordination Group, to facilitate the exchange of information and coordination in the implementation of the Floods Directive. The Group has met on a number of occasions, and exchanged information and developed a strong awareness of and appreciation for the approaches to implementation to the Directive. The Group has also facilitated close liaison for the assessment of flood risk and planned measures to address that risk for those areas near to the border, for example Lifford in Co. Donegal and Strabane in Northern Ireland.

In addition, representatives from the OPW have attended and participated in relevant meetings in Northern Ireland during the implementation of the Directive. Similarly, representatives from the Department for Infrastructure, Rivers have been members of the Steering Groups for the relevant Catchment-based Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) Projects, and are also members of the National Floods Directive Coordination Group that is chaired by the OPW. This has further helped ensure coordination and exchange of information on a regular

basis at the strategic and operational levels.

More general cross-border coordination has also been ongoing in the field of flood risk management through bilateral meetings of the two organisations for many years, through the Irish National Hydrometric Working Group and Joint National Committee of the International Hydrological Programme and the International Commission for Irrigation and Drainage that the Department for Infrastructure, Rivers are members of. This continued close co-operation has provided the opportunity for co-operation in areas, such as flood forecasting and hydrometric monitoring.

Flood Relief Schemes Status

76. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when construction of the flood relief works on the Sullane River at Ballyvourney will be advanced; the remaining stages to bring the works to construction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49194/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by the Commissioners of Public Works that the Baile Mhúirne and Ballymakeera Flood Relief scheme is currently at outline design stage, and the preferred options for the scheme are in the process of being finalised.

The River Sullane has a history of freshwater pearl mussels, which have protected status as an Annex II listed species under the EU Habitats Directive. An environmental survey was carried out to establish the status of the population and the likely impact of any works.

Given the impact the proposed works could have on the Fresh Water Pearl Mussel population, a proposal to translocate Fresh Water Pearl Mussel from the River Sullane and re-introduce them post works was submitted to, and has now been approved by, the NPWS and the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, allowing the scheme preparations to progress to site investigation, which will inform the preferred options for the scheme. A site investigation was completed in Q3 2018 and the results will further assist in determining the preferred options, and in refining construction cost estimates.

The emerging preferred option was presented to members of the public and relevant stakeholders at a second Public Information Day in March 2018. A public exhibition of the preferred scheme is expected to take place in spring 2019.

When these stages are successfully completed and, subject to the proposals being accepted by the public and the stakeholders, and the scheme being technically, environmentally and economically viable, the scheme will then proceed to formal Confirmation by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform under the Arterial Drainage Acts 1945 and 1995, and then move onto detailed design stage, following which the scheme can progress to construction stage.

In the interim, the OPW has approved funding of EUR187,248 for temporary flood defence works in Ballymakeera under its Minor Flood Mitigation Works & Coastal Protection Scheme.

My Office continues to liaise with Cork County Council and local representatives on this Scheme.

Legislative Measures

77. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he expects the Public Service Superannuation (Age of Retirement) Bill 2018 to pass all Stages before Christmas; if he will consider backdating the qualification for application of the Bill to when the interim measures were announced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49184/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, the Public Service Superannuation (Age of Retirement) Bill 2018, which was published on 9 July, passed all stages in the Seanad on 17 July. It passed Second Stage in the Dail on 7 November and is provisionally scheduled for Committee Stage in the Dail on 11 December. While ultimately, the scheduling of the Bill in the Dail is a matter for the Oireachtas, my intention is to secure enactment of the Bill as soon as possible.

In relation to the backdating issue, I refer the Deputy to my response to his PQ 46505/18 of 13 November 2018.

Office of Government Procurement

78. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he is satisfied with the supervision of publicly funded construction contracts; the oversight he provides for such work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49205/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, I have responsibility for the formulation of policy, and the dissemination of best practice and guidance in public procurement. The Capital Works Management Framework, (CWMF), managed by the Office of Government Procurement, provides the necessary tools for Contracting Authorities to ensure adequate supervision and oversight on construction projects. This Framework is mandated for use on all capital funded construction projects. The provisions include the conditions of the Public Works Contract which outline the functions of the contract administrator; the Employer's Representative during the construction stage of a project as well as dedicated guidance, (Guidance Note 3.1-Implementation Process), on the management and oversight of the project once works commence.

The conditions of the public works contract provide the contractual tools necessary to ensure that a contractor completes a project to the required standard. These include:

- Provision for inspections of the works whether they are executed on or off site;
- A prohibition on the covering up of work without notification to the Employer's Representative in advance;
- A requirement for all the materials and products that are to be incorporated into the works to be fit for their intended purpose and to meet the required standards;
- A fitness for purpose obligation on the works themselves in design and build contracts;
- The requirement for a detailed inspection notification framework and testing plan;
- An obligation on the contractor to keep the Employer's Representative up to date on all matters related to the management and supervision of the works;
- To instruct the removal or replacement of works that are not completed in accordance with the specification;
- Where work is not completed in accordance with the specification, to withhold payment

until the matter is rectified;

- To appoint another contractor to rectify the works where the contractor fails to respond in a timely fashion;

The extent to which these tools are utilised and the resources associated will vary depending on a project's scale and complexity and is a matter for the Contracting Authority with responsibility for the delivery of the project.

Coastal Erosion

79. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he has met with Fingal County Council to address the issue of coastal erosion in Portrane; if funding has been provided to prevent further erosion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48884/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am very familiar with the situation at Portrane and I have visited the area. Fingal County Council is leading on this issue, as it is a matter for local authorities in the first instance to assess and address problems of coastal erosion in their areas. Where necessary, Local Authorities may put forward proposals to relevant central Government Departments, including the OPW, for funding of appropriate measures depending on the infrastructure or assets under threat.

In response to serious coastal erosion problems at The Burrow, Portrane, I am advised that Fingal County Council have completed implementing the interim emergency measures to protect properties at risk. Funding of €456,464 has been approved under the OPW Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme for these works.

Fingal County Council are also progressing the preparation of the consultants brief for the long term solution which will be commissioned in the near future.

Office of Public Works Properties

80. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the properties which are vacant and are either owned or being rented by the Office of Public Works; the amount of rent paid to date on those vacant rented properties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48885/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Commissioners of Public Works, on behalf of the State, manage a large and diverse property portfolio, which ranges from office accommodation to heritage properties, visitor centres, Garda stations, among others. As is typical of such large portfolios, there will always be a number of properties, at any given time, that are vacant. These are currently being retained because of their future strategic development value.

A list of non-operational properties currently vacant and owned or leased by the Commissioners is attached.

The majority of the properties currently vacant are those Garda stations closed under the 2012/2013 policing plans of An Garda Síochána. The remainder consists of properties such as customs posts, former coastguard stations and sundry other properties located throughout the country.

The future use of the former Garda stations is under review, in consultation with An Garda Siochana.

There are two rented/leased properties that are currently vacant. These are as follows:

1. Waterford Customs Store, Tramore Road, Waterford

This is a warehouse previously used by the Revenue Commissioners. Despite efforts to find an alternative use for the property, it has been vacant since 2005 and the Landlord is not interested in an early surrender. The annual rent paid is €145,005.

2. 12 Clare Street, Dublin 2

The building at 12 Clare Street was occupied by the Department of Finance and Department of Public Expenditure & Reform until early August 2018. Prior to any re-occupation by another entity, significant works will be required to the building.

County	Property	Property Type	Current Status
			Garda stations closed under the 2012 and 2013 Policing plans (53)
Cavan	Ardagh	Garda Station	Subject to a review of closed stations
Cavan	Redhills	Garda Station	Subject to a review of closed stations
Clare	Broadford	Garda Station	Subject to a review of closed stations
Clare	Doonbeg	Garda Station	Subject to a review of closed stations
Clare	Inagh	Garda Station	Subject to a review of closed stations
Clare	Lahinch	Garda Station	Subject to a review of closed stations
Clare	Quin	Garda Station	Subject to a review of closed stations
Cork	Adrigole	Garda Station	Subject to a review of closed stations
Cork	Ballyfeard	Garda Station	Subject to a review of closed stations
Cork	Ballygurteen	Garda Station	Subject to a review of closed stations
Cork	Goleen	Garda Station	Subject to a review of closed stations
Cork	Knocknagree	Garda Station	Subject to a review of closed stations
Cork	Rathduff	Garda Station	Subject to a review of closed stations
Cork City	McCurtain Street	Garda Station	Alternative State use being examined
Donegal	Malin	Garda Station	Subject to a review of closed stations

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County	Property	Property Type	Current Status
			Garda stations closed under the 2012 and 2013 Policing plans (53)
Donegal	Na Brocacha/ Cloghan	Garda Station	Subject to a review of closed stations
Dublin	Dalkey	Garda Station	Subject to a review of closed stations
Dublin	Kill O'The Grange	Garda Station	Subject to a review of closed stations
Galway	Ballymoe	Garda Station	Subject to a review of closed stations
Galway	Corrandulla	Garda Station	Subject to a review of closed stations
Galway	Kilconly	Garda Station	Subject to a review of closed stations
Galway	Kiltullagh	Garda Station	Subject to a review of closed stations
Galway	Leenane	Garda Station	Subject to a review of closed stations
Kerry	Brosna	Garda Station	Subject to a review of closed stations
Kerry	Camp	Garda Station	Subject to a review of closed stations
Kerry	Kilgarvan	Garda Station	Subject to a review of closed stations
Kerry	Moyvane	Garda Station	Subject to a review of closed stations
Leitrim	Dromahair	Garda Station	Subject to a review of closed stations
Leitrim	Drumkeeran	Garda Station	Subject to a review of closed stations
Leitrim	Glenfarne	Garda Station	Subject to a review of closed stations
Leitrim	Keshcarrigan	Garda Station	Subject to a review of closed stations
Limerick	Castletown Conyers	Garda Station	Subject to a review of closed stations
Limerick	Galbally	Garda Station	Subject to a review of closed stations
Limerick	Kilfinane	Garda Station	Subject to a review of closed stations
Limerick	Mary Street	Garda Station	Intra State transfer to Limerick City and Co. Co.
Limerick	Shanagolden	Garda Station	Subject to a review of closed stations
Longford	Ballinalee	Garda Station	Subject to a review of closed stations

County	Property	Property Type	Current Status
			Garda stations closed under the 2012 and 2013 Policing plans (53)
Mayo	Ballyglass	Garda Station	Subject to a review of closed stations
Mayo	Bellacorrick	Garda Station	Subject to a review of closed stations
Mayo	Blacksod	Garda Station	Subject to a review of closed stations
Mayo	Hollymount	Garda Station	Subject to a review of closed stations
Monaghan	Clontibret	Garda Station	Subject to a review of closed stations
Monaghan	Corrinshigagh	Garda Station	Subject to a review of closed stations
Monaghan	Newbliss	Garda Station	Subject to a review of closed stations
Monaghan	Smithborough	Garda Station	Subject to a review of closed stations
Roscommon	Ballintubber	Garda Station	Subject to a review of closed stations
Roscommon	Ballyforan	Garda Station	Subject to a review of closed stations
Roscommon	Knockcroghery	Garda Station	Subject to a review of closed stations
Roscommon	Tarmonbarry	Garda Station	Subject to a review of closed stations
Sligo	Cliffoney	Garda Station	Subject to a review of closed stations
Tipperary	New Inn (Tipperary)	Garda Station	Subject to a review of closed stations
Waterford	Ballyduff	Garda Station	Subject to a review of closed stations
Wicklow	Hollywood	Garda Station	Subject to a review of closed stations
	Other former Garda stations (11)		
Cavan	Stradone	Garda Station	Being prepared for disposal
Cork City	Ballyhooley Rd, Cork	Garda Station	Being prepared for disposal
Donegal	Bunbeg	Garda Station	Community interest.
Donegal	Buncrana	Garda Station	Intra State transfer to Donegal Co. Co.
Galway	Maam	Garda Station	Being prepared for disposal
Kildare	Rathangan	Garda Station	Being prepared for disposal

Questions - Written Answers

County	Property	Property Type	Current Status
			Garda stations closed under the 2012 and 2013 Policing plans (53)
Kilkenny	Castlecomer	Garda Station	Intra State transfer to Kilkenny Co. Co.
Limerick	Edward Street	Garda Station	Intra State transfer to Limerick City and Co. Co.
Limerick	Mayorstone Park	Garda Station	Intra State transfer to Limerick City and Co. Co.
Mayo	Ballina	Garda Station	Being prepared for disposal
Sligo	Ballymote	Garda Station	Being prepared for disposal
	Former Garda residences (9)		
Cork	13 Woodville, Blarney	Residence	Being prepared for disposal
Cork	Buttevant	Residence	Intra State transfer to the HSE.
Donegal	Castlefin	Residence	Alternative State use being examined.
Offaly	Kinnitty	Residence	Community Interest
Tipperary	The Mall, Templemore	Residence	Intra State transfer to Tipperary Co. Co.
Tipperary	The Mall, Templemore	Residence	Intra State transfer to Tipperary Co. Co.
Tipperary	The Mall, Templemore	Residence	Intra State transfer to Tipperary Co. Co.
Tipperary	Church Ave, Templemore	Residence	Intra State transfer to Tipperary Co. Co.
Tipperary	Church Ave, Templemore	Residence	Intra State transfer to Tipperary Co. Co.
	Coastguard Properties (7)		
Cork	Crosshaven	Cottage	Intra State transfer to Cork County Council.
Cork	Crosshaven	Cottage	Intra State transfer to Cork County Council.
Cork	Crosshaven	Cottage	Intra State transfer to Cork County Council.
Cork	Crosshaven	Cottage	Intra State transfer to Cork County Council.
Cork	Crosshaven	Cottage	Intra State transfer to Cork County Council.
Cork	Crosshaven	Cottage	Intra State transfer to Cork County Council.

County	Property	Property Type	Current Status
			Garda stations closed under the 2012 and 2013 Policing plans (53)
Cork	Crosshaven	Cottage	Intra State transfer to Cork County Council.
	Miscellaneous Buildings (16)		
Cork	Clonakilty	Agricultural College & Office	Alternative State use being examined
Cork	8 Harbour Road, Cobh	DSP office	Alternative State use being examined
Dublin	10/11 Castle Street	Building	Retained for strategic purposes.
Dublin	Halston Street.	Building	Alternative State use being examined
Kilkenny	Freshford Road	Met Station	Intra State transfer to Kilkenny Co. Co.
Leitrim	Manorhamilton	Customs Stn	Alternative State use being examined
Limerick	Cecil Street	Building	Intra State transfer to Limerick City and Co. Co.
Limerick	Mallow Street	Building	Intra State transfer to Limerick City and Co. Co.
Louth	Dundalk former Employment Exchange	Building	Intra State transfer to Louth County Council.
Louth	Drogheda - 62/63 West Street	Building	Intra State transfer to Louth County Council.
Meath	Enfield	Former ESB building	Intra State transfer to Meath Co. Co. being considered.
Meath	Navan (Kells Road)	Government Buildings	Intra State transfer to Meath Co. Co. being considered.
Monaghan	Innisshannon	Customs Hut	Alternative State use being examined
Offaly	Birr	Met Station	Being prepared for disposal.
Tipperary	Dromard House (Residence)	Templemore	Acquired for AGS.
Waterford	Ardmore	Building	Future use under consideration..
	Leased property (2)		
Waterford	Tramore Road	Warehouse	Rent €32,505 per annum
Dublin	12 Clare Street	Office	Rent €112,500 per annum

In addition, there are a limited number of sundry residential dwellings that are intrinsic to

the estates of National Parks and Gardens managed by the Office of Public Works. In general, these are allocated to staff where there is a requirement for officials to be present on the ground. There are a number of these currently vacant due to the poor condition of the properties.

Industrial Disputes

81. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he has had discussions with the Minister for Health with regard to the possible upcoming industrial dispute involving nurses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49105/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Public Service Pay Agreement 2018 -2020 provides the appropriate industrial relations mechanisms for the processing of disputes that may arise between the parties to this Agreement. The threatened industrial dispute in question is being addressed on this basis in consultation between officials from my Department and those of my colleague the Minister for Health.

Public Private Partnerships Data

82. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the annual unitary payments for each of the past and current public-private partnerships will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48993/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Deputy might be interested to know that I already publish two sets of financial data on PPPs. The data can be accessed on the PPP website at www.ppp.gov.ie. The first set of data provides an update on the existing Financial Commitments table. This table contains detailed information in relation to all PPP projects for which contracts have been signed and which are either operational or in construction. Information is broken out by individual project on the type of PPP model being used, the operational date of the project, the capital contractual value of the project, the total unitary payments made to the end of 2017, the projected total future unitary payments for each project, other PPP related costs, the total cost of each project, the year of final payment and the name of the PPP company delivering the project.

In addition to this considerable amount of information contained in the Financial Commitment table, I have also published the projected annualised breakdown of the expected future unitary payments for each year, by project, extending out to when each project will be handed back by the PPP Company to the Sponsoring Authority.

The published data is intended to provide indicative information in relation to PPP projects, based on information provided to my Department by the relevant responsible Departments or Agencies. The Central PPP Policy Unit in my Department endeavours to ensure that the information is as accurate as possible but any queries in relation to the details of specific projects should be confirmed directly with the State authorities responsible for those projects.

I should inform the Deputy, however, that with reference to PPP projects in the water sector, since 1st January 2014, Irish Water has statutory responsibility for all aspects of water services planning, delivery and operation at national, regional and local levels, and this includes taking on responsibility for the water related 'PPPs' from the local authorities.

As water projects have been fully funded by the Exchequer they are already classified as on-balance sheet in General Government terms. Such projects are not generally regarded as

‘classic’ PPPs as they do not involve private finance and there are no contingent liabilities associated with them since there is no risk of a potential future GGB or GGD impact associated with such projects given that they are already on-balance sheet - unlike ‘classic’ PPPs. On this basis, we do not record these projects on the PPP.gov.ie website, nor do I propose to change that approach.

Details of the PPP projects in the water area would, however, be available from Irish Water.

Public Procurement Regulations

83. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the policy in relation to the delivery of public infrastructure to examine the long-term costs and benefits of the present reliance on private sector providers will be reviewed in view of recent issues with competitive tendering and public procurement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49215/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Public Spending Code, published by my department, summarises the high level principles to be applied when scrutinising expenditure proposals as well as the roles and responsibilities of those involved.

It also encompasses guidance on a variety of issues related to the management of expenditure at each stage of the expenditure lifecycle. This includes central guidance on the application of appraisal and evaluation methodologies including cost benefit analysis. This methodological guidance aims to enhance consistency across sectors through common approaches and the use of key technical parameter values needed for quantifying costs and conducting economic appraisals.

Where construction projects are concerned, the optimum means of delivery and the long-term costs of the project are specifically addressed as part of the evaluation.

In reality the majority of construction projects are undertaken by private sector contractors engaged following a procurement process since it is neither practical nor cost effective for the State to employ a skilled workforce of the size necessary to directly deliver large sections of the NDP. Indeed, even in that scenario, procurement of specialist expertise would still be necessary in certain circumstances.

Where there is a requirement to procure contractors, all public works projects delivered under the exchequer-funded element of the NDP must be procured in accordance with the provisions laid down in the Capital Works Management Framework which was developed to assist contracting authorities to meet their ongoing procurement requirements. It provides an integrated set of contractual provisions, guidance material, technical templates and procedures which cover all aspects of the delivery process of a public works project from inception to final project delivery and review.

The performance of the public works contracts was reviewed in 2014 and set out a number of recommendations including a range of interim amendments and the development of a medium term strategy for the procurement of public works projects. The interim amendments have been adopted and engagement on the medium term strategy has commenced. This will see a comprehensive review of the manner in which public works projects are procured and will focus on better delivery through public procurement. It will not determine whether procurement is the optimum means of delivery for a contract as this responsibility remains with the contracting authority as part of the initial evaluation process.

Coastal Erosion

84. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the action his Department is taking to tackle coastal erosion in Portrane, County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49118/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am very familiar with the situation at Portrane and I have visited the area. Fingal County Council is leading on this issue, as it is a matter for local authorities in the first instance to assess and address problems of coastal erosion in their areas. Where necessary, Local Authorities may put forward proposals to relevant central Government Departments, including the OPW, for funding of appropriate measures depending on the infrastructure or assets under threat.

In response to serious coastal erosion problems at The Burrow, Portrane, I am advised that Fingal County Council have completed implementing the interim emergency measures to protect properties at risk. Funding of €456,464 has been approved under the OPW Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme for these works.

Fingal County Council are also progressing the preparation of the consultants brief for the long term solution which will be commissioned in the near future.

Flood Risk Management

85. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the details on the management of the River Shannon as part of the report managing flood risk in Ireland; the timelines of the projects announced in the report; the annual money allocation until 2027; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49188/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): On 3rd May, 2018, I was delighted to launch 29 Flood Risk Management Plans and investment of €1bn in flood risk management as part of the Government's Project Ireland 2040.

These Plans are the output from the Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) Programme - the largest ever flood risk study carried out in the State.

The Plans set out the measures proposed to address the flood risk nationally, and include 19 new flood relief schemes to protect towns in the River Shannon River catchment, in addition to the scheme already underway in Athlone.

Twelve of these have now been prioritised, as part of this ten year programme. The OPW and the Local Authorities have been engaging pro-actively since the launch of the Plans to advance the implementation of these schemes. Engagement with the Local Authorities is ongoing in relation to Springfield, Ballinasloe, Nenagh, Longford, Rahan, Castleconnell, Mohill, Leitrim, Clonaslee and Killaloe and for Limerick City, King's Island and environs. Further to recent engagement with Leitrim County Council, the OPW and the County Council have also agreed to advance the implementation of the scheme for Carrick-on-Shannon.

Capital Funding for the delivery of the existing schemes and the additional schemes identified in the Flood Risk Management has been provided by the Government and expenditure in this area will increase to €100m annually by 2021.

In January 2016, the Shannon Flood Risk State Agency Co-ordination Working Group was established by Government to support the Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management

Programme and further enhance the on-going co-operation across all of the State agencies involved with the River Shannon, including ESB, Waterways Ireland, Bord na Móna, Inland Fisheries Ireland, the National Parks and Wildlife Service, OPW and the relevant local authorities.

The Shannon Group has taken a number of significant decisions since its establishment, including targeted maintenance at a number of locations, trialling the lowering of the levels on Lough Allen, studies to explore managing flood risk at the Callows and lower Shannon below parteen.

Freedom of Information

86. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his views on the 40-plus agencies that are either fully or partially exempt from freedom of information requests; his further views on whether these exemptions are in the public interest with regard to accountability and transparency; if he will consider conducting a review of the agencies that benefit from such exemptions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49198/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): While obviously it would not be possible in this context for me to address each example individually, I am satisfied that there are compelling grounds to justify each of the various exclusions and part exclusions set out in schedule one of the Freedom of Information Act 2014.

Taking the example of commercial state bodies, government policy remains that these should not be subject to FOI because of the competitive market in which they operate. The public interest would be badly served if entities of this nature were put at a disadvantage in their respective markets through being obliged to release classes of information that their privately owned competitors are not.

However, as the Deputy will be aware, the 2014 Act made companies such as Irish Rail, ESB Networks, Gas Networks Ireland, and Eirgrid which operate in a monopoly market or perform network functions subject to FOI in relation to their relevant activities.

These examples illustrate the approach taken in the 2014 Act, whereby even where unassailable policy or legal arguments for the exclusions of certain elements or activities of particular entities, every reasonable effort has been made to ensure that these entities are subject to FOI to the greatest extent possible. The exclusions were carefully crafted so as to strike an appropriate balance between protecting the public interest by providing for exclusions where necessary, but furthering openness, transparency and accountability wherever possible.

Given the relatively short period of time that has elapsed since the introduction of the 2014 Act, I do not believe that the background facts underpinning the rationales behind the relevant exclusions has changed to any significant extent, and I therefore do not believe that there is any necessity to review these provisions at this time.

Public Service Stability Agreement

87. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the way in which he plans to use FEMPI legislation to deal with unions and workers that do not sign up to proposed pay deals; if he has received legal advice on targeting workers of a particular union in the same workplace as other workers that have agreed to such a deal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49213/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Public Service Pay and Pensions Act 2017 provides for a range of benefits for those public servants who have accepted and comply with the terms of the Public Service Pay and Stability Agreement 2018 - 2020.

In exchange for work practice reforms, greater productivity, improvements in how services are delivered to the public, industrial peace and restraint from cost-increasing claims, public servants benefit from an accelerated and more advantageous phased series of pay increases up to October 2020 as part of the unwinding of FEMPI legislation.

Separately, the Agreement also provides processes through the Public Service Pay Commission to address particular recruitment and retention issues in the public service and makes provision to address salary scale issues for “New Entrants” to the public service.

Legislation passed by the Oireachtas, the Public Service Pay and Pensions Act 2017 provides for accelerated payments only in respect of those public servants who have engaged with and are complying with the Public Service Pay Agreement 2018-2020. Such public servants are described as ‘covered public servants’ in the legislation.

Public servants who choose not to sign up to the Public Service Pay Agreement or having signed up, choose to breach the terms of the agreement in relation to industrial peace will not benefit from either the accelerated timetable (they will suffer a delay of nine months) set out in the agreement for pay increases or from the implementation of the recommendations of the Public Service Pay Commission or the New Entrant process. In addition, they will experience an increment freeze and will not benefit from advantageous changes to the payment of additional superannuation contributions. The legislation describes such public servants as ‘non-covered public servants’.

My Department is in receipt of regular legal advice including on the operation of the provisions of this legislation as required.

Garda Divisional Headquarters

88. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the steps that have been taken by the OPW in the securing of a site for the development of a new Garda divisional headquarters in County Meath as requested by the Chief Superintendent in the division; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49196/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Office of Public Works (OPW) has advanced a comprehensive Garda Building Programme in recent years that has provided Garda accommodation such as, new builds, major extensions and refurbishments to existing Garda Stations. The design and construction of these new works has provided An Garda Síochána with appropriate, fit for purpose working conditions and facilities on a prioritised basis.

The Office of Public Works advances the provision of facilities for An Garda Síochána in line with the requirements identified by An Garda Síochána and included in its list of Capital Programme Priorities. The Garda Commissioner determines the priority of capital projects to be undertaken and this informs the schedule of capital works that is planned and undertaken by the OPW.

A new Garda Divisional Headquarters at Navan, Co. Meath has not been identified as a priority in the current programme. However, the existing Garda station at Navan has been identi-

fied by An Garda Síochána as a priority for the cell upgrade programme.

As the Deputy is aware, the Government also launched a Capital Investment Plan for An Garda Síochána for 2016-2021. This includes plans for the major refurbishment of Garda Stations and facilities for meeting victims of crime, essential remedial works to certain Garda properties, upgrading and modernising prisoner detention areas, developing Property and Evidence Material Stores (PEMS) in a range of locations. OPW has also recently completed the construction of three new major Garda Regional and Divisional Headquarters. A Regional Headquarters in Galway was completed in July 2018, one at Kevin Street, Dublin also this year and one in Wexford was completed in September 2017.

Estimates Process

89. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the supplementary expenditure estimates he plans to introduce in Dáil Éireann; and the timeframe for same. [49207/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Due to the scale of Government expenditure and the cash basis of Government accounting, the need for Supplementary Estimates can arise for a number of reasons, including policy decisions, timing issues and overspends. The position in relation to Supplementary Estimates takes into account the most up to date trends in Departmental expenditure and receipts. Last week, Supplementary Estimates were presented to Dáil Éireann and referred to Committee in respect of Votes in the following Ministerial Vote groups:

- Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Technical);
- Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Technical);
- Children and Youth Affairs (Substantive);
- Defence (Substantive);
- Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Substantive);
- Foreign Affairs and Trade (Substantive);
- Public Expenditure and Reform – Office of Public Works (Substantive) and Superannuation (Technical); and
- Transport, Tourism and Sport (Substantive).

Expenditure Report 2019 outlined that Supplementary Estimates would also be required for the following Vote Groups:

- Education and Skills (Substantive);
- Justice and Equality (Substantive);
- Health (Substantive); and
- Housing, Planning and Local Government (Substantive).

Arrangements are being made to present Supplementary Estimates for the relevant Votes in these Ministerial Vote Groups to Dáil Éireann in the coming days.

Brexit Issues

90. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the Brexit funding available to Departments; if requests for additional expenditure have been received; if so, the Departments and the amount, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48840/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Budget 2019 contains specific measures to ensure that Ireland is in the best possible position to respond to the challenges - and indeed the opportunities - that Brexit will bring.

Increased resources of €25 million has been provided across a range of Departments and Offices based on a Brexit central case scenario, where there will be a transition period until 31 December 2020. This will enable the Office of the Revenue Commissioners, the Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine, the Department of Transport, Tourism & Sport, the Department of Health and the HSE implement necessary measures including in the areas of customs, SPS and food safety controls.

The €300 million Future Growth Loan Scheme, jointly funded by the Department of Business, Enterprise & Innovation and the Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine, provides a longer-term facility to support strategic capital investment by business at competitive rates in a post-Brexit environment.

A €71 million package has been provided for the Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine and its agencies, Teagasc and Bord Bia, to further strengthen the agriculture sector's ability to become more resilient in addressing the challenges of Brexit.

An increase of €14 million in the allocation for the Department of Business, Enterprise & Innovation will enable it to continue to plan for the impact of Brexit on the business sector, including the expansion of Departmental and regulatory agency capacity, the expansion of its agencies' global footprint and additional Brexit information campaigns and supports.

€5 million has been allocated to the Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade to enable it to continue to address the challenges posed by Brexit across a range of headings, including building capacity across strategic European locations and developing outreach responsibilities through public and stakeholder engagement and EU alliance enhancement. In addition, additional funding of €13 million will support the opening of new markets for our businesses and a higher international profile through our Global Ireland 2025 strategy, which aims to strengthen Ireland's global footprint.

Fiscal Policy

91. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his preferred options to meet the ongoing social and economic requirements of the country in the context of current and capital expenditure in line with prudent management but placing sufficient emphasis on the important structures such as social housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49180/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Ensuring our social and economic priorities are met depends on sound public finances and sustainable economic growth. To this end, the expenditure strategy for Budget 2019 is based on providing steady increases in public expenditure, which are underpinned by stable and predictable tax

measures. This requires a focus on affordable and sustainable improvements in services as well as effective prioritisation in the allocation of resources to deliver on key policy objectives.

Since 2015, Government has been in a position to provide for increases in expenditure each year. While these increases have impacted broadly across all sectors, a particular emphasis has been placed on key sectoral areas of Health, Housing, Education and Social Protection which support our social goal of moving towards a fairer and more inclusive society.

Of course, as we increase expenditure we must also strengthen our focus on managing resources in a prudent and efficient manner. This is a key responsibility of each Government Minister and Department. Officials in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform are in regular contact with all Government Departments and Offices to ensure that expenditure is being managed within the overall fiscal parameters and there is reporting to Government each month on expenditure levels. The drawdown of funds from the Exchequer is monitored against published expenditure profiles and this information is published each month with the Exchequer Statement.

Responsible spending means we must also prioritise spending that mitigates risk, enhances the resilience of the economy and raises our growth capacity. In this context, the Government has set out its vision for Ireland over the medium term through the publication of Project Ireland 2040 and the National Development Plan. This plan sets out a roadmap for increasing investment levels in Ireland in a sustainable manner and delivering modern public infrastructure over the coming years. This will further our social and economic goals by improving the lives of people throughout Ireland and allowing our companies and economy to continue to compete in a globalised world.

Furthermore, it is also important that we continue to reform and enhance the way public services are delivered. This can be achieved by applying management accountability, raising efficiency, technological progress and other means. By better aligning inputs with outputs, we can ensure better value for taxpayers' money and improve the efficiency with which these monies are allocated. A number of initiatives are in place in my Department and across the system that aim to do this, such as Performance Budgeting, Equality Budgeting, the Spending Review process and Social Impact Assessments.

Public Sector Staff Recruitment

92. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the protocols in place regarding disclosure of complaints or disciplinary processes in relation to persons going for promotion in the public service. [49210/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, in general, selection competitions within the Civil Service take place by way of;

- competitions confined to particular Offices/Departments (Internal promotion) or
- from competitions open to candidates from all Offices/Departments (Interdepartmental promotion) or
- from open competitions to all eligible candidates including members of the public

The Commission for Public Service Appointments (CPSA) is an independent statutory body which has responsibility for overseeing appointments to a wide range of positions in the Civil

and Public Service.

I understand from the CPSA that all appointment processes to all positions within the remit of the Public Service Management (Recruitment and Appointments) Act 2004 are subject to Codes of Practice published by the Commission.

All appointments made by way of open recruitment must be carried out under licence. The CPSA has responsibility for issuing, where appropriate, recruitment licences to Offices/Departments, on request. Open and Interdepartmental competitions are generally organised on behalf of the Civil Service by the Public Appointments Service (PAS), which is an independent statutory body, under its recruitment licence. However, on occasion an Office/Department will carry out its own recruitment, under its own licence.

The Codes set out the regulatory framework for such appointment processes and centre on five recruitment principles. Through its audit function, the Commission safeguards the standards established in the Codes of Practice and ensures compliance by the Office Holder with these standards for the recruitment of staff to positions within the organisation. Open and Interdepartmental competitions are organised on behalf of the Civil Service by the Public Appointments Service (PAS), which is an independent statutory body.

In carrying out its oversight role, it audits recruitment processes and examines complaints from individuals dissatisfied with the conduct of an appointment process. The CPSA may make recommendations, offer advice or give instructions to recruiting bodies within its remit however it does not have the statutory authority to reverse a recruitment decision taken by one of those recruiting bodies.

Review/Appeal Procedures

There are two distinct review procedures provided for under Section 7 and Section 8 of the CPSA Codes of Practice.

A review under Section 7 applies in cases where a candidate is unhappy with a decision in relation to his or her candidature (but does not believe that there was a breach of the Codes) and wishes to have that decision reviewed. The review of a recruitment decision is conducted solely by the Licence Holder. The Commission cannot overturn the decision of the Licence Holder and, aside from setting out how the review should be conducted, has no role in this process.

A review under Section 8 applies in cases where a person believes that an appointment process has breached the Codes and wishes to have it investigated. The complainant must make the complaint to the Licence Holder in the first instance. If the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome of the Licence Holder's review, he or she may request the Commission to investigate the alleged breach.

Public Service Pay Commission

93. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if there will be a review of the terms of reference of the Public Service Pay Commission; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48992/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): "The Terms of Reference for the work of the Public Service Pay Commission are published at <https://pay-commission.gov.ie/> and I have no plans to review those Terms of Reference. "

Freedom of Information Legislation

94. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he is satisfied with the functioning of the freedom of information system in place under the Freedom of Information Act 2014; if he will consider amending section 44 of the Act to give himself the power to instruct the Information Commissioner to carry out a review of the operations of the Act; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49197/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The 2014 Act was the product of a very extensive process of review, involving FOI users, academics and transparency advocates, as well as representatives of public bodies. These findings informed all aspects of the approach taken in the Act, as well the Code of Practice issued under the legislation, which sought to bring about greater efficiency, consistency and promote best practice in the operation of FOI throughout public bodies.

FOI gives rise to significant challenges. The number, nature and complexity of requests continues to grow. To support the effective implementation of FOI, the FOI Central Policy Unit at my Department oversees a training framework to ensure consistency in standards and approach through which over 9,000 participants have receiving training. The Central Policy Unit also provides ongoing support and advice to citizens and to FOI bodies through its website, www.foi.gov.ie and helpdesk and has presented at a number of conferences and training events. Networks for FOI Bodies have been established which provide an excellent means of sharing learning and expertise, assisting in the development of common approaches and facilitating the transfer of learning between FOI bodies.

Some 33,979 requests were received across the system in 2017, a record number, representing an increase of 11% on 2016. The total annual usage figure has risen by 67% since the 2014 Act came in to force. 74% of those requests were granted either in full or in part. It is also worth noting that in only 3% of cases did requesters avail of the review mechanism available to them, with only 1.5% of seeking an independent review by the Information Commissioner. The steps taken by my Department and the low level of appeals gives some indication of the progress being made in the implementation of the 2014 Act and the general satisfaction of requesters.

As the Deputy will be aware, under section 44 of the 2014 Act the Commissioner, supported by his staff, has extensive powers to keep the operation of the 2014 Act under review on an ongoing basis, as well as to carry out investigations at his own initiative if he believes it is warranted. By law, the Commissioner is independent in the performance of his functions, which is of tremendous importance in ensuring that his Office is seen to be impartial in carrying out its functions. I do not see that there is any compelling reason to compromise that independence by empowering the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform to direct him in the performance of his role.

Labour Market

95. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Taoiseach the number of jobless households in each county in tabular form. [49129/18]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Seán Kyne) (Deputy Seán Kyne): The exact information requested by the Deputy is not available.

Estimates for the jobless household indicator are produced by NUTS 3 Regions and are not

available on a county basis.

The CSO Labour Force Survey (LFS), which replaced the Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) in Q3 2017, is the official source of data for the jobless household indicator in the State.

The most recent LFS figures available are for Q3 2018.

The jobless households indicator can be calculated using different age categories. In general, the age categories used (by Eurostat for example) are for persons aged 0-17 years (children) and persons aged 18-59 years (adults). Therefore, the indicator “People aged 18 - 59 years living in jobless households” is calculated as the share of persons aged 18 - 59 who are living in households where no one is in employment. The indicator “People aged 0 - 17 years living in jobless households” is calculated as the share of persons aged 0 - 17 who are living in households where no one is in employment.

The table below shows the proportion of all persons aged 0-59 living in jobless households classified by sex, age group and NUTS3 region in Q3 2018 while the table also includes the different age categories as defined above. Persons aged 18-59 years are also categorised by sex.

Proportion of all persons aged 0-59 living in jobless households classified by sex, age group and NUTS3 region, Q3 2018

NUTS3 regions	Q3 2018
Border	%
Proportion of persons aged 0-17 living in jobless household	8.3
Proportion of male persons aged 18-59 living in jobless household	9.9
Proportion of female persons aged 18-59 living in jobless household	9.3
Proportion of persons aged 18-59 living in jobless households	9.6
Proportion of all persons aged 0-59 living in jobless households	9.2
West	
Proportion of persons aged 0-17 living in jobless household	14.4
Proportion of male persons aged 18-59 living in jobless household	10.4
Proportion of female persons aged 18-59 living in jobless household	12.1
Proportion of persons aged 18-59 living in jobless households	11.2
Proportion of all persons aged 0-59 living in jobless households	12.2
Mid-West	
Proportion of persons aged 0-17 living in jobless household	11.4
Proportion of male persons aged 18-59 living in jobless household	9.5
Proportion of female persons aged 18-59 living in jobless household	12.7
Proportion of persons aged 18-59 living in jobless households	11.1
Proportion of all persons aged 0-59 living in jobless households	11.2
South-East	
Proportion of persons aged 0-17 living in jobless household	14.7
Proportion of male persons aged 18-59 living in jobless household	10.2
Proportion of female persons aged 18-59 living in jobless household	15.0
Proportion of persons aged 18-59 living in jobless households	12.7
Proportion of all persons aged 0-59 living in jobless households	13.3
South-West	
Proportion of persons aged 0-17 living in jobless household	11.1
Proportion of male persons aged 18-59 living in jobless household	6.4
Proportion of female persons aged 18-59 living in jobless household	8.2

NUTS3 regions	Q3 2018
Proportion of persons aged 18-59 living in jobless households	7.3
Proportion of all persons aged 0-59 living in jobless households	8.5
Dublin	
Proportion of persons aged 0-17 living in jobless household	11.6
Proportion of male persons aged 18-59 living in jobless household	6.0
Proportion of female persons aged 18-59 living in jobless household	7.4
Proportion of persons aged 18-59 living in jobless households	6.7
Proportion of all persons aged 0-59 living in jobless households	8.1
Mid-East	
Proportion of persons aged 0-17 living in jobless household	8.8
Proportion of male persons aged 18-59 living in jobless household	7.4
Proportion of female persons aged 18-59 living in jobless household	8.3
Proportion of persons aged 18-59 living in jobless households	7.9
Proportion of all persons aged 0-59 living in jobless households	8.2
Midland	
Proportion of persons aged 0-17 living in jobless household	13.5
Proportion of male persons aged 18-59 living in jobless household	10.4
Proportion of female persons aged 18-59 living in jobless household	15.1
Proportion of persons aged 18-59 living in jobless households	12.7
Proportion of all persons aged 0-59 living in jobless households	13.0
State	
Proportion of persons aged 0-17 living in jobless household	11.4
Proportion of male persons aged 18-59 living in jobless household	7.9
Proportion of female persons aged 18-59 living in jobless household	9.9
Proportion of persons aged 18-59 living in jobless households	8.9
Proportion of all persons aged 0-59 living in jobless households	9.7

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: Q3=July-September.

Note: Households consisting entirely of persons aged 18-24, all of whom have indicated that their Principal Economic Status is Student, are excluded from the above calculations.

Note: The composition of the NUTS regions changed in 2016 and took effect in the LFS from Q1 2018. Data from Q1 2012 to Q4 2017 was revised to reflect these changes at that time.

European Council Meetings

96. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he had bilateral meetings when attending the November EU Council meeting; and the issues that were discussed. [49142/18]

The Taoiseach: I attended the special meeting of the European Council on Sunday, 25 November in Brussels. I had no formal bilateral meetings at this Summit.

However I had the opportunity to engage informally with my EU counterparts in the mar-

gins of the Summit.

The focus of our exchanges was on Brexit, where I took the opportunity to thank them for their solidarity in relation to our concerns and the need to ensure a legally operable backstop in the Withdrawal Agreement.

Consultancy Contracts Expenditure

97. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Taoiseach the fees paid and services rendered to a person (details supplied) in each of the years 2013 to 2017 and to date in 2018. [49432/18]

The Taoiseach: My Department has not paid any fees or rendered any services to the person or company in question for the years 2013 to date.

Permanent Structured Co-operation

98. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if the Government plans to participate in the Joint EU Intelligence School; the funds that will be spent on the project; his views on reports that the project would form part of a European Army; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49024/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Under PESCO, Member States are coming together in different groups to develop and make available additional capabilities and enablers for peacekeeping and crisis management operations under the EU Common Security and Defence Policy.

With regard to the Joint EU Intelligence School, this is a PESCO Project which is led by Greece and features in the second round of projects. The second round of projects were agreed at the Foreign Affairs Council with Defence Ministers in Brussels on the 19th November, 2018.

The project aims to provide education and training in intelligence disciplines and other specific fields to EU member states intelligence personnel. I can confirm that Ireland does not have any plans to participate in this project and as such no costs will arise in this regard.

PESCO is provided for in the Treaty of the European Union (Articles 42.6, 46 and Protocol 10) introduced under the Lisbon Treaty. PESCO has nothing to do with the creation of an EU army. Indeed the Irish Protocols to the Lisbon Treaty specifically state that the Lisbon Treaty does not provide for the creation of an EU Army.

Permanent Structured Co-operation

99. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the projects announced on 19 November 2018 (details supplied) in the PESCO framework he plans to participate in; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49025/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): On 2 May 2018, the European Defence Agency, through the PESCO Secretariat, invited participating Member States to submit their project proposals for the second list of PESCO Projects. The proposals once submitted were then evaluated and assessed from both the capability and the operational perspective with the second wave of seventeen (17) PESCO Projects adopted on 19 November

2018 at the meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council. The updated projects list referred to also contains the seventeen (17) first round PESCO Projects as adopted on 6 March 2018.

In relation to the second round of PESCO projects agreed this week at the Foreign Affairs Council with Defence Ministers, while not committing to participating in any further projects, we confirmed our interest in being an Observer on two projects: the French led “EU Radio Navigation Solutions (EURAS) Project” and the Italian led “Counter Unmanned Aerial System (C-UAS) Project”. Observer Status allows PESCO participating Member States to keep abreast of developments in a particular area.

Ireland is currently participating in two projects from the first round of PESCO projects as adopted in March 2018. One relates to the ongoing development of Defence Forces capabilities for peace support and crisis management operations; The German led “Centre of Excellence for EU Military Training Missions (EUTMCC) Project” and the second project is a Greek led “Upgrade of Maritime Surveillance Systems”. We also maintain observer status on eight further projects from the first tranche.

Defence Forces Medicinal Products

100. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence further to Parliamentary question No. 30 of 9 October 2018, if the figures provided include persons being double-counted such as in an example (details supplied) or if the figures represent only discrete individual cases. [48957/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I refer to the clarification sought by the Deputy in relation to the figures that were provided further to her Parliamentary Question No. 30 of 9 October 2018.

I have requested the information from the Military Authorities and I will revert to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Army Barracks

101. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the position regarding the potential to conclude the sale of married quarters at Cathal Brugha Barracks with the occupants in view of the fact that some practical problems with regard to common areas have emerged; if he will leave open the process in order that residents can assist in trying to overcome same in view of the fact that they have sought to conclude this matter for well over a decade; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49315/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The matter of the proposed sale of the former married quarters at Cathal Brugha Barracks has been ongoing for some time now. During this period, it emerged that there were legal difficulties in selling the properties as originally intended. In December 2016, the Chief State Solicitor’s Office met with the residents’ legal advisers to outline the issues arising and, in order to resolve the matter, invited proposals as to how the sales could be facilitated. I am advised that this approach did not yield any viable proposals.

Having taken into consideration the advice of the Chief State Solicitor’s Office, my officials have been left with no alternative but to formally withdraw from proceeding with the proposed sales. On the 1st November 2018 the Chief State Solicitor’s Office wrote to the legal represen-

tatives of the occupiers advising them accordingly. As part of this communication my Department has indicated that it is intended to regularise the current occupancies of those people who were the subject of the original sales offer.

Army Personnel

102. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number serving in each rank in the Army in tabular form. [49366/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The table below sets out the number serving (WTE) in each rank in the Army as of 31 October 2018.

Army WTE Strength

Rank	WTE Personnel
Lieutenant General	1
Major General	2
Brigadier General	5
Colonel	34
Lieutenant Colonel	105
Commandant	252
Captain	266
Lieutenant	150
Sergeant Major	27
Battalion Quartermaster Sergeant	31
Company Sergeant	107
Company Quartermaster Sergeant	152
Sergeant	818
Corporal	1,163
Private	3,976
Cadets	147
Total	7,236

Air Corps Recruitment

103. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence when an Air Corps flying officer cadet recruitment campaign will commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49402/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): It is planned to launch a 2019 Cadetship competition in the first quarter of 2019.

Air Corps Expenditure

104. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the amount spent on overseas aircraft maintenance for the Air Corps in each of the years 2016 and 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49403/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): As the Deputy will appreciate, all aircraft must undergo regular maintenance and scheduled overhauls to ensure that they are fully airworthy and meet the certification standards laid down for the aviation industry. I am advised that the Air Corps perform all first line maintenance across the fleet where possible while heavy/annual maintenance is outsourced abroad.

The information sought by the Deputy is set out in the table below.

Year	Total amount of money spent on overseas aircraft maintenance (€'000s)
2016	1,741
2017	1,890
2018 to-date	550

I am advised by the military authorities that the figure stated above for 2018 to-date is in respect of overseas maintenance for which invoices have been paid. The Deputy will note that there are a number of outstanding invoices for work ongoing or already completed.

Consultancy Contracts Expenditure

105. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the fees paid and services rendered to a person (details supplied) in each of the years 2013 to 2017, inclusive, and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49421/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): No fees have been paid, or services rendered, to the person to whom the Deputy refers, in the years 2013 to 2017, or to date in 2018.

Air Corps

106. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if the observations made by the HSA to the Air Corps by letter dated 21 October 2016 regarding risk assessments and safety statements have been implemented in full; if not, the progress made on same; the reason for the delay in implementation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49516/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Following three inspections at Casement Aerodrome, Baldonnell during 2016, the Health and Safety Authority issued a Report of Inspection to the Air Corps on 21 October, 2016. This report listed a number of advisory items for follow up, including the areas of risk assessments and safety statements.

The resultant Air Corps improvement plan confirmed the Air Corps' full commitment to implementing improved safety measures that protect workers and ensure risks are as low as reasonably practicable. The plan was implemented over eight phases, seven of which the military authorities have advised are now complete, while phase eight - Chemical awareness training and respiratory equipment training - is a continuous, ongoing process.

I wish to assure the Deputy that the health and welfare of the men and women of the Defence Forces is a key priority for me and the Defence Forces.

Defence Forces Training

107. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if all Defence Forces and Air Corps officers are trained in the use of respirators and-or breathing apparatus in the context of handling chemicals and toxic material; if the use of same is now mandatory; the date on which it became mandatory; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49518/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I have requested the information sought by the Deputy from the military authorities and will revert to the Deputy in due course.

Air Corps Operations

108. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if the Air Corps maintains a short- and long-term record for staff; if an assessment of same is reviewed; if deaths in service are recorded; if an analysis of same is conducted with a view of establishing an officer well-being charter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49521/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): It is not possible to provide the information requested by the Deputy in the time available. I shall revert with the information when it has been provided by the military authorities.

Air Corps Operations

109. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if the Air Corps conducts mandatory risk assessments in the context of handling, using and storing dangerous and-or toxic chemicals; the date on which risk assessments in this regard became mandatory; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49522/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I am advised by the military authorities that if an activity involving the use of chemicals is conducted then this activity will be risk-assessed in accordance with the relevant Health and Safety legislation. The risk assessment will outline the necessary control measures in the handling, use and storage of such chemicals or toxins.

Following three inspections at Casement Aerodrome, Baldonnell during 2016, the Health and Safety Authority issued a Report of Inspection to the Air Corps on 21 October, 2016. This report listed a number of advisory items for follow up, including the areas of risk assessments and safety statements.

The resultant Air Corps improvement plan confirmed the Air Corps' full commitment to implementing improved safety measures that protect workers and ensure risks are as low as reasonably practicable. The plan was implemented over eight phases, seven of which the military authorities have advised are now complete, while phase eight - Chemical awareness training and respiratory equipment training - is a continuous, ongoing process.

I wish to assure the Deputy that the health and welfare of the men and women of the Defence Forces is a key priority for me and the military authorities.

Climate Change Adaptation Plans

110. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he will provide a timeline for the development of his Department's specific climate change targets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49565/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Under the National Energy Efficiency Action Plan (NEEAP) the Department is committed to reducing its energy consumption and to improve energy efficiency by 33% by 2020. By the end of 2017 (the latest date for which figures are available), the Department had reduced its energy consumption by 25%.

The energy consumption reduction achieved to date is as a consequence of participating in a number of programmes. My Department participates in the SEAI Public Sector Energy Efficiency Programme and engages in the Optimising Power @ Work campaign under the auspices of the OPW. In line with the Public Sector Energy Efficiency Strategy 2017 an Energy Performance Officer has been appointed, at Assistant Secretary level, to provide leadership and accountability in reaching the NEEAP targets. Efforts towards improving energy efficiency have been achieved through proactive departmental energy teams who are, since 2007, implementing energy efficiency initiatives such as using only energy-efficient lighting, more strict control of heating and ventilation systems, organising Energy Awareness Days to improve behaviour by staff at desk level, installing timers on high energy units, regular energy audits and monitoring and reporting etc. It's also worth noting that since 2010 the Department HQ uses a renewable resource, wood pellets, as its main heating system rather than depending on fossil fuels. To date the efforts of our energy teams have been recognised by the OPW under the Optimising Power @ Work campaign with the receipt of numerous awards, including most recently 2018 Regional Best Energy Team and 2018 Regional winners of the Outstanding Achievement Category.

The Department is continuing to make every effort and will continue to strive to be more energy-efficient to reach the ambitious 2020 target by continuing to implement existing initiatives in a proactive approach in order to improve energy efficiency. In addition its energy teams will continue to meet on a regular basis to devise and implement new energy saving initiatives in order to reach climate change targets.

Ministerial Meetings

111. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has recently addressed the European ambassadors based in Dublin. [49147/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I regularly meet with Ambassadors, from the European Union and elsewhere, who are accredited to Ireland.

I addressed a meeting with EU Heads of Mission on 19th June last, organised by the Bulgarian Ambassador on the occasion of the Bulgarian Presidency of the European Union.

I recently had the opportunity to meet all resident Heads of Mission at the inauguration of President Michael D. Higgins on 11 November when I officially presented each Head of Mission to the President and Sabina Higgins.

My officials brief EU Ambassadors and other Embassy representatives on a regular basis, including in advance of Foreign Affairs and General Affairs Councils.

The Taoiseach will address EU Heads of Mission on 3 December next, organised by the Austrian Ambassador on the occasion of the Austrian Presidency of the European Union.

Maritime Jurisdiction

112. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if there is a plan to define a boundary for the territorial seas of Ireland; his plans to provide for that boundary in legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49149/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Under the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea the sovereignty of a coastal state extends beyond its land territory to the adjacent band of water and to the seabed and subsoil beneath it. This band is called the territorial sea and, under the Convention, may extend to a maximum breadth of 12 nautical miles. The Convention provides that where the coasts of two states are opposite or adjacent to each other, neither of the two is entitled to extend its territorial sea beyond the median line between them, unless they otherwise agree.

In domestic law the State's territorial sea is defined by Part 3 of 2006 Sea Fisheries and Maritime Jurisdiction Act, which gives effect to relevant rules established by the 1982 Convention.

Brexit Issues

113. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if citizens of Northern Ireland will have the same access to rights as all other citizens here after the draft withdrawal agreement is ratified. [49437/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Government is determined to ensure that the Good Friday Agreement in all its parts, and the gains and benefits of the Peace Process, are protected for people on the island of Ireland, North and South.

The Government appreciates the solidarity and support which has been shown by all of our EU partners in respect of Ireland's unique issues and concerns, throughout the Article 50 negotiations.

The Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland that is an integral part of the Agreement on the Withdrawal of the UK from the EU, and which has been endorsed by the European Council, confirms the Union citizenship of Irish citizens in Northern Ireland.

As Union citizens, Irish citizens in Northern Ireland will continue to enjoy the right to move and reside freely throughout the EU, benefiting from the important right not to be discriminated against on the grounds of nationality while doing so.

The Protocol also confirms that Irish citizens in Northern Ireland "will continue to enjoy, exercise and have access to rights, opportunities and benefits" that come with EU citizenship.

Article 5 of the draft Protocol provides for the maintenance of the Common Travel Area (CTA) arrangements between Ireland and the UK. The Common Travel Area is a long-standing arrangement between the UK and Ireland which means Irish citizens can move freely to live, work, and study in the UK on the same basis as UK citizens and vice versa. It provides for associated rights and entitlements including access to employment, healthcare, education, and social benefits, as well as the right to vote in certain elections. It is an arrangement that is val-

ued on both islands and the continuation of this arrangement is a stated objective of both the Irish and UK Governments. The maintenance of the CTA is a bilateral matter. Work is ongoing both with the UK and domestically at official level to ensure that the necessary provisions are made in both jurisdictions so that the CTA continues to function effectively after the UK leaves the EU.

Ensuring the access of those entitled to Irish citizenship in Northern Ireland to specific EU programmes, such as in the areas of healthcare and education, will be addressed as appropriate during the period of transition and in the context of the future relationship. This is reflected in the preamble of the Protocol.

The transition period that is provided for in the Withdrawal Agreement will ensure no change in terms of access to EU programmes such as EHIC and Erasmus out to December 2020 and possibly for up to a further 1 to 2 years if the EU and UK decide to extend transition.

There is an onus on the UK government to protect the Good Friday Agreement in all its parts and it should ensure that these issues, including possible future UK participation in EU funds and programmes, are part of its detailed position and pursued in the discussions on the EU-UK future relationship. There have been some indications in the UK White Paper in this regard.

The Political Declaration setting out the framework for the future relationship between the European Union and the UK that was agreed on 25 November also includes some important references to cooperation between the Union and the UK in relevant areas.

The Political Declaration in addition affirms the commitment of the Union and the UK that the Good Friday Agreement “must be protected in all its parts, and that this extends to the practical application of the 1998 Agreement on the island of Ireland and to the totality of the relationships set out in the 1998 Agreement”.

The Government will continue to proactively engage to ensure that people in Northern Ireland continue to enjoy access to EU rights, opportunities, and benefits into the future.

Brexit Documents

114. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will request a copy of the EU report or confidential document dealing with the mapping exercise carried out by the EU and the British Government in the summer and autumn of 2017 which was key to the Government’s strategy to highlight the risks to the Good Friday Agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48889/18]

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

The Government is therefore firmly focused on protecting the full range of areas in which North South cooperation exists today. This is fully reflected in the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland in the Agreement on the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union which was endorsed by the European Council on 25 November 2018.

In the context of the negotiations between the EU and the UK which led to this agreement and at the request of the EU and UK Coordinators for the High Level Dialogue on Ireland/

Northern Ireland, officials carried out detailed work over October and November 2017 to map out areas of cooperation that operate on a North South basis on the island of Ireland and which rely on EU law and policies.

This included looking at the six North South implementation bodies, the areas of cooperation under the North South Ministerial Council, which cover agriculture, environment, health, education, transport and tourism, as well as other areas where there is practical cooperation between North and South, including justice and security, energy, broadcasting and communications, inland fisheries, sport and culture.

The exercise overall highlighted how the maintenance and future development of meaningful North South cooperation relies on the EU legal and policy frameworks to give direction to this cooperation and to facilitate its operation. The EU frameworks are both overarching and the foundation to North South cooperation in many instances. Much of the cooperation is interconnected, mutually supporting and complementary.

The Joint Report agreed by the EU and UK negotiators on 8 December 2017 acknowledged that cooperation between Ireland and Northern Ireland is a central part of the Good Friday Agreement, and that the UK departure from the Union gives rise to substantial challenges to the maintenance and development of North-South cooperation. The UK has accordingly committed to protecting and supporting continued North-South cooperation across the full range of contexts and frameworks of cooperation, including the continued operation of the North-South implementation bodies. This is reflected in Article 13 of the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland to the Withdrawal Agreement.

As the mapping exercise was conducted by the EU and UK in the course of their dialogue on Ireland and Northern Ireland, joint publication of a final report is ultimately a matter for the EU and UK. However, once the Withdrawal Agreement has been endorsed by all parties, the Government would see no reason why the report should not be published in due course.

Foreign Conflicts

115. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if Ireland will increase its diplomatic efforts through the EU to ensure that South Sudan's peace deal holds (details supplied); if Ireland will continue to support the humanitarian efforts in South Sudan that are addressing the root causes of the conflict and continue to fund and support the vital conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts at community level by the South Sudan Council of Churches in partnership with INGOs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48939/18]

116. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the steps to ensure that Ireland increases its diplomatic efforts through the EU to ensure South Sudan's peace deals holds. [48951/18]

117. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans for continued support for humanitarian efforts in South Sudan that seek to address the root causes of the conflict. [48952/18]

118. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the steps he will take to ensure that Ireland increases its diplomatic efforts through the EU to ensure that South Sudan's fragile peace deals holds; the further steps he will take to support the humanitarian efforts in South Sudan that are addressing the root causes of the conflict; if funding and support will continue in order to support the vital conflict resolution and peacebuilding

efforts at community level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48979/18]

119. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the support being provided to South Sudan; the support being provided for humanitarian efforts in the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49075/18]

123. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the part Ireland is playing in the political resolution to the conflict in South Sudan; the way in which the diplomatic efforts can be increased to ensure that the fragile peace deal holds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49096/18]

124. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on the humanitarian efforts in South Sudan; the resources being provided by Ireland to assist in these efforts; if increased resources are needed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49097/18]

125. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to increase diplomatic efforts through the EU to ensure South Sudan's fragile peace deals holds. [49115/18]

126. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will continue to support the humanitarian efforts in South Sudan that are addressing the root causes of the conflict in the country. [49116/18]

127. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will continue to fund and support the conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts by an organisation (details supplied) in South Sudan in partnership with INGOs. [49117/18]

128. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the support he is providing to ensure the peace in South Sudan holds and moves to a sustainable peace process; the further supports he is providing for the humanitarian crisis in the country; his plans to increase same; and if he will support the conflict resolution and peacebuilding being carried out by civil society organisations and non-governmental organisations in the country. [49157/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): I propose to take Questions Nos. 115 to 119, inclusive, and 123 to 128, inclusive, together.

South Sudan continues to endure a terrible humanitarian crisis, primarily the consequence of conflict. I am deeply concerned by the continued high level of violence, and by reports of violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, which perpetuate the crisis and impact negatively on its scale.

The current conflict began in 2013 and has had devastating consequences for civilians. The war, compounded by drought, has led to severe food insecurity and caused massive population displacement and suffering throughout the country, with women and girls suffering the most. More than 400,000 people have died and an estimated 7 million people are currently in need of humanitarian assistance.

On 12 September last, the President of South Sudan, Salva Kiir, signed a peace agreement with the opposition. While this peace agreement has the potential to mark a new departure, it is critical that South Sudan's leaders implement it without delay. Achieving lasting peace will require sustained effort and commitment as well as a genuinely inclusive approach to building the future South Sudan.

Ireland strongly supports efforts to build peace in South Sudan. In November 2017, during his visit to Addis Ababa, the Tánaiste met representatives of IGAD (Intergovernmental Authority on Development) and the African Union to discuss the situation in South Sudan. On that visit, the Tánaiste announced funding to the IGAD High Level Revitalization Forum, the process which delivered the revised peace agreement. Ireland will continue to support IGAD's work on monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the agreement in 2019.

Our Embassy in Addis Ababa, which is accredited to South Sudan, monitors the situation and engages with local, regional and international parties on an ongoing basis. The Irish Ambassador in Addis Ababa visits Juba frequently where she meets with key government, UN, NGO, Red Cross and diplomatic partners, including the EU Delegation. Our Ambassador plans to visit again this week.

We are committed to supporting efforts towards peace in South Sudan and have contributed to projects aimed at peacebuilding. In 2018, this has included supporting partners' mediation efforts and empowering civil society, in particular women's groups, to facilitate their engagement in peace processes.

As well as our direct bilateral support, we are actively involved in the efforts of the EU to support peace in South Sudan. Two officials from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade have been seconded to the EU Delegation in South Sudan, including one as head of Mission. The EU Delegation is strongly supportive of the peace process, in particular by providing support to the implementing and monitoring bodies of the peace agreement. The Tánaiste discussed these efforts with the EU Special Representative for the Horn of Africa, Alexander Rondos, when he visited Dublin on 7 November.

While a sustained resolution to the conflict is the ultimate goal, we have a duty now to deal with immediate humanitarian needs. Since 2012, Ireland has provided €61 million in direct humanitarian assistance to South Sudan. Over €10 million in Irish funding has been provided so far this year, including to Irish NGOs to assist them in reaching the most vulnerable. Christian Aid, Concern Worldwide, Oxfam, Trócaire and World Vision, with support from Irish Aid, are working in partnership with local organisations and NGO networks to provide lifesaving supplies to meet the basic needs of those suffering from the conflict.

As well as this direct bilateral aid, Ireland has also contributed significantly to humanitarian support in South Sudan through the multilateral system. Ireland is a significant contributor to the UN's Central Emergency Response Fund, which has allocated \$187 million to alleviate the crisis in South Sudan since 2011, as well as to the EU, which has provided more than €90 million so far this year.

With humanitarian needs likely to remain acute in 2019, Irish funding will continue to support both those in need inside South Sudan as well as South Sudanese refugees in neighbouring countries.

Brexit Supports

120. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the costs associated with the Getting Ireland Brexit Ready forums in tabular form including events due to take place over the coming weeks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49092/18]

121. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the advertisement agencies that have been secured by his Department to promote the Getting

Ireland Brexit Ready forums and other Government Brexit-related promotional material across print media, broadcast media and online media; the costs associated with the use of such agencies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49093/18]

122. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the media budget allocated for promoting Government-related Brexit events and supports; the budget allocated for print media, broadcast media and online media, including publically funded and commercial media in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49094/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 120 to 122, inclusive, together.

Since my appointment as Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade in June 2017, I have overseen and co-ordinated a sustained intensification of Brexit preparedness and contingency planning across Government.

As part of these efforts, the Government is organising “Getting Ireland Brexit Ready” public information events around Ireland to inform and advise about Brexit preparedness and the range of support measures and resources that the Government has put in place.

These events bring together over a dozen Agencies and their parent Departments – the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine, and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport - under one roof to inform and advise both citizens and businesses about Brexit preparedness and the range of support measures and resources the Government has put in place.

Five Getting Ireland Brexit Ready workshop events have so far taken place in Cork on 5 October, Galway on 12 October, Monaghan 19 October, Dublin on 25 October, and Limerick on 23 November. Having participated at each event, I am pleased to confirm that all workshops attracted a strong attendance with over 2000 businesses attending to date. The Workshops also attracted significant domestic and international (in particular UK) media coverage which afforded an opportunity to highlight Ireland’s overall approach and specific concerns in relation to Brexit.

The positive impact of the roadshows is reflected in an increase in interactions with the Brexit supports offered by State agencies. For example, Enterprise Ireland has recorded a 92% increase in Brexit Scorecard completions from September to October, as well as a 62% increase in interactions on its website. Similarly, Fáilte Ireland noted a 24% increase in views to their Brexit webpages subsequent to the October events, as well as an uptrend averaging 83% in the number of interactions on their Get Brexit Ready diagnostic tool.

In organising each workshop, every effort has been made to ensure that costs are kept to the necessary minimum, and that they reflect the best value for money. Costs that have arisen directly so far in connection with the workshop events and for which invoices / confirmed costings have been received are as follows:

Item	Totals
Venue Hire, Catering & Related	€54,848.09
Event Staging/Audio-Visual Equipment (OPW)	€35,420.93
Event Materials/Signage	€5,304.33
Badging/Registration	€1,702.77

Item	Totals
Photography	€2,091
Moderator	€1409.47
Total	€100,776.59

One further Getting Ireland Brexit Ready workshop event will take place in Letterkenny, Donegal on 30 November. I am confident that this will likewise be in high demand and that attendees will gain many useful insights and practical advice on steps which they and their businesses can take to help prepare for the impact of Brexit. Other Brexit preparedness-related public information activities and events continue to be organised by State Agencies and Departments across Ireland and relevant details on these can be found at the new dedicated Brexit events page on the dfa.ie/brexit website.

My Department engages in advertising and public awareness campaigns where there is important information that needs to be brought to the attention of citizens.

A public information campaign to promote awareness of Government-wide supports and resources that are available to assist with Brexit preparedness is one such example of this.

As detailed above, my Department is coordinating a Government-wide ‘Getting Ireland Brexit Ready Campaign’ which I and Ministers Humphreys and Creed launched together on 20 September. This campaign has updated citizens, communities and businesses about Brexit preparedness and support measures that are available as well as public workshop events which are being held throughout October and November. A programme of awareness raising via web and social media platforms and radio and print media advertising also took place.

The Government Brexit Update email service and the Getting Ireland Brexit Ready public information campaign forms part of the Government’s overall strategy to keep the Irish public fully informed and up-to date on the implications and challenges of Brexit.

The Update is issuing on a regular basis via a commercial provider and provides information on latest developments in the ongoing Brexit negotiations, on the latest available research publications and on engagement at Government level. It also highlights the range of business supports that are available through the various Government Departments and State agencies.

Advertising costs that have arisen directly so far in connection with the ‘Getting Ireland Brexit Ready’ campaign and for which invoices / confirmed costings have been received are as follows:

Item	Totals (to date)
PhD Media/TBWA	€28,948.10
GIBR 5 Part Podcast Series	€1845
Government Brexit Update	€1,280.08
Total	€32,073.18

Questions Nos. 123 to 128, inclusive, answered with Question No. 115.

Trade Agreements

129. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his views on the EU-Mercosur trade deal have altered to take into account the new incoming far

right government in Brazil. [49158/18]

132. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has had communications with the Brazilian Government regarding Brazil's regressive climate action policies including the appointment of climate-denying Ministers elect, and the increase in the rate of deforestation in the country. [49304/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 129 and 132 together.

Mr. Jair Bolsonaro was elected as President of Brazil on 28 October 2018 and will be inaugurated on 1 January next year. Officials in my Department in Dublin, at our Embassy in Brasília, and at our Consulate-General in São Paulo, followed the election process closely and have continued to monitor political developments since, including announcements made by the President-elect, members of his transition team and of the incoming government.

It is important to note that the full plan for the new government will not be clear until after President-elect Bolsonaro assumes office on 1 January 2019. The President-elect is currently in the process of appointing ministers, but the overall shape of the incoming government is yet to be finalised. While we have taken note of statements made by the President-elect and Ministers-designate, this is a period of transition and it will be some time before official government policy becomes apparent.

Ireland is a committed supporter of global efforts to combat climate change, one of the most serious threats facing the world today, and Brazil has been an important partner on this issue. Brazil played a key role in the formation of the Paris Agreement of 2015, and I was pleased to see indications from President-elect Bolsonaro that he plans to keep Brazil in the agreement. Ireland will continue to engage with Brazil, and other partners in the Latin America and Caribbean region, on the issue of climate change and sustainable development, through our bilateral, EU level and EU-CELAC relationships.

Regarding the EU-Mercosur trade deal, as the Deputy will appreciate, the negotiation of trade agreements is an EU competency. Ireland remains supportive of the EU approach to the Mercosur trade negotiations, and is hopeful of reaching a conclusion on a balanced and ambitious deal.

The relationship between Brazil and Ireland is longstanding and warm. Brazil is an important partner of Ireland in a number of areas, including on multilateral issues, such as disarmament and non-proliferation, and is our second largest trading partner in the Latin America and Caribbean region. Brazilians are the sixth largest non-Irish group in our population, with nearly 16,000 Brazilians living in Ireland in 2016.

I look forward to building and strengthening our relationship with Brazil in the years to come .

Humanitarian Aid Provision

130. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the aid being provided to assist with the famine appeal in Yemen; and the best option for a person who wishes to donate to the cause. [49178/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): I remain extremely concerned by the appalling humanitarian situation in Yemen,

where over 22 million people require some form of assistance.

Ireland has provided almost €16.5 million in direct humanitarian assistance to Yemen since 2012. This includes over €4 million in 2018 principally channelled through the UN's Yemen Humanitarian Fund - Ireland is one of the top ten donors to the Fund, which provides essential humanitarian services to millions of people in need.

In addition, Ireland is also a significant contributor to multilateral funds that allocate funding to the Yemen Crisis, notably the UN's Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF). Ireland has been one of the strongest supporters of CERF since its inception in 2006. So far in 2018, the CERF has allocated \$50 million to the humanitarian response in Yemen.

Ireland also contributes support to Yemen via the EU. Since the beginning of the conflict in 2015, the EU has allocated over €438 million to support humanitarian assistance.

Like so many humanitarian crises around the world, the tragedy unfolding in Yemen has its roots in conflict. Ireland, directly and through the EU and the UN, continues to call for a negotiated settlement to the conflict in Yemen, and calls on all parties to facilitate safe and secure access for humanitarian actors.

Should the public wish to assist those in need in Yemen, there are very capable aid agencies with presence in Ireland who would welcome contributions.

Human Rights

131. Deputy Brendan Howlin asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has received representations from an organisation (details supplied) regarding legislation introduced by the Turkish Grand National Assembly and approved by the health commission that will restrict the freedom of Turkey's doctors to practise medicine; if this matter has been discussed at EU level; if action has been taken by the EU on this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49228/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I have received the correspondence from the Irish Medical Organisation referred to.

The draft legislation in question is indeed a matter of concern, and we have noted the statements against the draft bill issued by the World Medical Association, the Standing Committee of European Doctors, and the Irish Medical Organisation. The principle that medical practitioners must be allowed to practice free of any political interference is one that must be respected in any democratic country, and particularly in an EU Candidate and key partner country such as Turkey.

As you are aware, the Irish Government, together with the European Union, continues to view the backsliding in Turkey with regard to freedom of media, human rights, rule of law and democracy as an ongoing cause for grave concern. This was reflected in the Conclusions on Enlargement adopted on 26 June last at the General Affairs Council, which found that Turkey has been moving away from the EU and that accession negotiations have, therefore, come to a standstill. Concerns were expressed, including by Ireland, about backsliding on the rule of law and fundamental rights and measures targeting journalists, academics, members of political parties, parliamentarians, human rights defenders, social media users, and others exercising their fundamental rights and freedoms.

While it is to be welcomed that in July the Turkish Government chose not to renew the State

of Emergency that had been in place in the country, we echo the EU's statement that the retention of a number of the State of Emergency's restrictive measures may dampen any potential benefits brought about by its removal. Together with our European partners, and particularly following this non-renewal, we will continue to monitor government actions that undermine freedom of expression, democracy, the rule of law, and fundamental rights in Turkey.

Question No. 132 answered with Question No. 129.

Human Rights Cases

133. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the position regarding the potential threat to a person (details supplied); his plans to offer assistance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49328/18]

141. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the position regarding a person (details supplied) in Pakistan who is believed to have a risk to their life. [49464/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 133 and 141 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.

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

I am aware of the particular 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. Since the Supreme Court decision, I have continued to follow developments in the case. I strongly condemn all forms of persecution on the basis of religion or belief, irrespective of where they occur and who the victims are.

My Department has raised the case of Asia Bibi on a number of occasions both in Dublin with the Embassy of Pakistan and in Islamabad through our Ambassador in Ankara (who is also accredited to Pakistan). The European Union has also raised the case with the Pakistani authorities.

My predecessor as Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Mr Charles Flanagan T.D. raised concerns on the blasphemy laws with his Pakistani counterpart on the margins of the UN General Assembly in September 2016. He also raised the case with the Pakistani Chargé d'Affaires *en pied* in January 2016.

Now, as Minister for Justice and Equality, who has responsibility for asylum issues, he has followed developments in the case. Ms. Bibi has not indicated a wish to come to Ireland. Should such a wish be expressed, Minister Flanagan has indicated that he will look favourably on her case.

Missing Persons

134. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will address a matter in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49391/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I can confirm that officials at the relevant Irish Embassy have been in direct contact with the individual's mother and continue to provide consular assistance.

I note that members of An Garda Síochána have been in contact with their counterparts in the relevant policing authority in relation to this matter.

Officials in my Department's headquarters continue to monitor the case and stand ready to provide all possible help and support. Should the individual's family wish to discuss the situation further, they can contact my Department's Consular Assistance Unit, by phone on 01 408 2527 or by e-mail at consularassistance@dfa.ie.

Overseas Development Aid

135. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to cease having dealings with an organisation (details supplied) in view of the substantial amounts of Saudi funding to same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49393/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): Ireland's policy for international development sets out our longstanding commitment to strengthening health systems, reducing maternal and infant mortality and overcoming the HIV epidemic in developing countries.

The organisation in question has been an important partner for Ireland's official development assistance programme, Irish Aid, since 2003. That partnership is rooted in the close alignment between Irish Aid's health goals and objectives and those of the organisation under reference. The organisation is well recognised for its technical expertise in designing, supporting and delivering health care in some of the poorest countries in the world. Their expertise coupled with my Department's engagement with the governments in the focus countries has helped maximise our combined contribution in improving health outcomes, including HIV and AIDS prevention and care.

Under the current arrangements, Irish Aid works in partnership with the organisation in Ethiopia, Mozambique and Zimbabwe.

The organisation receives support from many donors including from other governments, charitable foundations and the private sector. It invested an average of USD138 million per annum in 2016-2017. Ireland's contribution to the organization in the same period averaged €600,000 per annum. Irish funding is provided through negotiated annual country level agreements and is closely monitored by Irish Embassy officials in those countries.

In addition to working in partnership at the country level, we also hold annual meetings at a global level to review the continued impact of the partnership in delivering vital health services. In a context of continued satisfactory performance, including the multiplication effect which the partnership has on other Irish Aid health interventions in the countries in question, the intention is to continue with the existing arrangements.

Syrian Conflict

136. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will lobby his EU counterparts to undertake an analysis of the humanitarian impact of the sanctions imposed on Syria and the impact on the Syrian economy. [49394/18]

137. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the objective of the continued use of sanctions against the Syrian people; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49395/18]

138. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will lobby his EU counterparts to ensure that the sanctions imposed on the Syrian people are lifted. [49396/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 136 to 138, inclusive, together.

The situation in Syria continues to be a matter of grave concern, and I take this opportunity to reiterate my condemnation of the violence against civilians that has been the hallmark of this conflict to date. The conflict was sparked, more than seven years ago, by brutal repression of dissent by the Assad regime. The conduct of the conflict, including the use of chemical weapons and medieval “starve or surrender” tactics, is estimated to have cost the lives of over 400,000 people. It has led to a situation in which 13 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance inside Syria, over 6 million people are displaced internally, and a further 5.5 million have fled to neighbouring countries and the wider region.

Sanctions are a tool which the international community may use to put political pressure on those who commit violence against their own people. Targeted EU sanctions are in place against people and entities that are complicit in the violent repression of the civilian population in Syria. The first person on this EU list is Bashar Al Assad, whose brutal pursuit of this conflict, neglecting all opportunities to seek a political solution, has led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people. There are numerous barriers to humanitarian access in Syria as a result of actions by the parties to the conflict, particularly the Assad regime.

Ireland has consistently supported EU sanctions targeting the Assad regime and its supporters, and will continue to do so as long as the situation on the ground justifies these measures.

The EU’s Basic Principles on the Use of Restrictive Measures state that “Sanctions should be targeted in a way that has maximum impact on those whose behaviour we want to influence. Targeting should reduce to the maximum extent possible any adverse humanitarian effects or unintended consequences for persons not targeted ...” Accordingly, the EU’s Syria sanctions include specific exemptions for essential civilian needs and for humanitarian assistance. Ireland has been a consistent advocate for ensuring such exemptions are included.

In line with the EU strategy on Syria, the EU is maintaining its restrictive measures against the Syrian regime and its supporters as long as the repression of civilians continues. To repeal these sanctions could be misconstrued as tacit acquiescence in the actions of the Assad regime and therefore serve to encourage a belief in impunity with regard to attacks on civilians, and disregard for the UN-led peace process.

The EU does however keep the impact of sanctions under constant review, and will consider options to mitigate any unintended consequences which can be documented as relating directly to the measures themselves, as distinct from the more general economic disruption caused by the conflict. The relevant working groups in Brussels propose options to address any unattend-

ed negative impacts where they are identified.

For example, in 2016 the EU amended the Syria sanctions regime to make it easier for NGOs operating in Syria to buy fuel. In 2017, EU Member States including Ireland consulted with NGOs to identify any further difficulties they were experiencing in carrying out humanitarian work in Syria that may have been linked to the sanctions. Based on the feedback of the NGOs, the European Commission published a Frequently Asked Questions document to clarify certain provisions of the sanctions identified as unclear by NGOs, as well as the humanitarian exemptions and derogations. In April of this year, EU Member States reviewed best practice guidelines on humanitarian exemptions, with a view to facilitating the work of NGOs responding to humanitarian crises, including the crisis in Syria. I welcome the ongoing work to implement the findings of previous reviews.

Northern Ireland

139. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the conviction of persons (details supplied) for the murder of a person; if he will lobby the criminal cases review commission for the case to be considered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49397/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am aware of the case to which the Deputy refers. Officials from my Department, based both in Dublin and Belfast, monitor this case as part of their wider engagement with the relevant authorities in Northern Ireland on justice and prison matters. The persons concerned were convicted of murder by joint enterprise at their trial in 2012. Their appeal against their convictions failed at the Belfast High Court in 2012 and in 2015 the Supreme Court in London refused them permission to mount a further appeal.

As the Deputy is aware, the case is now being looked at by the Criminal Cases Review Commission, an independent public body which is responsible for reviewing possible miscarriages of justice in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. At this stage in the proceedings it would be inappropriate for me to comment further. It is important that we respect the legal process and allow time for it to reach its conclusion.

My officials in the Irish Secretariat in Belfast regularly engage with the NI Department of Justice, the Northern Ireland Office, the Northern Ireland Prison Service, the Criminal Justice Inspectorate, the NI Police Ombudsman, and NI Prisoner Ombudsman. In addition, at the recent British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference, Minister Flanagan and I engaged with the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, David Lidington and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Karen Bradley, on matters related to Security Cooperation.

Officials will continue to monitor developments in this case and the Government will take action as appropriate. In the absence of a devolved Assembly, it is regrettable that we do not have a locally elected and accountable Justice Minister with whom we could engage with on matters such as this but we will continue our efforts in this regard.

Consultancy Contracts Expenditure

140. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the fees paid and services rendered to a person (details supplied) in each of the years 2013 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49425/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department has not engaged the named person to provide any services during the period 2013 to date in 2018 and therefore no fees have been incurred.

Question No. 141 answered with Question No. 133.

Climate Change Adaptation Plans

142. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will provide a timeline for the development of his Department's specific climate change targets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49569/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): Failure to address climate change will seriously affect all countries. Already, vulnerable people and communities in the least developed countries, in particular women and children, are struggling to cope with the consequences of erratic weather patterns. Additionally, an increasing number of severe weather events is putting response systems and communities under strain. Through Ireland's official overseas assistance programme, Irish Aid, funding is provided for climate adaptation and mitigation activities, particularly in least developed countries. This funding consists of contributions to multilateral organisations, grants to NGOs, and programmes implemented through our Embassies.

In 2016, the Programme for Government committed Ireland to spending €175m in climate finance to 2020. We are well on track to meet that target. Irish climate finance expenditure is rigorously tracked, with annual reporting to the UN on how Ireland is meeting commitments under the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. In 2016, Ireland was voted by Adaptation Watch as the second most transparent donor in its reporting of climate finance.

In that year, almost €53m was spent on international climate action, rising to €64m in 2017. The vast majority of these funds were targeted at adaptation activities for the poorest people in Least Developed Countries. This finance was 100% in grant form. A similar outturn for Irish Aid climate expenditure in 2018 is anticipated.

A new policy on international development is currently being finalised, which will set out my Department's ambitions for climate action in the years ahead, as the Irish Aid budget increases in line with the Government's commitment - set out in the Global Ireland policy document launched earlier this year - to reach the UN target of 0.7% of GNI for official development assistance by 2030.

National Development Plan Expenditure

143. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Finance if the social housing construction commitments in the National Development Plan 2018 to 2027 are accounted for in the general Government balance in each of the years concerned. [48891/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The general government balance figure in Table 8 of the Economic and Fiscal Outlook, published in Budget 2019, takes into account capital allocations as outlined in the National Development Plan.

The National Development Plan, including social housing construction commitments, forms the basis for the voted capital allocations outlined in Table 8.

Thereafter, the general government gross fixed capital formation figure adds in any relevant expenditure from other general government bodies, assesses the voted expenditure and classifies it accordingly within the statistical framework.

Tax Code

144. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance if he will report on his recent announcements on increasing the tax thresholds at the lower and upper rate. [49141/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As I said in my Budget speech, it is the Government's position that workers start to pay too high a rate of income tax at too low an income level. We cannot hope to remain competitive if someone on a relatively low income and who decides to work a few hours overtime has nearly half that extra money taken in tax.

Therefore, in Budget 2019 I have once again increased the entry point to the higher rate of income tax for all earners by €750, and reduced the 3rd rate of USC from 4.75% to 4.5%.

The impact of these changes is that the top marginal rate on incomes up to €70,000 will be reduced to 48.5% and fewer people on incomes around the national average will have any income subject to the 40% rate of income tax.

By making these changes, the Government has fulfilled our commitment to make steady and sustainable progress in reducing the income tax burden for low and middle income earners by concentrating on increasing the level that workers pay the marginal rate of income tax.

As I have stated on many occasions, we plan to continue this progress in the coming years within available resources, to make sure that Ireland remains competitive.

The extent to which it may be possible to make further progress in this regard will depend on the overall resources available, but as the Taoiseach recently announced, over the next five Budgets we will commit to increasing the point at which people pay the top rate of tax to €50,000 for a single person or €100,000 for a two income couple.

Banking Operations

145. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the cost incurred by a bank (details supplied) for its corporate hospitality event at the recent Ireland versus New Zealand rugby match. [48844/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy is aware, I have no role in the day to day commercial operations of any bank in which the State has a shareholding and therefore the information which the deputy requests is not held within my department.

Imports and Exports Data

146. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 51 of 9 October 2018, if a response will issue to a further related query raised in correspondence (details supplied). [48856/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Primary responsibility for the accuracy, compilation and publication of trade statistics rests with the Central Statistics Office (CSO) and

the Revenue Commissioners has no authority to divulge the information it collects (on behalf of the CSO) to any third party.

This remains the case even in situations where a trader provides incorrect information. In this regard, the Deputy will appreciate that the accuracy of the information provided by Revenue to the CSO is very much dependent on the information received from traders.

Regarding the case in question, Revenue has consulted with the CSO on the issue and has been advised that the matter is under review. The CSO has also confirmed that contact will be made with the relevant party in the coming week.

Betting Regulations

147. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the analysis undertaken regarding increasing betting taxes; if the industry was consulted in relation to the issue; if revenue raised from a betting tax will be held in central funds; his plans to redistribute funds to support services for persons with gambling addiction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48906/18]

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 per cent to 25 per cent on the commission earned for betting intermediaries. These measures will take effect from 1 January 2019. All receipts from betting duty go to the Exchequer.

The rate of betting duty at 1 per cent 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 am familiar with arguments put forward by the betting sector regarding the impact of the increase in betting 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.

We must 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.

The Government fully accepts that the issue of problem gambling is a serious one that needs to be addressed. Earlier this year the Government approved the drafting of a new general scheme of a Gambling Control Bill which will provide for a strengthened regulatory framework for the wider gambling sector. My colleague, Minister of State Stanton, has stated that a key element of the proposed new Gambling Control legislation is that it would permit the establishment and operation of a social fund supported by industry levies, further that such a fund will support those professional expert organisations involved in addiction treatment.

Tax Collection

148. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 59 of 19 September 2018, the way in which tax (details supplied) that has been deducted in the UK will be reflected here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48863/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that in the case at hand, it appears from the information provided so far that tax may have been deducted from this taxpayer's pension in the United Kingdom in contravention of the Double Taxation Convention ("the Convention") between Ireland and the United Kingdom of 1976.

Double Taxation Conventions allocate taxing rights between Contracting States. Articles 17 (Pensions) and 18(2) (Government Service) of the Convention gave Ireland an exclusive taxing right over this taxpayer's pension. As a consequence, the UK did not have a right to tax this pension and if it did so, it was in contravention of the Convention. Ireland had the right to tax the pension without having to provide relief (i.e. give a credit) for tax deducted in the United Kingdom against the Convention.

If the taxpayer considers that Revenue's or Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs' actions have resulted in taxation not in accordance with the Convention she may initiate a Mutual Agreement Procedure under Article 24 of the Convention. Both Competent Authorities will endeavour to solve the case by mutual agreement with a view to avoid the double taxation that arose from the incorrect application of the Convention.

I am advised that Revenue will contact shortly the Deputy's office to provide information on how to initiate a Mutual Agreement Procedure and the contact details of Revenue's Competent Authorities.

Childcare Services Data

149. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Finance the number of employees that have availed of childcare as a benefit-in-kind in each year since 2005. [48865/18]

150. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Finance the number of employers that provide childcare either onsite or offsite as a benefit-in-kind to their employees in tabular form. [48866/18]

151. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated cost of reducing the rate at which childcare benefits under the benefit-in-kind scheme are taxed by one, two, three, four, five and six percentage points. [48869/18]

165. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Finance the number of employees that avail of childcare as a benefit-in-kind from their employer. [49068/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 149 to 151, inclusive, and 165 together.

I am advised by Revenue that Benefit-In-Kind is declared on tax returns as a total figure rather than by individual benefit type. Therefore, there is no basis available to separately compile the numbers of employees availing of childcare as a Benefit in Kind, or the number of employers providing childcare as a Benefit in Kind.

Regarding Question No. 151, as the value of childcare as a Benefit in Kind cannot be isolated, it is also not possible to estimate the costs of reducing the rate of Income Tax on childcare.

Mortgage Lending

152. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of persons that availed of exemptions under the Central Bank's macro-prudential mortgage rules by first time buyers and second and subsequent buyers each month since the establishment of such rules; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48872/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Central Bank mortgage lending measures are now in place as a permanent feature of the market and are operating in line with their stated objectives of enhancing the resilience of banks and borrowers to future shocks and reducing the risk of credit - house price spirals from developing.

The Central Bank introduced proportionate limits specifically to allow flexibility by lenders when assessing individual cases. The proportionate limits mean that lenders are able to make decisions based on an individual borrower's circumstances up to a specific limit. Lenders are still required to assess an individual borrower's affordability and lend prudently on a case-by-case basis, in line with the requirements of the Consumer Protection Code and other regulations.

The Central Bank advises that the table below provides the number of principal dwelling home loans drawn-down for each month since the introduction of the Central Bank mortgage measures that were issued above either the loan-to-value or loan-to-income limits.

Number of Loans Drawn-down with Allowances

Month	FTBs Total Allowances	SSBs Total Allowances
Feb-15	1	14
Mar-15	25	21
Apr-15	55	76
May-15	131	83
Jun-15	213	164
Jul-15	251	186
Aug-15	249	195
Sep-15	270	200
Oct-15	250	214
Nov-15	204	162
Dec-15	205	129
Jan-16	134	113
Feb-16	160	115
Mar-16	139	111

Month	FTBs Total Allowances	SSBs Total Allowances
Apr-16	147	130
May-16	183	132
Jun-16	250	175
Jul-16	226	179
Aug-16	226	167
Sep-16	232	199
Oct-16	283	226
Nov-16	334	263
Dec-16	333	256
Jan-17	148	214
Feb-17	169	174
Mar-17	220	227
Apr-17	203	239
May-17	294	272
Jun-17	331	275
Jul-17	339	302
Aug-17	376	272
Sep-17	329	244
Oct-17	316	264
Nov-17	341	265
Dec-17	331	218
Jan-18	191	175
Feb-18	217	159
Mar-18	242	176
Apr-18	269	195
May-18	301	235
Jun-18	242	234

Tax Data

153. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the cost or revenue raised by a policy of a 5% income levy on income above €140,000 for individual income based on the latest available individualised data together with the tapering of tax credits on individual income between €100,000 and €140,000 at the rate of 2.5% per €1,000. [48932/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that to calculate a combined cost for the proposals described by the Deputy, it is necessary to base all costs and calculations on 2016 tax return data. An exercise was undertaken on 2016 data to break down the gross incomes of taxpayer units to an individualised level and a manual estimation process (outside of Revenue's usual tax modelling software) was required. As the exercise can only split gross incomes, this estimation process requires certain assumptions to be made in relation to the distribution of credits for the tapering on individual income.

Furthermore, it is assumed that the 5% levy on income above €140,000 proposed by the Deputy will not be subject to any credits, reliefs or exemptions.

Subject to these assumptions the estimated yield from these changes is set out in the table

below.

-	First Year (€m)	Full Year (€m)
Yield from tapering credits by 2.5% per €1,000 for individualised gross incomes between €100,000 and €140,000	185	220
Yield from 5% levy on individual incomes over €140,000	235	310
Total Yield	420	530

Tax Data

154. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the revenue raised by increasing the rate of exit tax to be introduced in the Finance Bill 2018 from 12.5% to 20%, 25%, 30% and 33% respectively. [48961/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As part of Ireland's commitment to ongoing corporate tax reform, including the implementation of the Anti-Tax Avoidance Directives (ATAD), Finance Bill 2018 introduced a new ATAD-compliant exit tax regime with effect from Budget night.

The ATAD exit tax regime will apply a charge to tax at 12.5% on certain unrealised capital gains where companies migrate or transfer assets offshore, without a disposal of the assets, such that they leave the scope of Irish tax. It replaces a pre-existing, more narrowly focused exit charge that was designed as an anti-avoidance measure following the identification of a number of transactions whereby Irish companies migrated their residence to avoid the charge to Irish Capital Gains Tax, disposed of an asset, and then subsequently migrated back into the State.

The new ATAD-compliant exit tax is a broad-based measure and it is expected that in time it will give rise to Exchequer revenue. However the nature of the charge is such that it will arise on occasional, stand-alone transactions – a charge will arise where a company migrates residence while holding assets, or transfers assets abroad, such that the assets leave the Irish tax net, in cases where those assets have increased in value and therefore hold an unrealised gain.

An estimation of the future recurring annual yield would require predicting future changes in asset values, in addition to projections as to future restructuring of companies. As any such estimate at this point would be highly theoretical, no specific provision was made in the Budgetary arithmetic for future exit tax yield, and equally it would not be possible to estimate the change in revenue if an alternate tax rate were to be applied.

With regard to the rate of exit tax, I am aware that the Deputy has queried the number of submissions to my Department's public consultation on ATAD implementation which recommended a 12.5% exit tax rate. In total, 22 submissions were received in response to the consultation document, of which 15 responded to the question on exit tax. Of those 15, 12 proposed a rate of 12.5% and the remaining 3 responses did not make a recommendation with regard to the rate. All the submissions received are published in full on my Department's website.

Tax Code

155. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the revenue raised by intro-

ducing a digital services tax of 1%, 2% and 5% respectively on digital services firms with turnover of €50 million or over here and at least €750 million globally. [48962/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): It is assumed that the scope and design of the Digital Services Tax (“DST”) to which the Deputy refers would mirror those of the European Commission’s initial DST proposal.

The Commission, in an impact assessment of its proposed DST – which applies at a 3% rate – estimated that the measure would yield approximately €5 billion per annum across all EU Member States. If it is assumed that Ireland would receive a portion of the yield in proportion to Ireland’s population, the estimated annual yield in Ireland from the EU proposal would be €45 million.

The impact of the DST if the rate were varied can be estimated on a pro rata basis. The table below shows the estimated yield side.

Rate	Estimated DST Receipts
1%	€15 million
2%	€30 million
3%	€45 million
5%	€75 million

When considering the impact of a DST potentially introduced across the EU a whole, it is important to note that DST paid in other countries is likely to be deductible in calculating profits subject to corporation tax (“CT”) and this would reduce Ireland’s CT receipts disproportionately. Based on an analysis carried out by the Revenue Commissioners, introducing the EU DST at a rate of 3% would reduce Ireland’s CT receipts by up to €160 million per annum, assuming full deductibility from taxable corporate profits for DST paid in the EU by companies taxable in Ireland. These findings were presented to the *Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform and the Taoiseach* in May of this year.

Recycling Policy

156. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the revenue to be raised by introducing a 1%, 2% and 5% levy on products with packaging which does not have at least 30%, 40% and 50% recyclable material, in tabular form. [48963/18]

157. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the revenue raised of introducing a latte levy of 5 cent, 10 cent and 25 cent on each single use coffee cup used or distributed in a commercial setting. [48964/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 156 and 157 together.

I am informed that the information available to the Office of the Revenue Commissioners from tax returns or other sources does not provide detail on numbers of single use cups or the recyclable content of packaging. Accordingly, the revenue raising estimations requested by the Deputy cannot be provided by Revenue.

Tax Reliefs Data

158. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the revenue raised by stan-

standardising all pension tax relief at the 20% rate. [48965/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am informed by Revenue that the estimated savings to the Exchequer that would arise as a result of decreasing the rate or ceiling for occupational pension schemes, RACs and PRSAs to 20% is outlined on page 11 of the Revenue Ready Reckoner, at <https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/documents/statistics/ready-reckoner.pdf>.

Based on these estimates, standardizing the relief at 20% and maintaining the current €115,000 ceiling would yield €319m.

Tax Code

159. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the cost of equalising the earned income credit with the PAYE credit. [48966/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the estimated cost of equalising the Earned Income Credit with the PAYE credit would be €72 million in a full year.

The estimated costs for increases to the Earned Income Credit are available on page 6 of the Revenue Ready Reckoner which is available on the Revenue website: <https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/documents/statistics/ready-reckoner.pdf>.

Mortgage Interest Relief Data

160. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the cost in budgetary terms of retaining mortgage interest relief at the level it will be at from the 1 January for the next three years. [48967/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): It is presumed the Deputy is referring to mortgage interest relief for persons with a qualifying mortgage loan on a principal private residence. I am advised by Revenue that the estimated cost of the relief in 2019 is €78m. Therefore, it can also be estimated that the cost of retaining the relief at 2019 levels for the following three years would result in a similar annual cost. However, this does not take account of any reduction in the number of qualifying loans over the three-year period.

Foreign Direct Investment

161. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the savings that would be expected if the special assignee relief programme, SARP, scheme was abolished. [48968/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Before addressing the question put down by the Deputy, it would be useful to recall the background to the Special Assignee Relief Programme (SARP) and the circumstances within which the relief operates.

SARP was introduced in Budget 2012 as part of a strategy to promote Foreign Direct Investment into Ireland, and to allow us to compete internationally to attract highly skilled and mobile executives who act as key decision makers within organisations.

The measure provides income tax relief on a portion of income earned by employees, who

are assigned by their employer to work in Ireland, and who previously worked abroad for that employer for a minimum of six months. There is no exemption or relief from USC and PRSI is payable where the individual is not liable to social insurance contributions in the home country.

It should also be noted that individuals who benefit from SARP make a substantial contribution to the exchequer in terms of income tax, USC and PRSI which would not otherwise arise if these individuals were not located in Ireland.

The existence of an incentive like SARP is an acknowledgement that we are competing on a global basis for highly skilled and mobile executives. Given the mobility of these individuals, and the existence of similar assignee schemes in competitor jurisdictions, it is possible that if SARP was abolished these individuals would not have chosen to locate in Ireland.

The 2016 annual Revenue report on SARP shows that for the years 2012 to 2016 (the most recent year for which data are available) the costs of the measure were as follows:

Tax Cost 2012	Tax Cost 2013	Tax Cost 2014	Tax Cost 2015	Tax Cost 2016
€0.1 million	€1.9 million	€5.9 million	€9.5 million	€18.1 million

In relation to the €18.1 million tax cost for 2016, it is also worth noting that SARP directly generated 793 jobs in that year, which resulted in a very significant tax contribution to the exchequer. Employers also reported that an extra 477 employees had been employed by their companies in 2016, and 607 employees retained by companies in 2016 for which the exchequer benefited directly from additional tax from these associated jobs retained and created through SARP.

In terms of the Deputy's question, it is not clear that there would be any net savings to the Exchequer if the programme was abolished. On the contrary, it may well be the case that there could be a net loss to the Exchequer arising from such a move. As the Deputy is aware, only a proportion of income is disregarded for income tax purposes under SARP and the majority of a person's income remains liable to taxation. Also, as already indicated, USC applies on the full amount of the person's income. It is unclear what proportion of SARP beneficiaries, if any, might remain in the jurisdiction if the measure was withdrawn. Furthermore, such a withdrawal would inevitably have implications for the numbers of SARP-related jobs that would be created in the future and, by extension, the tax revenues that would be associated with those jobs.

As the Deputy is aware, I recently brought forward an amendment to the Finance Bill 2018 to place a ceiling on eligible income for SARP recipients at €1 million. This change will be effective for new entrants to the programme from 1 January 2019 and for existing beneficiaries of the programme from 1 January 2020. In addition, I announced that a full review of SARP will be carried out in 2019. I expect that this exercise will, among other things, afford an opportunity to examine in greater detail the issues raised in the Deputy's question.

Tax Reliefs Application

162. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance if recommendations by an organisation (details supplied) will be examined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48985/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As part of the annual Budgetary and Finance Bill process, all taxes, reliefs and exemptions are subject to on-going review. The Department of Finance produces a TSG paper annually on Capital Taxes. This year's Capital Taxes TSG paper, which can be found at

<https://www.finance.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/TSG-18-10-Capital-and-Savings-Taxes-PL.pdf>, examined options to change both the CGT rate and the lifetime limit for the Revised Entrepreneur Relief.

Most recent estimates indicate that in the absence of behavioural change each 1% reduction in the rate of CGT was estimated to reduce yield by approximately €36m annually, while the cost to increase the lifetime limit for Revised Entrepreneur Relief to €5m or €15m was estimated at approximately €39m and €50m respectively.

Whilst all taxes are subject to ongoing review, you will appreciate that all policy choices with respect to changes in taxation are made from both a broader policy perspective and in the context of the financial resources available. In light of this, I decided not to amend the rate of Capital Gains Tax or the Revised Entrepreneur Relief as part of Budget 2019, however these matters will again be subject to review during preparations for Budget 2020.

In relation to R&D Tax Credits, the Office of the Revenue Commissioners have advised me that in putting together a claim for the R&D tax credit, companies must have regard to two interlocking parts: the claim must pass the science test (i.e. is the activity a qualifying activity) and the accounting test must be satisfied (i.e. is the amount of the claim correct). Revenue inform me that they have detailed R&D guidance on the operation of the R&D tax credit, for all companies, which is designed to remove some of the uncertainty that companies may have. Furthermore, Revenue advise me that they are currently working on guidance in relation to the level of records that they would expect to see to support a claim for the R&D tax credit. It is their expectation that this new guidance will give all companies greater certainty in advance of submitting a claim for relief.

In February 2017 Revenue issued guidance aimed specifically at micro and small companies, to reduce the administrative burden on SMEs while also ensuring that the credit is granted to bona fide R&D. The aim of this guidance was to give these smaller companies greater clarity on how they could demonstrate to Revenue that their R&D tax credit claim satisfied the “science test”. Where a company spends €200,000 on activities which Enterprise Ireland have looked at and confirmed as R&D, then in most cases Revenue will accept that those activities pass the science test. Revenue may still review that the accounting test has been satisfied.

As Revenue engage independent, case specific, experts where there is uncertainty in respect of whether or not the activities are qualifying R&D activities, any pre-approval would out of necessity be cumbersome and slow, potentially acting as a barrier to companies carrying out R&D. In respect of the accounting test, it is not possible to judge if an amount will be incurred in carrying on R&D until that R&D is actually carried out and that amount is actually incurred. As such, in addition to the difficulty of putting in place pre-approval in relation to the science test, it is not possible to put in place a pre-approval process for the accounting test.

Finally, Revenue advise me that all R&D claims are currently dealt with by their Medium Enterprises Division or Large Cases Division. There is an internal network of experienced R&D auditors from those divisions who meet and share their experiences. Revenue also engage with external stakeholders through the Tax Administration Liaison Committee (TALC), where there is a specific sub-group which looks at R&D issues.

Tax Credits

163. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated cost of increasing the personal tax credit for the single, married, and so on credit by €50, €100, €200, €300,

€400 and €500, respectively. [49007/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that costings for increases to personal tax credits can be found in the table on page 6 of the Revenue Ready Reckoner which is available on the Revenue website: <https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/documents/statistics/ready-reckoner.pdf>.

While some of the costs of the increases sought by the Deputy are not displayed in the Ready Reckoner, they can be estimated on a straight-line or pro-rata basis from the costs shown.

For ease of reference, the estimated costings sought by the Deputy, and calculated on the basis of the Ready Reckoner, are set out in the tables below:

Personal Tax Credit - Single	Cost First Year €m	Cost Full Year €m
€1,700	40	46
€1,750	80	92
€1,850	160	184
€1,950	240	276
€2,050	320	368
€2,150	400	460

Personal Tax Credit - Married	Cost First Year €m	Cost Full Year €m
€3,350	32.25	37.75
€3,400	64.5	75.5
€3,500	129	151
€3,600	193.5	226.5
€3,700	258	302
€3,800	322.5	377.5

Widowed Person or surviving Civil Partner (without qualifying child) Credit	Cost First Year €m	Cost Full Year €m
€2,240	2.95	3.5
€2,290	5.9	7
€2,390	11.8	14
€2,490	17.7	21
€2,590	23.6	28
€2,690	29.5	35

Single Person Child Carer Tax Credit	Cost First Year €m	Cost Full Year €m
€1,700	1.6	1.85
€1,750	3.2	3.7
€1,850	6.4	7.4
€1,950	9.6	11.1
€2,050	12.8	14.8

Single Person Child Carer Tax Credit	Cost First Year €m	Cost Full Year €m
€2,150	16	18.5

Tax Code

164. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 158 of 13 November 2018, if the date of 1 January 2019 for removal of flat rate expenses is accurate. [49051/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that their review of the flat rate expenses regime is ongoing and that it is intended to have the review completed by the end of 2019. Therefore, in the interest of fairness to all sectors and employees currently benefitting from the regime, Revenue has decided that the effective date for implementation of any changes to particular flat rate expenses categories will now be 1 January 2020.

Question No. 165 answered with Question No. 149.

Insurance Costs

166. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Finance when it is planned to implement the outstanding recommendations of the cost of insurance working group; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49085/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy is aware, the Cost of Insurance Working Group is in the process of implementing both its Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance and its Report on the Cost of Employer Liability and Public Liability Insurance.

The Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance was published in January 2017, containing 33 recommendations with 71 associated actions. While the Report on the Cost of Employer Liability and Public Liability Insurance was published in January 2018, containing 15 recommendations with 29 associated actions. Both reports contain Action Plans which set out agreed timelines for implementation as well as a commitment that the Working Group will prepare quarterly updates on its progress.

The seventh such update was published earlier this month and can be accessed on the Department of Finance's website under the 'Cost of Insurance Working Group' section. The Deputy may wish to note that this provides an update on the implementation of each recommendation as well as a traffic light indicator on the status of each individual action point, including those with deadlines into the future (19 relating to the Motor Report and 11 relating to the EL/PL Report). The Update shows that of the 78 separate applicable deadlines within the Action Plans of the two Reports to the end of Q3 2018, 62 relate to actions which have now been completed, while substantial work has also been undertaken in respect of the nine action points categorised as "ongoing". I believe this quarterly report outlines the significant amount of work being done to address the cost of insurance problem. In this regard, there has been significant progress on a number of legislative fronts as well as the publication of the second Personal Injury Commission report on benchmarking of awards.

While I acknowledge that some deadlines have yet to be met, the general direction of travel is positive and this is reflected in the most recent CSO figures (for October 2018) which indicates that private motor insurance premiums have decreased by 22.9% since peaking in July

2016. In this regard, I can assure the Deputy that the implementation of the recommendations remains a priority for the Government and I remain confident that the continued implementation of them cumulatively, with the appropriate levels of commitment and cooperation from all relevant stakeholders, should achieve the objectives of delivering fairer premiums for consumers and a more stable and competitive insurance market.

Corporate Tax Compliance

167. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance if the European Commission has been in contact with his Department about ongoing state aid investigations relating to the tax arrangements of companies resident here other than the Commission's completed investigation into a company (details supplied); the number of such investigations to which his attention has been drawn; and the specific issues involved. [49232/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Since 2014, the European Competition has been engaged in an "information gathering exercise" and have sought information from all Member States in relation to certain corporate tax practices and regimes.

It is understood that the Commission has examined over 1,000 rulings across national tax jurisdictions. This exercise has been ongoing since this time and, of course, has not been limited to Ireland.

Ireland has always co-operated in respect of these requests and will continue to do so.

It is not appropriate for me to comment on the nature of any such requests as any enquiries made are confidential between Ireland and the Commission.

Customs and Excise Controls

168. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Finance if he will seek from the Revenue Commissioners' customs department a progress report on developments on combating the importation of drugs in the border midlands area since an October 2017 meeting with Houses of the Oireachtas representatives; the number of joint policing committee meetings customs has attended since October 2017 in counties Sligo, Leitrim, Donegal and Mayo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49249/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that since October 2017 it has not been notified of, or invited to any Joint Policing Committee (JPC) meetings in Sligo, Leitrim, Donegal or Mayo. Revenue has reiterated assurances previously given that officials will participate in meetings regarding the importation of illicit drugs, where requested to do so by the Joint Policing Committees.

I am assured that Revenue is very aware of its responsibilities and the frontline role that it carries out in protecting society from the importation of illicit drugs. Revenue is active in targeting and combating drugs smuggling and works closely with other State agencies (particularly an Garda Síochána) acting against the illicit drugs trade. As part of Revenue's risk focused approach to combating the importation of illicit drugs, the potential for drug smuggling at harbours and inlets along the coastline is evaluated, monitored and acted upon on an ongoing basis. The work is also informed by Revenue's analysis of national and international seizure trends, frequency of traffic, routes and other risk indicators.

Revenue's work is supported by Revenue's Customs Drugs Watch programme which pro-

vides a confidential reporting mechanism to the public to report any suspicious activity on a 24/7 free phone facility at 1800 295 295.

If the Deputy has specific information that could assist Revenue in its targeting of any illegal activity, the information should be forwarded to Revenue for investigation.

Pension Provisions

169. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Finance if the Revenue Commissioners will re-examine the tax calculation for a person (details supplied) and have it re-assessed in view of the fact that their spouse receives a pension separately and not as a qualified adult with reference to supporting documentation; if this will be amended as soon as possible; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49250/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the person in question receives a Contributory State pension, which includes an additional amount in respect of a Qualifying Adult Dependant.

Although the Qualifying Adult portion of the pension is paid directly to the person's spouse/civil partner/co-habitant, the payment is premised on there being an entitlement to the pension in the first instance. In this regard, Section 112 of the Social Welfare Consolidation 2005 Act specifies that the Qualifying Adult portion of a pension is an 'increase' that is payable in respect of a spouse/civil partner/co-habitant who is being financially maintained and whose income is not greater than a specified amount.

The taxation position of the Qualifying Adult portion is set out in Section 126(2B) of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997, which provides that any 'increase' is treated as if it arises to and is payable to the person who qualifies for the pension (the beneficiary). As a consequence, the income is treated as income of the beneficiary and not the Qualifying Adult and there is no entitlement to any additional Employee Tax Credit nor an increase in the Standard Rate Band.

For these reasons the person in question is correctly assessed for tax and there is no further credits due to the person.

Motor Insurance Coverage

170. **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. [49255/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): At the outset, it is important to note that as Minister for Finance, I do not have a role in the regulation or availability of car rental services, including the durations for which companies may choose to offer it.

Notwithstanding this, my officials contacted Insurance Ireland on the basis of the details supplied. It advised that motor insurance is generally sold as an annual contract in Ireland but that in relation to a customer wishing to rent a car, it advised that generally, the cost of motor third party liability insurance is included in the overall car rental price.

In addition, you might like to note that according to the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC), if a person has a complaint about a specific car rental company, they should initially contact the rental company in writing and go through its own complaint handling process to conclusion. If the person is not satisfied with the response, they can contact the

Car Rental Council of Ireland which has drawn up its own “Code of Best Practice for the Car Rental Industry in Ireland” and runs a complaints procedure for member companies.

Tax Credits

171. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Finance the status of tax credits for a person (details supplied). [49295/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the matter in question, which requires interaction with another Government Department, is currently being reviewed. It is anticipated that the review will be completed within the next week and Revenue has assured me that it will then make direct contact with the person to discuss the issue.

Revenue Documents Issuance

172. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Finance when the correspondence requested will issue to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49314/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the difficulty in this case exists because the person in question is not yet registered (with Revenue) as being self-employed. The registration delay is a consequence of the person having to date failed to complete the necessary documentation.

Revenue has also confirmed that it very recently made direct contact with the person to enquire as to when they would complete the registration process and to offer assistance if required. Following the discussions, the person confirmed that they would complete the process as quickly as possible. As soon as this is done, Revenue will prioritise their application and will provide the required third-party confirmations to which the Deputy is referring.

Tax Data

173. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Finance the net cost or gain if new tax bands (details supplied) were introduced. [49382/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): It is assumed that when the Deputy refers to ‘corresponding bands based on the status quo for others’, the intention is that the standard rate cut off point is adjusted accordingly, but that the additional proposed bands of income are standardised, i.e. they are the same width, for all taxpayers.

Revenue has advised that the estimated full yield to the Exchequer from the introduction of the new bands outlined by the Deputy would be of the order of €130 million and €230 million on a first year and full year basis respectively.

These estimates have been generated by reference to projected 2019 incomes, calculated on the basis of actual data for the year 2016, the latest year for which returns are available and adjusted as necessary for income, self-employment and employment trends in the interim. The estimates also assume that there is no change in behaviour patterns.

Home Renovation Incentive Scheme Eligibility

174. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if it is possible for persons to avail of the home renovation incentive scheme who have contracted to have work carried out now but where tradespeople are not available to undertake the work until after the incentive scheme has been closed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49388/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Home Renovation Incentive (HRI) is provided for in section 477B of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997. As the Deputy will be aware, the HRI provides a tax relief by way of an income tax credit in respect of expenditure on qualifying work. Qualifying work is any repair, renovation or improvement works carried out on principal private residences or rental properties by tax compliant contractors. The HRI will expire on 31 December 2018.

I am advised by Revenue that to qualify for relief under the incentive, the qualifying work must be carried out no later than the expiry date. However, where planning permission is required for the qualifying work, then provided planning permission has been granted no later than 31 December 2018, any qualifying work carried out between 1 January 2019 and 31 March 2019 will be deemed to have been carried in 2018 and can qualify for the relief. Where planning permission is not required for the qualifying work, any work carried out after 31 December 2018 will not qualify for relief.

VAT Rate Application

175. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Finance his plans for the VAT regime on food supplements which have been zero rated for tax purposes to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49398/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Currently, the standard rate of VAT applies to food supplements. However, there is a Revenue concession which allows the zero rate to be applied to certain types of food supplements (vitamins, minerals and fish oils). The practice of zero rating vitamins, minerals and fish oil food supplements has been applied since the introduction of VAT in November 1972 when the marketplace for food supplements was small. However, this concession is proving to be extremely problematic.

Elements of the food supplement industry has made a sustained challenge to the application of the standard rate of VAT to a range of food supplements. There are concerns that while elements of the industry apply the correct rates, others have a competitive advantage by applying the zero rate to products that are properly liable at the 23% VAT rate. Their argument is generally that the products concerned are similar and compete with other products that are zero rated.

There has been protracted correspondence on the issues raised which has raised concerns regarding possible non-compliance in the sector, in particular the zero rating of products that should be standard rated which may result in a degree of unfair competition between compliant and non-compliant businesses.

Revenue's position is that food supplements are not food and, as such, are not entitled under VAT law to the zero rate of VAT; therefore, the standard rate of VAT applies. The concession in relation to vitamins and the like is proving unworkable as the industry seeks to use the concession to achieve a zero rating for much of the product range in the sector.

After consultations between Revenue, Department of Health and my Department concern-

ing policy options that might be considered in the context of Budget 2019, reservations were expressed by the Department of Health as to the implications a change might have on the promotion of food supplements in certain circumstances. For these reasons, I decided not to make any changes in this year's Budget and Finance Bill. However, I have asked my officials to address this matter in the context of the Tax Strategy Group next year.

Consultancy Contracts Expenditure

176. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Finance the fees paid and services rendered to a person (details supplied) in each of the years 2013 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49424/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): My Department has no record of fees paid or services rendered to Mr Peter Smyth, in his capacity as a process auditor and/or Peter Smyth Management Consultancy Ltd. for each of the years 2013 to 2017 and to date in 2018.

Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman

177. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of complaints outstanding at the Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman; the number of complaints outstanding at the end of each month in 2018 and at the end of 2015, 2016 and 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49472/18]

178. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of complaints outstanding at the Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman by length of time (details supplied); the complaints that are open from the time of first receipt; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49473/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 177 and 178 together.

Firstly, I must point out that the Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman is independent in the performance of his statutory functions.

I have been advised by the Ombudsman that the number of complaints outstanding each month in 2018 were as follows:-

Year	Month	Number of complaints outstanding at the end of the Month
2018	January	3328*
	February	3515
	March	3740
	April	3853
	May	3943
	June	3964
	July	4155
	August	4307
	September	4454
	October	4662

* This includes 44 complaints transferred from the Office of the Pensions Ombudsman on 1 Jan 2018.

I have also been advised by the Ombudsman that the number of complaints outstanding for the years for 2015 to 2017 were as follows:-

Year	Number of complaints outstanding at year end
2017	3134
2016	2198
2015	1954

To answer the Deputy's question in relation to the number of complaints and the length of time that complaints are open from date of receipt up to 1 month and to over 1 year, the Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman has provided the following information:-

Month since Received	Complaint Numbers @ 23 November 2018
<1	489
1-3	920
3-6	907
6-12	865
1 Year Plus	1541
Total	4722

Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman

179. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the funding provided to the Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman in each of the years 2015 to 2017 and to date in 2018; the planned funding in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49474/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): At the outset, I must point out that the Financial Services and Pension Ombudsman is independent in the performance of his statutory functions.

As the Deputy will be aware the Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman Act 2017 (FSPO Act 2017) which commenced on 1 January 2018 established the Office of the Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman (FSPO). Prior to 2018 the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection were responsible for the funding of the Office of the Pensions Ombudsman.

The FSPO is funded through two distinct sources; the pensions complaints are funded by the Exchequer, through the Department of Finance and the financial services complaints are funded by a levy on the financial services industry.

The Ombudsman has informed me that the 2018 budget breakdown was as follows:-

Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman	2018
Exchequer Funding	€ 950,000
Financial Services Industry Levy	€ 4,336,961

The Financial Services Ombudsman, which preceded the establishment of the FSPO, was funded solely through a levy on the financial services industry, the table below sets out the details of this levy for 2015 to 2017:-

Financial Services Ombudsman	2015	2016	2017
Financial Services Industry Levy	€3,770,930	€4,231,925	€4,279,834

The FSPO Act 2017 sections 40 and 43 set out part of the role of the FSPO Council, which includes responsibility for setting the levy to be paid by financial service providers and oversight responsibilities in relation to the work of the Office of the Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman including responsibilities in relation to:

- Approval of the Office’s annual estimates;
- Approval of the Office’s strategic plan; and
- Keeping under review the efficiency and effectiveness of the Ombudsman

I understand that the Annual Estimates of Income and Expenditure 2019 will be considered by the Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman Council at its meeting in December, at which point the funding requirement for 2019 will be agreed. The Council with my consent will prescribe by regulation the “Financial Services Industry Levy” to be paid in relation to financial service providers.

The proposed Exchequer funding in relation to pension complaints for 2019 is €950,000.

Tax Data

180. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated number of PAYE taxpayers eligible for the flat rate expenses tax allowance; the number that claimed the allowance in 2017; the cost to the Exchequer of this allowance in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49495/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that as flat rate expenses allowances are given as a deduction from employment income, the cost of the allowance at individual level is dependent on not just the amount of the allowance but also the particular tax circumstance of the recipient of the allowance. The cost will vary depending on whether and to the extent that the taxpayer concerned has taxable income and whether such income is taxable at the standard or marginal rate of income tax.

Allowable expenses for employees, including flat rate expenses, are also claimed through different channels depending on the status of the taxpayer. For some employees, the allowances may be carried forward from year to year and applied automatically through the PAYE system at pay roll level. For other employees, particularly those in receipt of non-PAYE income, the allowances may be claimed through the annual income tax returns, the Form 11 (which taxpayers within the self assessment system are obliged to complete) or the Form 12 Return of Income. As the Form 11 or Form 12 returns are not required to be returned until 10 months after the year end, returns for the 2017 tax year were only due in November 2018. Thus, the final position on the cost of flat rate expenses allowances for 2017 cannot be reasonably estimated until full returns data is available and analysed. This will also require analysis of information contained in the 2017 P35 returns by employers of the pay and tax details of employees under the PAYE system, which were due in February 2018. With late filers, processing of returns and parsing of data, Revenue has advised that complete information on expenses for the 2017 tax year will

not be available until mid 2019.

Finally, as I have indicated in response to previous questions on this subject, Revenue's ongoing review of the flat rate expenses regime is expected to be completed by end 2019. With this in mind, in the interests of fairness to all sectors and employees currently benefitting from the regime, Revenue has decided that the effective date for implementation of any changes to particular flat rate expenses categories will be deferred until 1 January 2020. Any revisions to flat rate expenses categories will be communicated to the relevant employee representative bodies involved in the review process.

Climate Change Adaptation Plans

181. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide a timeline for the development of his Department's specific climate change targets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49568/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The first National Mitigation Plan represents an initial step to set us on a pathway to achieve the level of decarbonisation required. It is a whole-of-Government Plan, reflecting in particular the central roles of the key Ministers responsible for the sectors covered by the Plan – Electricity Generation, the Built Environment, Transport and Agriculture, as well as drawing on the perspectives and responsibilities of a range of other Government Departments.

The measures that we implement through this first Plan will lay the foundations for transitioning Ireland to a low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by 2050. To support this ongoing work, the Plan also includes over 100 individual actions for various Ministers and public bodies to take forward. Importantly, the Government recognises that this first Plan does not provide a complete roadmap to achieve the 2050 objective, but began the process of development of medium- to long-term mitigation choices for the next and future decades. Furthermore, it is a 'living document', which is being updated on an on-going basis.

As Minister for Finance I am leading on five National Mitigation Plan actions as follows:

No. 3 Examination of impact of carbon tax and future tax rate.

Current Status: ESRI study published in October 2018. Further ESRI study in progress which seeks to incorporate multi-annual impacts of carbon tax increases.

No. 55 Maintain under continuous review the use of the VRT/Motor Tax system in incentivising the uptake of lower emission technologies. (Leading with Minister for HPCLG)

Current Status: Kept under continuous review and, in view of the introduction of a new EU wide emissions system known as the WLTP, new approaches were discussed in this year's Environmental Tax Strategy paper.

No. 56 Continue to encourage the adoption of natural gas as a cleaner transport fuel by maintaining the excise rate applied at the minimum rate allowable under the Energy Tax Directive.

Current Status: The excise rate for natural gas is maintained at the minimum allowable under the Energy Tax Directive while the Accelerated Capital Allowances Scheme provides tax incentives for the investment in and installation of infrastructure necessary to support the adoption of natural gas as a transportation fuel.

No. 71 Examine the expansion of existing support schemes.

Current Status: Existing tax expenditures to encourage the uptake of lower pollutant vehicles were reviewed this year and the 0% BIK rate for electric vehicles is being extended for a further 3 years while the VRT relief for hybrid electric vehicles is being extended for 1 year.

No. 74 Conduct a review of vehicle and fuel taxation measures within the context of evolving technology development and need to chart a sustainable pathway to the decarbonisation of transport by 2050.

Current Status: This is being achieved through measure 55 and also through work being undertaken by the Low Emission Vehicles (LEV) Taskforce which my officials participate in.

I understand that the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and the Environment shall revert to government with proposals for an ambitious multi-annual, all-of-government plan to set out the actions which must be taken in every government department and body to make Ireland a leader in responding to climate change. This Plan will build on the previous actions taken by government, including in the National Mitigation Plan and the National Development Plan. In this regard I will fully play my part as Minister for Finance to ensure significant progress is made.

Flood Relief Schemes

182. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform further to Parliamentary Question No. 89 of 26 April 2018, if he will provide a detailed update on plans for a flood relief scheme (details supplied) in County Cork; the funding committed; the steps in the process; the timeline for the completion of the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49434/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): A pre-feasibility study into the flooding issues in Ballinhassig has been completed by the Office of Public Works (OPW) and has identified a preferred option for the area. Further assessment of the environmental impacts are currently being progressed to inform the planning process, after which the project will progress to planning and detailed design. It is not possible to provide a timeframe for the project at this time but provision has been made in OPW's multi annual financial profiles for the progression of the scheme to implementation.

Departmental Properties

183. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the estimated costs related to new properties at a location (details supplied) in County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48849/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Commissioners of Public Works have not acquired any new properties in Rosslare Europort.

Public Private Partnerships

184. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he has considered the impact locally of pursuing the route of PPPs to develop State-funded

projects (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48931/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Public procurement is a key priority for Government and has undergone significant reform aimed at ensuring sustainable delivery of much needed public services while also encouraging and supporting SME participation in these business opportunities. This approach is beneficial for the State because it nurtures competition which ensures value for money is maintained and provides SMEs with a platform to take advantage of similar opportunities in Ireland and across the European Union. The Programme for a Partnership Government recognises the importance of the SME Sector to the economy and is cognisant that public procurement represents a major opportunity for SMEs.

Specifically, the Office of Government Procurement have developed a suite of measures aimed at assisting SMEs to access public procurement opportunities (circular 10/14). These include:

- Proportionate financial capacity criterion (turnover requirements limited to twice the contract value);
- Contracting Authorities are encouraged to divide public contracts into lots;
- Provision for “consortia bidding” to assist SMEs to participate in procurement procedures where they would not have the relevant capability or scale; and
- Public bodies are required to advertise contracts for goods and services valued above €25,000 on the national eTenders portal.

In addition, my colleague, Minister of State Patrick O’Donovan, who has responsibility for public procurement, chairs quarterly meetings of an SME Advisory Group, in accordance with the Programme for Government. This ensures that the voice of Irish SMEs (including ISME, IBEC, SFA, Chambers Ireland, and CIF) is heard by Government.

One of the public procurement options available to Government is PPP, which offers an alternative model for delivering infrastructure that can be effective in particular circumstances. The Report of the PPP Review, published earlier this year, noted the role that PPPs have played in delivering much needed infrastructure in recent years, particularly during times when Exchequer funding was constrained. However, the Review did also acknowledged the challenges that PPPs can pose in terms of scale and complexity of the PPP contract.

While recommending that PPPs continue to be considered as a procurement option for suitable projects, the report also recommended that in order to address the scale/complexity issue, the scope for creating a new PPP-type procurement option that would be suitable for procuring smaller scale and less complex projects, over a shorter timeframe, be explored as an alternative to the typical PPP procurement option, for such smaller scale projects. I am pleased to say that work is progressing well on exploring this option and the European PPP Expertise Centre is assisting my Department in the matter. If successful, this would certainly assist in addressing some of the concerns of the Deputy in relation to typical PPP procurements.

I should, of course, also point out that while a number of projects have been, and continue to be, procured by PPP, the vast majority of public works contracts are procured as traditional Exchequer funded projects.

However, even in relation to the large scale PPP projects, opportunities exist for the SME sector to play a part in these projects. The NDFA, as part of the PPP procurement process, incorporates a programme-wide initiative with Enterprise Ireland whereby they host a series

of “Meet the Buyer” events around the country offering small and medium-sized enterprises within the construction sector the opportunity to meet directly with the senior contractors within NDFA managed programmes.

Office of Public Works

185. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the way in which a person (details supplied) can tender for services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48986/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Tenders for services as they arise within the Office of Public Works (OPW), are advertised on *www.supplygov.ie* or *www.etenders.gov.ie*.

Open recruitment to fill positions in the OPW for the operation of mechanical plant and equipment, is advertised on the OPW website (*www.opw.ie*) and may also be advertised in certain national and provincial newspapers.

National Monuments

186. **Deputy Jonathan O’Brien** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform further to Parliamentary Question No. 94 of 21 February 2018, the status of discussions with a society (details supplied) on ensuring public access to the execution site of four persons in Roscrea Castle in 1922 for the centenary celebrations; if public access to the site will be made permanent; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49172/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): While some discussions have taken place locally in Roscrea in relation to the area of the site in question, no conclusions have yet been arrived at. As stated previously, OPW will ultimately be guided in relation to these matters by the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht who is overseeing how best to address the respectful commemoration of this era on a national basis and the future treatment of the location will be considered in that context.

It is not possible currently for the OPW to provide guaranteed permanent access to this location as it forms part of a works area with restricted access, for health and safety reasons, for members of the public. However, it may be possible to facilitate a private ceremony for family members with prior notice. Interested parties are invited to submit a proposal in this regard through permissions@opw.ie

Public Sector Reform Implementation

187. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he has quantified the extent to which reforms throughout the public sector are likely to yield further improved economic performance in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49189/18]

201. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which his Department continues to monitor the performance of the public sector with a view to the maximisation of opportunities for economic growth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49487/18]

202. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the most effective reforms undertaken throughout the public and private sectors over the past number of years which have contributed substantially to economic progress; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49488/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 187, 201 and 202 together.

As I have previously informed the House, since 2011 a number of significant public service reforms have been undertaken that continue to deliver improved services and value for money across a range of areas, including governance, accountability, procurement, shared services, organisational reform and property management.

The latest framework for reform and innovation in the public service, Our Public Service 2020 - which I launched last December, is a whole-of-public-service initiative designed to build on previous reforms while expanding the scope of reform to focus on collaboration, innovation and evaluation. This new policy framework has been designed to deliver better outcomes for the public and will ensure that the citizen is at the centre of policies and service delivery across the whole of the public service.

As Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform I must ensure that our fiscal and public expenditure policy is prudent and sustainable. A number of budgetary reforms have also been introduced in recent years to guide my decisions on overall fiscal policy in this regard, including fiscal rules, expenditure ceilings and spending reviews. The actions in Our Public Service 2020 will ensure that the focus of the public service is very much on delivery of quality public services, while operating within these prudent limits.

A Public Service Leadership Board (PSLB) has been established to lead the delivery of Our Public Service 2020. For the first time, both civil and public service leaders and managers will work jointly to drive the reform programme. This will ensure there is shared ownership for the actions on reform right across the public service.

Our Public Service 2020 contains an added focus on evaluation and on the importance of building a reform evaluation culture and in developing indicators to support an outcomes focus. With this goal in mind, within my Department we have established a Reform Evaluation Unit to focus on monitoring and evaluating the outcomes of reform as well as creating greater links between expenditure and reform.

Legislative Reviews

188. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the OPW plans to review the Arterial Drainage Act 1945; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49268/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Arterial Drainage Act 1945 made provision for the drainage and improvement of land through the delivery by the Commissioners of Public Works in Ireland of arterial drainage schemes, for entire catchments.

Increasing urbanisation led in 1995 to an amendment of the Arterial Drainage Act, 1945, that permits the OPW to implement localised flood relief schemes to provide flood protection for cities, towns and villages. The launch of the Flood Risk Management Plans in May 2018, following the largest ever study of flood risk in Ireland, has identified that Government invest-

ment is feasible to protect 95% of properties at assessed risk from significant flooding through flood relief schemes. The legislative basis for these works includes the Arterial Drainage Act, 1945 as amended by the Arterial Drainage (Amendment) Act 1995.

There have been a number of further amendments to the principal Act that provide the statutory framework to ensure work on flood risk management by the Commissioners of Public Works in Ireland meets the European environmental assessments and other requirements. In this regard, the Office of Public Works has significantly progressed work with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the Office of the Attorney General to amend the Arterial Drainage Act, by way of regulations to transpose Directive 2014/52/EU (Environmental Impact Assessment).

The Office of Public Works continually monitors the legislative basis for its overall management of Ireland's flood risk including working with all statutory bodies and with the European Commission.

Drainage Schemes

189. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to establish arterial drainage schemes on the River Erne system in County Cavan in view of the difficulties caused by flooding in that area and the need to have a comprehensive programme of drainage works undertaken; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49269/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Historically, flood risk management focused on the arterial drainage of river catchments to improve agricultural land. Maintenance of Arterial and Drainage District channels, designated under the Arterial Drainage Act 1945, is the responsibility of the OPW and Local Authorities respectively. These include the maintenance by the OPW of the Boyne, Inny and Glyde-and-Dee Arterial Drainage Schemes in County Cavan that in 2018 includes seventy-eight kilometres of river channel maintenance at an estimated cost of €460,000.

In 1995, due to nationally increasing urbanisation, the Arterial Drainage Act 1945 was amended to facilitate the OPW's implementation of localised flood relief schemes to provide flood protection to cities, towns and villages.

The launch of the Flood Risk Management Plans in May 2018, following the largest ever study of flood risk in Ireland, has identified that Government investment is feasible to protect 95 percent of properties at assessed risk from significant flooding through flood relief schemes.

Together with this legislative amendment and in line with the Government's 2004 policy on flood risk management, the OPW has no plans for catchment-wide arterial drainage schemes. However to target the management of flood risk outside of cities, towns and villages, in 2009 the OPW introduced the Minor Flood Mitigation Works & Coastal Protection Scheme.

The purpose of this scheme is to provide funding to Local Authorities to undertake flood mitigation works or studies to address localised flooding and coastal protection problems within their administrative areas. To date there have been 724 schemes approved under this Scheme providing important local flood protection measures to their local flood risk.

The OPW approved the sum of €205,002 to Cavan County Council, under the Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme for flood defence works for Drumullan. The works comprised a combination of earthen embankment, culvert and flood wall defences to

protect the community of Drumullan from the risk of flooding.

Also, a proposed flood relief scheme for Cavan town, identified by the CFRAM programme, is being progressed at a projected cost of €4.44 million. This proposed scheme involves the construction of a series of hard defences (embankments and walls) protecting 110 properties when completed. The proposed scheme is in the first tranche of projects to be progressed directly by Cavan County Council.

Garda Stations

190. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the OPW plans to purchase property for Garda stations; the stages of negotiation for each; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49275/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The preferred property solutions in regard to Garda Stations involve the use of State owned property. Other than the finalisation of a small number of acquisitions at Clonmel and Bailieborough currently being completed, the Office of Public Works has no other immediate plans to purchase property for Garda Stations.

Question No. 191 answered with Question No. 61.

Office of Public Works

192. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the OPW plans to purchase property for State organisations in Cavan and Monaghan; the stage of negotiation for each; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49277/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the question refers to matters which would be commercially sensitive, the Office of Public Works is unable to comment on any such plans. Details of properties which are purchased for State organisations are normally made public when purchases have been completed. Generally when OPW is seeking to acquire a property or site it will trawl the market and advertise publicly. However, once negotiations commence on an individual property the details of such negotiation are not made public until the transaction is completed.

Departmental Meetings

193. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if his officials met with members of a political party (details supplied) in the past ten days; if he sanctioned this meeting; the reason this meeting took place; if he will provide this Deputy with minutes of the meeting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49301/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy is aware, the Taoiseach has initiated a process with the Leader of Fianna Fáil to review the Confidence and Supply Agreement which facilitates the operation of the current Fine Gael led minority Government.

Both Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil have appointed teams of negotiators and the review is ongoing. In that context, the Taoiseach has requested that factual briefing be provided by the Civil

Service on specific issues. This involves officials providing both written and oral briefing to the respective negotiating teams. The negotiating teams have undertaken to ensure that any briefings will be treated as confidential. Any briefings being provided by officials are undertaken in consultation with the Minister in charge of the Department.

In this context, officials from the Department of Public Expenditure & Reform met the negotiating teams last week to brief them on relevant issues.

National Monuments

194. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the Office of Public Works is planning to provide a new entrance and exit to the Casino at Marino which is a designated national monument; the planning requirements needed to facilitate this redevelopment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49386/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Office of Public Works has secured a funding commitment from Fáilte Ireland to improve visitor facilities at Casino Marino through provision of a new visitor welcome facility (including café and retail space) additional visitor car parking and improvements to the landscape. This proposed development may include provision of access/egress from Malahide Road.

The proposed development will be subject to the usual planning processes with the Local Authority and will require consent from the Minister of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht as the Casino is a designated National Monument.

Consultancy Contracts Expenditure

195. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the fees paid and services rendered to a person (details supplied) in each of the years 2013 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49430/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The payments made by my Department to the individual / company in question from 2013 to 2017 are set out below.

Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Vote 11)

Payment Date	Total	Services Rendered	Description of service
2013	€110,700	Consultancy	Procurement Advice and Support

Office of Government Procurement (Vote 39)

Payment Date	Total	Services Rendered	Description of service
2014	€69,003	Consultancy	Procurement Advice and Support

Flood Prevention Measures

196. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to address flooding at Shannon Airport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49456/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The protection of Shannon Airport from flooding is the responsibility of the airport owners, the Shannon Airport Authority.

The airport is protected by a range of embankments on its Eastern and Western sides which are owned by the airport Authority which is responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of those embankments.

There are other embankments adjacent to the airport which protect Shannon town and these are the responsibility of the Office of Public Works.

The Shannon river basin Flood Risk Management Plan recognises the potential risk of damage to Shannon airport infrastructure in the extreme flood event and indicates that Shannon Airport Authority may wish to consider implementing measures to protect against such risk.

Both the embankments that protect the airport and those that protect the town would not have been constructed to modern engineering standards and would not offer the level of protection required to protect against the 1 in 200 year tidal flood event which is the accepted standard for coastal defences.

In this context it was agreed by the Shannon Airport Authority and the OPW, working in conjunction with Clare County Council, to commission engineering consultants to procure and manage contractors to undertake a joint topographical survey and geotechnical investigation of both the airport and town embankments with a view to determining the shortcomings in the structural integrity and consequent defensive capacity of the embankments.

The technical survey confirmed that the embankments were not of the required standard to protect the airport or the town against the 1 in 200 year event. The commission also included for the engineering consultants to examine the options for addressing the structural weaknesses in the embankments and to recommend the best solution. This study has been completed and has identified a preferred option which involves as the primary measure, the raising, widening and armouring of the front and back faces and crest of the airport embankments and the raising, widening and armouring of the crest and back face of the town embankments.

It has been further agreed between Shannon Airport Authority and the OPW in conjunction with Clare County Council that the required works to both the airport and town embankments will be brought forward as a single project to be co-funded by both agencies relative to their respective responsibilities. It is agreed also that the proposed measures to address the risk of fluvial flooding to Shannon town as set out in the Shannon river basin Flood Risk Management Plan will be incorporated into this joint project also. Clare County Council has agreed to act as the lead authority for the project.

A project steering group has been established with representatives of Shannon Airport Authority, the OPW and Clare County Council. The group's initial task will be to agree a brief for the procurement of engineering and environmental consultants to progress the design of the works and to examine all the required environmental considerations.

Estimates Process

197. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his Department's general policy on Supplementary Estimates which he plans to introduce for 2018; his views in general terms on proposed Supplementary Estimates for Votes 20, 24, 31, 32, 35, 37, 38 and 40; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49479/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Due to the scale of Government expenditure and the cash basis of Government accounting, the need for Supplementary Estimates can arise for a number of reasons, including policy decisions, timing issues and overspends. Supplementary Estimates are an important element of expenditure management, allowing for the proper alignment of resources within allocations. However, they can only be allowed where they can be accommodated within the overall fiscal parameters.

As outlined in the Expenditure Report 2019, at the end of September PRSI receipts were over €150 million ahead of profile, and it is currently projected that PRSI receipts will finish the year c. €250 million higher than projected in the Revised Estimates Volume (REV) 2018. In addition, other Departmental receipts, or appropriations-in-aid, are anticipated to finish the year ahead of profile. It is because of this additional revenue, along with higher than anticipated Exchequer tax receipts, higher-than-projected non tax revenues, and lower non-voted current expenditure, that the increase in gross voted expenditure to be provided by way of Supplementary Estimates can be accommodated.

The position in relation to Supplementary Estimates takes into account the most up to date trends in Departmental expenditure and receipts. Last week, Supplementary Estimates were presented to Dáil Éireann and referred to Committee in respect of the following Vote groups:

- Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Technical);
- Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Technical);
- Children and Youth Affairs (Substantive);
- Defence (Substantive);
- Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Substantive);
- Foreign Affairs and Trade (Substantive);
- Public Expenditure and Reform – Office of Public Works (Substantive) and Superannuation (Technical); and
- Transport, Tourism and Sport (Substantive).

The ceiling for Vote 31 (Transport, Tourism and Sport) is broadly in line with that set out in the Expenditure Report. The Supplementary Estimate for Vote 32 (Business, Enterprise and Innovation) is of a technical nature, to allow for reallocation of funding within the Vote. In relation to Vote 35 (Army Pensions) the additional expenditure required to accommodate the Supplementary Estimate for Army Pensions is expected to be offset by underspends elsewhere in the Defence Vote Group.

A provision for a 100% Christmas Bonus was made in Expenditure Report 2019. A Supplementary Estimate of €139 million is required by Vote 37 (Employment Affairs and Social Protection) in order to meet the Exchequer element of this bonus. Finally, while Vote 40 (Children and Youth Affairs) was below profile at the end of October there are pressures emerging on the Community Childcare scheme. The Department is looking to offset the increased costs arising to the greatest extent possible.

Expenditure Report 2019 outlined that substantive Supplementary Estimates would also be required for the following Vote groups:

- Education and Skills;
- Justice and Equality;
- Health; and
- Housing, Planning and Local Government.

Arrangements are being made to present Supplementary Estimates from these Vote groups to Dáil Éireann in the coming days.

Public Expenditure Policy

198. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the steps he is taking to implement the actions outlined in chapter 3 of the Budget Statement 2019 Expenditure Report relating to the responsibilities of Accounting Officers, the management and monitoring of voted allocations by Dáil Éireann and control mechanisms on public expenditure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49480/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): A number of actions have taken place since the publication of the Expenditure Report and there are plans in place for further reforms in the area of reporting and accountability into next year and beyond.

Ireland requested support under the European Commission Structural Reform Support Programme (SRSP) to advance central Government financial reporting reforms. An OECD team visited Ireland in September 2018 and conducted an assessment of the central Government Accounting Framework with the aim of identifying a road map for the implementation of financial reporting reforms. The OECD assessment includes a gap analysis between the current accounting framework and international best practice and accounting standards. The OECD's final report and recommendations for phased implementation of financial reporting reforms is due by end 2018. OECD will present the main findings and recommendations of its report in a second mission planned for January 2019. I anticipate that the implementation of this road map may also have implications for corporate governance standards and arrangements in relation to public financial management and accountability, and my Department will be keeping this area under active review in this context.

As discussed in the Expenditure Report and the Mid-Year Expenditure Report, there is a spending review process currently underway that will continue beyond 2018. The spending review looks at the trends, sustainability, efficiency and effectiveness of specific spending programmes with the goal of ensuring that public money is used in the most efficient way possible. The spending review in 2018 highlighted necessary improvements to date in identifying data gaps and the scope to further improve and identify performance metrics and indicators. A further spending review cycle will commence in 2019, where the monitoring and improvement in performance will once again be core to the review.

Work is also well underway on revisions to aspects of the Public Spending Code, in particular the technical parameters for expenditure appraisal, and it is intended to finalise these revisions and update the Public Spending Code accordingly.

Equality Proofing of Budgets

199. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the degree to which his Department continues to monitor the performance in both the public and private sectors with a view to ensuring a reasonable degree of equality throughout the economy in terms of opportunities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49484/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Sustainable public finances are essential in order to ensure that Government can provide for ongoing improvements in public services and infrastructure. Total voted expenditure in 2019 will be over €66.5 billion, with over €59.2 billion allocated to current expenditure, a c. 4 per cent increase on the current expenditure provision in 2018. This will allow Government to continue to incrementally enhance the delivery of public services, including in key areas such as health and education, for the benefit of all our citizens.

Project Ireland 2040 - the National Development Plan (NDP) and the National Planning Framework (NPF) – was launched by the Government earlier this year. The NDP sets out a 10 year vision for Ireland’s public capital infrastructure priorities over the next 10 years strictly aligned with the National Strategic Outcomes for Ireland’s new spatial strategy contained in the NPF. The NDP demonstrates the Government’s commitment to meeting Ireland’s infrastructure and investment needs over the next ten years, through a total investment estimated at €116 billion. This level of capital spending will ensure ongoing employment maintenance and creation with appropriate regional development.

Project Ireland 2040 seeks to achieve ten strategic outcomes, building around the themes of wellbeing, equality and opportunity. These ten shared priorities will ensure a consistent approach between planning objectives under the NPF and investment commitments under the NDP.

Turning to budgetary reform to support delivery of equality objectives, following a commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government to ‘develop the process of budget and policy proofing as a means of advancing equality, reducing poverty and strengthening economic and social rights’ an Equality Budgeting pilot was implemented for the 2018 budgetary cycle. The approach I have taken in introducing Equality Budgeting in Ireland is that equality budgeting is to be integrated into the existing budgetary process. Therefore, equality budgeting is contained within the existing performance budgeting framework and utilises the processes already in place.

The measures identified in the pilot related mainly to gender equality but as I outlined in my budget statement in October equality budgeting remains a priority for the coming year and I am therefore expanding the programme to further develop the gender budgeting elements, and to broaden its scope to other dimensions of equality. This expansion is being supported by an Equality Budgeting Expert Advisory Group which will bring expert knowledge on how best to progress this important work. This group is comprised of expert stakeholders such as the National Women’s Council of Ireland, IHREC, NESCC, the ESRI and a number of Government Departments.

Another element in responding to the Programme for Government commitment regarding equality budgeting has been the development of a Social Impact Assessment (SIA) Framework, which is designed to focus on policy areas that cannot easily be incorporated into the existing SWITCH model, specifically the impacts of public expenditure on recipient households. The framework allows evaluators to broaden the scope of the current SIA practice to take account of not only tax and social welfare measures, but also assess how changes in public expenditure

policy can impact on household outcomes and living standards.

Housing Issues

200. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which he and his Department have identified issues likely to cause inflation in the property market thereby excluding domestic purchasers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49486/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I should first say that responsibility for affordable housing is a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, while questions relating to general economic matters are best addressed to me in my capacity as Minister for Finance.

However, what I can say is that, following the launch of the National Development Plan in February 2018, I have established a Construction Sector Group (CSG), chaired by my Department. The role of the CSG is to ensure regular and open dialogue between Government and the construction sector in relation to issues that may impact on the successful delivery of the NDP on a value-for-money basis for the State.

The CSG brings together both key industry segments and relevant representatives from key Government Agencies and Departments. The industry bodies represented are:

- Construction Industry Federation
- Irish Congress for Trade Unions
- Building Materials Federation
- Engineers Ireland
- Society of Chartered Surveyors Ireland
- Royal Institute of the Architecture of Ireland
- Association of Consulting Engineers of Ireland
- Irish Planning Institute

The production by DPER of a Construction Sector Activity Report will be an important source of evidence to inform discussion of the CSG. A work programme will be developed to set the agenda over the next 18-24 months and will include:

- Working with industry and government bodies to (a) benchmark and improve productivity and environmental sustainability and (b) to modernise public works delivery
- Considering opportunities to introduce reforms within the sector that will help in controlling construction price inflation, improving efficiency and delivering value for money for investment
- The supply of necessary skills and measures enhancing capacity (including potential use of overseas contractors)
- Issues arising from inadequate or ineffective regulation, poor performance and systemic poor quality

While the focus of the CSG is the successful delivery of the NDP rather than the property market, I would expect the work of this group will complement any actions in the space of promoting efficiency and cost effectiveness in the construction sector which should benefit the citizen.

Questions Nos. 201 and 202 answered with Question No. 187.

Public Expenditure Policy

203. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the degree to which he remains satisfied that each Department continues to effectively operate best practice in the context of public expenditure and reform with a view to ensuring long lasting benefits for the persons and the economy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49489/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Managing the delivery of public services within allocations is a key responsibility of each Minister and Department. There are important measures in place to ensure that our budgetary targets are being met and my Department is in regular contact with all other Departments and offices to ensure that expenditure is being managed within the overall fiscal parameters. Expenditure profiles are published for each month, and the drawdown of funds from the Exchequer is monitored throughout the year and reported on against profile on a monthly basis in the Fiscal Monitor published by the Department of Finance.

The management of expenditure within the overall fiscal parameters over the last number of years has played a key role in ensuring that we have continued to meet our fiscal targets. However, given the scale of Government expenditure - €61.8 billion in aggregate for gross voted expenditure in the Revised Estimates Volume (REV) 2018 - and the cash basis of Government accounting, the need for Supplementary Estimates can arise for a number of reasons, including policy decisions, timing issues, and overspends. They are a budgetary tool that allows for the proper alignment of funding allocations with planned expenditure. Of course, they can only be allowed where they can be accommodated within the overall fiscal parameters.

As set out in the most recent Fiscal Monitor, total gross voted expenditure at end-October 2018 was €49,931 million, which is broadly on profile. Net voted expenditure of €40,142 million was €168 million below profile with net voted spending in 14 out of 17 Vote Groups being below profile.

Ensuring long-lasting benefits for citizens and the economy requires a focus on value for money. A number of measures are in place to support value for money in terms of capital and current expenditure. During 2018, my Department has engaged with a range of Departments on year two of the Spending Review process, with a view to reinforcing a systematic analysis of existing spending programmes, focusing on an assessment of efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability. In the last two years of the Spending Review process, over 50 analytical papers have been produced.

In relation to capital expenditure, the National Development Plan (NDP) has set an investment in infrastructure of almost €116 billion over the ten year period to 2027. Such a level of investment requires a strong framework to drive its implementation and increased transparency on the projects and programmes being supported by this investment. In this regard, a high-level Project Ireland 2040 Delivery Board has been established. The Project Delivery Board will continue to provide strategic direction and leadership to the NDP and National Plan-

ning Framework (NPF) implementation process. The Delivery Board will monitor and oversee implementation structures and performance across the various sectors to ensure a co-ordinated and collaborative whole of Government approach to NDP and NPF delivery.

Public Sector Staff Recruitment

204. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the full extent to date of recruitment throughout the public sector in the context of economic recovery; the expectation in respect of future recruitments throughout the sector in 2019 and thereafter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49490/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, in my role as Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, I have overarching responsibility for workforce planning in, and recruitment to, the Civil Service.

In Budget 2015, it was announced that there would be a targeted programme of recruitment into the Civil Service to address service needs and a shortfall in key skills. The Deputy will be aware that a number of open competitions have already taken place or are in the process of taking place for recruitment to the Civil Service.

I understand from the Public Appointments Service, who are the independent recruiter for the Civil Service, that since the lifting of the moratorium, approximately 9,500 civil servants from open competitions excluding temporary assignments and professional and technical posts, have been assigned to Government departments and offices across general service grades. This figure would, of course be offset by retirements and other people leaving the Civil Service.

In the Civil Service in 2018, competitions for Clerical Officer, Administrative Officer, and Assistant Principal Officer have commenced or taken place.

It is too early to say at this stage what competitions will be held for all of 2019. Factors such as the demand from Departments/offices from existing panels, consequential vacancies arising, retirements and defined skill demands will influence decisions to hold competitions and these are currently being assessed.

Public Procurement Regulations

205. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the degree to which public procurement and reform thereto continues to be part of policy with particular reference to the need to ensure maximum economic benefit while maintaining good procurement practice and indigenous resourcing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49491/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Public Procurement is a key element of the Government's Public Service Reform programme and the Office of Government Procurement (OGP) was established to lead on its implementation.

The OGP commenced sourcing operations in 2014 and, together with four key sectors (Health, Local Government, Education and Defence), has responsibility for sourcing common goods and services on behalf of the public service, leveraging the State's purchasing power. The OGP and its sector partners put in place Framework Agreements and contracts through which public sector bodies can buy these common goods and services, broken down into 16 categories of expenditure.

The reform of public procurement in Ireland is being carried out in a manner that recognises the importance of small and medium-sized enterprises to the Irish economy. The aim is to drive fair, transparent and open competition in the marketplace but also to work with business to ensure that government procurement policies are business friendly.

The OGP works with the SME industry representative bodies (including ISME, IBEC, SFA, Chambers Ireland, and CIF) as well as the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, InterTrade Ireland and Enterprise Ireland to promote the engagement of SMEs in public procurement. Given the budgetary pressures, public procurement reform can support the dual objectives of meeting our fiscal targets and enhancing public services.

All public bodies are keenly aware of the importance of maximising the value for money achievable when procuring any commonly acquired goods or services. The central procurement frameworks and contracts established by the OGP have been designed to optimise benefits to the public service through the strategic aggregation of its buying power. The OGP is continuing to refine the central procurement model in order to strengthen and improve it, in line with the Programme for Government commitments.

Brexit Issues

206. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the degree to which his Department continues to prepare for a worst case scenario arising from Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49492/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Government is under no illusions about the complexity of Brexit and is taking forward extensive and detailed Brexit preparedness and contingency planning across all Government Departments and Agencies. Contingency planning is well advanced, with all issues identified and an array of measures are under active consideration in a worst case scenario.

Within my own Department Brexit issues are coordinated by the Brexit/EU/North South Unit. The Unit supports me in my work on Brexit, leads work across the Department and its agencies, and represents the Department on the various groups that coordinate the Government's response to Brexit. This work includes the preparation of an Action Plan for responding to Brexit in all scenarios, in line with the approach being taken across Government.

Central to the Government's preparation for Brexit is the prudent management of the public finances so as to ensure the economy remains competitive in the face of future economic headwinds. Measures being taken include balancing the books, reducing our debt burden, building up the Rainy Day Fund and continuing to invest in infrastructure.

Budget 2019 sets out a number of specific measures aimed at making Ireland Brexit ready, including the introduction of a longer-term loan scheme, the Future Growth Loan Scheme for terms of 8-10 years, to provide a longer-term scheme facility of up to €300 million to support strategic capital investment for a post-Brexit environment by business at competitive rates.

It also provides increased resources of €25 million across a range of Departments and Offices based on the Brexit central case scenario; a €71 million package for the Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine and its agencies; an increase of €14 million to the allocation for the Department of Business, Enterprise & Innovation; and €5 million for the Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade to enable it to continue to address the challenges posed by Brexit across a range of headings.

Budget 2019 builds on Budget 2017 and Budget 2018 and will help to ensure that Ireland is in the best possible position to respond to the challenges - and indeed the opportunities - that Brexit will bring.

National Broadband Plan Expenditure

207. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform further to Parliamentary Question No. 859 of 6 November 2018, if his Department has costed the National Broadband Plan; the estimated cost of the National Broadband Plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49551/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment is the Sponsoring Agency for the National Broadband Plan (NBP) and it is the responsibility of that Department to undertake costings and comply with the Public Spending Code.

It would not be appropriate to comment or speculate on the estimated cost of the NBP, at this juncture in advance of the Government having considered the matter.

The Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment is currently evaluating the final tender received under the existing procurement process.

Flood Relief Schemes

208. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of the long promised Clonlara flood relief scheme following the decision of Clare County Council to withdraw its plans as a result of submissions from the National Parks and Wildlife Service and an environmentalist; the implications the delay has for the commencement and completion of this urgent scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49553/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) study carried out by the Office of Public Works resulted in the publication of Flood Risk Management Plans (FRMP's) for each river basin district studied under the programme. The FRMP for the Shannon river basin identified a potentially viable solution for the flooding problem in Springfield (Clonlara) comprising the construction of a flood defence embankment with floodgate and pumping and recommended that this be progressed to project-level development and assessment including necessary environmental assessment.

The Office of Public Works has approved funding to Clare County Council (CCC) for this project and the project is being progressed by the Council which is the contracting authority for the proposed works.

Following consideration of a number of submissions received as part of the project's Part VIII planning application, it became apparent that further information and a more detailed assessment of some environmental factors were required.

Having regard to that, and to the requirement as a Local Authority to satisfactorily address all relevant environmental matters, CCC considered it appropriate to withdraw the current Part VIII application.

On completion of the necessary further assessments, including an updated cost-benefit as-

essment, CCC will then be in a position to prepare and submit an updated planning application at the earliest juncture.

Climate Change Adaptation Plans

209. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide a timeline for the development of his Department's specific climate change targets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49573/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, my role is to ensure that the funds allocated to addressing climate change are well-managed, well-targeted and sustainable. My Department does not have specific climate change targets save for the objective of improving its energy efficiency by 33% by 2020.

A sustained whole of Government approach will be required to enable Ireland's transition to a low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by 2050. I am, together with my Department, committed to playing our part in this transition.

For example, earlier this month my Department published significant reforms to the Public Spending Code, which will, when adopted, require all Government investment projects to price future greenhouse gas emissions at the estimated cost that Irish society will have to bear in reaching our climate targets in their appraisal.

As I announced on Budget Day, Ireland has also joined the OECD Paris Collaborative on Green Budgeting. My objective in joining this initiative is to integrate environmental and climate outcome based reporting into our annual budgetary processes. This will be an iterative process but Ireland's participation in the Paris collaborative will lead to more transparency on the level and effectiveness of Ireland's climate expenditure.

The Irish Government Economic Evaluation Service (IGEES) was created to enhance the role of economics and value for money analysis in public policy making. IGEES has already conducted reviews of areas of climate related expenditure and will continue to systematically analyse the performance of programmes to gather evidence to support better informed decisions.

In addition to funding made available to Departments for tackling climate change through the annual budgetary/estimates process, the National Development Plan/Project Ireland 2040 also provides significant increased levels of funding for climate action related measures. Project Ireland 2040 commits a record level of investment for climate change initiatives over the next decade, with €21.8bn specifically allocated for Transition to a Low Carbon and Climate Resilient society (National Strategic Outcome 8).

In addition, a number of the other National Strategic Outcomes in the NDP are also directly relevant to delivering on our climate action goals - €14.5 billion is allocated to encouraging compact smart growth and a further €8.6 billion is allocated for investment in environmentally sustainable public transport while €8.8 billion is allocated for the sustainable management of water and other environmental resources. The NDP also established a €500m Climate Action Fund which will leverage investment by public and private bodies in climate action measures. The results from the first round of applications to this fund will be announced shortly.

Public Sector Pensions Data

210. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of public service pensioners who retired pre-March 2012 by public service pension reduction income bands in each of the years 2019 to 2021, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49577/18]

211. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of public service pensioners who retired post-March 2012 by public service pension reduction income bands in each of the years 2019 to 2021, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49578/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 210 and 211 together.

My understanding of the PQ's is that the Deputy is looking for the number of people who currently fall into each of the income bands that apply to the PSPR rates and how the number in bands will change as a result of the PSPR rate changes provided for under the Public Service Stability Agreement.

I have been supplied by the National Shared Services Office with the following table which sets out estimates relating to the civil service schemes for which I have direct responsibility as Minister. The NSSO has advised me that these estimates do not take account of scheduled pay increases.

PSPR Rates

PSPR in 2019	Count of Person Reference
POST-FEMPI (post-February 2012)	8,117
1: Up to €60,000	8,021
2: Any amount over €60,000 but not over €100,000	89
3: Any amount over €100,000	7
PRE-FEMPI (pre-March 2012)	12,904
1: Up to €39,000	10,777
2: Any amount over €39,000 but not over €60,000	1,834
3: Any amount over €60,000 but not over €100,000	230
4: Any amount over €100,000	63
Grand Total	21,021
PSPR in 2020	Count of Person Reference
POST-FEMPI (post-February 2012)	8,117
1: Up to €60,000	8,020
2: Any amount over €60,000 but not over €100,000	90
3: Any amount over €100,000	7
PRE-FEMPI (pre-March 2012)	12,904
1: Up to €54,000	12,286
2: Any amount over €54,000 but not over €60,000	325
3: Any amount over €60,000 but not over €100,000	230
4: Any amount over €100,000	63
Grand Total	21,021

Appendix 3 of Circular 02/2018: Pension increase policy in the public service until end-2020 (available at <https://circulars.gov.ie/pdf/circular/per/2018/02.pdf>) sets out the details of

the changes.

Public Sector Pensions

212. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to reduce the public service pension deduction beyond 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49579/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Public Service Pay and Pensions Act 2017 sets out a specific schedule of measures and dates in respect of deductions made under the FEMPI Acts including provisions in respect of the implementation of the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020 (PSSA). This scheduled further lessening of the PSPR impact on pensions will mean that from 1 January 2019 all pensions up to €39,000 per annum will be exempt from PSPR, removing some 12,000 pensioners from the impact of PSPR.

From 1 January 2020, further PSPR-amelioration will mean that all pensions up to €54,000 per annum will be exempt from PSPR, removing some 10,500 additional pensioners from the impact of PSPR.

When fully in place from the beginning of 2020, these changes will mean that the vast majority of public service retirees - approximately 97% - comprising everyone with occupational pension values up to at least €54,000, will be entirely free of PSPR. For those who retired since end-February 2012 that threshold will be even higher at €60,000.

Section 26 of the Public Service Pay and Pensions Act, 2017 requires the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform to make an order, no later than 31 December 2020, setting a date for the complete elimination of PSPR from all public service pensions.

This approach can be seen in the context that restoration of the public service pension cuts has proceeded at a faster pace than has applied to the FEMPI pay measures.

This implies that only those pensions whose associated contemporary salaries are, at a minimum, €108,000 (or €120,000 for the post-February 2012 retiree group), will bear any PSPR impact beyond the end of 2020. I can assure the Deputy that the timetable set out in the Act will be complied with.

Public Sector Pensions

213. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the estimated cost of removing the public service pension deduction in 2020 for public service pensioners that retired pre-March 2012; the estimated cost of removing the public service pension reduction in 2020 for public service pensioners that have retired post-March 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49580/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Section 24 of the Public service Pay and pensions Act, 2017 will raise the PSPR exemption threshold from €34,132 to €39,000 per annum.

This change means that all pensions up to €39,000 per annum will be exempt from PSPR in 2019, while those higher-value pensions still affected will benefit from a gain of €1,080 per annum.

This significant change in 2019 will reduce the overall PSPR yield by approx. 50% (from c. €48 million to c. €24 million), and will remove approx. 12,000 pensioners from the impact of PSPR.

From 1 January 2020, the PSPR exemption threshold will be raised from €39,000 to €54,000 per annum.

This change means that all pensions up to €54,000 per annum will be exempt from PSPR from the beginning of 2020, while those pensions still affected will benefit from a gain of €1,800 per annum.

This change in 2020 will reduce the residual PSPR yield by 50% (from c. €24 million to c. €12 million), and will remove an additional 10,500 pensioners from the impact of PSPR.

Taken together, these changes in 2019 and 2020 will mean that, from 1 January 2020 the vast majority of pre-March 2012 pensions will be exempt from PSPR. In the region of 3,500 of the highest value pre-March 2012 pensions will continue to be subjected to PSPR from then onwards. In addition to the currently legislated reduction in PSPR yield for 2020, the estimated additional cost of full abolition of PSPR in 2020 is €12m and while the bulk of this cost would relate to pre-March 2012 pensioners, a disaggregated estimate between pre and post-2012 pensioners is not currently available.

In addition to the PSPR amelioration, many public service pensioners stand to benefit from the public service pension increase policy which Government has agreed to as part of the PSSA 2018-2020.

For the duration of the Agreement, i.e. until end-2020, that policy means that there will be an effective limited return to the traditional “pay parity” link, whereby pay increases awarded to public servants are passed on proportionately to the pensions of retired public servants:

- For post-February 2012 retirees, this means that that they will receive pension increases in line with the pay increases due to their peers currently in employment over the three-year lifetime of the PSSA to end-2020.

- Pre-2012 retirees, whose pensions are already based on superior (pre-2010 salary level), will see their pensions likewise boosted during the 2018-2020 period where that is necessary to keep pace with the value of a pension awarded to a same-profile person retiring just after each particular pay increase.

Flood Risk Management

214. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the position with regard to the provision of flood relief for Springfield, Kilrea, County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49581/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) study carried out by the Office of Public Works resulted in the publication of Flood Risk Management Plans (FRMP’s) for each river basin district studied under the programme. The FRMP for the Shannon river basin identified a potentially viable solution for the flooding problem in Springfield comprising the construction of a flood defence embankment with floodgate and pumping and recommended that this be progressed to project-level development and assessment including necessary environmental assessment.

The Office of Public Works has approved funding to Clare County Council (CCC) for this project and the project is being progressed by the Council which is the contracting authority for the proposed works.

Following consideration of a number of submissions received as part of the project's Part VIII planning application, it became apparent that further information and a more detailed assessment of some environmental factors were required.

Having regard to that, and to the requirement as a Local Authority to satisfactorily address all relevant environmental matters, CCC considered it appropriate to withdraw the current Part VIII application.

On completion of the necessary further assessments, including an updated cost-benefit assessment, CCC will then be in a position to prepare and submit an updated planning application at the earliest juncture.

Schools Building Projects Status

215. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the extension to a school (details supplied) is at a standstill; the progress of the new school build including commenced and completed works; and the timeline for the completion of same. [48898/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The Deputy will probably be aware that the project to which he refers was halted earlier this year when the main contractor went into liquidation.

The project is being delivered by the local Education and Training Board (ETB). Since that time, the ETB and its Design team have been working to get an alternative contractor back on site. This involves an extensive range of work including surveying the construction already carried out; designing the works to be completed; preparing revised drawings, specifications and bills of quantities; pre-qualifying suitable contractors and tendering for a new main contractor.

The ETB worked with its Design Team to develop a programme covering all of the requirements necessary to re-start the project with processes being overlapped and/or truncated where this is feasible.

The programme to complete the project is now August 2019. The ETB has confirmed that the programme is on target to achieve this.

National Training Fund

216. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the revenue raised by increasing the national training fund levy from 0.7% to 1% and 2% and 5%, respectively. [48959/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): In Budget 2018, the National Training Fund (NTF) levy was increased by 0.1 per cent in 2018 to 0.8 per cent – providing over €47m of additional investment in the Higher and Further Education Sectors. On foot of decisions taken in Budget 2019, the levy will rise to 0.9 per cent in 2019 (providing an additional €69 million of additional investment in higher and further education and training) and to 1 per cent in 2020.

The net additional expenditure available from increases in the levy is lower than the gross revenue yield as, under the fiscal rules, the calculation of such increases must take account of the increased costs which arise for public sector employers.

As requested by the Deputy, the following table provides indicative estimates of the full year yield from different rates of National Training Fund contributions using 2018 as the base year.

	2018 Estimated Revenue from different NTF levy rates	Estimated Amount from an Increase in 0.70% NTF levy rate
0.70%	€503m	
1.00%	€719m	€216m
2.00%	€1,438m	€935m
5.00%	€3,595m	€3,092m

Autism Support Services

217. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of children in Dublin 7 who are on a waiting list to access an ASD unit. [49523/18]

218. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of children in Dublin 1 who are on a waiting list to access an ASD unit. [49524/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I propose to take Questions Nos. 217 and 218 together.

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. 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 National Council for Special Education (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.

Parents/guardians who may need advice or are experiencing difficulties in locating a school placement should contact their local Special Education Needs Organiser (SENO) who can assist in identifying an appropriate educational placement for their child. Contact details are available on www.ncse.ie.

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.

124 special schools provide specialist education for those students with the most complex special educational needs, including students diagnosed with ASD.

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.

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 this issue in areas where the NCSE is of the opinion that there is insufficient capacity in relation to the provision of education for children with special educational needs.

Section 8 of the Act, which will commence from Monday 3rd December 2018, will provide the Minister with a power, after a process of consultation with the 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.

The NCSE is engaging with the education partners and will 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.

Autism Support Services

219. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the supports available for a 16 year old autistic student who has specific personal needs and requires home tuition (details supplied). [48882/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The purpose of my Department's Home Tuition Grant Scheme is to provide funding towards the provision of a compensatory educational service for children who, for a number of reasons such as chronic illness, are unable to attend school. The scheme also provides a compensatory educational service for children with special educational needs seeking an educational placement. Provision is also made for early intervention for children with autism.

Home tuition is provided as an interim provision only and should not be regarded as an optional alternative to a place in school.

Further details on the Home Tuition Grant Scheme, including the annual Circular and associated Application Forms are available at <https://www.education.ie/en/Parents/Services/Home-Tuition/>

My Department has not received a home tuition application for the person referred to by the Deputy for this school year.

As the matter raised by the Deputy refers to a particular student, I have arranged for the Deputy's question to be forwarded to the National Council for Special Education for their attention and direct reply.

SOLAS Training and Education Programmes Data

220. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of safe pass tutor accreditation programmes run by SOLAS in each of the years 2014 to 2017 and to date in 2018. [48899/18]

221. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of safe pass tutor accreditation programmes applications made to SOLAS to date in 2018; the number still to be approved; when the next course will be held in view of the fact that there are only 149 safe pass tutors in Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48900/18]

222. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of persons who applied to SOLAS for the safe pass tutor accreditation programmes in each of the years 2014 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48909/18]

227. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of persons who have taken part in and successfully completed the SOLAS safe pass tutor accreditation programmes in each of the years 2014 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48864/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 220 to 222, inclusive, and 227 together.

I understand from SOLAS that to date a total of 499 people have been approved and trained to be approved SOLAS Safe Pass tutors. Safe Pass tutor applications are processed and approved on an ongoing basis. SOLAS is satisfied that the current and planned provision of SOLAS Safe Pass tutors has the capacity to meet the current and expected demand for Safe Pass training courses nationwide.

It is important for the continuing success of the Safe Pass Health and Safety Awareness programme for SOLAS approved tutors to have the necessary experience and qualifications to deliver the programme. Consequently, SOLAS in partnership with the relevant stakeholders has developed detailed approval criteria to satisfy the requirement to be a Safe Pass tutor. All applications received are reviewed and considered by an independent Approvals Committee whose membership includes the Construction Industry Federation and the Irish Congress of Trade Unions.

Of the 41 Safe Pass Tutor Accreditation applications to date in 2018, 9 applications have been approved and a further 10 are scheduled to go before the next committee in December 2018. A decision on the date of the next course will be made when the number of approved applications is known.

The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the attached tabular statement.

PQs re Safe Pass Tutor Accredited Programmes

Year	Participants in Safe Pass Tutor Accreditation Programme	Safe Pass Tutor Courses
2014	0	0
2015	0	0
2016	3*	0
2017	12	2
2018	9	1
Total	24	3

Year	New Safe Pass Tutor Applications	Safe Pass Tutor Applications Approved
2018	41	9

Year	New Safe Pass Tutor Applications	Safe Pass Tutor Applications Approved
2014	0	0
2015	0	0
2016	67	3
2017	72	12
2018	41	9

*3 participants were approved in 2016 but did not attend a course until 2017 due to insufficient numbers.

Education and Training Boards Administration

223. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the details of a series of matters relating to an invitation to tender for the supply of goods to a further education and training centre in County Tipperary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48915/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): The reply to Question No. 101 of 7 November set out the position regarding the tender process leading to the award of the contract in question. However, my Department has now been informed by the relevant Education and Training Board that the information provided in that reply, in fact, related to a tender process advertised in February 2018 rather than the date referred to by the Deputy. In that context, I understand that the invitation to tender with the deadline for response referred to by the Deputy was withdrawn before the deadline was reached and a new tender process was initiated in February 2018.

On this basis, my Department is seeking further information as a matter of urgency from the ETB in question regarding the conduct of the original tender process and will provide the Deputy with the information he has requested as soon as possible.

Further Education and Training Programmes Fees

224. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason Irish citizens living outside the EU for over three years must pay non-EU rates of fees for undergraduate courses; if his attention has been drawn to the case of a person (details supplied). [48921/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): In general, with regard to payment of non-EU rates of fees, the criteria for eligibility are detailed in the Student Support Act 2011. Section 14 (4) states that for the purposes of the Act, a student is a person who has been resident in the State for at least 3 years out of the previous 5 years. If a student has not been resident in the state for three of the previous five years then they do not qualify under the Act for EU fee rates.

However, the specific case raised by the Deputy refers to a person attending a further education college rather than a higher education institution. As a result, my officials are examining the circumstances in this case with the relevant Education and Training Board. I will respond to the Deputy directly once matters have been clarified.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

225. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if SNA support will be provided for a person (details supplied); when SNA support will be made available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48924/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible for allocating a quantum of Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support for each school annually taking into account the assessed care needs of children qualifying for SNA support enrolled in the school.

The NCSE allocates SNA support to schools in accordance with the criteria set out in Department Circular 0030/2014, which is available on my Department's website at www.education.ie, in order that students who have care needs can access SNA support as and when it is needed.

In considering applications for SNA support for individual pupils, the NCSE take account of the pupils' needs and consider the resources available to the school to identify whether additionality is needed or whether the school might reasonably be expected to meet the needs of the pupils from its current level of resources.

SNAs are not allocated to individual children but to schools as a school based resource.

SNA allocations to all schools can change from year to year as children with care needs leave the school, as new children with care needs enrol in a school and as children develop more independent living skills and their care needs diminish over time.

My Department's policy is to ensure that every child who is assessed as needing SNA support will receive access to such support.

By the end of this year, there will be a total of 15,000 Special Needs Assistants working in our schools, a 42% increase on 2011.

As this question relates to a particular child, I have referred the question to the NCSE for their direct reply. I do not have a role in making determinations in individual cases.

Teacher Supply

226. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the concessions that will be made in relation to students at a school (details supplied) that are due to sit the leaving certificate exam in the summer of 2019 have been missing a teacher for a subject for the first full term of 2018 due to a vacant position. [48928/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I am very aware of the issue of having an adequate supply of teachers in our schools. My Department has a number of measures aimed at addressing the current challenges for teacher supply. A Steering Group on Teacher Supply, chaired by the Secretary General of my Department, was established in March 2018. The membership of the group includes nominees of the Department, HEIs providing primary and post primary initial teacher education, the Teaching Council, the HEA, primary and post primary school management bodies, as well as an independent expert. Addressing the issue of teacher supply is complex and involves consideration of a wide range of issues including: initial teacher education policy, provision, funding and support; data/research requirements; policies and arrangements for schools and teachers that impact on teacher mobility/supply and promotion of the teaching profession. Arising from the work of the steering group an Action Plan for Teacher Supply was published earlier this month with actions identified under

four policy headings: Data/Research; Higher Education; Promotion of the teaching profession; Policies and arrangements impacting on teacher supply. The Steering Group will oversee the implementation of the Action Plan which aims to address the current challenges in Teacher Supply and ensure adequate supply of appropriately qualified teachers into the future.

In relation to concessions for students in the school referred to, that are due to sit the leaving certificate examination in 2019, some flexibility may be possible around the completion dates for practical coursework. The school in question should contact the State Examinations Commission (SEC) directly for advice in this regard. No further concessions can be granted in relation to marking of candidates' examination work as ultimately all candidates must be subject to the same marking procedures and standards. This is consistent with one of the underlying principles of the operation of the State Examinations in that the SEC must apply marking schemes uniformly to all candidates in the interests of inter-candidate equity.

Question No. 227 answered with Question No. 220.

Youth Employment Initiative

228. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to set out the annual amount allocated to Ireland under the youth employment initiative in each year since it commenced; the amount that was expended in each year subsequently and to date in 2018; the projects that have been allocated funding in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48876/18]

229. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to set out the annual amount allocated to Ireland under the European Social Fund education and training ErasmusPro and the Youth Employment Initiative budgets for 2014 to 2018 by employment and training, apprenticeships of young persons; and the amount that was expended in each of the areas in each of the years 2014 to 2017 and to date in 2018. [48877/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):
I propose to take Questions Nos. 228 and 229 together.

The Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) is integrated into European Social Fund (ESF) programming as a dedicated priority axis within the ESF Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning 2014-2020 (PEIL). The specific YEI allocation for Ireland of €68 m (for 2014 and 2015) is matched by equal amounts from our ESF allocation and from the Exchequer, giving an overall allocation of €204m. Ireland was not eligible for an additional allocation under the second YEI allocation arising from the mid-term revision of the Multi-annual Financial Framework in 2017.

All ESF activities, including YEI activities, are fully funded up-front by the Exchequer with the EU (ESF/YEI) funding being claimed in arrears. Seven activities were originally selected for YEI funding namely, the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance (BTWEA); JobBridge; JobPlus; Momentum; Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP); Tús; and Youthreach. Improvements in the rate of youth unemployment coupled with the discontinuance of the JobBridge and Momentum schemes had consequences for the expenditure expected on YEI activities. Consequently, the Programme Monitoring Committee agreed to the inclusion of the Community Training Centres; the Defence Forces Employment Support Scheme (DFESS) and the Youth Employment Support Scheme (YESS) under the YEI. At the same time, the Committee agreed to the removal of the Tús, JobBridge and the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme from the YEI, having unsuccessfully explored the potential to use

Simplified Cost Option models and/or in the light of audit trail difficulties. The current gross allocations under the YEI for the activities are:

-	Amount
(BTWEA) Scheme	€4,647,870
JobsPlus	€7,992,000
Youthreach	€101,156,387
Momentum	€13,800,000
CTCs	€60,000,000
DFESS	€840,000
YESS	€16,000,000
Priority Totals	€204,436,257

The first payment application in respect of the PEIL, which has recently been submitted to the European Commission includes €112 m in respect of the YEI. The ESF authorities will ensure that sufficient payment applications are submitted to fully drawdown the YEI funding allocations.

With regard to Erasmus PRO, Leargas has advised that to date, €780,430 has been awarded to 5 projects representing 110 learner mobilities broken down as follows:

- 2015 awarded € 25,391 for 4 long term learner mobilities;
- 2016 awarded € 62,836 for 10 long term learner mobilities;
- 2017 awarded € 157,918 for 24 long term learner mobilities;
- 2017 awarded € 169,800 for 27 long term learner mobilities; and
- 2018 awarded € 364,485 for 45 long term learner mobilities

In addition Leargas currently had 1 project application on assessment for the October 2018 round which if included would bring the total to €880,283 in respect of 122 learner mobilities.

Skills Development

230. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to set out the number of businesses that availed of enterprise training, workforce learning and upskilling services from Skillnet Ireland in each of the years 2010 to 2017 and to date in 2018; the breakdown in participation in percentage terms by firm size (details supplied); the annual allocation to Skillnet Ireland in each of the years 2010 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and the amount announced in budget 2019 in tabular form. [48942/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): Skillnets Ltd, established in 1999, is an enterprise-led body funded through the National Training Fund (NTF) to provide companies with new opportunities to develop relevant, effective answers to their training and development needs.

It operates with enterprise and co-funds training networks in a range of sectors and/or regions throughout the country. The Training Networks Programme (TNP) funds demand led training through a network model, where companies from networks representing specific industry sectors or geographical regions co-operate to deliver training programmes specifically designed and adapted to current market requirements. This ensures projects remain enterprise-

led and aligned with their needs.

The following table contains details of the funding allocation to Skillnet Ireland for the period 2010 to date.

-	Allocation €'m
2010	13.6
2011	11.6
2012	14.5
2013	14.5
2014	15.7
2015	16.2
2016	16.2
2017	18.2
2018	21.7
2019 (Budget 2019)	28.0

The additional information requested is being compiled and will be forwarded directly to the Deputy.

School Attendance Data

231. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to set out the number of children of school going age that are experiencing reduced hours during the school day. [48972/18]

232. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to set out the number of post-primary students that are experiencing reduced hours during the school day. [48973/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I propose to take Questions Nos. 231 and 232 together.

The position of my Department is that all pupils who are enrolled in a school should attend school for the full day, unless exempted from doing so for exceptional circumstances, such as medical reasons.

Reduced timetables should not be used as a behavioural management technique, or as a de facto suspension or expulsion.

Where schools apply a shorter school day in relation to a child, such arrangements should only be put in place in exceptional circumstances in order to assist a pupil to return to a school, where a pupil has been experiencing an absence due to a medical or behavioural related condition.

Any such arrangement should be a transitional arrangement, which is designed to assist the reintegration of a pupil to a school environment.

In making any such arrangements, school authorities should be mindful of the best interests of the child and of the child's right to a full day in school. Schools should seek the advice of the National Educational Psychology Service before implementing such arrangements.

My Department does not hold the data requested by the Deputy.

The Education (Welfare) Act 2000 requires a school principal to inform an educational welfare officer in writing where a student is suspended from a recognised school for a period of not less than 6 days. The school is also obliged to record and maintain attendance records and to report to Tusla, unauthorised non-attendance above the threshold of 20 days, or where the school principal is of the opinion that a student is not attending school regularly. This is done currently through the School Returns mechanism to TUSLA Educational Welfare Services.

Developing a Code of Behaviour: Guidelines for Schools (NEWB, 2008) states that “*Exclusion of a student for part of the school day, as a sanction, or asking parents to keep a child from school, as a sanction, is a suspension. Any exclusion imposed by a school is a suspension, and should follow the guidelines relating to a suspension*”.

Section 29 of the Education Act 1998 makes provision for a parent to take an appeal against a school in relation to suspension of a student. In certain circumstances reduced timetables could be appealed by a parent under this provision.

I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department is engaging with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and TUSLA Educational Welfare Service on the matter of reduced timetables, with a view to examining options which can be taken to address the issues raised.

Minor Works Scheme Payments

233. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 347 of 6 November 2018, when the payment will issue to schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49009/18]

265. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when funding will be issued to schools (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49290/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I propose to take Questions Nos. 233 and 265 together.

The Minor Works Grant 2018/2019 will be paid this week to all primary schools throughout the country.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

234. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address a matter regarding special educational needs support for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49032/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I understand that the Deputy's question relates to Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible for allocating a quantum of Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support for each school annually taking into account the assessed care needs of children qualifying for SNA support enrolled in the school.

The NCSE allocates SNA support to schools in accordance with the criteria set out in Department Circular 0030/2014, which is available on my Department's website at www.education.ie, in order that students who have care needs can access SNA support as and when it is

needed.

In considering applications for SNA support for individual pupils, the NCSE take account of the pupils' needs and consider the resources available to the school to identify whether additionality is needed or whether the school might reasonably be expected to meet the needs of the pupils from its current level of resources.

SNAs are not allocated to individual children but to schools as a school based resource.

SNA allocations to all schools can change from year to year as children with care needs leave the school, as new children with care needs enrol in a school and as children develop more independent living skills and their care needs diminish over time.

My Department's policy is to ensure that every child who is assessed as needing SNA support will receive access to such support.

By the end of this year, there will be a total of 15,000 Special Needs Assistants working in our schools, a 42% increase on 2011.

As this question relates to a particular child, I have referred the question to the NCSE for their direct reply. I do not have a role in making determinations in individual cases.

Speech and Language Therapy Services are under the remit of my colleague, the Minister for Health and the service is provided by the Health Service Executive (HSE). Questions in relation to the provision of speech and language therapy services should therefore be referred to the Department of Health and the HSE.

School Transport Provision

235. **Deputy Michael Lowry** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to set out the status of an application by a person (details supplied) for a special education school transport grant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49033/18]

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

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

The purpose of the School Transport Scheme for Children with Special Educational Needs is, having regard to available resources, to support the transport to and from school of children with special educational needs arising from a diagnosed disability.

Children are generally eligible for school transport where they satisfy the Department's criteria and are attending the nearest placement that is resourced to meet their special educational needs.

Eligibility for school transport is determined following consultation with the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) through its network of Special Education Needs Organisers. Decisions regarding transport eligibility are based on the prevailing circumstances at the time of first enrolment.

School Transport Section is currently consulting with the NCSE regarding the additional information submitted and they will liaise directly with the family when this process is finalised.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

236. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to outline the reason a person (details supplied) cannot be assigned a special needs assistant in school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49034/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible for allocating a quantum of Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support for each school annually taking into account the assessed care needs of children qualifying for SNA support enrolled in the school.

The NCSE allocates SNA support to schools in accordance with the criteria set out in Department Circular 0030/2014, which is available on my Department's website at www.education.ie, in order that students who have care needs can access SNA support as and when it is needed.

In considering applications for SNA support for individual pupils, the NCSE take account of the pupils' needs and consider the resources available to the school to identify whether additionality is needed or whether the school might reasonably be expected to meet the needs of the pupils from its current level of resources.

SNAs are not allocated to individual children but to schools as a school based resource.

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My Department's policy is to ensure that every child who is assessed as needing SNA support will receive access to such support.

By the end of this year, there will be a total of 15,000 Special Needs Assistants working in our schools, a 42% increase on 2011.

As this question relates to a particular child, I have referred the question to the NCSE for their direct reply. I do not have a role in making determinations in individual cases.

Special Educational Needs Data

237. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to set out the number of ASD units at both primary and post-primary schools by county in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49044/18]

240. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to outline the provisions in Dublin for the post-primary educational needs of children on the autism spectrum; and the post-primary school provision available for children with autism or on the autism spectrum in the Dublin area. [49049/18]

241. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to set out the number of ASD units within schools in Dublin 24. [49050/18]

248. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to outline the provisions for children on the autism spectrum in terms of their post-primary education; the schools in the Dublin 6, 6W, 12, 14 and 16 areas that will accept pupils on the autism spectrum; and the provisions in place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49084/18]

249. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to outline the reason that there is only one ASD unit for children on the autism spectrum out of 7,000 classroom places in the Dublin 6, 6W and 12 postal codes. [49086/18]

251. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to set out the number of ASD units there are in schools in the Dublin 24 area; and the schools involved. [49090/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I propose to take Questions Nos. 237, 240, 241, 248, 249 and 251 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. The placement decision is based on a recommendation contained within a professional assessment.

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 (SENOs), 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.

The NCSE is aware of emerging need in South Dublin from year to year, and where special provision, including special class provision, is required, it is planned and established to meet that need. This process is ongoing.

The number of ASD special classes in Co. Dublin have increased from 66 in 2011/2012 to 197 in 2018/2019. This includes 34 ASD classes in the areas referred to by the Deputy; 5 Early Intervention, 23 Primary and 6 Post-primary ASD classes.

Details of all special classes for children with special educational needs are available on www.ncse.ie.

While it is not always possible or practical that a special class placement would be available in a child's local school, the NCSE has informed my Department that, in general, they are satisfied that there are sufficient ASD special class placements to meet existing demand nationally. From time to time, the Council identifies local areas where additional provision is required. In those circumstances, SENOs work with the schools and families concerned to resolve the issues involved.

My Department is aware that the establishment of special class provision in some schools and communities can be challenging.

The Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018 when commenced will assist in addressing this issue in areas where the NCSE is of the opinion that there is insufficient education provision for children with special educational needs.

Section 8 of the Act, which will commence from Monday 3rd December 2018, will provide the Minister with a power, after a process of consultation with the 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.

Teacher Training Provision

238. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to outline the requirements placed on teachers at primary school level to train or qualify in the education of children with autism spectrum disorder in advance of qualifying as teachers and in advance of teaching children with autism in view of the numbers of children with autism in Dublin; and the number of primary and post-primary school teachers that hold qualifications specifically aimed at the education of such children. [49045/18]

246. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to outline the modules in place in teacher training colleges taken by student teachers with regard to the provision of the special educational requirements of children on the autism spectrum. [49079/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I propose to take Questions Nos. 238 and 246 together.

The Teaching Council is the statutory body with responsibility for professional standards and regulation of the teaching profession. Under Section 38 of the Teaching Council Act, all initial teacher education programmes are subject to review and accreditation by the Teaching Council, in accordance with the Criteria and Guidelines for Programme Providers (published in 2011 and revised in March 2017). In accordance with these Criteria and Guidelines, inclusive education is a mandatory component for all students in ITE. Inclusive education encompasses education of children with special educational needs, including autism.

The learning outcomes of ITE programmes also reflect the need for the teacher to be able to conduct a systematic, holistic assessment of learner needs; to apply knowledge of the individual potential of students, their disposition towards learning and their backgrounds, identities and learning styles to their teaching; to set clear, challenging and achievable expectations for pupils; to evaluate learner progress; to act as an advocate for students, referring students for educational support as required and participating in the provision of that support, amongst other relevant outcomes.

The Teaching Council is currently carrying out a review of the impact of the current programmes, with a view to amending the Criteria and Guidelines before the next round of accreditation commences in 2020.

A recently published report from the National Council for Special Education on *Initial Teacher Education for Inclusion: Phase 1 and 2* (NCSE Research Report No. 26), found that there is in general much good practice related to inclusive education in ITE, particularly in relation to the fostering of positive attitudes to inclusion, while also noting scope for further alignment between theory and practice, in particular as between student placement and the university

experience. These findings will be considered by the Teaching Council in the course of its work.

There are also a range of in-service professional development supports provided to teachers by the Department. Since March 2017, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) Support Service, has a remit to develop schools' capacity to include students with special educational needs and to promote a continuum of educational provision which is inclusive and responsive.

The role of the NCSE Support Service includes enhancing the quality of learning and teaching in relation to special educational provision. The service co-ordinates, develops and delivers a range of professional development initiatives and support structures for school personnel working with students with special educational needs in mainstream primary and post-primary schools, special schools and special classes.

In addition to the above, the Department provides funding support for teachers to expand their capacity through courses at the Middletown Centre for Autism and through funded post-graduate provision at a number of higher education institutions for teachers involved in Learning Support & Special Education.

Schools Data

239. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to set out the number of new schools that have been built in the Dublin area at primary and post-primary level since 2012; and the number that have incorporated ASD units for children on the autism spectrum including extensions and additional capacity buildings. [49046/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The information requested by the Deputy is being collated by my Department and will be forwarded to him when compiled.

Questions Nos. 240 and 241 answered with Question No. 237.

Schools Building Projects Status

242. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to set out the status of an application for a new school building (details supplied) in County Donegal; the timeline for the delivery of this school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49060/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The major building project for the school to which the Deputy refers is at an advanced stage of architectural planning, Stage 2b – Detailed Design, which includes the applications for Planning Permission, Fire Cert and Disability Access Cert and the preparation of tender documents. All statutory approvals have been obtained.

The Stage 2(b) submission for the project has been reviewed by my Department and comments have issued to the school and its Design Team.

The Design Team is currently working on a submission to my Department outlining the steps required to achieve compliance with Part L of the Building Regulations 2017 (NZEB). On receipt and review of this submission, my Department will revert to school with regard to the further progression of the project at that time.

Schools Building Projects Status

243. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to set out the status of an application for a new school building (details supplied); the timeline for the delivery of same; when the project will go to construction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49062/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The major building project for the school referenced by the Deputy is currently at Stage 1 of the Architectural Planning Process. A Design Team was appointed to this project in June 2017.

Stage 1 is the Preliminary Design Stage where the Design Team analyse all the constraints of the site, develop a preferred design option and cost plan. A Stakeholders meeting was held on 10th October last where the design proposals were presented by the school and its Design Team. Following a detailed review of the proposals presented at that meeting the Design Team was asked to revert with an Addendum Report.

Upon satisfactory completion of Stage 1 my Department will be in a position to authorise the project to progress to the next stages of Architectural Planning which includes detailed design, obtaining statutory approvals and the preparation of tender documents.

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

Summer Works Scheme Applications

244. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to outline the status of applications for school building improvements and extension to the building made by a school (details supplied); the timeline for the necessary improvements to be carried out at this school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49064/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that my Department approved funding under the Summer Works Scheme (SWS) for a Category 3 project, to provide for a mechanical upgrade (heating system). This was approved following a review process in June last and the school was advised of the position.

I can also confirm that the most recent application under the Additional School Accommodation scheme was processed by my Department and the school was advised of the outcome in August 2017.

School Accommodation Provision

245. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to set out the status of applications for school building improvements and extension to the building made by a school (details supplied); the timeline for the necessary improvements to be carried out at this school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49065/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I can confirm that my Department received an application for additional accommodation from the school referred to by the Deputy last month. The application is being processed and my Department will be in contact with the school management authority once a decision is finalised.

Question No. 246 answered with Question No. 238.

Autism Support Services

247. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the plight of a pupil with autism that will shortly complete primary school and whose parent has applied and been refused (details supplied); and the options available to this pupil and others on the autism spectrum. [49082/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): It is the policy of my Department that all children with Special Educational Needs, including those with Autism, can have access to an education appropriate to their needs, preferably in school settings through the primary and post primary school network.

Such placements facilitate access to individualised education programmes which may draw from a range of appropriate educational interventions, delivered by fully qualified professional teachers, with the support of Special Needs Assistants and the appropriate school curriculum.

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 a recommendation contained within a professional assessment in consultation with the NCSE.

Students enrolling in specialised placements must have a report from a relevant professional or team of professionals stating that:

- S/he has a disability (in line with the designation of the special placement in question) and
- S/he has significant learning needs that require the support of a specialised setting and the reasons why this is the case.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible for organising and planning provision for children with Special Educational Needs, including the establishment of special classes in mainstream primary and post primary schools.

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.

124 special schools also provide specialist education for those students with complex special educational needs, including students diagnosed with ASD.

The NCSE is aware of emerging need in Dublin from year to year, and where special provision, including special class provision, is required, it is planned and established to meet that need. This process is ongoing.

The NCSE advises parents to seek to enrol their child, by applying in writing, to the school/s of their choice as early as possible.

Where parents have been unsuccessful in enrolling their child in a school placement, for the 2019/20 school year, they should update their local SENO to inform the planning process. Contact details are available on www.ncse.ie .

As the Deputy has not provided adequate details I cannot comment on the specific case to which you refer. I would advise the Deputy to refer the specific case, including details in relation to the child, to the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) for their attention and

direct reply.

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 this issue in areas where the NCSE is of the opinion that there is insufficient capacity in relation to the provision of education for children with special educational needs.

Section 8 of the Act, which will commence from Monday 3rd December 2018, will provide the Minister with a power, after a process of consultation with the 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.

The NCSE is engaging with the education partners and will 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.

Questions Nos. 248 and 249 answered with Question No. 237.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

250. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if special needs assistance access to a student (details supplied) will be reinstated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49089/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible for allocating a quantum of Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support for each school annually taking into account the assessed care needs of children qualifying for SNA support enrolled in the school.

The NCSE allocates SNA support to schools in accordance with the criteria set out in Department Circular 0030/2014, which is available on my Department's website at www.education.ie, in order that students who have care needs can access SNA support as and when it is needed.

In considering applications for SNA support for individual pupils, the NCSE take account of the pupils' needs and consider the resources available to the school to identify whether additionality is needed or whether the school might reasonably be expected to meet the needs of the pupils from its current level of resources.

SNAs are not allocated to individual children but to schools as a school based resource.

SNA allocations to all schools can change from year to year as children with care needs leave the school, as new children with care needs enrol in a school and as children develop more independent living skills and their care needs diminish over time.

My Department's policy is to ensure that every child who is assessed as needing SNA support will receive access to such support.

By the end of this year, there will be a total of 15,000 Special Needs Assistants working in our schools, a 42% increase on 2011.

As this question relates to a particular child, I have referred the question to the NCSE for

their direct reply. I do not have a role in making determinations in individual cases.

Question No. 251 answered with Question No. 237.

Schools Data

252. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of school places there are available in the Dublin 24 area at both primary and post-primary level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49091/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department does not hold the specific information to which he refers.

More detailed information relating to enrolment levels in all primary and post schools nationwide is available on the Department's website at the following link:

<https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/Data-on-Individual-Schools>.

In relation to school admissions, parents can choose which school to apply to and where the school has places available, the pupil should be admitted. However, in schools where there are more applicants than places available, a selection process may be necessary. This selection process and the enrolment policy on which it is based must be non-discriminatory and must be applied fairly in respect of all applicants. However, this may result in some pupils not obtaining a place in the school of their first choice. The Deputy will note however that the selection process procedures and enrolment policy are the responsibility of the individual school authorities.

The Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018, which was signed by the President on the 18th July 2018, is an important piece of legislation which will introduce a more parent-friendly, equitable and consistent approach to how school admissions policy operates for the almost 4,000 primary and post-primary schools in this country and a fair and balanced school admission process for all pupils.

The Deputy will be aware that a new post-primary school for the Firhouse, Dublin 24 area opened in interim accommodation in September 2018. I can confirm that the school opened with an enrolment of 43 pupils.

I also wish to advise the Deputy that my Department's capital investment programme provides for devolved funding for additional classrooms for existing schools where an immediate enrolment need has been identified.

School Accommodation

253. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of progress on the renewal of a lease held by a school (details supplied) to secure permanent stabilising tenancy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49106/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I can confirm that there is a lease in place up to 2024 for the school building occupied by the school referred to by the Deputy. There are no plans to change the current arrangements regarding the use of the school building.

School Transport Provision

254. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 83 of 9 October 2018, when a school transport service will be provided for a person (details supplied); when contact will be made with the family as they have received no correspondence from Bus Éireann regarding same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49148/18]

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

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

School Transport Section has reviewed the background to this case and has requested Bus Éireann to issue a school transport ticket to the pupil in question.

School Funding

255. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of funding for a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49150/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): My Department has not received any direct communication from the Patron or Board of Management of the school referred to by the Deputy.

My Department has been made aware that the Patron has written to the Board of Management relating to the matter. My Department awaits a communication from the Board of Management in this regard.

Schools Building Projects

256. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the schools building unit has considered a proposal from a school (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49153/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The Deputy will be aware that a building project for the school in question is included in my Department's 6 year Construction Programme. My Department is currently considering the school's proposal as well as the demographic need in the area and will be in further contact with the school authority when this process has been finalised.

Sustainable Development Strategy

257. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will consider introducing a pilot programme (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49154/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): My Department has published a National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development which aims to ensure that education contributes to sustainable development by equipping learners with the relevant knowledge, the key dispositions and skills and the values that will motivate and empower them throughout their lives to become informed active citizens who take action for a more sustainable future.

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

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

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

School Staff

258. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the school principals of a school (details supplied) since the foundation of the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49171/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The principal teachers of the school referred to by the Deputy were recruited and employed by the managerial authority of the school. They have been paid on payrolls operated by my Department on behalf of the managerial authority. The information required for their payment is provided by the managerial authority on standardised forms submitted to my Department.

The main purpose for which my Department requires the personal data provided is the correct payment of the salary. It is also required for the correct payment of pension at retirement.

Under the terms of the General Data Protection Regulation, the information as requested by the Deputy cannot be provided by my Department.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

259. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if consideration will be given to extending the school year for children with special needs (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49173/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): My Department's July Provision Grant Scheme provides funding for an extended school year for children with severe/profound general learning disabilities or children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). The scheme was developed to reduce potential regression in learning associated with these specific

categories of special education needs over the summer holidays.

Under the scheme, the school year of participating schools is extended by four weeks in July.

Each year eligible schools are invited to participate in the Programme. Participation in the scheme by the school is voluntary and subject to the availability of suitably qualified personnel in July. Staffing resources for the JEP, i.e. teachers and SNAs are the same as those provided for the participating children during the normal school year.

Where school-based provision is not feasible, eligible students may be granted 40 hours home-based tuition (10 hours for each of the four weeks). The qualification standard for home based tuition reflects that required in a school environment.

The Deputy may be aware that the National Council for Special Education's Policy Advice on Educational Provision for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (2016) included a review of the July Provision Grant Scheme.

In the course of preparing the advice, the NCSE consulted widely with a range of stakeholders including parents, teachers, academics, experts, psychologists, HSE officials and others.

The NCSE also reviewed relevant national and international research.

The Policy advice is available on the NCSE's website.

My Department has convened an Implementation Group with representatives of the NCSE, NEPS, the Inspectorate and representatives from other Departments and agencies to ensure that the Report's recommendations are fully and appropriately considered.

There are no plans to change the July provision scheme until this work is complete.

School Enrolments Data

260. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of junior infants places available in the Ballincollig catchment area for 2019; the projected enrolments; and the plans to accommodate a shortfall in places. [49176/18]

261. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of junior infant places planned to be available for the next school year in each of the schools in the Ballincollig catchment area in tabular form. [49177/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I propose to take Questions Nos. 260 and 261 together.

I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department does not hold the specific information to which he refers. More detailed information relating to enrolment levels in all primary and post-primary schools nationwide is available on the Department's website at the following link:

<https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/Data-on-Individual-Schools>.

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 announced plans for the establishment of 42 new schools over the next four years (2019 to 2022). This announcement follows nationwide demographic exercises carried out by my Department into the future need for primary and post-primary schools across the country and the 4-year horizon will enable increased lead-in times for planning and delivery of the necessary infrastructure.

In addition to the new schools announced, there will be a need for further school accommodation in other areas in the future. 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.

While the announcement did not include a new primary school in the Ballincollig school planning area, two new primary schools were announced for the adjoining school planning areas as follows:

- a new 8 classroom primary school to serve the Glasheen_CorkCity/Pouladuff school planning area to be established in 2019; and
- a new 16 classroom primary school to serve the Carrigaline school planning area to be established in 2020.

My Department's responsibility is to provide sufficient accommodation to meet 20,000 new and replacement school places each year, to ensure that every child has a school place. It is open to an individual school to apply for accommodation under the additional accommodation scheme if the school does not have sufficient capacity to meet school places.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

262. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a person (details supplied) has been refused a place at a local national school which they had been enrolled in prior to commencement particularly when this school has a special unit for special needs; his views on whether this decision is discriminatory and entirely unfair refusing this young person a place to begin primary school education in view of the facts provided; and if he will review this case accordingly with the school. [49240/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): It is the policy of my Department that all children with Special Educational Needs can have access to an education appropriate to their needs, preferably in school settings through the primary and post primary school network.

Such placements facilitate access to individualised education programmes which may draw from a range of appropriate educational interventions, delivered by fully qualified professional

teachers, with the support of Special Needs Assistants and the appropriate school curriculum.

Some children with special educational needs 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 in consultation with the National Council for Special Education (NCSE).

Students enrolling in specialised placements must have a report from a relevant professional or team of professionals stating that:

- S/he has a disability (in line with the designation of the special placement in question) and
- S/he has significant learning needs that require the support of a specialised setting and the reasons why this is the case.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) plans and co-ordinates the provision of educational support services to children with special educational needs, in consultation with the relevant education partners and the Health Service Executive (HSE).

The enrolment of a child in a school is a matter, in the first instance, for the parents of the child and the Board of Management of a school. 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.

Accordingly, the NCSE advises parents, to seek to enrol their child, by applying in writing, to the school/s of their choice as early as possible. Where parents need advice or are experiencing difficulties in locating a school placement, including a special class placement, they should contact their local Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO) who can assist in identifying an appropriate educational placement for their child. Contact details are available at <http://ncse.ie/seno-contact-list>

The NCSE also works in collaboration with the Educational Welfare Services (EWS) of the Child and Family Agency which is the statutory agency that can assist parents who are experiencing difficulty in securing a school place for their child or can offer assistance where a child is out of school.

The local service is delivered through the national network of Educational Welfare Officers (EWO). Contact details are available at <http://www.tusla.ie/get-in-touch/education-and-welfare/>

It is the responsibility of the managerial authorities of all schools to implement an enrolment policy in accordance with the Education Act, 1998. The selection process and the enrolment policy on which it is based must be non-discriminatory and must be applied fairly in respect of all applicants. Under section 15 (2) (d) of the Education Act 1998, each school is legally obliged to publish its enrolment policy.

Section 29 of the Education Act 1998, provides parents with an appeal process where a board of management of a school or a person acting on behalf of the Board refuses enrolment to a student. Where a school refuses to enrol a pupil, the school is obliged to inform parents of their right under Section 29 of the Education Act 1998 to appeal that decision to either the relevant Educational Training Board or to the Secretary General of my Department.

Where there is no placement available for a child with Special Educational Needs, my Department will consider applications under the Home Tuition Grant Scheme, where a student can receive up to 20 hours home tuition per week as an interim measure until a placement becomes

available.

The NCSE have advised my Department's officials that they have no record of an application for support in respect of the student named by the deputy. On this basis, the student's parents should, as outlined above, contact their local SENO for guidance.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

263. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on whether it is acceptable that a parent has been turned down by 24 different schools in terms of providing a place for their child that is on the autism spectrum (details supplied). [49246/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The National Council for Special Education (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.

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. 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.

Parents/guardians who may need advice or are experiencing difficulties in locating a school placement should contact their local Special Education Needs Organiser (SENO) who can assist in identifying an appropriate educational placement for their child. Contact details are available on www.ncse.ie.

The NCSE works in collaboration with the Educational Welfare Services (EWS) of the Child and Family Agency which is the statutory agency that can assist parents who are experiencing difficulty in securing a school place for their child or can offer assistance where a child is out of school. The local service is delivered through the national network of Educational Welfare Officers (EWO). Contact details are available at <http://www.tusla.ie/get-in-touch/education-and-welfare/>.

In circumstances, where there is no school placement available for a child with Special Educational Needs, my Department will provide the Home Tuition grant towards the provision of 20 hours tuition per week as an interim measure until the NCSE confirms that a placement is available.

It is suggested that the parents in this particular case get in touch with the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) as soon as possible.

Teaching Qualifications

264. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the documentation a person (details supplied) can send to his Department in view of the fact that a university (details supplied) does not award students with letters or certificates on a percentage basis and only acknowledges pass or fail on letters. [49253/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The issue referred to by the Deputy relates to a Post Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE). The position is that post primary PGCE is awarded on an unclassified pass/fail basis and the associated allowance is paid at pass Higher Diploma level. In order for the allowance to be upgraded to honours Higher Diploma level the teacher concerned must present her employer with a letter from the awarding University stating “that had the PGCE been awarded on a percentage basis, the overall result would have been equal to or higher than 55%”.

Question No. 265 answered with Question No. 233.

Schools Refurbishment

266. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when will the repair of the of the two schools (details supplied) will be completed; the estimated costs for same; if a supplementary estimate will be required to fund repairs; the way in which they will be funded; and when the restoration will be fully completed. [49293/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): As the Deputy is aware, over the course of the mid-term break my Department undertook structural assessments on all 42 school buildings constructed by the Western Building Systems since 2003 which were part of the Department’s Design and Build school building programme. The safety of school students and staff has been and will continue to be my Department’s overriding priority.

The two schools referred to by the Deputy opened at ground floor level initially following internal precautionary measures which were carried out over the mid-term break. Works to the upper floor areas are now underway and it is anticipated that these works will be completed to allow the schools in question to open to receive all students in the next few weeks. This is the immediate priority for my Department.

My Department will now be moving as quickly as possible to the next phase, which is to initiate more detailed structural investigations at the 42 schools and, following on from this, to implement the permanent remediation works required. This will enable an implementation plan to be put in place which will include, as appropriate, projected timelines and expected remediation costs. Until such time as this work is completed, a robust cost estimate cannot be formulated. Therefore there are currently no plans at this stage for an additional supplementary estimate. The Department fully intends to pursue the company through all contractual and legal channels for the cost of the precautionary measures and the remediation work.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

267. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will review an application for an SNA by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49318/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible for allocating a quantum of Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support for each school annually taking into account the assessed care needs of children qualifying for SNA support enrolled in the school.

The NCSE allocates SNA support to schools in accordance with the criteria set out in Department Circular 0030/2014, which is available on my Department’s website at www.educa-

tion.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 child, I have referred the question to the NCSE for their direct reply. I do not have a role in making determinations in individual cases.

School Accommodation

268. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 241 of 18 September 2018, if the accommodation needs of a school (details supplied) have been agreed; when a design team will be appointed for the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49330/18]

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. In the context of progressing the building project, my Department undertook a technical site visit to the school. Following the site visit, my Department is now considering how the school's accommodation needs will be met. When this process has been finalised, my Department will be in further contact with the school authority.

In the context of the school's immediate accommodation needs, the school authority has been advised that my Department is willing to approve rental of temporary accommodation should this be required.

Schools Building Projects Status

269. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department has received the pre-qualification report in relation to the building of a new school (details supplied); if his Department has received the report; if it has been approved; when tenders will be invited for the project from the shortlist of contractors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49331/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The major building project referred to by the Deputy is currently at Stage 2b – Detailed Design.

This project was authorised to commence the Pre-Qualification of Contractors in May 2018. My Department has been informed that the Design Team Leader published the contract notice inviting contractors to tender for Pre-Qualification on e-tenders on 2 August 2018 with a closing date for receipt of submissions of 10 September 2018.

When pre-qualification is complete the project will then be progressed to tender stage. A tender stage normally takes between 7 and 8 months to complete.

In March 2018 my Department issued a letter to the school and its Design Team outlining the projected timeframe for the progression of this project to tender and construction stage and the steps involved.

Schools Building Projects Status

270. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the pre-qualification process for a school (details supplied) has been concluded; if so, if tenders have now been invited for the project from the shortlist of contractors; if so, the closing date for receipt of tenders; when construction will commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49332/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The major building project referred to by the Deputy is at an advanced stage of architectural planning, Stage 2(b) – Detailed Design which includes the application for Planning Permission, Fire Cert and Disability Access Cert and the preparation of tender documents. All statutory approvals have been secured.

The outcome of the pre-qualification process has been notified to contractors who expressed interest in tendering for this project. Feedback and issues arising from same are currently being dealt with by the school and its Design Team. When this process has concluded the project will then be progressed to tender stage.

A tender stage normally takes between 7 and 8 months to complete.

Schools Building Projects Status

271. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the pre-qualification report for a school (details supplied) has been received; if the report has been approved; if tenders have been invited from the shortlist of contractors; if so, the closing date for receipt of tenders for the project; when construction will commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49333/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The project to which the Deputy refers has been devolved to the local Education and Training Board. The pre-qualification process for the project is currently being finalised. My Department expects the project to proceed to tender immediately following the completion of this process.

Schools Site Acquisitions

272. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the required clarifications have been received from the vendor of the site for a school (details supplied); if satisfactory, if a design team will be appointed for both projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49334/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Engagement with the vendor is still ongoing in respect of outstanding clarifications regarding the proposed school site acquisition. Progress is being made on aspects of the proposed sale. However the appointment of a design team cannot be progressed at this juncture. I can assure you that officials in my Department are working to do so as soon as is possible.

School Transport Applications

273. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when payment for a school transport grant will issue to a person (details supplied). [49340/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):

School transport is a significant operation managed by Bus Éireann on behalf of the Department.

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

Payment of the Special Transport Grant for the child in question will be processed this week.

Schools Establishment

274. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the attention of the forward planning unit has been drawn to the prospective lack of secondary school places in an area (details supplied); if the growth of two primary schools in the feeder area will now lead to the provision of extra secondary school places; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49343/18]

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.

In addition to the new schools announced, there will be a need for further school accommodation in other areas in the future. Based on the current analysis, this need can be addressed through either planned capacity increases in existing schools or additional accommodation or extensions to existing schools.

While the announcement did not include a new post primary school in Gorey (which is located in the Gorey school planning area), the requirement for new schools will be kept under on-going review and in particular would have regard for the increased rollout of housing provision as outlined in Project Ireland 2040.

My Department's responsibility is to provide sufficient accommodation to meet 20,000 new and replacement school places each year, to ensure that every child has a school place. It is open to an individual school to apply for accommodation under the additional accommodation

scheme if the school does not have sufficient capacity to meet school places.

Residential Institutions Data

275. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of applications received in respect of the two vacancies which arose in February 2018 on the board of Caranua; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49349/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): In accordance with the Guidelines on Appointments to State Boards, the Public Appointments Service (PAS) managed the application and selection process for appointments to the Board of Caranua. The notice seeking expressions of interest appeared on the PAS website on 27th August 2018 with a closing date of 24th September 2018. PAS convened an Assessment Panel to examine the applications received. In total 11 applications were received for the 2 vacancies; not all the candidates met the selection criteria set out in section 11(1)(a) of the Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Act 2012.

Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Board

276. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason only one UK based survivor has been appointed to the board of Caranua; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49350/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The composition of the Board of Caranua is set out in Section 11 of the Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Act 2012. It specifies that four of the members will be persons, who before they attained the age of 18 years, resided in an institution specified in the Schedule to the Residential Institutions Redress Act 2002. Members of the Board are expected to play key roles in relation to the direction, leadership and corporate governance of the organisation. Board members do not have a role in determining the outcome of applications by survivors to Caranua or in lobbying on behalf of individual survivors or survivor representatives or advocacy groups.

With the recent filling of the two vacancies, the composition of the Board is as geographically diverse as it was before the vacancies arose, i.e., there continues to be 1 UK based survivor on the Board.

Schools Review

277. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department has carried out a review of the need for a new secondary school in County Kildare (details supplied). [49354/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): As the Deputy will be aware, my Department is currently advancing building projects in a number of post-primary schools in the South Kildare school planning areas and these projects, when completed, will provide additional capacity in the region of 1,700 school places.

The Government recently announced plans for the establishment of 42 new schools over the next four years (2019-2022). In addition to the new schools announced, there will be a need for further school accommodation in other areas in the future. While this announcement

did not include a new post-primary school in the area referred to by the Deputy, a review of provision at post-primary school level across the school planning areas in South Kildare is now well advanced and nearing completion. The outcome of the review will be finalised and made available as soon as possible.

This review will include an assessment of the extent to which projected needs in the area will be met from the additional capacity being provided by the projects already approved and how any specific additional needs will be best catered for, recognising the importance of maintaining a balance between existing and any additional school provision.

Consultancy Contracts Expenditure

278. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the fees paid and services rendered to a person (details supplied) in each of the years 2013 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49422/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): There are no payments recorded on my Department's Financial Management System in respect of the individual and/or company identified by the Deputy.

School Curriculum

279. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the subjects which he and his predecessor have requested the NCCA to conduct a review of since 2011; the reviews completed since 2011; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49455/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Below is a table of curriculum subjects, areas and programmes that have reviews conducted and completed since 2011 in line with work plans agreed between NCCA and the DES.

Date of review completion	Curriculum review areas and subjects
Nov. 2018	Junior Cycle subject specifications in Religious Education, Jewish Studies and Graphics Junior Cycle short course in Enterprise in Animation (Level 2) Leaving Certificate specification in Applied Mathematics Reporting templates – Mo Scéal: Moving from Preschool to Primary
Sept. 2018	Leaving Certificate specification in Art
July 2018	Junior Cycle subject specifications in Applied Technology, Classics, Engineering and Wood Technology
Dec. 2017	Junior Cycle subject specifications in Mathematics Leaving Certificate specification in Computer Science
Sept. 2017	Junior Cycle subject specifications in Geography, History, Home Economics and Music, Leaving Certificate specification in Economics.
Feb. 2017	Junior Cycle subject specifications in Irish (Irish-medium schools) and Irish (English-medium schools)

Date of review completion	Curriculum review areas and subjects
Dec. 2016	Leaving Certificate specification in Agricultural Science Consultation Paper - Proposals for structure and time allocation in a redeveloped primary curriculum
Nov. 2016	Leaving Certificate specification in Physical Education Junior Cycle Guidelines on Wellbeing
October 2016	Junior Cycle subject specifications in Visual Art and Modern Foreign Languages – German, French, Italian and Spanish Junior Cycle short course in Philosophy
Sept. 2016	Senior Cycle Framework in Physical Education
Dec. 2015	Primary Language Curriculum for junior infants to second class
Nov. 2015	Junior Cycle subject specification in Business Studies Consultation Paper - Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics in the Primary School
Sept. 2015	Leaving Certificate specification in Politics and Society
March 2015	Aistear Síolta Practice Guide
Dec. 2014	Junior Cycle subject specification in Science
June 2014	Junior Cycle short courses in Chinese Language and Culture and Artistic performance: Engaging with the Arts
May 2014	Junior Cycle short courses in Digital Media Literacy, A Personal Project: Caring for Animals (Level 2) and CSI: Exploring Forensic Science (Level 2)
April 2014	Junior Cycle short courses in Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE), Coding, Physical Education (PE) and Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)
March 2014	Leaving Certificate specifications in Biology, Chemistry and Physics Education Passport - supporting the transfer of information on children's learning and development as they move from primary to post-primary
Sept. 2013	Junior Cycle subject specification in English
June 2013	Final specifications for Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate Mathematics (Project Maths)
2012	Draft Framework for Junior Cycle Guidelines for Level 2 Learning Programmes

Schools Building Projects Status

280. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the tendering procedure for the main construction contract for an education project (details supplied) in County Cork; when the main building contractor is expected to be on site; if the new facilities will be completed for the commencement of the 2020-2021 school year in order to allow schools to plan properly for maximum pupil intake; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49478/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): As the Deputy is aware, the project to which he refers has been devolved for delivery to the local Education and Training Board (ETB). The ETB's Design Team has tendered for a main contractor for the project and the Tender Report in that regard is currently being examined in my Department.

The direct tendering process for reserved specialists is also underway. Prior to the award of the main contract, the main contractor must agree to enter into a contract with the successful reserved specialist bidders. Once this agreement is reached, a contract will be awarded.

It is not possible at this time to say when this process will be completed. However, the project is expected to go to site early next year. The ETB will keep the Boards of Management of the schools involved informed of progress so that they can plan for their pupil intakes until their new buildings are in place.

Schools Building Projects Status

281. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the further consideration that has been given to an application by a school (details supplied) for a replacement building on its own site on foot of a letter sent by the patron to the capital appraisal unit in October 2018 enclosing a letter from the local authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49494/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The Deputy will be aware that a building project for the schools in question is included in my Department's 6 year Construction Programme. The school authority has provided my Department with a copy of a letter it received from the local authority. My Department will consider the matter further and will liaise directly with the school authority in this regard.

Schools Building Projects Status

282. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress made to date on the major capital works application by a school (details supplied); the timeline for the delivery of this extension to the school; if the 2019 Department capital budget is in a position to fund this high priority project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49513/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): As the Deputy is aware, a major project, which includes the provision of an extension to replace temporary accommodation for the school to which he refers, is included in my Department's 6 year Capital Programme.

The project, once complete, will provide for 900 pupils. The project brief is being finalised and my Department will be in further contact with the school in relation to the next steps at the earliest opportunity.

Teaching Council of Ireland

283. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the length of time it is taking the Teaching Council to process applications; and if there is a delay. [49525/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Under the Teaching Council Acts 2001-2015 the Teaching Council is the body with statutory authority and responsibility for the regulation of the teaching profession in Ireland including the registration of teachers in the State.

It is a function of the Council under the Teaching Council Acts (s7(2)) to act as the competent authority for the recognition of qualifications obtained by a person who has applied under this Act for registration as a teacher.

The Department understands that the Teaching Council advice is that for teachers qualified in Ireland the registration process may take up to 6-8 weeks from receipt of all application documentation and depending on the time of year. For teachers qualified outside of Ireland, the assessment and registration process may typically take up to 12 weeks from receipt of all application documentation and depending on the time of year. In both cases the Council recommends that applicants apply in advance of their planned return to or commencement of teaching in Ireland.

Arising from the work of my Department's Steering Group on Teacher Supply, an Action Plan for Teacher Supply was published on 8th November 2018 with actions identified under four policy headings: Data/Research; Higher Education; Promotion of the teaching profession; Policies and arrangements impacting on teacher supply. Included under Policies and Arrangements is an action to develop a more streamlined process for the registration of teachers qualified in jurisdictions outside the State. This will be progressed through the implementation of the Action Plan for Teacher Supply, overseen by the Steering Group.

School Accommodation

284. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding a matter which has been subject to long-term delays and is critically necessary to be reached in order for a school (details supplied) to operate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49528/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I wish to clarify for the Deputy that Longford Westmeath Education and Training Board has applied to my Department for funding to purchase land adjacent to the school in question.

I also note that an application for additional schools accommodation has been submitted for this school recently. My Department will consider both requests collectively and a decision will be conveyed to the Education Training Board subsequently.

School Discipline

285. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of schools in which a reduced timetable for certain students has been put in place by county; the number of students affected in each of the years 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018, by county. [49545/18]

286. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the guidelines and-or procedures in place to ensure that this facility is not used as a behaviour management tool with regard to reduced timetables; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49546/18]

287. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has con-

ducted an analysis of the pupils which have been given a reduced timetable in recent years; the nature of this cohort of students; the findings of this analysis; if it has taken place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49547/18]

288. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the circumstances under which a reduced timetable can be imposed on a student; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49548/18]

289. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the actions taken to ensure that reduced timetables are recorded; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49549/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I propose to take Questions Nos. 285 to 289, inclusive, together.

The position of my Department is that all pupils who are enrolled in a school should attend school for the full day, unless exempted from doing so for exceptional circumstances, such as medical reasons.

Reduced timetables should not be used as a behavioural management technique, or as a de facto suspension or expulsion.

Where schools apply a shorter school day in relation to a child, such arrangements should only be put in place in exceptional circumstances in order to assist a pupil to return to a school, where a pupil has been experiencing an absence due to a medical or behavioural related condition.

Any such arrangement should be a transitional arrangement, which is designed to assist the reintegration of a pupil to a school environment.

In making any such arrangements, school authorities should be mindful of the best interests of the child and of the child's right to a full day in school. Schools should seek the advice of the National Educational Psychology Service before implementing such arrangements.

My Department does not hold the data requested by the Deputy.

The Education (Welfare) Act 2000 requires a school principal to inform an educational welfare officer in writing where a student is suspended from a recognised school for a period of not less than 6 days. The school is also obliged to record and maintain attendance records and to report to Tusla, unauthorised non-attendance above the threshold of 20 days, or where the school principal is of the opinion that a student is not attending school regularly. This is done currently through the School Returns mechanism to TUSLA Educational Welfare Services.

Developing a Code of Behaviour: Guidelines for Schools (NEWB, 2008) states that *“Exclusion of a student for part of the school day, as a sanction, or asking parents to keep a child from school, as a sanction, is a suspension. Any exclusion imposed by a school is a suspension, and should follow the guidelines relating to a suspension”*.

Section 29 of the Education Act 1998 makes provision for a parent to take an appeal against a school in relation to suspension of a student. In certain circumstances reduced timetables could be appealed by a parent under this provision.

I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department is engaging with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and TUSLA Educational Welfare Service on the matter of reduced timetables, with a view to examining options which can be taken to address the issues raised.

Climate Change Adaptation Plans

290. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide a timeline for the development of his Department's specific climate change targets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49566/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): My Department is at the forefront of design with respect to sustainable energy in school buildings and this performance has been recognised at both National and International level with sustainable energy awards for excellence in Design and Specification.

My Department's Technical Guidance Documents set the benchmark for sustainable design in school buildings with a clear focus on energy efficiency. The Department's policy is supported by a strong research programme with forty eight research projects at various stages.

Schools that are designed and built in accordance with the Department's Schools technical guidance documents must achieve as a minimum an A3 Building Energy Rating.

All new technologies and approaches are tested to ensure compatibility with school design and operational requirements. Successful and repeatable results are then incorporated into all new school designs and refurbishments.

In relation to existing schools buildings, my Department provided 100% funding for cavity wall and attic insulation and water conservation in 2009/2010 and energy upgrade works are often an integrated feature in summer works projects. Going forward a deeper upgrade of the energy efficiency of existing schools will be required to meet the requirements of Government and EU energy efficiency and climate change legislation. In this regard, a pilot programme on deep energy retrofits is currently being undertaken by my Department in partnership with the SEAI. This is being carried out with a view to developing a scalable model of energy efficiency retrofits in the school sector into the future, the funding for which will be made available over the lifetime of the National Development Plan.

Parental Leave

291. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if, further to his press release issued on 19 November 2018, it is his plan to increase both parents' parental benefit entitlement to seven weeks; and if he plans to provide seven weeks for parents to share. [48946/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): As the Deputy will be aware, as part of Budget 2019, the Government announced the introduction of a new paid parental leave scheme which will commence in late 2019. This new scheme will initially provide for two weeks of paid, non-transferable leave per parent, with a view to expanding the scheme and increasing the number of weeks of paid leave for both parents in future years.

This new scheme delivers on the commitment in the Programme for Partnership Government to increase paid parental leave during the first year of a child's life, as research shows that parental care is of particular importance and benefit in the first twelve months.

The new scheme is the key recommendation of the report of an interdepartmental committee which was established to develop recommendations as to how the relevant Programme for Partnership Government commitments could be best implemented.

Prisoner Transfers

292. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to bring forward legislation regarding the repatriation of prisoners from the UK to here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48842/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, the Transfer of Sentenced Persons Acts 1995 to 1997 give effect to the Convention on the Transfer of Sentenced Persons 1983. The Deputy will also be aware that there have been a number of recent Court judgements which have implications for transferring prisoners from other States to Ireland. These judgements raised a number of complex issues about the legislation and its administration, indicating that legislative change is required.

My Department is at present finalising a draft scheme of a Bill to bring forward such changes. This draft scheme will be brought to Government as soon as possible.

Closed-Circuit Television Systems

293. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to amend legislation to facilitate community groups wishing to set up a community-led CCTV scheme in cases in which the local authority does not consent to being the data controller. [48854/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will be aware that CCTV systems installed for the purposes of crime prevention and as aids to policing in areas to which the general public routinely have access, such as town centres, fall into two distinct but complementary categories, namely Garda CCTV systems and community-based CCTV systems. Neither type of CCTV system may be established without authorisation by the Garda Commissioner under section 38 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005, among other requirements.

Community CCTV is governed by section 38(3)(c) of the Garda Síochána Act 2005 and the Garda Síochána (CCTV) Order 2006 (SI No 289 of 2006). Under the 2005 Act as amended, the power to establish the criteria for community CCTV schemes is a matter for the Policing Authority, by order made with the approval of the Government.

This legal framework requires that any proposed community CCTV scheme must-

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

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

In accordance with this legal framework, I understand that the large majority of local authorities have previously undertaken to act as data controllers in the context of specific community CCTV schemes. This has been the case either in the course of the current grant-aid scheme administered by my Department, in connection with the previous grant-aid scheme operated by Pobal on behalf of the Department, or in connection with schemes funded independently by local authorities. I understand from my Department's engagement with the Local Government Management Agency that the total number of local authorities which have undertaken the role of data controller for these purposes amounts to 28 out of the 31 local authorities nationwide.

Nonetheless, my Department is engaging on an ongoing basis with the Local Government Management Agency and the County and City Management Association, to clarify any queries arising and to assist in resolving any concerns.

The Deputy may also wish to be aware that the Data Protection Commissioner's Office has confirmed as recently as May of this year that it does not have any concerns in relation to the legislative basis for CCTV. However it is currently conducting an audit of the practice, operation and governance of CCTV. We expect findings from this process to be of assistance to all concerned and in particular to local authorities.

Finally, I would recall that the Programme for a Partnership Government commits to supporting investment in CCTV systems. In pursuance of this commitment, a grant-aid scheme to assist groups in the establishment of community-based CCTV systems in their local areas is being administered by my Department. Community groups and local authorities can apply for grant-aid of up to 60% of the total capital cost of a proposed CCTV system, up to a maximum total of €40,000.

There have to date been 27 applications to the scheme. 20 applications have been approved, with grant aid totalling more than €500,000 approved from the total €1 million available for 2018. A further 4 applications to the scheme are currently being assessed and considered. The remaining 3 applications have been returned to the applicants concerned to enable them to supply the information necessary to qualify for grant aid.

I am keen to ensure that all interested groups, in both rural and urban areas, take advantage of the availability of this grant aid scheme. If the Deputy is aware of community groups wishing to avail of the scheme, full details of the grant aid package are available to download from my Department's website - www.justice.ie and support and guidance is available to help interested groups through a dedicated email address communitycctv@justice.ie.

Residency Permits

294. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a Garda National Immigration Bureau, GNIB, renewal will be processed for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48933/18]

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 9 February 2018. I am also advised that the process of having this application completed has been complicated, and delayed, by the continuing failure of the person concerned to provide definitive, reliable, documentary evidence to attest to their identity and nationality.

I am further advised that once the relevant personnel in the INIS have satisfied themselves as to the identity and nationality of the person concerned, detailed consideration can be given to their application for renewal of permission to remain.

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

Direct Provision Data

295. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of households of one, two, three, four and five or more persons living in direct provision centres at the end of 2017, respectively, in tabular form. [48938/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): The information requested by the Deputy is compiled on an annual basis and is broken down between families headed by one person and families headed by two persons.

The information for end December 2017 is set out below in the manner requested:

Family Type	Lone Parent Families				
Family size	LP+1	LP+2	LP+3	LP+4	LP+5+
Number of units	222	108	53	18	6

Family Type	Married/ Partner Families					
Family Size	M/P+0	M/P+1	M/P+2	M/P+3	M/P+4	M/P+5+
Number of units	94	111	93	68	22	6

Immigration Status

296. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 280 of 13 November 2018, if an appointment in early date can be made in the case of persons (details supplied); if contact will be made with the persons to facilitate an appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48958/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As indicated previously to the Deputy, in response to Parliamentary Question No.280 of 13 November 2018, I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that passengers arriving at a port of entry and intending to reside in the State are generally granted a 90 day permission by the Immigration Officers to facilitate registration at the relevant immigration office. In the case of residents of Dublin, 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. 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.

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 Deployment

297. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí by rank attached to the Galway (Mill Street) and Salthill Garda stations in each of the years year 2010 to 2017 and to date in 2018; the number of community gardaí for each year during this period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48970/18]

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 and Rank for the Galway-Mill Street, (Gaillimh on the list) and Salthill Garda stations in each of the years from 2010 to 31 October 2018 is available on my Department's website through the link below

Garda Numbers by Division District and Station

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. It is a matter for the Divisional Chief Superintendent to determine the optimum distribution of duties among the personnel available to him or her having regard to the profile of the area and its specific needs

The information requested by the Deputy in relation to the Community Garda Strength in Galway (Mill Street) and Salthill Garda stations in each of the years from 2010 to 31 October 2018, the latest date for which figures are currently available, as supplied by the Garda Commissioner are as set out in the attached table.

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.

Garda Strength presented - Community Gardaí | Total

		Galway (Mill Street)		Salthill
Year	Community Gardaí	Total	Community Gardaí	Total
2010	13	214	3	57
2011	12	210	2	55
2012	11	212	2	54

		Galway (Mill Street)		Salthill
Year	Community Gardaí	Total	Community Gardaí	Total
2013	10	213	2	52
2014	9	204	2	54
2015	11	212	2	51
2016	12	218	1	53
2017	12	215	1	61
2018*	13	202	1	49

**As of 31 October 2018*

Total: means all those Gardaí at a station all of whom have community policing as an inherent part of their role

Community Gardaí: are those with the official categorisation and are exclusively assigned to building relationships with local communities including giving talks to schools, community groups and others.

Legislative Measures

298. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if section 19A regarding the disclosure of third party records in certain trials also applies to child victims under the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017. [49008/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017 was enacted on 22 February 2017. The Act enhances and updates laws to combat the sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children, including new offences relating to child sexual grooming and new and strengthened offences to tackle child pornography. The Act also criminalises the purchase of sexual services, introduces new provisions regarding the giving of evidence by victims in sexual offence trials and introduces a new offence addressing public indecency. Other provisions include maintaining the age of consent to sexual activity at 17 years of age and for a new “proximity of age” defence as well as a statutory statement of the law as regards consent to sexual acts.

Part 6 of the Act amends the Criminal Evidence Act 1992, including new provisions around the disclosure of third party counselling notes and other amendments related to the cross-examination of witnesses. These provisions were commenced in May 2018.

Section 39 of the 2017 Act inserts a new section 19A into the Criminal Evidence Act 1992. The new section 19A requires an application to be made to the court prior to the disclosure of third-party counselling records in sexual offence proceedings. In considering whether to release any records, the court must consider the interests of justice alongside the privacy of the complainant and the likelihood of harm in releasing the record. The court must also have regard to the public interest in encouraging the reporting of sexual offences and the public interest in encouraging complainants of sexual offences to seek counselling. The section does not apply where a complainant or witness has expressly waived his or her right to non-disclosure of a counselling record without leave of the court.

Section 19A does not distinguish adult from child complainants.

The Government is acutely aware that complainants in sexual violence cases should be treated sensitively in criminal proceedings, most especially when they are children. The legislative provisions in place are designed to ensure that complainants are supported and facilitated in a way that protects them from any additional harm.

Magdalen Laundries

299. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if women eligible to apply to the Magdalen redress scheme (details supplied) are not required to provide proof or evidence of the hours they worked in cases in which this information is provided to the best of their ability. [49011/18]

305. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason the recently published addendum to the terms of the Magdalen restorative justice *ex gratia* scheme includes a provision that the calculation of the lump sum redress payment will be made on the basis that no child under 12 years of age worked in a Magdalen laundry, unless an applicant provides evidence of such work before they reached the age of 12 in view of documentation that children under the age of 12 did work in the laundries. [49278/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 299 and 305 together.

The Government is committed to complying with all of the recommendations of the Ombudsman in relation to the operation of Magdalen Restorative Justice *Ex Gratia* Scheme. In relation to the Ombudsman's principal recommendation that the Scheme should be applied to women who worked in the laundry of one of the 12 'Magdalen' Institutions and who were resident in one of 14 adjoining institutions, the Addendum to the terms of the scheme giving effect to this recommendation has been finalised and published on the Department's website - www.justice.ie.

The Addendum provides that the first phase of processing a completed application is the making of a provisional assessment as to whether the applicant comes within the scope of the scheme. This assessment will be made based on the records of the institutions concerned (where available) and any other relevant records or statements, which may include the applicant's testimony and in some cases testimony from other persons. If an applicant has any difficulty obtaining their records from a religious institution or if assistance is requested, the Department will provide it.

Each application will be assessed individually on its merits. Decisions will be made on the balance of probabilities. In addition, for those cases where there is insufficient documentary evidence available to make an assessment on their case, an interview process is in place so as to facilitate a fairer assessment of a woman's application.

In relation to the age at which a girl started work in a Magdalen laundry, the information contained in the McAleese Report relates only to girls and women admitted to the Magdalen Institutions. The McAleese Committee did not conduct any research into the adjoining institutions which are now covered by the Addendum. The statistical analysis carried out by the Committee indicated that the average age on entry into the Magdalen Institutions was 23.8 years of age and the median age was 20 years of age. While the youngest entrant was identified as 9 years of age, this had occurred in the 1930s. The McAleese Committee's analysis also shows that only 4.1% were under 14 years of age at the time of entry. As stated in the Addendum, it is open to an applicant to show that she worked in a Magdalen Laundry before she reached 12

years of age and, where shown, such work would be included in the calculation of the 'work' element of the lump sum.

Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal Data

300. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of cases before the Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal involving the Irish Prison Service; the length of time that each has been waiting for a decision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49014/18]

301. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number and name of those who serve on the Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal; the number of cases dealt with each year; the cost per year of the tribunal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49015/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 300 and 301 together.

The Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal administers the Scheme of Compensation for Personal Injuries Criminally Inflicted (General Scheme) and the Scheme of Compensation for Personal Injuries Criminally Inflicted on Prison Officers. Under the terms of the Scheme, the Tribunal is entirely independent in the matter of individual decisions on applications for compensation.

The Tribunal consists of a Chair and six ordinary members who are practicing barristers or solicitors, supported by a Secretariat staff. The current membership is:

Chair	Helen Boyle, B.L.
Ordinary Member	Martin Lawlor
Ordinary Member	Grace Mulherin, B.L.
Ordinary Member	Cian Kelly, B.L.
Ordinary Member	Mema Byrne, B.L.
Ordinary Member	Niamh Tuite
Ordinary Member	William Aylmer

There are currently no vacancies to be filled on the Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal. I have ensured that a full Tribunal membership has been maintained in order to continue to address claims as promptly as possible. The term of office for all Ordinary members has been extended to June 2019 pending the completion of a recruitment process for new members.

The number of applications received and the amount of compensation paid under both schemes is provided in tabular form below, though I should state that the amount paid out in any given year is not reflective of the applications received in that year, for various reasons, including that compensation payments may relate to applications made in prior years.

Year	Number of Applications Received (General Scheme)	Compensation Paid (€)
2014	257	3.955m
2015	217	4.016m
2016	210	3.765m
2017	181	3.978m

Year	Number of Applications Received (Prison Officers)	Compensation Paid (€)
2014	76	0.977m
2015	75	0.575m
2016	89	0.750m
2017	107	0.741m

It is not possible to provide an average length of time to settle each claim as it varies depending on the circumstances of each case. While applications are processed with the minimum of formality compared to court proceedings where compensation is being claimed under the Civil Liability Acts, in making their decisions Tribunal Members must be satisfied that all supporting documentation submitted is in order. In some cases there can be delays pending the availability of all required documentation and some cases are complex in terms of medical conditions being assessed.

Because of the manner in which cases are recorded, in particular cases which are open but not actively pursued by the applicant, it is not possible at this time to provide the Deputy with the number of cases awaiting decision and those which are deemed to be open. I have asked that a detailed assessment be made of the caseload with a view to clarifying this matter, and to inform a full review of processing capacity under the scheme.

Finally, administrative costs of the Tribunal for the years 2014-2017 are set out below. These figures include payments to Tribunal members, legal costs and the salaries of Secretariat staff:

Year	Cost (€)
2014	263,031
2015	213,035
2016	227,597
2017	349,469

Bail Law

302. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if there are changes to bail laws being considered by his Department in view of the Garda Commissioner's recent public statements on changes needed to bail laws; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49057/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Garda Commissioner recently ordered a review of policing issues arising from a case in which serious crimes were committed following breaches of bail conditions by the perpetrator in respect of prior incidents. The review will seek to establish any lessons to be learned and whether changes to Garda processes and procedures are needed, and will include an examination of the legislative framework. Following the conclusion of the review, any changes proposed to the law on bail will be considered.

The bail laws have been significantly strengthened by this Government. The Criminal Justice Act 2017, which came into force last year, expanded the factors a court may take into account when refusing bail. These factors include previous convictions for serious offences which indicate persistent serious offending and the likelihood of any danger to a person or the community that the release of the accused on bail could cause.

Further to this, the Act has increased the range of conditions that may be attached to a grant of bail such as the imposition of curfews and the prohibition of contact by the accused with the victim or the victim's family. The Act also introduced a new power of arrest without warrant, where a Garda suspects that a person has breached or is about to breach a bail condition and the Garda considers it necessary to arrest the person immediately to prevent harm to, interference with or intimidation of the victim or a witness to the offence alleged.

Crime Data

303. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the annual number of crimes in which a knife was used and-or was an element of the crime in each of the years 2011 to 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49098/18]

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.

While the most recent publication of the official recorded crime statistics remain 'Under Reservation' due to issues around PULSE data, it is important to note the CSO, in conjunction with An Garda Síochána, continues to make progress on returning the crime figures to the higher standard expected of our national crime statistics. I am determined that this body of work be completed as soon as possible and I welcome the continued diligence of the Policing Authority in monitoring this matter.

Direct Provision Data

304. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 305 of 20 November 2018, the extra bed capacity in the direct provision centre in County Sligo for overnight stays for residents from a centre (details supplied) in County Donegal travelling en route to Dublin for interviews arranged by the Reception and Integration Agency and the Internal Protection Office; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49265/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): As outlined in my reply to Parliamentary Question No. 305 of the 20th November 2018, my Department agreed with the contractor running the centre to arrange overnight accommodation/rest and comfort breaks for those travelling to Dublin at the accommodation centre that they currently run in Sligo for anyone attending interviews in the International Protection Office or indeed accessing any other state services in Dublin.

Since then, the premises in County Donegal, has been the subject of an arson attack, and I want to take this opportunity to reiterate my condemnation of that attack.

Until a full assessment of the damage has been carried out, the Department won't be able to decide on the impact of any delay that may arise from this incident. A full investigation is

underway to determine the cause of the events that took place there and the level of any damage caused.

Following that review, matters will be reassessed as necessary. We remain committed to working with the local community to ensure that the best possible support is provided to those seeking international protection. And indeed I was encouraged by the response of the community in Moville to the fire, which was very tangible evidence of the welcome shown by people in Donegal and all over Ireland to international protection applicants.

As regards the planning of overnight stays in Sligo, bed spaces will be sourced from within existing agreed capacity. The latest occupancy returns from Globe House Accommodation Centre in Sligo shows an agreed capacity of 218 and 212 residents. It should be noted that the occupancy levels vary and are reported to the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) on a weekly basis. RIA will continue to monitor vacancies at Globe House with a view to facilitating residents from Moville who need to travel.

The Department will also source overnight accommodation in Dublin if required and the RIA will liaise with the International Protection Office to arrange for grouped interview appointment times so that residents of the Caisleán Mara can travel together.

I have requested the Department to examine the logistical and resource implications to establish if such business could be carried out from remote locations.

Question No. 305 answered with Question No. 299.

Court Orders

306. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will provide detailed consideration to the issues raised by an organisation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49299/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As Minister for Justice and Equality, I have no role in the making of court orders in relation to maintenance. This is a function of the courts, which are, subject to the Constitution and the law, independent in the performance of their functions.

Under Irish law, issues arising from disagreements about the provision of maintenance for dependent children, or failure by persons with maintenance responsibilities for children to provide proper maintenance, are determined by the courts. Relevant legislation in this area includes section 11 of the Guardianship of Infants Act 1964, the Family Law (Maintenance of Spouses and Children) Act 1976, section 8 of the Family Law Act 1995, section 13 of the Family Law (Divorce) Act 1996 and section 45 of the Civil Partnership and Certain Rights and Obligations of Cohabitants Act 2010. The Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 provides for a number of improvements in the law relating to maintenance of children.

It is open to parents who have separated/divorced to decide between themselves on maintenance arrangements for their children. If they cannot agree, they can try to work out a maintenance agreement through mediation. However, if parents still cannot agree on maintenance arrangements, an application must be made to the courts for a maintenance order. If a parent/spouse/civil partner fails to comply with a court order or falls behind with payments where there is a maintenance order in place, an attachment of earnings order can be sought from the court, if the person is in employment or on a private pension. This order results in the maintenance amount being deducted at source by the employer of the parent/spouse/civil partner. A

person can apply for an Attachment of Earnings Order when first applying for a maintenance order through the court, if they are concerned that maintenance will not be paid, or they can apply later if the maintenance is not paid. An enforcement summons can be applied for if the parent/spouse/civil partner is self-employed.

Under section 9A of the Family Law (Maintenance of Spouses and Children) Act 1976, the District Court has the power to regard a failure by a parent/spouse/civil partner to comply with a court order as contempt of court and to deal with it accordingly, including by means of imprisonment. The maintenance creditor may apply to the District Court Clerk for a summons directing the maintenance debtor to appear before the District Court. The court will then hear evidence from the maintenance creditor and maintenance debtor including evidence about the financial circumstances of the maintenance debtor and, where relevant, the maintenance creditor.

The other issues raised in the correspondence are not within my remit as Minister for Justice and Equality. I have asked my officials to consult with officials reporting to my colleagues the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government and the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection in that regard and will comprehensively respond directly to the Deputy in due course.

Direct Provision Data

307. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of residents living in a facility (details supplied) including children and adults; the capacity of the centre; and the amount paid annually to have the centre operated since its opening. [49309/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): All accommodation centres for those persons seeking protection, whether State-owned or privately owned, are operated by commercial companies. There are currently 38 accommodation centres being operated under the direct provision system.

The accommodation centre at Ashbourne House, Glounthaune, Cork is commercially owned and operated and is contracted to provide 95 bed spaces and is currently operating at full capacity. Currently there are 47 adults resident in the centre and 48 children.

Extensive and detailed information on the amount paid by my Department to each company contracted to provide direct provision accommodation every year up to and including 2014 can be found on the RIA website www.ria.gov.ie under the 'Contract Values' section of the website:

<http://www.ria.gov.ie/en/RIA/ContractValues2000-2014Inclusive.pdf/Files/ContractValues2000-2014Inclusive.pdf>.

The 2015 information will be available shortly.

This is in accordance with the Reception & Integration Agency's policy on disclosure of financial information which was agreed with the Office of the Information Commissioner. The Deputy will appreciate that it is not appropriate to provide values for current contracts entered into by my Department. Negotiations take place with a number of commercial entities on an on-going basis with a clear focus on achieving the best value for money in respect of each contract. It is not in the interests of yielding best value for the taxpayer that details of current individual contracts are made available to other commercial bodies who are, or may be in the future, engaged in these negotiations.

Direct Provision Data

308. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of residents living in a facility (details supplied), including children and adults; the capacity of the centre; the cost of providing for this centre annually; if the building is owned by the State; if it was sold; if so, the person or body it was sold to; and the amount. [49310/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): All accommodation centres for those persons seeking protection, whether State-owned or privately owned, are operated by commercial companies. There are currently 38 accommodation centres being used to provide accommodation to persons seeking international protection in Ireland.

The accommodation centre in question opened in September of this year in response to a call for expressions of interest to meet an urgent need for accommodation for persons entering the state and seeking international protection.

The Centre is privately owned and operated and provides accommodation, under contract to my Department, to 54 persons (30 adults and 24 children) in the 13 apartments in the complex.

Extensive and detailed information on the amount paid by my Department to each company contracted to provide direct provision accommodation every year up to and including 2015 can be found on the RIA website *www.ria.gov.ie* under the 'Contract Values' section - the 2016 information will be available shortly.

This is in accordance with the Reception & Integration Agency's policy on disclosure of financial information which was agreed with the Office of the Information Commissioner. Negotiations take place with a number of commercial entities on an ongoing basis with a clear focus on achieving the best value for money in respect of each contract. It is not in the interests of yielding best value for the taxpayer that details of current individual contracts are made available to other commercial bodies who are, or may be in the future, engaged in these negotiations.

Airport Security

309. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the production of a valid driver licence is sufficient proof of citizenship and identity for Irish travellers entering Dublin Airport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49311/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The requirements for any citizen entering the State at Dublin Airport or any other port of entry to the State is that he or she be in possession of a valid passport or other equivalent document, issued by or on behalf of an authority recognised by the Government, which establishes his or her identity and nationality to the satisfaction of an immigration officer.

This requirement does not apply to any person (other than a non-national) coming from or embarking for a place in the State, Great Britain or Northern Ireland (i.e. the Common Travel Area - CTA).

There is no requirement for Irish (or UK) citizens to produce passports when travelling within the CTA. However, it is the case that airline carriers in many instances require their passengers to have a passport in possession before allowing them to board the aircraft. As such, this is not an immigration requirement.

Unlike the operational practices at some UK airports, there is generally no segregation of arriving passengers at Irish ports of entry to the State. Consequently, Immigration Officers performing immigration control duties at airports in the State do not know where passengers have travelled from when such passengers present at immigration control desks. It is, therefore, necessary for Immigration Officers to establish where passengers have arrived from, and in order to do this, an Immigration Officer may ask passengers questions with a view to establishing their nationality and port of embarkation.

Once satisfied that a person is a citizen of the Common Travel Area (CTA) and that such person has travelled from the United Kingdom, the Immigration Officer will make no further requirement of that person.

In circumstances where a person, who is a citizen of the CTA, and who has travelled from within the CTA, is not in possession of a passport, an Immigration Officer is duty-bound to ask questions designed to establish that the person is entitled to benefit from the CTA immigration arrangements. The production of a valid driver's licence is a document that would assist an immigration officer with these enquiries.

Garda Transport Data

310. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda mountain bikes allocated to each Garda station in the Sligo-Leitrim Garda division; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49322/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, decisions in relation to the provision and allocation of Garda resources, including mountain bikes, across the various Garda divisions are a matter for the Garda Commissioner in the light of his identified operational demands and the availability of resources. As Minister, I have no 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, to ensure their optimum use.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that there are 13 mountain bikes allocated to stations in the Sligo/Leitrim Division - 1 allocated to Ballymote, 1 allocated to Manorhamilton, 2 allocated to Carrick on Shannon and 9 allocated to Sligo.

Sentencing Policy

311. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the review of presumptive minimum sentences that was commissioned by his Department and was due to be published in July 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49341/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Penal Policy Review Group (PPRG) was established in 2012 to conduct a wide ranging strategic review of penal policy, taking into account relevant work already carried out in this jurisdiction and elsewhere, the rights of those convicted of crimes, the perspective of those who are victims of crime and the interests of society in general. The report of the PPRG titled 'Strategic Review of Penal Policy', was published on 17 September 2014. In November 2014 the report of the Group was submitted to Government.

An Implementation and Oversight Group was established in early 2015, comprising officials from the Department of Justice and Equality, the Irish Prison Service, Probation Service and An Garda Síochána. Its primary function is to report to the Minister, on a six monthly basis, on the implementation status of the recommendations of the PPRG.

One of the recommendations of the Strategic Review of Penal Policy was a review of the principle behind mandatory sentencing. While it was anticipated that this recommendation would be achieved by mid-2018, the issue is still under consideration.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Government has introduced the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) (Amendment) Bill 2018 which provides for presumptive minimum sentences for repeat sex offenders. This Bill is based on existing legislative precedent for presumptive minimum sentences and its introduction is not intended to impact on the review of the principle behind mandatory sentences, which is ongoing.

Leave to Remain

312. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in the determination of an application for stamp 4 in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49381/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the persons concerned have been granted leave to remain in the State for the period to 4 November 2021. This decision was conveyed in writing to the persons concerned by letter dated 21 November 2018.

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.

Convictions Lists

313. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of plans to expunge convictions of those convicted of same-sex sexual activity; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49389/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The All-Party motion of apology for persons convicted of consensual same-sex sexual acts which was passed by the Houses of the Oireachtas to mark the 25th anniversary of the decriminalisation of homosexuality on 19th June 2018 was an important step in acknowledging the hurt and harm caused, both to those who were convicted of such acts and to the wider LGBTI community who were made to feel discriminated against and marginalised.

The Government also hopes to bring forward legislative proposals for a scheme to enable the criminal records to be expunged where the acts involved would now be lawful. Officials of my Department are working with the Garda Síochána to assess the nature and availability of the records of convictions for consensual same-sex acts which would now be lawful, in order to develop these proposals. As the Deputy will appreciate, it is important that any such scheme

be legally robust, practical, and sensitive to the needs of those affected. I will update my colleagues in the Houses of the Oireachtas on progress as the scheme develops.

I'm sure the Deputy will share the view that it is timely to reiterate the sincere apology of the Government and the Houses to those convicted of same-sex sexual activity which is now legal and to reaffirm our commitment to ensuring that all citizens and residents of Ireland can live free from discrimination.

Missing Persons

314. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will address a matter in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49390/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will appreciate that an investigation such as this is an operational matter for An Garda Síochána.

However, I have requested a report from An Garda Síochána in relation to the missing person referred to by the Deputy and I will be in contact with the Deputy directly on receipt of this report.

Visa Applications

315. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason numerous delegates who sought to attend a conference (details supplied) were denied visas for the purpose, with particular reference to the fact that these persons came from organisations lobbying for peace and disarmament. [49392/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that visa applications are processed for a variety of purposes including from persons wishing to come here for events or conferences such as those referred to by the Deputy.

All visa applications are considered on their individual merits having regard to the information and supporting documentation supplied by applicants, and their ability to provide sufficient evidence that they will adhere to the terms of a visa including returning home before the visa expires. If an application is refused, full details are provided to the applicant as to the reasons why, which can be wide ranging, and is often based on more than one reason. Applicants subject to a negative decision, have the opportunity to appeal within two months.

Garda Transport Data

316. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number and percentage of Garda vehicles attached to the roads policing unit now fitted with automatic number plate recognition; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49399/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): There has been unprecedented investment in An Garda Síochána in recent years, in support of the Government's commitment to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country in order to maintain and strengthen community engagement and provide reassurance to citizens and deter

crime. In total, €342 million is being invested in Garda ICT infrastructure between 2016 and 2021, to enable An Garda Síochána to deploy the latest cutting edge technologies and to deliver on reform.

As the Deputy will appreciate, decisions in relation to the provision, allocation and management of Garda equipment and resources, including Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) equipment, are matters for the Garda Commissioner. As Minister, I have no direct role in that regard.

I am informed that ANPR was introduced into An Garda Síochána in 2008 and is used on a daily basis to assist in the prevention and detection of crime on our roads network. The Garda authorities advise that the number of Garda vehicles fitted with ANPR equipment varies on a daily basis, due to operational requirements, including repair and maintenance of equipment and 'end-of-life' of vehicles and equipment, the up-dating of software and the decommissioning of damaged units.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that, as of 1 November 2018, there are 289 vehicles attached to Roads Policing Units nationwide. 76 of these currently have ANPR capacity, which amounts to just over 26% of the vehicles allocated to Roads Policing Units.

I am further informed that the capacity and capabilities of ANPR, including the expansion of the deployment of such systems within An Garda Síochána, are kept under regular review by senior Garda management.

More generally, I can confirm that the Garda Mobility Strategy, which aims to provide frontline members with greater connectivity to back-office systems harnessing the power of mobile technology, forms part of the Modernisation and Renewal Programme 2016-2021. I am informed by the Garda authorities that the pilot programme in operation in Limerick Garda Division has been continuously evaluated, with very positive feedback to date and that further expansion of the project is planned for 2019.

The Deputy may be interested to note that one key application developed for the Mobility pilot is a Traffic App, which allows users to search for vehicle information by entering a vehicle registration number into the mobile phone. The app gathers information recorded on PULSE in respect of the vehicle, including tax status, ownership information and vehicle warnings. Updates to the App already rolled out include a Driver-Licence check facility. Work has also commenced on developing the capacity to create a Fixed Charge Notice via an App.

I am informed that it is expected that mobile devices will enable Garda members to be more efficient and effective by having mobile access to relevant core policing applications, a wide-range of up-to-date information and the ability to input and update information in real time.

Commencement of Legislation

317. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if all sections of the Criminal Justice Amendment Act 2009 are in effect; if not, when the remaining sections of the Act will come into effect; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49400/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I can inform the Deputy that all of the provisions of the Criminal Justice (Amendment) Act 2009 came into operation on 23 July 2009, the date of enactment.

Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal Applications

318. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the timeframe for processing an application to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal by a person (details supplied); and the process involved. [49409/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As I outlined in my response to the Deputy's question number 68 of 11 October 2018, the Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal administers the Scheme of Compensation for Personal Injuries Criminally Inflicted. Under the Terms of the Scheme, the Tribunal is entirely independent in considering applications made under the Scheme. Therefore, you will appreciate that in these circumstances, I cannot comment on individual cases.

I also outlined in that response that it is not possible to provide an estimate of the time required to settle any particular claim as it varies depending on the circumstances of each case. While applications are processed with the minimum of formality compared to court proceedings where compensation is being claimed under the Civil Liability Acts, in making their decisions Tribunal Members must be satisfied that all supporting documentation submitted is in order. In some cases there can be delays pending the availability of all required documentation and some cases are complex in terms of medical conditions being assessed.

Domestic Violence Policy

319. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 427 of 6 November 2018, when a reply will issue. [49410/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by An Garda Síochána that the Garda National Protective Services Bureau, under the direction of the Assistant Commissioner with responsibility for Special Crime Operations, is in the process of developing a domestic violence risk assessment matrix. I am informed that the proposed matrix is the subject of an independent validation by Trinity College which is expected to take approximately three months and will help to quality assure the process prior to implementation. In the interim, the risk assessment tool is also being piloted in two Garda Divisions and this pilot is also producing data for the validation process.

Once the risk assessment matrix has been finalised, training for personnel utilising it will be required and I am informed that the Garda National Protective Services Bureau is working with the Garda College to develop an appropriate training programme. The risk assessment matrix will not become fully operational until necessary training has been completed. I am informed that this process will be completed by the end of Q4 2019.

Consultancy Contracts Expenditure

320. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the fees paid and services rendered to a person (details supplied) in each of the years 2013 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49428/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I can advise the Deputy that my Department has not paid fees or procured services from the person or company in question during the years 2013 to 2017 or to date in 2018. The person in question has provided assistance to the Department on behalf of the Office of Government Procurement in connection

with a procurement matter in recent months.

Climate Change Adaptation Plans

321. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will provide a timeline for the development of his Department's specific climate change targets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49572/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Ireland's first statutory National Adaptation Framework (NAF) was published in January 2018 and sets out the national strategy to reduce the vulnerability of the country to the negative effects of climate change and to avail of any positive impacts.

Under the NAF, a number of Government Departments are required to prepare sectorial adaptation plans in relation to a priority area that they are responsible for and the formalisation of adaptation planning guidelines to assist in the development of these plans is a key action under the NAF.

While my Department is not a lead Department in terms of preparing a sectorial adaptation plan, it nonetheless remains committed to achieving increases in energy efficiency.

My Department, along with all public sector bodies, is committed to achieving a 33% reduction in energy usage by 31st December, 2020, over a baseline of energy used in 2009 - a target set out in S.I. 426 of 2014. It is therefore fully engaged in the Public Sector Energy Reporting Programme.

By the end of December, 2017, my Department had achieved a reduction of 32.4% in energy use, and is on course to meet the 33% target ahead of the deadline.

As reported by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) a reduction of 43% in greenhouse gas emissions between 2009 and 2017 was recorded for my Department.

My Department will continue to engage with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment, the SEAI and the Optimising Power at Work scheme to continue to achieve reductions in energy use at our offices.

Proposed Legislation

322. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the 2019 allocation for the future growth loan scheme in view of the fact that the explanatory memo to the European Investment Fund Agreement Bill 2018 indicates the cost will be €62 million over a five year period. [48901/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Future Growth Loan Scheme is being developed by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) in partnership with the Department of Finance, the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) and the European Investment Fund (EIF).

Through a counter-guarantee from the EIF, the Future Growth Loan Scheme will leverage €62 million Exchequer funding to provide a scheme of up to €300 million to eligible businesses for terms of 8-10 years. My Department will provide 60% of the Exchequer funding and the

remaining 40% will be provided by the Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine, over a five-year period. It is expected that €6 million will be allocated to the scheme in 2019. This will be confirmed in the 2019 Revised Estimates Volume, which is expected to be published in the coming weeks.

The scheme will be available to eligible Irish businesses, including those in the primary agriculture and seafood sectors, to support strategic, long-term investment in a post-Brexit environment. The eligibility criteria have yet to be finalised, but the scheme will be open to SMEs with an establishment or branch in Ireland. Sole traders will be eligible for funding under the scheme. Finance provided under the scheme will be competitively priced and have favourable terms, including the interest rate, with loans up to €500,000 unsecured.

The scheme is expected to launch in early 2019.

Brexit Supports

323. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of applicants and participants in all Brexit schemes and supports provided by her Department or agencies under her remit; the amount allocated and expended to each such scheme in each year since being established in tabular form. [48903/18]

327. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the take up of all Brexit supports since they opened and that fall under the remit of her Department in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48940/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 323 and 327 together.

My Department and its agencies are providing extensive supports to ensure that businesses are prepared for Brexit. These supports aim to assist businesses in identifying key risk areas and the practical preparatory actions to be taken over the coming months.

In addition to direct supports to firms, I and my Department have been developing a number of schemes to mitigate against the potential effects of Brexit. In late November 2017 a Rescue and Restructuring (R&R) Scheme was approved by the EU Commission. This scheme has been put in place as it is considered prudent to have contingency measures in place so that we can respond swiftly to changing circumstances as necessary.

The Brexit Loan Scheme was launched in April 2018 and provides affordable working capital financing to eligible businesses that are either currently impacted by Brexit or will be in the future, to help them innovate, change or adapt to mitigate their Brexit challenge.

In May 2018, the Rescue and Restructuring scheme was extended to include temporary restructuring aid for enterprises experiencing acute liquidity needs. The aid is granted in the form of loans repayable over a period of 18 months. Together with the Brexit Loan Scheme, this temporary restructuring aid will provide valuable stabilisation to businesses as they respond to the immediate and long-term impacts of the UK's decision to leave the EU.

The Future Growth Loan Scheme was announced in Budget 2019. The scheme will be available to eligible Irish businesses, including those in the primary agriculture and seafood sectors, to support strategic, long-term investment in a post-Brexit environment. It will provide low cost loans for terms of between 8-10 years, which is not readily available on the market. It is expected that this scheme will be operational in Q1 2019.

Local Enterprise Office funding has been increased and this increase is being used to assist micro-enterprises in becoming more competitive and better able to cope with the changing environment in which they are operating. The suite of LEO Brexit supports includes tailored mentoring to address Brexit-related business challenges and targeted training on specific Brexit challenges.

Enterprise Ireland has established a Prepare for Brexit online portal and communications campaign, as well as an online “Brexit SME Scorecard” to help Irish businesses self-assess their exposure to Brexit and a “Be Prepared Grant” to support SME clients in planning to mitigate risks arising from Brexit. It has also launched a new Eurozone Strategy to help SMEs broaden their export footprint beyond the UK.

InterTrade Ireland’s Brexit advisory service was established in May 2017 to provide a focal point for SMEs working to navigate the changes in cross-Border trading relationships brought about by Brexit negotiations.

As part of awareness-raising activities, EI has rolled out regional Brexit Advisory clinics throughout the year. My Department and its agencies have also participated in the Getting Ireland Brexit Ready roadshow to inform businesses of supports available to them to prepare for Brexit. I will continue to ensure we provide the supports and services best suited to the needs of enterprise over the coming months.

The information is set out in the following table:

Scheme	Uptake (as of 19 November 2018)	Allocation/Expenditure by year up to 19 November 2018
Brexit Loan Scheme	307 applications received, 270 approved by SBCI, 54 Loans progressed to sanction at bank level to a value of €12.51 million (23 November 2018)	€23 million exchequer funding has been used to leverage a fund of up to €300 million: €14 million from DBEI and €9 million from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. This Exchequer funding was allocated to the SBCI at the end of 2017.
Enterprise Ireland (EI) Brexit Scorecard - online platform for Irish companies to self-assess their exposure to Brexit	3,332 Brexit Scorecards have been completed, which includes 502 LEOs clients	2017 Expenditure: €25,568 2018 Expenditure: €11,261
EI Be Prepared Grant	148 Be Prepared Grants have been approved	2017 Expenditure: €10,000 2018 Expenditure: €154,573
EI Market Discovery Fund - A support to EI clients to research new markets	166 projects have been approved under this initiative	Market Discovery fund was launched in 2018 2018 Expenditure: €165,470

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Scheme	Uptake (as of 19 November 2018)	Allocation/Expenditure by year up to 19 November 2018
EI Agile Innovation Fund - Gives rapid fast-track access to innovation funding	33 Agile Innovation projects have been approved	Agile Innovation Fund was launched in 2018 2018 Expenditure: €263,681
EI Brexit Advisory Clinics	11 events been run with approx. 915 in attendance	2017 Expenditure: €57,797 2018 Expenditure: €144,567
EI Brexit 'Act On Programme' – A support funding the engagement of a consultant to devise report with recommendations to help clients address weaknesses and improve resilience	130 'Act on' Plans have been completed	2018 Expenditure: €258,000
EI Strategic Consultancy Grant – A grant to assist EI clients to hire a strategic consultant for a set period	1,045 Strategic Consultancy Grants have been approved	2016 Expenditure: €278,137 2017 Expenditure: €482,617 2018 Expenditure: €444,368
Local Enterprise Office (LEO) Mentoring	263 mentoring participants solely focused on Brexit	Not available
LEO Technical Assistance Grant for Micro Export - an incentive for LEO clients to explore and develop new market opportunities	293 clients were approved assistance under the Technical Assistance Grant	2017 Allocation: €785,000 2017 Expenditure: €188,829 2018 Allocation: €800,000 2018 Expenditure: €365,774 up to 30/09/18
LEO LEAN4Micro – The Lean4Micro offer was developed in collaboration between the EI Lean department and the LEOs to tailor the EI Lean offer for LEO micro enterprise clients	192 LEO clients have participated in the programme	2017 Allocation: €882,500 2017 Expenditure: €529,922 2018 Allocation: €852,620 2018 Expenditure: €518,411 up to 30/09/18
LEO Brexit Seminars/Events	3,925 Participants at the Brexit Information events	2017 Allocation: €153,500 2017 Expenditure: €85,509 2018 Allocation: €177,800 2018 Expenditure: €57,855 up to 30/09/18
InterTradeIreland Brexit Advisory Service	2,350 SMEs have directly engaged with the Brexit Advisory Service	2017 Expenditure: €342,000 2018 Expenditure: €834,000 up to 31/10/2018
InterTradeIreland (ITI) Brexit Start to Plan Vouchers	There have been 619 applications, with 514 approved and 105 pending.	2017 Expenditure: €7,409 2018 Expenditure: €333,654
Pilot Online Retail Scheme administered by Enterprise Ireland	Total fund of €1.25m. The first call opened on 24 October. This call will close on 5 December at 3pm.	Not available

Brexit Supports

324. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of firms that have applied for working capital under the Brexit loan scheme; the number of firms that have been sanctioned financing to date; and the value of same. [48875/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Brexit Loan Scheme provides affordable working capital to eligible businesses with up to 499 employees that are or will be impacted by Brexit and meet the scheme criteria. The €23 million exchequer funding (€14 million from my Department and €9 million from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine) has been leveraged to provide a fund of up to €300 million.

It has been designed to assist eligible Irish businesses in the short-term to deal with the challenges of Brexit, which include the pressures of increased market instability and currency volatility. The scheme is open to both State Agency clients and businesses that do not have any relationship with State Agencies. Sole traders may also apply.

The scheme features a two-stage application process. First, businesses must apply to the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) to confirm their eligibility for the scheme. This application process requires businesses to use guidelines provided on the SBCI website to determine if they are eligible, and if so, to complete the eligibility form. As part of the process, businesses must submit a business plan, demonstrating the means by which they intend to innovate, change or adapt to meet the challenges posed by Brexit. Guidance is available on the SBCI website on how to complete a business plan. The SBCI assess the applications and successful applicants receive an eligibility reference number.

Successful applicants can then apply for a loan under the scheme with one of the participating finance providers. Participating finance providers are the Bank of Ireland, Ulster Bank and Allied Irish Bank. Approval of loans under the Brexit Loan Scheme is subject to the finance providers' own credit policies and procedures.

The scheme was launched in March this year and, as of 23 November, there have been 307 applications received, of which 270 have been approved and 54 loans progressed to sanction at finance provider level to a value of €12.51 million. These figures were issued as an interim update, more detailed information is available on a quarterly basis.

Trade Agreements

325. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the status of discussions at EU level following the agreement between the United States of America Administration and the European Commission in July 2018 to commence trade negotiations focused on industrial goods; the sectors that will be included and excluded, respectively in these negotiations; and if she has communicated sectors that should not be included in such negotiations to the Commission. [48878/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The EU and US are each other's most significant trading partners based on broadly similar values and interests that have proved indispensable for the prosperity of both sides of the Atlantic. Ireland and the EU remain fully committed to a continued strong partnership with the US as equal partners. Our long-established relationships provide the basis for continuing economic and trade cooperation.

In the context of current international trade developments, I very much welcome the Joint Statement of 25th July 2018 by President Juncker and President Trump concerning the launching of a new phase in the relationship between the EU and the US, where we agreed to:-

- work together toward zero tariffs, zero non-tariff barriers, and zero subsidies (on non-auto industrial goods) and to work to reduce barriers and increase trade in services, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, medical products, as well as soybeans,

- strengthen strategic energy cooperation to potentially increase US imports of (LNG) to diversify the EU's energy supply,

- launch a close dialogue on standards to ease trade barriers, reduce bureaucratic obstacles, and slash costs,

- work closely together with like-minded partners to reform the WTO and to address unfair trading practices, including intellectual property theft, forced technology transfer, industrial subsidies, distortions created by state owned enterprises, and overcapacity, and

- commit to resolving the steel and aluminium tariff issues and rebalancing tariffs and no further tariff measures unless either party terminates the negotiations.

On 10th September 2018, EU Commissioner Malmström met U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) Lighthizer to initiate the Executive Working Group (EWG) established in order to improve trade relations between the US and EU and address each of the topics in the Joint Statement. During 23rd - 26th October 2018, EU officials visited Washington to attend a number of technical meetings to advance the work of the EWG and to meet with a number of US agencies to discuss voluntary regulatory cooperation. Commissioner Malmström met again with USTR Lighthizer on the 14th November in Washington where they had positive discussions on conformity assessment, industrial standards and regulatory cooperation in the pharmaceuticals, medical devices and cybersecurity sectors. It is important to stress that regulatory cooperation will be voluntary and agreed outside any formal trade negotiation with the US.

This EWG is due to publish a report before the end of the year to outline the next steps the EU and US should take to implement the Joint Statement. After the scope of negotiations has been agreed by the EWG, EU Trade Ministers will consider any proposed mandate for the EU Commission to negotiate a formal trade deal with the US.

I have clarified with the EU Commission that agriculture will remain excluded from the scope of any future agreement with the US. Further, my officials and I remain in close consultation with other Departments, colleague Member States and the EU Commission in relation to the ongoing EU-US dialogue on trade. In that context, we will review any draft mandate from the Commission to ensure that Ireland's interests are fully represented.

Brexit Supports

326. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of businesses that have availed of the Brexit loan scheme by county and by sector; and the average breakdown loaned between €25,000 and €1.5 million. [48937/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Brexit Loan Scheme provides affordable working capital to eligible businesses with up to 499 employees that are or will be impacted by Brexit and meet the scheme criteria. The €23 million exchequer funding (€14 million from my Department and €9 million from the Department of

Agriculture, Food and the Marine) has been leveraged to provide a fund of up to €300 million.

It has been designed to assist eligible Irish businesses in the short-term to deal with the challenges of Brexit, which include the pressures of increased market instability and currency volatility. The scheme is open to both State Agency clients and businesses that do not have any relationship with State Agencies. Sole traders may also apply.

The scheme features a two-stage application process. First, businesses must apply to the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) to confirm their eligibility for the scheme. This application process requires businesses to use guidelines provided on the SBCI website to determine if they are eligible, and if so, to complete the eligibility form. As part of the process, businesses must submit a business plan, demonstrating the means by which they intend to innovate, change or adapt to meet the challenges posed by Brexit. Guidance is available on the SBCI website on how to complete a business plan. The SBCI assess the applications and successful applicants receive an eligibility reference number.

Successful applicants can then apply for a loan under the scheme with one of the participating finance providers. Participating finance providers are the Bank of Ireland, Ulster Bank and Allied Irish Bank. Approval of loans under the Brexit Loan Scheme is subject to the finance providers' own credit policies and procedures.

The scheme was launched in March this year and, as of 23 November, there have been 307 applications received, with 270 deemed eligible and 54 loans progressed to sanction at finance provider level to a value of €12.51 million. This equates to an average loan value of approximately €231,700. These figures were issued as an interim update from the SBCI.

The SBCI issues a detailed report on a quarterly basis, which includes county level breakdown and sector breakdown. The figures below are those as at the most recent quarterly report, dated 02 October 2018:

County	Applications Approved
Carlow	3
Cavan	9
Clare	2
Cork	18
Donegal	9
Dublin	58
Galway	10
Kerry	6
Kildare	8
Kilkenny	0
Laois	4
Leitrim	0
Limerick	7
Louth	7
Mayo	3
Meath	9
Monaghan	9
Offaly	1
Roscommon	1

County	Applications Approved
Sligo	4
Tipperary	7
Waterford	2
Westmeath	3
Wexford	6
Wicklow	14

Industry Sector	Applications Approved
Agriculture (Primary) – Not eligible	0
Agriculture (Non-Primary)	2
Mining & Quarrying	1
Manufacturing	79
Electricity, Gas, Steam & Air Conditioning Supply	1
Water Supply, Sewerage & Waste Management	1
Construction	8
Wholesale & Retail	40
Transportation & Storage	3
Accommodation & Food	6
Information & Communication	41
Financial & Insurance Activities	2
Professional, Scientific & Technical Activities	9
Administrative & Support Services	2
Education	4
Human Health & Social Work	1

Question No. 327 answered with Question No. 323.

Employment Data

328. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of adults on the autism spectrum who gain meaningful employment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49047/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): There is no data available which specifically measures the number of people on the autism spectrum that are employed in Ireland. The first study measuring the number of people who are on this spectrum in Ireland was completed in 2016 by researchers at DCU, but did not include metrics on employment. My Department has consulted with the Central Statistics Office and Departments of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, Health and Justice and Equality who do not have such data. This data cannot be fully captured by any Department or body as employees do not have to inform their employer that they are on this spectrum and indeed may not be aware that they are on it. Both the Departments of Employment Affairs and Social Protection and Justice and Equality have policy responsibility in relation to the employment of people with disabilities and a number of policy documents have been published such as, Make Work Pay

for People with Disabilities 2017, the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities 2015-2024 and the National Disability Inclusion Strategy.

Legal Costs

329. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the legal service providers contracted by the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement in 2018; the hours worked by each legal service provider; the cost of each legal service provider; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49229/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Legal service providers contracted in 2018 are set out in the following table. The table does not include contracts already existing at the start of 2018, nor does it include contracts which have not yet given rise to Fee Notes (e.g. where a case is ongoing). The hours worked are not relevant in many cases as some tasks are undertaken at a flat fee.

Service provider contracted in 2018	Payments made to date
Beauchamps	€43,421.63
Neil Steen S.C.	€162,247.26
David Dodd B.L.	€2,829.00
William Abrahamson B.L.	€9,225.00
David Fennelly B.L.	€430.50
Declan Murphy B.L.	€3,075.00

Legal Costs

330. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the legal service providers contracted by Enterprise Ireland in 2018; the hours worked by each legal service provider; the total cost of each legal service provider; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49230/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Details of the legal service providers contracted by Enterprise Ireland from January to October 2018 are set out in the following table along with the total cost of each.

The number of hours worked has not been included as this would identify the cost per hour of each legal service provider, which is commercially sensitive information.

Legal Service Providers	Cost €
A&L GOODBODY	114,233.73
MATHESON ORMSBY PRENTICE	2,326.55
MASON HAYES & CURRAN	21,855.87
BAKER & MCKENZIE	49,499.74
CROSKERRYS	806.88
MCCANN FITZGERALD SOLICITORS	12,300.00
BEAUCHAMPS, SOLICITORS	195,865.78
Total:	396,888.55

Legal Costs

331. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the legal service providers contracted by IDA Ireland in 2018; the hours worked by each legal service provider; the cost of each legal service provider; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49231/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The following table sets out a list of legal service providers utilised by the IDA from January to September 2018 and the cost of each particular service during that period. The professional fees referenced include a range of services, including land and building sales, land acquisition, lease transactions, grant recoveries and legal advice on various matters.

As to the number of hours, legal firms do submit billable hours where they are charging on a time - as opposed to set-fee - basis. When billed, IDA Ireland checks that the hourly rate charged is in accordance with the tenders submitted by the firms.

Legal Service Provider	Description of Service	Cost
Gerard Carrigg	Fees re Affidavit x 2 + Exhibits x 2	24.00
Mason Hayes & Curran	Professional Fee	905.33
Denis McDonald SC	Professional Fee	3,531.30
Byrne Wallace	Professional Fee	899.58
Gore & Grimes	Professional Fee	861.00
Beauchamps Solicitors	Professional Fee	19,562.23
Gore & Grimes	Professional Fee	2,198.91
Mason Hayes & Curran	Professional Fee	2,954.67
Eversheds Sutherland	Professional Fee	891.45
Byrne Wallace	Professional Fee	646.60
Byrne Wallace	Professional Fee	1,151.75
Byrne Wallace	Professional Fee	5,144.26
Beauchamps Solicitors	Professional Fee	11,010.30
Byrne Wallace	Professional Fee	9,534.42
McDowell Purcell	Professional Fee	368.47
Byrne Wallace	Professional Fee	2,138.29
Byrne Wallace	Professional Fee	1,288.48
Beauchamps Solicitors	Professional Fee	1,168.79
Lavelle Solicitors	Professional Fee	771.99
Matheson Solicitors	Professional Fee	2,158.55
Lavelle Solicitors	Professional Fee	133.07
Lavelle Solicitors	Professional Fee	6,031.07
Matheson Solicitors	Professional Fee	3,827.29
Matheson Solicitors	Professional Fee	3,344.14
Eversheds Sutherland	Professional Fee	845.50
Eversheds Sutherland	Professional Fee	7,725.90
Beauchamps Solicitors	Professional Fee	11,740.86
Beauchamps Solicitors	Professional Fee	3,326.60
Beauchamps Solicitors	Professional Fee	28,332.04
Beauchamps Solicitors	Professional Fee	12,810.02
Beauchamps Solicitors	Professional Fee	410.01

Legal Service Provider	Description of Service	Cost
Beauchamps Solicitors	Professional Fee	8,310.17
Hayes Solicitors	Professional Fee	2,540.00
Reddy Charlton Solicitors	Professional Fee	1,000.00
Gallagher Shatter	Professional Fee	65.83
Gallagher Shatter	Professional Fee	1,100.00
Mason Hayes & Curran	Professional Fee	4,126.55
Reddy Charlton	Professional Fee	1,000.00
Beauchamps Solicitors	Professional Fee	2,225.60
Beauchamps Solicitors	Professional Fee	5,412.00
Reddy Charlton Solicitors	Professional Fee	2,382.50
Gallagher Shatter	Professional Fee	4,662.31
Beauchamps Solicitors	Professional Fee	2,525.00
Hayes Solicitors	Professional Fee	2,045.00
Hayes Solicitors	Professional Fee	2,544.43
Beauchamps Solicitors	Professional Fee	2,320.00
Beauchamps Solicitors	Professional Fee	2,162.50
Byrne Wallace	Professional Fee	814.00
Beauchamps Solicitors	Professional Fee	905.94
Reddy Charlton Solicitors	Professional Fee	1,000.00
Mullin & Treacy Solicitors	Professional Fee	2,755.98
Philip Lee	Professional Fee	3,635.50
Byrne Wallace	Professional Fee	3,154.32
Mason Hayes & Curran	Professional Fee	3,500.00
Mason Hayes & Curran	Professional Fee	2,890.64
Mason Hayes & Curran	Professional Fee	1,040.00
Lavelle Solicitors	Professional Fee	1,389.20
Byrne Wallace	Professional Fee	792.00
Byrne Wallace	Professional Fee	308.00
Byrne Wallace	Professional Fee	1,604.40
Hayes Solicitors	Professional Fee	6,140.00
Byrne Wallace	Professional Fee	6,029.42
Byrne Wallace	Professional Fee	1,122.80
Gallagher Shatter	Professional Fee	10,175.36
Philip Lee	Professional Fee	1,293.48
Beauchamps Solicitors	Professional Fee	7,275.00
Reddy Charlton Solicitors	Professional Fee	2,800.00
Hayes Solicitors	Professional Fee	4,896.32
Hayes Solicitors	Professional Fee	4,140.00
Byrne Wallace	Professional Fee	547.52
Hayes Solicitors	Professional Fee	2,540.00
Philip Lee	Professional Fee	3,744.00
Byrne Wallace	Professional Fee	1,191.16
A & L Goodbody Consulting Ltd	Professional Fee	2,200.00

Legal Service Provider	Description of Service	Cost
Beauchamps Solicitors	Professional Fee	1,706.10
Mason Hayes & Curran	Professional Fee	1,040.00
Beauchamps Solicitors	Professional Fee	3,450.47
Hayes Solicitors	Professional Fee	10,196.00
Byrne Wallace	Professional Fee	21,068.73
Reddy Charlton Solicitors	Professional Fee	25,658.00
Mason Hayes & Curran	Professional Fee	2,037.80
Lavelle Solicitors	Professional Fee	350.00
Gallagher Shatter	Professional Fee	675.00
Beauchamps Solicitors	Professional Fee	20,777.40
Hayes Solicitors	Professional Fee	2,448.50
Philip Lee	Professional Fee	2,648.50
Byrne Wallace	Professional Fee	420.00
Byrne Wallace	Professional Fee	88.00
Byrne Wallace	Professional Fee	2661.32
Mason Hayes & Curran	Professional Fee	563.30
Total		363,832.92

Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement

332. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of company director restrictions imposed by the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement in 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form. [49280/18]

333. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of company director disqualifications imposed by the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement in 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form. [49281/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 332 and 333 together.

The ODCE does not have the power to impose company director restrictions or disqualifications. Only the High Court can impose such sanctions. However, following the commencement of the Companies Act, 2014, in June, 2015, the ODCE may, in specified circumstances, invite an individual, who would otherwise face High Court proceedings seeking their disqualification or restriction, to submit to a voluntary undertaking. Where such undertakings are given they have the same legal effect as Court imposed disqualifications or restrictions.

In order to determine whether, or not, to offer an undertaking, the ODCE examines the circumstances of each case and determines whether it has reasonable grounds for believing that the individual concerned should be subject to a disqualification or restriction.

Disqualifications

In 2017, the ODCE recommenced a programme of investigation of companies that were struck off the companies register while still having debts. The directors of such companies are liable to be disqualified by virtue of section 842(h). This area of investigation had previously to be suspended in the light of concerns arising from a judgement handed down by the High Court. Having regard to their concerns about the judgment, the ODCE successfully appealed

the decision to the Court of Appeal.

Further disqualifications arise in connection with insolvent companies in liquidation. The decisions will usually be based primarily on a detailed review of the statutory reports that liquidators are required to make to the ODCE in respect of insolvent liquidations. In a small number of such cases, an offer of a disqualification undertaking may be made.

However, in other cases, such as where a director decides not to give an Undertaking, the liquidator involved will be required to proceed with an application to the High Court for the restriction of the directors of the company but, in appropriate cases, may also apply to have the directors concerned disqualified.

Details of all disqualifications arising on foot of either Undertakings given to the ODCE or Court orders are set out in the table attached:

Restrictions

In order to determine whether, or not, to offer an Undertaking, the ODCE examines the circumstances of each case and determines whether it has reasonable grounds for believing that the individual concerned should be subject to a restriction. This primarily arises in connection with insolvent companies in liquidation. The decisions will usually be based primarily on a detailed review of the statutory reports that liquidators are required to make to the ODCE in respect of insolvent liquidations.

In certain circumstances, such as a case where a director decides not to give an Undertaking, the liquidator involved will be required to proceed with an application to the High Court for the restriction of the directors of the company. In certain circumstances, liquidators may also form the view that a disqualification application is appropriate. Details of all restrictions arising on foot of either Undertakings given to the ODCE or Court orders are set out in the following tables:

Directors Restricted	2017	2018 (to date)
Undertakings	86	78
Court Order	31	17*
Total	117	95

*This is the number of Court Orders that have been notified to the ODCE.

PQ 49281 Table

Directors disqualified	2017	2018 to date.
Struck-off companies (all by undertakings)	4	19
Disqualifications in connection with insolvent liquidations:		
- Undertakings	1	1
- Court Order	9	8*
Total	14	28

* This is the number of Court Orders that have been notified to the ODCE to date.

334. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of prosecutions the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement has brought in 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form. [49282/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Investigations/prosecutions - The ODCE has a remit to investigate indications of both civil and criminal wrongdoing under company law. In conducting such investigations, the ODCE has a range of investigative powers at its disposal as provided for by the Companies Acts.

Exercise of investigative powers

Those powers are supplemented by those powers that members of An Garda Síochána (“AGS”) possess by virtue of being members of AGS. During the period covered by the question, i.e., 2017 and 2018, the ODCE exercised the following investigative powers:

Investigative (and related) powers exercised	2017	2018
Production and Other Orders under the Companies Act 2014, the Criminal Justice (Theft & Fraud Offences) Act 2001 and the Criminal Justice Act 1994 (as amended) (not an exhaustive list)	52	54
Directions to liquidators to submit statutory reports	45	46
Arrest	3	5
Search and Seizure	4	0
Total	104	105

Enforcement actions

Enforcement actions arising from the exercise of the investigative powers referenced above can be civil in nature and/or criminal in nature.

Civil enforcement

In March 2018, and following a lengthy investigation, the ODCE lodged an application with the High Court for the appointment of Inspectors to Independent News & Media plc (“INM”). In September 2018, following an unsuccessful Judicial Review and a subsequent three day hearing, the President of the High Court appointed two inspectors to INM. The Inspectors are now in situ and are due to produce their first report to the High Court in April 2019.

Other civil enforcement actions, i.e., applications for the disqualification of the directors of insolvent companies that have been struck off the register, are dealt with under the response to question reference 49281/18.

Criminal enforcement – summary prosecutions

The ODCE is only empowered to initiate summary prosecutions (i.e., in the District Court). Only the Director of Public Prosecutions (“DPP”) can initiate a prosecution on indictment (i.e., in the Circuit Criminal Court before a jury).

Summary prosecutions are only suitable for relatively minor matters and, as such, the ODCE typically seeks to resolve issues of underlying non-compliance by other, more cost, effective means such as, for example, by issuing warning letters, by requiring evidence of rectification

and/or issuing statutory directions requiring the taking of certain actions. Consequently, and consistent with its strategic focus on deploying finite specialist resources (i.e., Garda, accounting, legal and digital forensics) towards more serious indications of wrongdoing, the ODCE did not initiate any summary prosecutions in the District Court over the period 2017 to 2018.

Referrals to the DPP

Investigations into more serious indications of wrongdoing will typically result in a file being submitted to the DPP for consideration as to whether charges should be directed on indictment. Whether charges are directed is solely a matter for the DPP.

During the period covered by the question, i.e., 2017 and 2018, the ODCE submitted files to the DPP for consideration as follows:

-	2017	2018
Files submitted	5	0 (YTD)

Directions to charge on indictment

Once an investigation file is submitted to the DPP, the timeframe within which a decision is taken as to whether to charge or not is outside the ODCE's control. In complex cases, it is not unusual for the DPP to seek advices on proofs from Counsel prior to making such a decision.

Where the DPP directs charges on indictment, the matter enters the Courts system where the timing is, similarly, outside the ODCE's control. During the period covered by the question, i.e., 2017 and 2018, the DPP directed charges on foot of ODCE files as follows:

	2017	2018
Charges directed	1 alleged offence of Fraudulent Trading	1 alleged offence of Fraudulent Trading 6 alleged offences of Money Laundering 1 alleged offence of the Use of a False Instrument
Total	1	8

Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement Investigations

335. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of convictions the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement has achieved in 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form. [49283/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Prosecutions on indictment - Purpose of criminal investigations

It is important to appreciate that the purpose of a criminal investigation is not to secure a conviction. Rather, the purpose is to establish the facts. Thereafter, it is a matter for the DPP to determine, having regard to the facts and to potentially relevant offences, whether the direction of charges is appropriate and in the public interest.

Prosecutions on indictment

During the period covered by the question, i.e., 2017 and 2018, the following convictions resulted from charges having been directed by the DPP on foot of ODCE investigations:

Prosecution	Outcome
2017	
DPP v William McAteer	Convicted of one count of Fraudulent Trading contrary to section 297 of the Companies Act 1963
DPP v Patrick Whelan	Convicted on one count of failing to maintain a licensed bank's register of lending to directors and connected persons contrary to section 44 of the Companies Act 1990
2018	
DPP v David Drumm	Convicted on ten counts of providing unlawful financial assistance contrary to section 60 of the Companies Act 1963
DPP v Mary Donnelly	Convicted of one count of Fraudulent Trading contrary to section 297 of the Companies Act 1963

Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement

336. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of vacant positions in the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement; the length of time these positions have been vacant; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49284/18]

338. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement has asked for additional funding, staffing or resources to date in 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49286/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 336 and 338 together.

The ODCE currently has one vacancy (Corporate Compliance Manager). Since his appointment, the current Director has undertaken a significant restructuring of the ODCE to better reflect the organisation's needs in the context of both its strategic shift towards deploying resources towards more serious indications of wrongdoing and the increasingly complex environment within which the ODCE operates.

That restructuring has included the seeking of sanction for the recruitment of a substantial number of additional professional staff, and following receipt of sanction, the recruitment of eight accounting professionals, three legal professionals and a digital forensics professional, together with significant investment in a digital forensics laboratory, training and development. The recruitment and assimilation of a large number of new professional staff into a multi-disciplinary organisation that undertakes complex work in a fast-moving environment is a project that requires careful management. As such, the Director is of the view that it is preferable to allow that process to fully bed down before filling the aforementioned vacancy. The Director is further conscious of the fact that the transition of the ODCE to a stand-alone Agency will give rise to additional expertise requirements and, as such, is of the view that it is prudent that those considerations should be factored into developing the role, and associated skill set, required of the appointee.

As part of the annual budgetary process, the ODCE has sought additional funding in respect of 2019. This additional funding request is related primarily to the recent appointment by the President of the High Court of Inspectors to Independent News & Media plc. Under the Com-

panies Act 2014, the costs associated with the Inspectorship are met, in the first instance, by the ODCE. Additional funding was also sought to reflect the likely costs associated with the transition of the ODCE into an independent Agency. An additional €1m was provided for the ODCE in the Budget announced on 9 October 2018.

Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement

337. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the status of her plans to reform the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49285/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): One of the actions in the Government's package of Measures to Enhance Ireland's Corporate, Economic and Regulatory Framework, published in November 2017, is the establishment of the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement (ODCE) as an agency.

Work on the development of the legislative framework for the establishment of the ODCE as an agency is well advanced. I intend to bring a General Scheme of a Bill to give effect to that action to Government very shortly.

Changing the structure of the ODCE from an office to a statutory agency will provide greater autonomy to the agency and ensure it is better equipped to investigate increasingly complex breaches of company law. Sourcing of expertise and specialist staff, such as forensic accountants, will be enhanced under the agency model.

This establishment of the ODCE as an Agency is intended to:

- Enhance the ODCE's independence, by providing it with more autonomy, particularly the ability to recruit the required specialist skills and expertise;
- Build on its existing expertise and experience;
- Strengthen its capability to investigate increasingly complex breaches of company law; and
- Build on the organisational and procedural reforms that have been implemented.

Question No. 338 answered with Question No. 336.

Ministerial Meetings

339. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of meetings she held in 2017 and to date in 2018 with the Director of Corporate Enforcement; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49287/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Since my appointment and to date I have not had any meetings with the Director of Corporate Enforcement.

My Department maintains regular contact with the ODCE on, inter alia, issues such as reform and modernisation, resourcing, performance and proposals for legislative change.

Ministerial Meetings

340. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of meetings held in 2017 and to date in 2018 between officials from her Department and officials from the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49288/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): As is the case with other Offices and Agencies under the remit of my Department, officials from my Department meet with officials from the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement on a regular basis to discuss a range of issues, including in relation to Human Resource issues, ICT matters, funding, facilities, legislation and meetings with the Department's Management Board.

These meetings are complemented by engagement which takes place on an ongoing basis between my officials and officials of my Department and officials from the ODCE, as part of the normal day-to-day interaction to discuss operational matters relating to the Office. Communication takes place in several ways including by telephone and by way of both formal and informal meetings.

Health and Safety Authority

341. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of farm safety inspectors employed by the HSA; and the number of new inspectors hired in 2017 and to date in 2018 for farm safety. [49364/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): There are currently 24 field inspectors who have been involved in farm safety inspections and campaigns throughout 2018.

In 2017 the HSA undertook a recruitment campaign for 11 Inspector posts, 6 of which were for field inspection posts. These 6 Inspectors have been involved in farm inspection campaigns during 2018 thereby helping to ensure that farm inspection targets and farm safety campaign targets are being achieved. These new inspectors were in addition to the existing cohort of 18 inspectors involved in farm inspections and farm safety campaigns.

In 2018, to date, the HSA has recruited 5 new field inspector posts. It is intended that 3 of these new inspector posts will be assigned to general inspection activities during 2019 which will include farm inspection and farm safety promotion campaigns.

Consultancy Contracts Expenditure

342. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the fees paid and services rendered to a person (details supplied) in each of the years 2013 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49417/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department has not made any payments to, or procured any services from, the named person or the named company during the period in question.

Climate Change Adaptation Plans

343. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if she will provide a timeline for the development of her Department's specific climate change targets; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49561/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): While not directly responsible for delivering climate change mitigation programmes, my Department ensures that climate change is factored into its core enterprise and innovation policy responsibilities. My Department works closely with its agencies to fund climate change related research and to deliver environmental performance improvement programmes which directly assist enterprise in reducing emissions and improving energy efficiency.

Climate change adaptation and mitigation measures are a central part of our policy considerations and are a key factor when developing new initiatives. For example, the Future Jobs initiative is the Government's new plan and programme of action for the next phase of Ireland's economic development. The initiative is being developed jointly by my Department and the Department of the Taoiseach and we expect to launch the initiative early next year. One of the key areas being considered under the initiative is adaptation to the 'Low Carbon Economy' and how enterprises can innovate and adapt to succeed in a low carbon economy. The initiative recognises that climate change impacts how we do business and requires a change to production and consumption methods.

My Department is administering the Government's new €500m Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund, one of four funds in the National Development Plan 2018-2027. Applications under the fund must align with research priority areas which include climate action related areas such as "Decarbonising the Energy System" and "Sustainable Living". Applications under the first funding call are currently being considered.

Innovation 2020, Ireland's strategy for research and development, science and technology, contains a series of actions to promote research and innovation in climate change related areas.

In addition to the initiatives being developed and implemented by my Department, the enterprise sector continues to participate in emission reduction efforts with accompanying obligations to reduce emissions. Irish enterprises' main contribution to reducing greenhouse gas emissions is through the European Union Emissions Trading System which includes approximately one hundred installations of Ireland's largest energy users, who account for more than 25% of Ireland's emissions. The Emissions Trading System operates on a "cap and trade" basis, with the cap continuously reducing over time. Under Phase IV of the System which will commence in 2021, the sectors covered by EU ETS must reduce their emissions by 43% by 2030 compared to 2005 levels.

Two hundred of Ireland's largest energy users are members of Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland's Large Industry Energy Network. Estimated energy savings of over 10% were achieved by network members in 2017 and over 300 projects were implemented covering a wide range of energy efficiency and renewable energy technologies.

A number of companies are availing of Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland initiatives such as the "Lighting Support Scheme for SMEs" and the Excellence in Energy Efficient Design, which incorporate energy efficiency into design projects. Enterprises continue to avail of the Accelerated Capital Allowances scheme for Energy Efficient Equipment to assist them in their purchase of highly energy efficient equipment.

In terms of my Department's agency initiatives in the area of climate change, Science Foundation Ireland funds climate action related research in areas such climate change mitigation and renewable energy.

IDA's Environmental Aid Programme assists client companies to implement major renewable energy or energy efficiency initiatives or address other environmental issues such as waste reduction.

Enterprise Ireland supports companies to improve their environmental performance, drive environmental efficiencies and achieve improved sustainability.

Medical Card Applications

344. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for Health when a medical card will issue to persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48843/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, the Deputy's question has been forwarded to the HSE for direct reply.

HSE Properties

345. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health the details of HSE properties (details supplied). [48851/18]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

346. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 365 of 23 October 2018, if a date has been set for scoliosis surgery for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48859/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Hospital Waiting Lists

347. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied)

will receive a CT scan appointment. [48860/18]

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 Statistics

348. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons with MS here; the number that have relapsing remitting MS; and the number that have primary progressive MS. [48861/18]

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 Provision

349. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health when an organisation (details supplied) in County Wexford will be advised of the date, time and location of a meeting with a HSE employee; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48883/18]

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.

Nursing and Midwifery Staff Remuneration

350. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the estimated cost of bringing the nursing and midwifery professions in line with the pay grades of other therapeutic grades. [48603/18]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

351. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a scan for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48886/18]

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.

Cannabis for Medicinal Use

352. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a series of matters (details supplied) regarding cannabis licences; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48897/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): No licences have been issued for the specific treatment of cervical cancer with medical cannabis.

The Department is not aware if any of the patients currently being treated with medical cannabis in Ireland have been affected by the Cervical Check issues.

If the Deputy would like to provide more information on this matter which has come to his attention, I will be happy to provide a further response.

Hospital Appointments Status

353. **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. [48908/18]

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 Building Programme

354. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Health the status of the development of new buildings and services at Youghal and Midleton community hospitals, respectively; the progress over the past 12 months; his plans for the next 12 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48910/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of capital projects in the health services, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to you.

Hospital Appointments Status

355. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if an early appointment for a cataract operation will be arranged for a person (details supplied); and the reason they have not been called to date as promised at the time of their assessment [48914/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Services for People with Disabilities

356. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health when a place will be made available for a person (details supplied) in a community home in Kilkenny city; his views on whether persons fitting this profile should be given priority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48916/18]

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

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

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

Services for People with Disabilities

357. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health the amount of funding paid to an organisation (details supplied) in County Kilkenny for services in respect of a person (details supplied); the reason a sustainable long-term care plan was not put in place; the reason the family has had no support services for the past 11 years; if a long-term plan for funding will be put in place by the HSE in agreement with the person's mother; and if the matter will be expedited. [48917/18]

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

358. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if a hospital appointment will be expedited for a person (details supplied). [48918/18]

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.

Risk Equalisation Scheme

359. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of times since 2012 the Health Insurance Authority has reported that overcompensation has occurred through the risk equalisation scheme; the amount of overcompensation that was estimated; the steps that were taken to rectify the situation, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48923/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Section 7F of the Health Insurance Act 1994, as amended, sets out the detailed rules that apply to the Health Insurance Authority in assessing whether an insurer, that is a net recipient from the Risk Equalisation Fund, has been overcompensated by the Risk Equalisation Fund.

No insurer has been assessed by the Health Insurance Authority as being overcompensated since the legislation was enacted in 2009.

Eating Disorders

360. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the steps being taken to tackle muscle dysmorphia also known as bigorexia; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48926/18]

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

Occupational Therapy Waiting Lists

361. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delay for a person (details supplied) to see an occupational therapist. [48929/18]

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.

Disability Support Services Provision

362. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his plans for a residential home to be opened seven days a week (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48930/18]

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.

Home Care Packages Provision

363. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health when a new home care staff member will be assigned to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48934/18]

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 Provision

364. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 1761 of 24 July 2018, the position regarding service provision at a centre (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48950/18]

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

Dental Services Provision

365. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if he will publish the report of the investigation conducted by a person (details supplied) into allegations regarding children's dental services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48955/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the report was commissioned by the HSE, this matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Staff

366. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the specific contracts available to staff employed by the child and adolescent mental health services in south west County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48971/18]

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

Cancer Screening Programmes

367. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the wait time for women waiting on smear test results; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48975/18]

368. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the number of smear test slides waiting to be viewed; the reason for the backlog; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48976/18]

369. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the steps he is taking in cases in which slides have not been read in time and therefore become unreadable; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48977/18]

370. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the number of CervicalCheck slides that have become unreadable since the beginning of the CervicalCheck scandal to date due to being left too long; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48978/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 367 to 370, inclusive, together.

On 1 May this year, I asked CervicalCheck to make the necessary arrangements to provide that any woman who has had a CervicalCheck smear test, and whose GP considers that they should have a further test, to access such a further test without charge. CervicalCheck laboratory activity has since been significantly above normal levels. This is as a result both of these out of cycle smears and increased uptake generally, and has impacted turnaround times for results of smear tests. This is a priority concern for my Department.

The HSE has advised that, currently, receipt of results of smear tests may take up to 20 weeks, that it may take longer in a small number of cases, and that it is working closely with laboratories to address this issue.

Smear test samples must be sent to the laboratory and made into slides within six weeks of the smear test date. After six weeks, the sample is deemed expired and cannot be processed. In some cases, the increased volume has resulted in a delay transferring samples to slides. The HSE has advised that, since 30 July 2018, the majority of smear test samples are now transferred to slides within the six-week timeframe. The HSE has further advised that, in October 2017, there was a 0.25% rate of expired samples and vials. For the same period in 2018 the rate was 0.29%. Additionally, in some cases a sample may be insufficient.

Although every effort is made to avoid these situations from happening, it is inevitable that cervical screening programmes will sometimes encounter these issues. In such cases, a woman and her GP are advised of the need for a repeat test in three months' time by letter from CervicalCheck.

In regard to the specific details sought in relation to numbers of slides, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

371. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Health if the cost of prescribed medicinal cannabis for a person (details supplied) with multiple sclerosis will be reimbursed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48981/18]

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

Sativex is not currently reimbursed in the community drug schemes. The HSE received a new application for the reimbursement of Sativex in February 2018. A rapid review by the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics was completed on 3 April 2018 and a full pharmacoeconomic assessment was recommended to assess the clinical and cost effectiveness of Sativex compared with the current standard of care. The HSE commissioned a full pharmacoeconomic assessment on 20 April 2018.

Medical practitioners and patients are encouraged to consult the Department of Health website for information on cannabis-based products and authorised cannabis-based medicines, including clinical guidance on the use of cannabis-based products. This information can be found at the following website: health.gov.ie/blog/publications/cannabis-for-medical-use/.

Hospital Appointments Delays

372. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if the case of a person (details supplied) will be reviewed; and if a hospital appointment will be expedited. [48982/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Medical Card Reviews

373. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the status of a medical card review for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48983/18]

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

Home Care Packages

374. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a homecare package for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48984/18]

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.

Counselling Services Provision

375. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the response from the HSE as a result of reviewing counselling and talk therapy services with the view of improving access and services to an organisation (details supplied). [48999/18]

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

Services for People with Disabilities

376. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49002/18]

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.

Hospital Waiting Lists

377. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) is on a non-urgent list for an MRI scan in Nenagh Hospital with a wait time of over 12 months despite being diagnosed with cancer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49003/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Psychological Assessments Waiting Times

378. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will have an assessment of needs carried out in view of the fact that under the Disability Act 2005 this assessment should have been concluded by August 2018. [49005/18]

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.

Psychological Assessments

379. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health if psychological assessments carried out privately can be used by the HSE when they are carrying out an assessment of needs if the HSE has not completed the assessment within the required timeframe. [49010/18]

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

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

Health Insurance Data

380. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health the amount outstanding in payments due from private health insurers to public hospitals; the details of the amount due to each hospital (details supplied); if there is a system in place in each hospital to ensure that the full amount is claimed from health insurance companies and that the hospital is not under-bill-

ing; the number of bed nights that are partially paid for or rejected by insurers in public hospitals in each of the years 2014 to 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49013/18]

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

Hospital Staff Data

381. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health if the use of the vascular laboratory at University Hospital Waterford is curtailed due to a lack of staff; if so, the staff shortages that exist; the number of consultants and junior doctors assigned to vascular services in each of the years 2015 to 2017 and to date in 2018 at UHW; the efforts being made to address the problem; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49017/18]

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.

Patient Data

382. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health if patients to the ENT ward at University Hospital Waterford who had an ear test in recent years have been recalled for a second ear test; if so, the reason for retesting; the number of persons retested; if more retesting is scheduled; and if so, the number that require a retest; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49018/18]

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.

Hospital Appointments Status

383. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); the reason for the delay in appointments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49026/18]

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.

Obesity Strategy

384. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of progress with implementing the non-broadcast media advertising and marketing of food and non-alcoholic

beverages, including sponsorship and retail product placement, voluntary codes of practice; when the monitoring body will be set up to monitor the codes of practice; the timeframe for the designation of the body; the timeframe for the development of guidelines for implementation of the code; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49027/18]

385. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the progress being made by the sub-group on reformulation to set targets on reformulation of food and drink; when its recommendations on addressing reduction of portion sizes and on monitoring and validation procedures will be made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49028/18]

386. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of the work being undertaken in developing proposals for the purposes of conducting an evaluation of the sugar-sweetened drink tax; the timeframe for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49029/18]

387. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health when his Department will make a progress report on the implementation of A Healthy Weight for Ireland, Obesity Policy and Action Plan 2016-2025; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49030/18]

462. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the way in which the obesity policy implementation oversight group will engage with the recommendations of the Oireachtas Committee on Children and Youth Affairs's report on childhood obesity; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49556/18]

463. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of the way in which Action 2.1 of A Healthy Weight for Ireland, the Obesity Policy and Action Plan will be advanced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49557/18]

464. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the outcomes that have come from the stakeholder forum on the built environment that took place on 21 November 2018; if a report will be compiled on the recommendations from the event; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49558/18]

465. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the details on working groups to be established to design, enhance and deliver healthier environments after the stakeholder forum on the built environment that took place on 21 November 2018; if the obesity policy and action plan will examine developing a guidance document for health and environmental planning; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49559/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): I propose to take Questions Nos. 384 to 387, inclusive, and 462 to 465, inclusive, together.

The national Obesity Policy Implementation Oversight Group (OPIOG) established under the Chair of the Department of Health, is comprised of individuals from a range of Government Departments and Agencies. It is providing oversight to the implementation of the recommendations of the national Obesity Policy & Action Plan (OPAP). At its next meeting, the OPIOG will consider the Report on Tackling Childhood Obesity from the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Children and Youth Affairs for the purposes of, among others, aligning both sets of recommendations. In the meantime, the preparation of a Progress Report on the implementation of OPAP is continuing so that it can be considered at this next OPIOG meeting.

As the Deputy is aware, the OPIOG agreed to establish a sub-group for Reformulation earlier this year. This sub-group has met on a number of occasions since being established and agreed their Terms of Reference. The Reformulation sub-group is technical in its work programme. The work of the sub-group will primarily set targets on reformulation of food

and drink. It will also make recommendations on addressing reduction of portion sizes and on monitoring and validation procedures. As part of its work, a workshop between the Reformulation sub-group and Food Sector Stakeholders on reformulation took place on 20 September last. This workshop provided an important opportunity for detailed engagement with key Food Sector Stakeholders on the challenges and opportunities of reformulation in the interests of promoting the health and well-being of the population. And the work of the sub-group will now build on this engagement.

The report of the sub-group, which is anticipated to be finalised in the first half of next year, will among other things, explore approaches and make recommendations to address reducing portion sizes along with considering options for implementing recommendations in particular, monitoring and validation procedures.

While there are no plans at this juncture to establish any additional sub-groups along the lines referred to by the Deputy, the Chair of the OPIOG keeps such questions under review.

The commencement of the Sugar-Sweetened Drinks Tax on 1 May last was in line with one of the recommendations in the OPAP. It represents a positive step in our national policy to deal with the problem of obesity. Work on the development of an evaluation framework for this tax is well underway and I anticipate that this framework will be well advanced by early next year. In addition, Codes of Practice for food and beverages promotion, marketing and sponsorship were developed involving representatives from the food industry, advertising sector, statutory agencies, and various Government Departments. It was chaired by the former CEO of the statutory Food Safety Authority of Ireland. The Codes of Practice concerned were published in February. Earmarking a process for monitoring the Codes and the development of a related process to agree guidance for supporting them are continuing.

Finally, a number of Government policies aim to support the design and development of built environments that enhance health, wellbeing and quality of life for all. The National Physical Activity Plan (NPAP) and OPAP both require that joint action is taken to promote the importance of physical activity and to reduce the obesogenic nature of the built environment.

In line with Actions 31 of the NPAP and 2.1 of the OPAP, which commit to developing guidelines and support materials for those working in developing the built environment in order to promote the importance of physical activity, and Action 59 of the NPAP which commits to developing a programme of on-going stakeholder communication and engagement, a Stakeholder Forum was held on the 21 November last.

The event was planned in partnership, with substantial input from three Government Departments, (Health; Transport, Tourism and Sport; and Housing, Planning and Local Government) and was hosted in the National Indoor Arena, Sport Ireland National Sports Campus, Abbottstown. I am pleased to note that the event was well attended with 125 delegates.

This Forum, entitled Connect, Collaborate, Create; Co-Designing Healthier Communities, A Healthy Ireland Stakeholder Forum on the Built Environment, brought together those who have a responsibility for planning and developing public spaces with those who have expertise regarding the impacts of the built environment on health and wellbeing, sport and physical activity.

I was delighted to address this Forum together with my colleague Simon Harris T.D., Minister for Health, and the CEO of Sport Ireland, John Treacy. Sessions were chaired by officials from the Departments of Transport, Tourism and Sport and Health. Expert presentations were given regarding optimal design of healthier communities, the Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets (DMURS) and the new Town and Village Toolkit, which is about to be launched by

the Royal Institute of Architects of Ireland (RIAI).

Presentations were also given by Waterford City & County Council on the lessons learned from the success of the Waterford Greenway, and on the development of the No Fry Zone initiative in Greystones, Co. Wicklow which aims to place limits on the proximity of fast food outlets to schools.

The talks were followed by a workshop and discussion. Written feedback was gathered from all participant groups and is in the process of collation. These collated outcomes will be considered in detail by the relevant Departments, the National Physical Activity Plan Implementation Group and OPIOG for the purposes of advancing our work in the area of health and environmental planning.

Hospital Appointments Status

388. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** 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. [49031/18]

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

389. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for a person (details supplied) will be scheduled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49035/18]

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

390. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (detail supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49037/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

391. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the status of a prescription for a person (details supplied); the date for the provision of the items; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49038/18]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

392. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); if this appointment will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49039/18]

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

393. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if a hospital appointment will be expedited for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49040/18]

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.

Health Services Staff

394. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the case of persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49042/18]

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

395. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive a hospital appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49043/18]

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.

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uled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Home Help Service Provision

396. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of home help hours for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49048/18]

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 Reports

397. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the status of the implementation of the recommendations of a 2014 report (details supplied) into the genetic department at Crumlin children's hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49052/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Donnai-Newman Report on the Review of Genetics Services in Ireland (2014) was commissioned by the HSE to recommend improvements in the governance, management and future development of the genetic services. The report made several recommendations, the vast majority of which focused on the internal team working and clinical governance issues at Our Lady's Children's Hospital Crumlin. The report resulted in 56 actions to be undertaken by the HSE and Crumlin Hospital. The HSE has confirmed that 31 of these actions have been implemented and 16 are currently being implemented.

An external multi professional team, led by an experienced NHS UK Health Manager, has been assisting the Department of Clinical Genetics at Crumlin to deliver an improved service for patients and clinical service users. There continues to be investments in the recruitment of extra staff resources and the purchase of new equipment to assist with the implementation of improvements to the service.

A key recommendation of the Donnai-Newman Report was that a Steering Group should be set up to develop a National Genetic and Genomic Medicine Network that reflects best international practice. This Steering Group was established by the HSE in early 2015. Their report included recommending the appointment of a National Director of the National Genetic and Genomic Medicine Network and a Clinical Laboratory Director. The HSE National Service Plan 2018 includes a commitment to commence development of the National Genetics and Genomic Network. These key posts, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, will inform the development of the national strategic direction for genetic and genomic medicine services, including genetic services.

Services for People with Disabilities

398. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 159 of 30 May 2018, if his attention has been drawn to the fact that no contact has been made with the parent about an upcoming appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49053/18]

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.

Bullying in the Workplace

399. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the status of the HSE's revisiting of its preventative measures on bullying and harassment in the workplace, specifically the actions laid out in a HR email of 17 August 2018 (details supplied). [49058/18]

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 Provision

400. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health if he will examine the case of a person (details supplied) who is waiting for educational psychology therapy, clinical psychology, diagnostic and paediatric occupational therapy. [49066/18]

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.

Cross-Border Health Services Provision

401. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons that have received cataract treatment under the Cross Border Directive in the past two years; the cost of this treatment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49071/18]

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.

Services for People with Disabilities

402. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the status of works on the new greenfield site for a service (details supplied); when works will commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49080/18]

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

403. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Health his views on the recent occupation of a charity's head offices by members of an organisation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49081/18]

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.

Cross-Border Health Services Provision

404. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the waiting time for a refund under the Cross Border Directive (details supplied). [49095/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE operates the Cross Border Directive in Ireland. Patients in Ireland can seek to be referred to another EU/EEA country for medical treatment that is available in the public health service in Ireland. The patient may access the overseas service in either the public or private health sector of the country they choose to receive the service in.

The patient pays for the treatment and claims reimbursement from the HSE at the cost of that treatment in Ireland or the cost of it abroad, whichever is the lesser.

The HSE's target for reimbursing patients for healthcare accessed abroad under the CBD is a maximum of 20 working days from receiving all the completed documents. However, the HSE have confirmed it currently takes approximately 64 days to process reimbursements. The HSE have confirmed the increase in processing times is due to a significant increase in the amount of applications received for the CBD and they are currently reviewing the appropriate resourcing requirements.

Hospital Appointments Status

405. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive a hospital appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49101/18]

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.

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In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

National Cervical Screening Programme

406. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) is not entitled to a review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49110/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Following the emergence of issues relating to CervicalCheck earlier this year, the audit of the cervical screening process being conducted by CervicalCheck, for training and education purposes, was paused in light of two reviews established by Government.

One is an Independent Expert Panel Review led by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG). This has a clearly defined scope and terms of reference, and includes those women with a diagnosis of cervical cancer who had been registered with the National Cancer Registry of Ireland (NCRI) as of 5th May 2018. While registration of cancer cases is a continuous process, a defined time period and cut-off date is required for such a review and hence there will be women diagnosed with cervical cancer, who have been screened, who are not part of the review process.

The other review is the Scoping Inquiry led by Dr Gabriel Scally, whose report was published on my Department's website on 12 September and includes 50 recommendations, all of which have been accepted by Government. These include two recommendations relating specifically to auditing cervical screening.

Dr Scally recommends that common, robust and externally validated approaches to all aspects of audit should be developed across the screening services. He also advises that there should be two patient advocates involved in the oversight of clinical audit for the screening services. Both of these recommendations will be implemented. I want to see audit of cervical screening recommence as soon as possible, but it must be done in the right way and in the robust way that Dr Scally recommends, and there is obviously some work required to ensure that happens.

In the interim, the CervicalCheck website provides detail for women who wish to have an independent review of their slides at <https://www.hse.ie/eng/cervicalcheck/screening-informa->

Hospital Waiting Lists

407. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for an operation for a person (details supplied); if there is a timeframe for pre-assessment; their place on the waiting list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49114/18]

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 Administration

408. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for a person (details supplied) will be expedited. [49119/18]

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 Staff Recruitment

409. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health when the paediatric endocrinologist post at Cork University Hospital will be filled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49120/18]

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

Home Help Service Provision

410. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if he will review the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49125/18]

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

411. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); the timeframe for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49152/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Disability Services Provision

412. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) will be referred to a registered dietitian in south County Kildare, Dublin, Meath or Wicklow, in view of the fact that there are no dietitians on the North Kildare Disability Network Team; if the location and the timeline for access to this alternate service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49162/18]

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.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme

413. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health if the current review of the legislation bringing in changes to the terms and conditions of farm businesses' means for the fair deal scheme will address the issue of the five year period within which a farm business or home can be calculated for the purposes of the fair deal scheme after it has already been transferred to a new owner; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49166/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): There are no plans to amend the legislation in relation to the transfer of assets and any income or assets that the applicant and his/her partner may have deprived themselves of in the five years leading up to their application, or at any time on or subsequent to the date on which the application for financial support under the Scheme is first made.

Health Services Staff

414. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the reason there is no specialist in Ehlers-Danlos syndrome employed here; if one can be hired; when they can commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49179/18]

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

Services for People with Disabilities

415. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a request for long-term care by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49242/18]

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.

Charitable and Voluntary Organisations

416. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Health his views on the recent occupation of a charity's (details supplied) head offices by members of a group; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49244/18]

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.

Palliative Care Facilities

417. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding a centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49245/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): My colleague, Simon Harris T.D., Minister for Health, had the pleasure of officially opening Milford Care Centre's new specialist inpatient hospice at the start of this month. While Milford has continuously offered excellent palliative care for 40 years, it was recognised that the previous hospice unit no longer met best practice in maintaining the dignity and privacy of patients and their families. A new hospice building was designed to meet changing needs in palliative care and I share the Minister's confidence that the new building will meet the palliative care needs of the people of Limerick, Clare and North Tipperary for a long time to come.

Over the last five years, the Government has increased the number of specialist palliative care beds across the country by 50%. We are proud of this achievement, but recognise that many people do not have access to a specialist palliative care unit in their region. National palliative care policy seeks to ensure that there is a hospice serving every region in the country. Although good progress has been made on national policy recommendations, it is acknowledged that there are regions which still do not have access to specialist palliative inpatient care beds.

The Department of Health is working with the HSE to prepare the 2019 National Service Plan. This process is ongoing. The Department has asked the HSE to consider options for opening the additional four beds in 2019 having regard to the provision of palliative care services across the country within the overall envelope of resources available.

Services for People with Disabilities

418. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49247/18]

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.

Pharmaceutical Sector

419. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49251/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (PSI) is an independent statutory body with responsibility for the recognition and registration of pharmacists for practice in Ireland under the Pharmacy Act 2007.

Schedule 1 of the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (Registration) Rules 2008, as amended, sets out the particulars to be contained in or to accompany an application for registration in Part A of the Register of Pharmacists. Paragraph 7(b)(i) of Schedule 1 requires that along with their application, an applicant must submit “(i) a copy of his or her passport, or in default, such other document as may be considered acceptable for the purpose by the Registrar...”.

The PSI have advised that they are not in a position to comment on individual cases.

The issue of a passport being retained by the Department of Justice & Equality is a matter for that Department.

Nursing Home Services

420. **Deputy Fergus O’Dowd** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 644 of 6 November 2018, if a reply will issue in relation to outlining an independent appeals process as requested but was not responded in the reply received from the HSE. [49252/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the reviews and/or appeals in relation to restrictions in place, in the first instance a complaint should be made through the residential service’s internal complaints process. All residential care homes must have processes and procedures in place for dealing with complaints. The person in charge of the home can provide assistance on how to make a complaint.

Complaints on issues may also be made to the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) as the statutory independent regulator for the nursing home sector and this responsibility is underpinned by a comprehensive quality framework comprising of Registration Regulations, Care and Welfare Regulations and National Quality Standards. As a regulator HIQA has no formal legal role in examining individual complaints. However, the Authority does take into account all information it receives, including complaints from the public, when carrying out inspections.

The Office of the Ombudsman, as an independent body, can examine complaints about the actions of a range of public bodies and, from 24 August 2015, complaints relating to the administrative actions of private nursing homes. The Office of the Ombudsman normally only deals with a complaint once the individual has already gone through the complaints procedure of the private nursing home concerned.

As such, there is already a well-established complaints/review process including, where required, an independent body which can consider any related issues. This is the appropriate

process for considering these matters. As noted previously a review of all instances of restrictions is underway in the HSE. There are 11 such cases across mental health and older people services. This is in the context of currently providing some 7,000 beds across those services.

Hospital Appointments Status

421. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for an operation for a person (details supplied); if there is a timeframe for pre-assessment; the position of the person on the waiting list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49254/18]

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.

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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

422. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if surgery will be expedited for a person (details supplied); and if his attention has been drawn to the fact that this person has been on the waiting list for five years. [49262/18]

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.

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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

423. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the status of the case of a person (details supplied); and when the person can expect an appointment in the Royal Victoria Eye and Ear Hospital, Dublin. [49264/18]

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.

Health Services Provision

424. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the new sexual health clinics or testing services opened or expanded since the publication of the National Sexual Health Strategy 2015 to 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49270/18]

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

Hospital Staff

425. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health the vacant posts at University Hospital Limerick; the length of time these positions have been vacant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49279/18]

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

Hospital Staff Recruitment

426. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Health the status of the recruitment of a sarcoma specialist for a hospital (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49289/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Following the advertisement of a post of Consultant Oncologist with a special interest in Sarcoma, a successful candidate was identified and an offer of appointment was made. However, the hospital has been advised that the person involved is not in a position to take up the post until summer 2019.

Meanwhile, specialist care of patients with sarcoma will continue to be provided through a multi-disciplinary team approach.

Hospital Waiting Lists

427. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be called for surgery in Cappagh Hospital. [49296/18]

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.

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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 Procedures

428. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health if he is satisfied the necessary provisions are available here, including doctors who have undergone specialist training, to allow full removal for all women affected by transvaginal mesh complications within a reasonable timeframe; when the chief medical officer's report will be available; if he will consider making the treatment abroad scheme available for this treatment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49300/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In late 2017, concerns were brought to my attention about the frequency and severity of complications associated with the use of mesh devices in the surgical treatment of Stress Urinary Incontinence (SUI) and Pelvic Organ Prolapse (POP) in women in Ireland; the regulation and audit of their use; the extent of use of these devices in Ireland and the availability of services for women affected by mesh-associated complications, including through the tabling of several Parliamentary Questions.

In responding to these questions and in recognition of the complexity of the matters arising, I requested the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) to prepare a report for me on the clinical and technical issues involved in ensuring both:

- a) the safe and effective provision of mesh procedures in urogynaecology and
- b) an appropriate response to women who suffer complications as a result of undergoing such procedures.

The Report, entitled *The Use of Uro-gynaecological Mesh in Surgical Procedures*, has now been presented to me and was published on the 21 November 2018 on the Department of Health website.

The report provides a brief background description of mesh implant devices, including the complications associated with their use; and summarises international best practice in the use of mesh procedures in the clinical management of SUI and POP. A range of recommendations for action by the HSE in collaboration with other stakeholders is identified, to provide assurance that the use of mesh implants and the care of women requiring aftercare in Irish hospitals is in line with emerging evidence and best practice internationally, based on expert advice received and review of international experience.

Methodology

Preparation of the report has involved consultation and engagement with national and international bodies, including the Health Products Regulatory Agency (HPRA); the relevant professional training bodies, the Institute of Obstetricians and Gynaecology (IOG) and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI); the Continence Foundation of Ireland (CFI) and the Health Service Executive (HSE), as well as colleagues in other jurisdictions. The report has been informed by review of international reports and safety reviews of mesh surgery which have been published in recent years. The report has also been informed by the personal experiences of women who have suffered complications following mesh surgery.

I wish to acknowledge the bravery, commitment and dignity shown, by the women that met with me and by those women who have written to me concerning this issue, in sharing what were harrowing, deeply personal experiences.

It is important to note that the views of the many women who have undergone mesh procedures and have had satisfactory outcomes, with minor or no complications, have not been formally sought and so are not reflected in this report. Also, following the implementation of a pause in mesh procedures by the HSE in July 2018, as described in Section 2, a number of women whose procedures were postponed made representations to the Department expressing concern at the impact that this has on them personally as they await treatment for the distressing symptoms of SUI, reflecting another important group of women affected directly by this issue.

Report Findings

The report makes a number of overall findings, in addition findings are presented which relate to informed consent, aftercare of women with complications, clinical and professional issues and information issues. The findings are:

Overall Findings

- Mesh implant devices are certified as compliant with relevant European Union (EU) legislation and no market action against mesh devices for the treatment of SUI or POP has been taken by any of the European device regulatory competent authorities.

- There is an extensive evidence base supporting (i) the use of the mid-urethral sling (MUS) devices in the treatment of SUI and (ii) the use of abdominally placed mesh in the management of POP. A significant majority of patients benefit greatly from these procedures, with reduced long-term complications and improved functional outcomes compared to non-mesh procedures.

- Mesh procedures should be performed by trained personnel, in patients who are appropriately selected and counselled and when appropriate multidisciplinary expertise and clinical governance mechanisms are in place.

- Transvaginal placement of mesh for the treatment of POP is no longer regarded as appropriate first line treatment. Its use is restricted by clinical guidance in some jurisdictions. Regulatory restrictions on its use are in place in Australia and New Zealand.

- Mesh devices are associated with significant and severe complications in a minority of women, which are of concern given the difficulties of mesh implant removal.

- Many other health systems, including the United Kingdom (UK), Australia and the Netherlands have implemented specific measures in recent years to ensure appropriate use of mesh procedures in the treatment of SUI and POP and to ensure appropriate aftercare for women suffering mesh complications.

Informed Consent

- As would be usual with many surgical conditions, standardised information resources were not available at national level to ensure that all patients receive consistent information about the benefits and risks of mesh devices, to advise of other treatment options and to support informed consent processes.

- Many women reported that they were not informed of other treatment options; they had not been informed that their surgeries involved the use of mesh; they were not informed of mesh complications; and they were not made aware of the difficulties associated with mesh removal or with the treatment of long-term mesh complications.

Aftercare of Women with Complications

- Structured treatment or referral pathways were not evidently in place for the minority of women requiring specialist, multidisciplinary care for serious complications following mesh surgery.

- Some women reported considerable difficulty in accessing timely, compassionate and appropriate specialist aftercare for complications.

- Some women reported that individual clinicians responded to their personal concerns in an inappropriate manner which greatly added to their distress. Women also reported feeling that they were not believed, or that their clinicians minimised or did not understand the severity of their complications.

Clinical and Professional Issues

- Governance mechanisms are not in place at national level to provide assurance that mesh surgeries are carried out in accordance with agreed international best practice and clinical guidance.

- There is no mandated professional clinical guidance at national level to guide the use of mesh implants in the management of SUI or POP or to guide the management of women with complications.

- Communication mechanisms currently in place at national level between the HPRA, healthcare providers and professional bodies do not provide assurance that the findings and recommendations of safety reviews such as those circulated by the HPRA in recent years regarding mesh implants are systematically analysed and acted upon where appropriate.

Information

- There are significant gaps in knowledge about current practice in Ireland regarding the use of urogynaecological mesh implants.

- Routinely collected clinical information at national level does not provide the capacity for monitoring or audit of mesh surgeries for the treatment of SUI and POP.

- Based on international experience, there is under-reporting of adverse events relating to mesh surgeries by clinicians to both the HPRA and to the National Incident Management System (NIMS) operated by the State Claims Agency (SCA).

Recommendations

Nineteen recommendations in total are identified throughout the report in response to the findings above:

- Patient Information and Consent - 2 recommendations;
- Aftercare for Women Suffering Complications - 5 recommendations;
- Clinical and Professional Recommendations - 8 recommendations;
- Information Recommendations - 5 recommendations.

These include recommendations about the development of patient information and informed consent materials to ensure appropriate patient selection and counselling, ensuring clinical and professional standards of practice are met by ensuring that all surgeons have undergone appropriate surgical professional training and ensuring that appropriate multidisciplinary expertise is available in units carrying out mesh procedures, the development of clinical guidance for the management of SUI and POP, the development of information resources to monitor the ongoing use of mesh devices and to permit long-term research and audit of practice, ensuring the reporting of mesh related complications, and ensuring timely, appropriate and accessible care pathways for the management of women with complications.

Full implementation of the report's recommendations will provide significant assurance that all patients presenting for treatment for SUI and POP and all women who develop mesh-related complications receive high quality, patient centred care in accordance with accepted evidence and supported by robust clinical governance mechanisms.

Actions to date

A number of important interim system actions to address the safety and effectiveness of mesh implant use have been progressed in advance of completion of the report.

1. Pause on all uro-gynaecological mesh procedures

On 24 July 2018, the HSE was requested by the CMO to pause all uro-gynaecological mesh procedures, in cases where it is clinically appropriate and safe to do so, pending confirmation by the HSE of the implementation of recommendations relating to (i) professional training requirements, (ii) patient information and consent and (iii) the development and maintenance of a national data set for all mesh procedures carried out in HSE funded hospitals. The request to institute a pause in vaginal mesh procedures was considered proportionate and necessary to address public and patient concern about the ongoing safety of mesh devices as comprehensively as possible.

2. Development of patient information and consent materials

Prior to this request, in May 2018, the HSE had been requested to begin work immediately on the development of national standardised patient information and informed consent materials and the clarification and development of treatment pathways and appropriate referral services for women suffering serious complications.

3. Learning Notice on mesh devices

A Learning Notice concerning mesh devices in uro-gynaecological procedures was circulated by the National Women and Infants' Health Programme (NWIHP) on 26 June 2018 to all maternity hospitals and acute hospitals with gynaecological services to highlight the importance of appropriate patient selection, adequate information and consent and also to inform the service providers that a Response Group has been convened to propose remedies for and address the provision of aftercare for complications. This learning notice has been posted on the NWIHP website. <https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/acute-hospitals-division/woman-infants/quality-and-safety/learning-notice-0518-transvaginal-mesh.pdf>

3. Synthetic Mesh Devices Group

A Synthetic Mesh Devices Advisory Group has been convened by the NWIHP which includes three patient representatives, as well as representatives of the HPRRA, the IOG, the RCSI, the CFI and all Hospital Groups, to advise on and progress all the interim recommendations as advised to the HSE in May 2018 and in July 2018. To ensure that the spectrum of views of women affected by mesh safety concerns is represented, the three patient representatives include Ms Melanie Power, representative of Mesh Survivors Ireland; as well as a woman who has had a successful outcome of mesh surgery for the treatment of SUI and a woman who is on the waiting list for surgery (currently paused).

I am informed that a work programme for the development of appropriate patient information resources and consent materials, the clarification and development of treatment pathways and appropriate referral services for women suffering from mesh-related complications including access to specialist diagnostic facilities such as translabial scanning is being progressed through this Group. The work being progressed by the HSE will include identifying the appropriate specialist clinical expertise and facilities required at hospital group level and nationally to provide comprehensive aftercare services. Pending the completion of this, the HSE will also examine the need to look at sourcing services from abroad to address any immediate shortfalls identified, either through utilisation of the treatment abroad scheme or by commissioning services from abroad.

Next Steps

As requested by the CMO in July 2018, the pause in the use of mesh procedures for the management of SUI and POP in HSE-funded hospitals is ongoing, in cases where it is clinically appropriate and safe to do so, pending confirmation by the HSE of the implementation of recommendations.

The Department will be writing to the HSE to request that it prepare a detailed Implementation Plan for the complete set of recommendations set out in the CMO's Report, working in conjunction with other stakeholders.

As promised at my meeting with Mesh Survivors Ireland on 14 June 2018, I provided the group with a copy of the CMO's Report on the date of publication and a date has been arranged for a further meeting with the group in coming weeks.

Hospital Appointments Status

429. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive a hospital appointment. [49302/18]

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.

Cross-Border Health Services Provision

430. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Health when a payment under the cross-border health care directive will issue to a person (details supplied). [49308/18]

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

Hospitals Building Programme

431. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health the commencement date for the construction of the 60 bed block at University Hospital Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49312/18]

432. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health when the funding for the construction of the 60 bed block in University Hospital Limerick will be allocated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49313/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 431 and 432 together.

The Health Service Executive is currently developing its National Service Plan and Capital Plan for 2019. The HSE will consider this development in the context of planning for 2019 within available funding and the process in place for the agreement and prioritisation of projects in the Capital Plan. All projects including the new block at University Hospital Limerick must comply with national and EU spending and procurement requirements and require time to complete the various development stages, including appraisal, design, planning, tender, construction, commissioning.

As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of healthcare infrastructure projects, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly in relation to this project.

Hospital Accommodation Provision

433. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if there is a management plan for persons waiting on hospital trolleys at Naas General Hospital; the per day trolley num-

bers for Naas General Hospital from 1 October 2017 to 1 March 2018 and 1 October 2018 to 21 November 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49320/18]

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. Within this context, the HSE requested singular integrated winter plans from Hospital Groups and Community Health Organisations in June 2018. Subsequently in September and October 2018, I met with Hospital Groups and Community Health Care Organisations to discuss their plans for winter preparedness.

The HSE Winter Plan 2018/19, which is currently under consideration by my Department, provides for a 4-week enhanced focus period from 17 December 2018 to 13 January 2019, targeting 9 key sites of concern. Naas General Hospital has been identified as one of these 9 sites, based on performance in previous winters.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme

434. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health if the cost of a specialised item of furniture recommended to a person residing in a private nursing home under the fair deal scheme is met by the HSE or the private nursing home or must it be funded by the person; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49329/18]

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

Hospital Overcrowding

435. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Health the actions that have been taken to relieve overcrowding pressure at Naas General Hospital over the coming months under the winter plan, with particular reference to reducing the number of persons on trolleys in the accident and emergency department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49335/18]

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. Within this context, the HSE requested singular integrated winter plans from Hospital Groups and Community Health Organisations in June 2018. Subsequently in September and October 2018, I met with Hospital Groups and Community Health Care Organisations to discuss their plans for winter preparedness.

The HSE Winter Plan 2018/19, which is currently under consideration by my Department, provides for a 4-week enhanced focus period from 17 December 2018 to 13 January 2019, targeting 9 key sites of concern. Naas General Hospital has been identified as one of these 9 sites, based on performance in previous winters.

As part of Budget 2019, an additional €10m in funding is being provided in 2018 for social care measures to enable older people to leave hospital and return to a more appropriate care setting, including their own home, as quickly as possible with the supports they need. My Department has sanctioned the release of €5 million of this additional funding to enable the deployment of social and primary care measures to support this transition.

Increasing bed capacity is a Government priority. Over the past 12 months an additional 240 beds have been opened, including 11 additional beds in Naas General Hospital and a further 78 additional beds are due to come on stream nationally in 2019.

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.

Physiotherapy Provision

436. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Health when a primary care physiotherapy service will be put in place for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49339/18]

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 Waiting Lists

437. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will have surgery in Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital in Drogheda. [49342/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Hospital Waiting Lists

438. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health if an emergency procedure for a person (details supplied) will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49348/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Primary Care Centres Provision

439. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the provision of a facility (details supplied) in County Kildare. [49356/18]

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.

Mental Health Services Provision

440. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the progress of plans for the development of a new mental health unit at Naas General Hospital included as part of the health priorities of the National Development Plan 2018-2027; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49360/18]

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.

General Medical Services Scheme

441. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if dental treatment will be covered under the general medical services scheme for a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49367/18]

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

442. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an assessment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49370/18]

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.

Air Ambulance Service Provision

443. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding an air ambulance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49372/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Deputy will be aware that the *Programme for a Partnership Government* commits to exploring the feasibility of the expansion of air ambulance services, including the possibility of a second base. In that context, I met with the Irish Community Rapid Response (ICRR) last year to discuss their proposal to establish a charitably funded Helicopter Emergency Medical Service in the South. At that meeting it was agreed that the ICRR would work with the National Ambulance Service (NAS) with a view to reverting to me with an agreed proposal.

I am advised that the ICRR and the NAS are currently finalising the details of a proposed service arrangement which will be submitted to me for decision. The Deputy will appreciate that I will need to be fully satisfied that the necessary clinical and corporate governance arrangements are such that the new service will be safe, robust and sustainable. I expect that the proposal will be submitted to me without undue delay.

Hospital Waiting Lists

444. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health if surgery for a person (details supplied) will be expedited based on medical evidence provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49375/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Hospital Waiting Lists

445. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Health the status of hip replacement surgery for a person (details supplied); if the person will qualify for hip replacement under the National Treatment Purchase Fund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49376/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Psychological Services

446. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive a child psychology appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49385/18]

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 Staff Recruitment

447. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to appoint a full-time consultant endocrinologist at Beaumont Hospital, Dublin 9; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49401/18]

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.

Disability Services Provision

448. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health the status of an application for a personal assistant by persons (details supplied); and when they can expect a decision on their case. [49404/18]

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.

Consultancy Contracts Expenditure

449. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health the fees paid to and services rendered by a person (details supplied) in each of the years 2013 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49426/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): One payment was made to the individual in question during the relevant period. The amount of €2,152.50 was paid on 6 March 2013 in respect of the January 2013 Procurement Process Audit.

Hospital Waiting Lists

450. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for a person (details supplied) will be scheduled without further delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49457/18]

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 Provision

451. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Health his plans to deliver mental health ser-

vices for behavioural therapy and in particular dialectical behaviour therapy in County Clare. [49463/18]

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

Cancer Screening Programmes

452. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the number of women who are awaiting test results under the national cervical screening programme; the average length of waiting time for test results; the number of women waiting in excess of 12 weeks for results by county in tabular form; the steps being taken to address lengthy waiting periods; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49466/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): On 1 May this year, I asked CervicalCheck to make the necessary arrangements to provide that any woman who has had a CervicalCheck smear test, and whose GP considers that they should have a further test, to access such a further test without charge. CervicalCheck laboratory activity has since been significantly above normal levels. This is as a result both of these out of cycle smears and increased uptake generally, and has impacted turnaround times for results of smear tests. This is a priority concern for my Department.

The HSE has advised that, currently, receipt of results of smear tests may take up to 20 weeks but that it may take longer in a small number of cases. In order to address the backlog of smear tests, the HSE advises that laboratories have agreed to undertake additional recruitment and are continuing to provide for overtime and manage annual leave. In addition, as part of ongoing negotiations with the laboratories, I am advised that the HSE is trying to source additional screening capacity, which would improve the turnaround time of results. Sourcing capacity and resources is a global challenge as countries start to move to primary HPV screening, which vastly reduces the requirement for cytologists.

This is a priority concern for my Department and the HSE, and every effort is being made to ensure that tests are processed as quickly as possible, having regard to the high standards required for testing.

In regard to the specific issues raised by the Deputy, I have asked the HSE to reply directly to him on the specific issues raised.

Cancer Screening Programmes

453. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) can expect to receive results under the cervical screening programme (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49467/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Deputy's question relates to service delivery matters, and accordingly I have asked the HSE to reply directly to him on the specific issues raised.

Departmental Correspondence

454. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter raised in correspondence (details supplied). [49470/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I am having the issue raised by the Deputy examined and will reply to the Deputy shortly.

HSE Properties

455. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health if he will seek and secure from the HSE's corporate estates office or other sources a map or maps of all lands held by the HSE at and surrounding the former St. Davnet's psychiatric hospital in Monaghan town, that is, all lands in the HSE's stewardship in the townland of Rooskey and all adjoining townlands; the acreage involved; and the buildings and structures thereon. [49471/18]

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

Health Services

456. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a referral letter for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49481/18]

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. The Department of Health has no role in obtaining consultant referral letters for any purposes, including referrals to the UK for treatment.

Home Care Packages Data

457. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of home care packages being provided by LHO area; the waiting list for home care packages by LHO area by the length of time those waiting have been on the waiting list; the number of home care supports provided per LHO area of between one and seven hours, seven and 14 hours and 14 and more; the number of consumer directed home support hours being provided by LHO area; the cost associated with same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49482/18]

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

HSE Expenditure

458. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the expenditure on medicines and its percentage of the total health budget in each of the years 2013 to 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49514/18]

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.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

459. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the medicines that have been approved as cost effective by the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics but have yet to be reimbursed by the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49515/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines under the community drug schemes, in accordance with the provisions of the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for reply to the Deputy.

Health and Social Care Professionals

460. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Health the qualification required to serve as a forensic psychiatrist; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49526/18]

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

Hospital Charges

461. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter regarding a hospital bill in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49529/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Act 1970 provides that all persons ordinarily resident in the country are eligible, subject to certain charges, to all in-patient public hospital services in public wards including consultant services and out-patient public hospital services. Persons can opt to be treated privately on admission to a public hospital, in which case they are liable for the consultants fees and hospital charges arising for that episode of care, whether paid for by the patient or by a health insurer on their behalf. It is important that a person seeking private healthcare is satisfied as to their level of cover and individuals should carefully review their private health insurance requirements when taking out, renewing, or before seeking to make a claim on their medical insurance. This includes which hospitals are covered under which plans. If an insurance provider has not resolved an issue to a person's satisfaction, they can also refer the matter to the Financial Services Ombudsman. The Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman is an independent officer who investigates complaints of customers about financial services. Details of how to make a complaint are available at: www.fspo.ie.

Questions Nos. 462 to 465, inclusive, answered with Question No. 384.

Climate Change Adaptation Plans

466. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide a timeline

for the development of his Department's specific climate change targets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49570/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In 2009 the Government set a national target for Ireland to improve energy efficiency by 20% by 2020. At the same time, a more challenging efficiency target of 33% was set for the public sector to demonstrate leadership on energy efficiency. The 20% improvement in energy efficiency by the public sector towards its target of 33% by 2020, has been achieved based largely on low-cost behavioural change measures. The Department of Health has been working with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Energy, the SEAI and the OPW via the Optimising Power at Work Programme on energy efficiency measures. In the most recent data available "Health" is shown as having achieved 17% savings to date and "not on track to achieve the target". However, it should be noted that this relates to the Health Sector as a whole, and not just the Department. The HSE has been working to address energy usage, particularly in Acute Hospitals - which are among the biggest energy users in the Sector. To put this in context, one large-scale project could deliver significant savings that would achieve the target on behalf of the entire sector. In relation to the Department, it has been participating in the OPW "Optimising Power at Work" scheme since 2007. This is the baseline year. Overall energy consumption in Hawkins House for the period 2017 v 2007 has shown an increase of 7.1%. This is primarily explained by a substantial increase in gas consumption over the year. A 33.3% increase on the base year was evident. This reflects the condition of Hawkins House and the adverse weather conditions over the period.

Electricity consumption continued to perform well, at the end of 2017 a saving of 26% was achieved.

Description	Electricity	Gas	Total
Benchmark Year	1,140,467	1,452,118	2,592,585
Previous 12 Months	839,484	1,936,005	2,775,549
% Difference	-26.4%	33.3%	7.1%

The Department continued with a range of initiatives to improve energy performance including:

- Improvements from "turn off" initiative - with a particular focus on all PCs being shut down at 10pm nightly, if they have not already been shut down by the user.
- Monitoring of time clocks on mechanical and electrical systems.
- Monthly energy reporting.
- BMS (Building Maintenance System) Maintenance.

In July 2018, the Department moved to an A rated Building Energy Rating (BER) accommodation in Miesian Plaza and it is expected that this will have a positive impact on the target going forward. This should be most evident by the end of 2019 when the Department can compare full-year data in relevant categories.

Bord Iascaigh Mhara

467. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when he will commission Bord Iascaigh Mhara, BIM, to carry out an archaeologist study in an area (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49061/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): All applications for aquaculture licences are considered by my Department under the provisions of the 1997 Fisheries (Amendment) Act, the 1933 Foreshore Act and applicable EU legislation.

The legislation also provides for a period of public and statutory consultation. The consultation phase in respect of licence applications in the area referred to by the Deputy has been completed. My Department is continuing to examine these applications in accordance with the applicable legislation. The necessity, or otherwise, of an archaeological survey will form part of my Department's consideration of all the issues involved.

As the licence applications in the area referred to are under active consideration as part of a statutory process it would not be appropriate for me to comment further at this time.

Achomhairc Talmhaíochta

468. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den an Aire Talmhaíochta, Bia agus Mara cén uair a bheidh cinneadh déanta ar achomharc maidir le deontas BPS (An Scéim Buníocaíochta), ANC (Limistéar Srianachta Nádúrtha) agus GLAS (An Scéim Comhshaoil Talmhaíochta, Íseal-Charbóin) do 2017 agus 2018 atá déanta ag feirmeoir i gContae na Gaillimhe (sonraí leis seo); agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [48879/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Tá sé deimhnithe ag an Oifig um Achomhairc Talmhaíochta go bhfuarthas achomharc ón duine atá ainmnithe maidir lena iarratas ar Scéim na hÍocaíochta Bunúsaí (BPS) agus ar Scéim na Limistéar faoi Shrianta Nádúrtha 2018 (ANC). Rinne Oifigeach Achomhairc teagmháil le hionadaí ainmnithe an achomharcóra an 22 Samhain 2018 agus tá éisteacht ó bhéal ar an achomharc á socrú faoi láthair. Seolfaidh an Oifig um Achomhairc litir chinnidh chuimsitheach chuig an achomharcóir nuair a bheidh athbhreithniú iomlán déanta ar fhíorais an cháis.

Tá sé tugtha le fios ag an Oifig um Achomhairc Talmhaíochta nach bhfuil aon taifead aici ar achomhairc a fuarthas ón duine atá ainmnithe maidir lena chuid iarratas ar Scéim GLAS 2017 agus 2018 ná ar na Scéimeanna BPS agus ANC 2018.

Proposed Legislation

469. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the 2019 allocation for the future growth loan scheme in view of the fact that the explanatory memo to the European Investment Fund Agreement Bill 2018 indicates the cost will be €62 million over a five year period. [48902/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Future Growth Loan Scheme is being developed by my Department and the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation in partnership with the Department of Finance, the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) and the European Investment Fund (EIF). It will be delivered through participating finance providers and make up to €300 million of long-term investment loans available to eligible Irish businesses, including the primary agriculture, agri-food & sea-food sectors. The loans will be competitively priced and will be for terms of 8-10 years.

The fund is leveraged by Exchequer funding of €62 million, of which 40% or some €25 million will be provided by my Department. My Department's contribution will be paid in 2018 with no provision for 2019.

The Scheme is expected to launch in early 2019.

Brexit Supports

470. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of businesses that have availed of the Brexit loan scheme by county and by sector; and the average breakdown loaned between €25,000 and €1.5 million. [48936/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Brexit Loan Scheme provides affordable working capital to eligible businesses with up to 499 employees that are or will be impacted by Brexit and meet the scheme criteria. The €23 million exchequer funding (€9 million from my Department and €14 million from the Department of Business Enterprise and Innovation) has been leveraged to provide a fund of up to €300 million. The Scheme has been designed to assist eligible Irish businesses in the short-term to deal with the challenges of Brexit, which include the pressures of increased market instability and currency volatility.

The Scheme was launched in March this year and will remain open until 31st March 2020, or until it is fully subscribed. As of 16 November, there have been 304 applications received, with 265 deemed eligible and 53 loans progressed to sanction at finance provider level to a value of €12.46 million. This equates to an average loan value of €235,000. These figures were issued as an interim update.

The SBCI issue a detailed report on a quarterly basis, which includes county level breakdown, sector breakdown, etc. The figures below are those as at the most recent quarterly report, dated 02 October 2018.

County	Applications Approved
Carlow	3
Cavan	9
Clare	2
Cork	18
Donegal	9
Dublin	58
Galway	10
Kerry	6
Kildare	8
Kilkenny	0
Laois	4
Leitrim	0
Limerick	7
Louth	7
Mayo	3
Meath	9
Monaghan	9
Offaly	1
Roscommon	1
Sligo	4

County	Applications Approved
Tipperary	7
Waterford	2
Westmeath	3
Wexford	6
Wicklow	14

Industry Sector	Applications Approved
Agriculture (Non-Primary)	2
Mining & Quarrying	1
Manufacturing	79
Electricity, Gas, Steam & Air Conditioning Supply	1
Water Supply, Sewerage & Waste Management	1
Construction	8
Wholesale & Retail	40
Transportation & Storage	3
Accommodation & Food	6
Information & Communication	41
Financial & Insurance Activities	2
Professional, Scientific & Technical Activities	9
Administrative & Support Services	2
Education	4
Human Health & Social Work	1

Agriculture Scheme Appeals

471. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of an appeal by a person (details supplied) which has been ongoing for three years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48988/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Agriculture Appeals Office has confirmed that an appeal was received from the person concerned on 8 September 2015. An Oral Hearing took place on 15 December 2015. The Appeals Officer notified the appellant of the outcome of his appeal in a comprehensive decision letter that issued on 21 January 2016.

A request for review was received by the Agriculture Appeals Office on behalf of the person concerned on 7 June 2016. A comprehensive review of the case has been undertaken to determine if the additional information submitted with the review request has any bearing on the Appeals Officer's decision or if there was an error in fact or in law. This involved an assessment of any legal issues arising as well as seeking my Department's views on the additional information submitted. I am advised that the review is now completed and that a decision letter is to issue in the next two weeks.

Basic Payment Scheme Applications

472. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 774 of 6 November 2018, when the inspection will be completed; when payments will issue to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49055/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named submitted a 2018 Basic Payment/Areas of Natural Constraint schemes application on 12th May 2018. EU Regulations governing the administration of these schemes require that full and comprehensive administrative checks, including in some cases remote sensing (i.e. satellite) inspections, be completed before any payments issue.

The application of the person named was selected for a Remote Sensing eligibility inspection. This inspection has now been completed and the results have been processed to finalisation. Payments due under the Basic Payment Scheme and Areas of Natural Constraints Scheme will issue to the nominated bank account of the person named shortly.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Applications

473. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 773 of 6 November 2018, when the inspection will be completed; when payments will issue to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49056/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named submitted a 2018 Areas of Natural Constraint schemes application on 12th May 2018. EU Regulations governing the administration of these schemes require that full and comprehensive administrative checks, including in some cases remote sensing (i.e. satellite) inspections, be completed before any payments issue.

The application of the person named was selected for a Remote Sensing eligibility inspection. This inspection has now been completed and the results have been processed to finalisation.

Payments due under the Areas of Natural Constraints Scheme will issue to the nominated bank account of the person named shortly.

Irish Land Commission

474. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 786 of 6 November 2018, the number of queries with the Irish Land Commission in the context of records held and requests for access to records; the longest period of time a query was open in the past five years to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49107/18]

475. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 786 of 6 November 2018, the average time it takes to close a query to the Irish Land Commission in which owners and purchasers of land and their personal or legal representatives are allowed access to and copies of relevant documents and or maps; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that long waiting times for settling queries has

impacts on conveyancing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49108/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 474 and 475 together.

Requests for access to the records of the former Irish Land Commission are fully processed on average within 10 working days, provided that the requestor has supplied all the required documentation to firstly satisfy the criteria for allowing access to the records and secondly to correctly identify the relevant estate files.

It is the policy of the Records Branch of my Department not to release copy records until the required fees have been paid in full. This is generally the reason why a case may remain open beyond the average 10 day processing period.

While the number of cases on hand changes daily, there are currently 99 open cases, 71 of which have outstanding fees dating back as far as April 2018.

All open cases are kept under review and are closed if no response is received after a number of months.

My officials are aware of the impact of time delays when dealing with queries from the general public and the legal profession, and processes and procedures are in place to avoid any unnecessary delay.

Herd Data

476. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of calves born in the suckler herd registered in the period 1 January to 30 June 2015 and 1 January to 30 June 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49111/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In response to the Deputy's question I would like to draw his attention to the data profiling of the national herd which is publically available on my Department's website in the form of detailed annual reports. These reports are available from 2002 onwards and can be accessed at: <https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/animalhealthwelfare/animalidentificationmovement/cattle/>.

These annual reports detail the national herd by age profile and breed type (Chapter 4) and the national herd birth registration data (Chapter 1).

The number of calves born to beef breed dams as extracted from my Department's Animal Identification and Movement database (AIM) for the period 01 January 2015 to 30 June 2015 was 763,587. Additionally, the figures for the corresponding period in 2016 was 749,181.

GLAS Applications

477. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a review of a GLAS 1 application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry has been completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49112/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named was approved into GLAS 1 with a contract commencement date of 1 October 2015 and has received full payments for scheme years 2015 and 2016 and the 2017 advance (85%). The

2017 Balance payment cannot be processed until an outstanding Commonage Management Plan (CMP) is received.

At the time the application was submitted on the Department's online application system the applicant's privately owned Natura land was not included. The approved GLAS contract did not include these lands. Following a review it was decided that the additional lands are eligible for GLAS. The applicant was informed that she is due GLAS + payments for 2015, 2016 and 2017. However these payments cannot issue until the Common Management Plan is submitted. The applicant should follow this up with her advisor to ensure its submission so that payments can be made.

GLAS Applications

478. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a GLAS payment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49121/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): As the Deputy would be aware from previous recent PQ's a review by the Director of Agriculture Appeals Office of the decision of the Appeals Officer has been requested in this case in accordance with the provisions of the Agriculture Appeals Act, 2001. The Agriculture Appeals Office has indicated that requests for reviews are generally dealt with in order of receipt and that both the Department and the person named will be advised of the outcome when the review has been completed.

Basic Payment Scheme Applications

479. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a farm payment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49130/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): A 2018 Basic Payment/Areas of Natural Constraints Application was received in respect of the person named on 09 April 2018. Processing of this application has recently been completed, and payment under both schemes has issued and will be in the nominated bank account in the coming days.

Basic Payment Scheme Payments

480. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a payment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49352/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): A 2018 Basic Payment/Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) application was received in respect of the person named on 21 March 2018. Processing of this application has been completed in respect of both schemes. Payment under the Basic Payment Scheme has issued and will be in the nominated bank account in the coming days. Payment under the ANC scheme will issue shortly.

GLAS Payments

481. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) will have recalculations completed and receive a GLAS payment for 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49384/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named was approved into GLAS 1 and has received payments for 2015, 2016 and 2017. The Department has undertaken a review of 2015 and 2016 GLAS payments. This case has been identified as one of a small number due an additional payment due to an underpayment in 2016. The payment will be made shortly. GLAS payments continue to issue on a weekly basis.

Consultancy Contracts Expenditure

482. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the fees paid and services rendered to a person (details supplied) in each of the years 2013 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49416/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has not paid any fees or engaged the services of the person or the company named (details supplied) in the years 2013 to 2017 and 2018 to date.

Agriculture Scheme Appeals

483. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a decision will be made by the Agriculture appeals office in respect of an appeal by a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49527/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Agriculture Appeals Office has confirmed that an appeal was received on 7 June 2018. The appeal was then forwarded by the Appeals Office to my Department with a request for the file papers and a statement concerning the appeal. When my Department examined the documents received from the Agriculture Appeals Office my Department's decision that was the subject of the appeal was partially revised, the outcome of which resulted in a part payment being due to the appellants. The appellants are proceeding with the appeal on the remaining penalty included in my Department's decision. The Agriculture Appeals Office requested the Department file and statement which was received on 22 October 2018 and the case was assigned to an Appeals Officer on 23 October 2018. The Appeals Office will be in contact with the appellants shortly to arrange the oral hearing of their appeal.

Climate Change Adaptation Plans

484. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide a timeline for the development of his Department's specific climate change targets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49560/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department is actively engaged as part of the whole of Government approach to transitioning to a low-carbon, competitive, sustainable and climate resilient economy and society. This transition approach is not based on sectoral specific targets: rather, each sector is engaging in a process to identify and implement climate mitigation policy measures and action to meet the 2020 and

2030 climate targets.

A key part of this process has been the development of the National Mitigation Plan (NMP) which my Department contributed a series of mitigation actions and measures for the agriculture and land use sector including forestry. These measures not only focus on the mitigation of greenhouse gases and improving resource efficiency but are also aimed at restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems related to building resilience of agricultural production systems (i.e. adaptation).

My Department, along with other government departments, provides quarterly progress reports to the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Energy, who are the lead department in this respect. As part of the on-going review, a number of additional measures and actions are developed by my Department for the sector. By way of example, the most recently announced new measures include: Forestry Knowledge Transfer Groups (sharing best practices in the forest sector), the Woodland Environment Fund (providing access to additional incentives for native woodland planting) and the Beef Environmental Efficiency Pilot. - This builds on the success of the Beef Data and Genomics Programme (measure AF2A in NMP) and is a new pilot scheme targeted at efficiency improvements for suckler farmers.

Whilst the mitigation potential for Agriculture is indeed limited, Agriculture can and must play a key role in contributing to Ireland's climate change and energy targets in the year ahead.

Waste Disposal Charges

485. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** 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 bin charges for homes which have a family member using incontinence pads; when details of this scheme will be announced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48855/18]

489. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will consider introducing a bin charge waiver for households that have to dispose of incontinence wear; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48974/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 485 and 489 together.

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 incontinence 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.

Broadband Service Provision

486. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when a person (details supplied) will receive a broadband connection. [48922/18]

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 of the procurement process. I note that there is some deployment of infrastructure by eir as part of that company's commercial rural fibre rollout in the area referred to by the Deputy.

eir's rural investment in high speed broadband is a commercial undertaking, and not part of the planned State Intervention network. Although the deployment is monitored under the terms of a Commitment Agreement signed between the company and my Department, it is not funded by the State and it is not planned, designed or directed by my Department in any capacity.

The selection of what premises are to be served under eir's deployment is an internal decision for that company. My Department has no statutory authority or function to intervene in the company's commercial decisions, nor in any decisions relating to the roll out and siting of infrastructure throughout Ireland by service providers operating in a liberalised market.

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.

Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan

487. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will report on planned offshore wind farms; the status of planning and procurement for prospective offshore wind farms; the status of offshore wind farms being built; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48871/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department published the Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan (OREDPA) in 2014 which set out policy for the sustainable development of our abundant offshore renewable energy resources. An interim review of the OREDPA was published in May and is available on my Department's website www.dccae.gov.ie. The Offshore Renewable Energy Steering Group, which oversees the implementation of the OREDPA is progressing the recommendations of the review and continuing the work of implementing the actions and enablers set out in the Plan. My Department has also developed the new Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) which was approved by Government in July 2018 and it is expected that the first renewable electricity auctions will take place under RESS in 2019. The economic appraisal undertaken for RESS involved comparing the cost of supporting a range of commercial renewable technologies, including offshore wind, to ensure that the new scheme delivers value for money for energy users whilst also delivering on the energy pillars of sustainability and security of supply. Technology diversity will occur naturally as the scheme matures and certain intervention levers may be used within each auction round to promote certain policy objectives such as community participation, community ownership and diversifying the renewable energy mix.

The RESS has been designed to deliver Ireland's contribution towards an EU-wide renewable energy target of 32% out to 2030, within a competitive auction-based, cost effective framework. The scheme will provide for a renewable electricity (RES-E) ambition of up to a maximum of 55% by 2030 subject to determining the cost effective level which will be set out in the National Energy and Climate Plan.

The development and consenting of specific offshore windfarms under the Foreshore Act is a matter for the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government.

Broadband Service Provision

488. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of including relevant coverage statistics for broadband provision in a village (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48954/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): In April 2017 my Department published an updated High Speed Broadband Map which is available at www.broadband.gov.ie. This map shows the areas targeted by commercial operators to provide high speed broadband services and the areas that will be included in the State Intervention Area under the National Broadband Plan. The Map is colour coded and searchable by address/Eircode: - The AMBER areas represent the target areas for the proposed State led Intervention under the NBP and are the subject of an ongoing procurement process.

- The BLUE represent those areas where commercial providers are either currently delivering or have plans to deliver high speed broadband services.

- The LIGHT BLUE areas represent eir's commercial rural deployment plans to rollout high speed broadband to 300,000 premises as part of a Commitment Agreement signed with my Department in April 2017.

There are 290 premises in the townland of Monkstown. 115 (40%) fall within the AMBER area and will be served under the State led Intervention, while 175 (60%) are in a BLUE area and are or will be served by commercial operators. Information on categories of specific premises can be accessed on my Department's website, www.broadband.gov.ie, by entering the relevant Eircode into the High Speed Broadband Map.

The procurement process to appoint a bidder for the State intervention network is now at the final stage. For those premises currently awaiting access to high speed broadband, practical initiatives will continue to be addressed through the work of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce to address obstacles and improve connectivity in respect of existing and future mobile phone and broadband services.

Under this Taskforce, engagement between telecommunications operators and local authorities through the Broadband Officers is continuing to strengthen. These Broadband Officers are acting as single points of contact in local authorities for their communities. The appointment of these officers is already reaping rewards in terms of ensuring a much greater degree of consistency in engagements.

Question No. 489 answered with Question No. 485.

Broadband Service Provision

490. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the position regarding the supply of broadband for persons (details supplied). [49063/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The premises referred to by the Deputy are 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. 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.

Environmental Policy

491. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will consider introducing a pilot programme (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49155/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Single Use Plastics proposal, published this year, is an EU-wide action plan to tackle single use plastic items commonly found as litter in the marine environment. This includes a proposed 90% collection target for plastic bottles and nationally we need to consider how this could be attained. A Deposit and Return Scheme has been identified as one option for Member States to consider as a means to achieve the new, higher collection target. I have agreed to commission a national study into how we can achieve this proposed new collection rate. I recognise the challenges presented by littering and I believe that a multi-faceted approach is required, incorporating effective enforcement, public awareness and education. Educating the young people of this country is key to affecting a long term change in society's attitudes towards litter. My Department supports a number of national anti-litter initiatives including, amongst others, the Local Authority Anti-Litter Awareness Grants, the National Spring Clean Campaign and the Green Schools Programme.

My Department currently provides funding to An Taisce for the operation of the Green Schools programme. Green-Schools is Ireland's leading environmental management and education programme for schools with in excess of 90% of all Irish schools currently participating in the programme. The Irish Green-Schools programme is one of the most successful within the international network. The aim of Green-Schools is to increase students' and participant awareness of environmental issues through classroom studies and to transfer this knowledge into positive environmental action in the school and also in the wider community. My Department also provides funding to Eco-Unesco for the operation of the Young Environmentalist Awards

which is open to young people between the ages of 10 and 18.

Climate Change Negotiations

492. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he has submitted a request to make a statement during the high-level segments of COP24; and if not, the reason. [49159/18]

493. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if all written submissions and preparatory work being done by his Department in advance of the COP24 climate conference will be published. [49160/18]

494. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the bilateral meetings, notwithstanding that they may not be finalised, that officials from his Department are planning to conduct during the COP24 conference. [49161/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 492 to 494, inclusive, together.

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) will hold its 24th Conference of the Parties (COP 24) in Katowice, Poland, from 2 to 14 December 2018. Since the adoption of the Paris Agreement at COP 21 in 2015, the focus of global negotiations has turned to the design of the rule-book which will enable the full implementation of the Agreement.

Parties to the UNFCCC have committed to concluding this process at COP 24. This meeting will also feature the global assessment of the adequacy of climate ambition to date with the conclusion of the Talanoa Dialogue process initiated by the Fijian Presidency of COP 23.

I intend to deliver Ireland's National Statement to the COP during the high level segment in the second week of the COP. In relation to the publication of written submissions, Ireland engages in negotiations under the UNFCCC through its membership of the European Union. All Parties to the UNFCCC and Paris Agreement, including the EU, regularly make written submissions on a range of topics relevant to ongoing negotiations. Written submissions are published through the UNFCCC written submissions portal at www4.unfccc.int/sites/submissionsstaging/Pages/Home.aspx.

Ireland's participation in COP meetings provides an opportunity to hold a variety of bilateral meetings with both participants and observers in attendance. While the schedule of bilateral meetings for COP 24 has not yet been finalised, at previous COPs meetings have taken place with representatives of civil society from Ireland, with EU and third country Ministerial counterparts, with representatives of other UNFCCC negotiating groups, and with representatives of organisations to which Ireland provides financial support for climate action in developing countries, including the Green Climate Fund, Adaptation Fund, and the NDC Partnership.

Ireland and its EU partners look forward to positive engagement by all Parties to the Agreement to ensure a successful conclusion to negotiations at COP 24 so that the Paris Agreement can become fully operational.

Broadband Service Provision

495. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and

Environment if a school (details supplied) can be included on the fibre broadband line being installed in the area; if not, the date for the roll out of high speed broadband; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49294/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The school referred to in the Question is located 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.

I note that there is some deployment of infrastructure by eir as part of that company's rural fibre rollout in the area referred to by the Deputy.

eir's rural investment in high speed broadband is an entirely commercial undertaking, and not part of the planned State Intervention network. Although the deployment is monitored under the terms of a Commitment Agreement signed between the company and my Department, it is not funded by the State and it is not planned, designed or directed by my Department in any capacity.

The selection of what premises are to be served under eir's deployment is an internal and commercial decision for that company. My Department has no statutory authority or function to intervene in the company's commercial decisions, nor in any decisions relating to the roll out and siting of infrastructure throughout Ireland by service providers operating in a liberalised market.

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.

Inland Waterways Maintenance

496. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment further to Parliamentary Question No. 189 of 22 November 2017, the progress made regarding the removal of a weir (details supplied). [49377/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Canney): Under the terms of a judicial review and an agreement in the High Court between my Department and the owners of the weir, Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) are managing the works required and the owners of the weir will pay all reasonable associated costs. IFI are managing the removal of the structure so as to minimise the impact on flora, fauna and habitat in the river and to ensure the free and uninterrupted passage of migratory fish, as required by National and European legislation.

My Department and IFI have been advised that the works require an application under the Planning Acts. IFI have worked closely with consultant engineers and tendered for surveys of

the site to secure topographical, architectural, archaeological, geomorphological, hydrological, and appropriate assessment reports. These surveys were required to compile the necessary information for the design and planning processes.

All surveys have been completed and I am advised that a planning notice regarding the weir is scheduled to be published this week, with submission of the planning file to Cork County Council expected two weeks later.

Waste Management

497. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the position regarding the next review of the national waste management strategy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49405/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): A review of “*A Resource Opportunity - Waste Management Policy in Ireland*” will be initiated in 2019. The review, in tandem with other initiatives, such as the European circular economy waste and plastics legislation framework and reports from the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission and the Price Monitoring Group, will inform the development of a future national waste management policy, including our environmental goals, regulatory and market structures, and policy instruments and tools.

Consultancy Contracts Expenditure

498. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the fees paid and services rendered to a person (details supplied) in each of the years 2013 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49419/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): A contract was awarded to appoint an independent process auditor to the National Broadband Plan procurement process in May 2016 following an open procurement process. The fees paid to date in respect of these services are set out in the table below:

Year	Payments Made (including VAT)	Services
2017	€1,968	Process auditor services
2018 (to date)	€7,872	Process auditor services
TOTAL	€9,840	

Electric Vehicles

499. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if charge points for electric vehicles will be installed in an area (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49429/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The majority of the existing network of publicly accessible charge points was rolled out by the ESB through its eCars programme. This network includes 77 fast chargers, mainly on national routes. An interactive map showing the locations of charging points throughout Ireland is available at www.esb.ie/our-businesses/ecars/charge-point-map.

There are currently charging posts at a number of locations in or near Castleknock including a fast charger in Blanchardstown Centre. Fast chargers are vital to overcome ‘range anxiety’ and are generally focused around the national road network.

A key aspect of the work of the Low Emission Vehicle Taskforce, co-chaired by my Department and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, involved examining how best to support the development of the electric vehicle charging. The first phase of the Taskforce’s work, which focused on electric vehicles, is now complete and the progress report is available on my Department’s website. Arising out of the work of the Taskforce a support scheme is in place to support electric vehicle charging at home, the primary method of charging for the majority of electric vehicles both internationally and in Ireland. My Department, in conjunction with the SEAI, is working on how best to support the provision of greater levels of on-street public charging. It is also important to note the role of the Climate Action Fund. The first Call for Applications, which was launched in July, includes provision for supporting electric vehicle charging networks along with a range of other project types. The deadline for applications has now passed and I can confirm that 97 applications have been received. An assessment process of these applications is currently underway.

Biofuel Availability

500. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the amount of used cooking oil, UCO, used in the production of biodiesel here in each of the years since 2010; the volume of the UCO that was collected here in each of the years; and the volumes of UCO that were imported (details supplied). [49550/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): Used cooking oil (or UCO) is the most widely used feedstock for biofuel used in Ireland. In 2017, over 141 million litres of biodiesel produced from UCO was placed on the market here, of which 4.7 million litres was from feedstock sourced in Ireland.

There is one biofuel manufacturer of scale in Ireland which has the facility to produce up to 34 million litres of biodiesel annually. The principal feedstocks used for the manufacture of biodiesel at the company’s plant are tallow, which is a waste from the meat processing industry, and UCO.

The Biofuels Obligation Scheme Annual Reports which are available on the website of the National Oil Reserves Agency at www.nora.ie/biofuels-obligation-scheme/bos-annual-reports.225.html lists the breakdown of biofuel feedstocks used by country of origin since July 2012, when biofuel sustainability regulations came into force. Data is not available prior to July 2012.

Taken from these annual reports, the following table lists the amount of biodiesel from UCO placed on the Irish transport fuel market in the past six years broken down by feedstock sourced in Ireland and outside Ireland.

Year	Sourced in Ireland (litres)	Sourced outside Ireland (litres)	Total (litres)
2012 (Jul – Dec)	5,968,874	21,686,407	27,655,281
2013	9,492,820	64,360,758	73,853,578
2014	3,720,163	66,905,212	70,625,375
2015	4,448,453	88,053,550	92,502,003

2016	9,287,455	72,617,563	81,905,018
2017	4,670,403	136,396,527	141,066,930

The table provides estimates of the collection figures for waste code 20 01 25 (which closely corresponds to UCO). It should be noted that this excludes household waste and a portion of the figures will refer to grease trap waste. These figures have been provided by the National Waste Collection Permit Office.

Year	Quantity (tonnes)
2012	25,343
2013	25,053
2014	31,010
2015	28,780
2016	40,419
2017	39,856

The table lists the available information by tonnage of imported UCO. A breakdown of countries and similar data in relation to exports is not currently available. The figures shown below have been provided by the National Transfrontier Shipment Office .

Year	Tonnes
2011	3,674
2012	11,026
2013	5,600
2014	1,694
2015	4,828
2016	9,119
2017	6,058

Climate Change Adaptation Plans

501. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will provide a timeline for the development of his Department's specific climate change targets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49563/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I have secured Government approval to prepare an All of Government Plan which will set out the actions which must be taken in every Government Department and Body to make Ireland a leader in responding to climate change. I will work with colleagues across Government to develop new initiatives across electricity, transport, heat, agriculture and other relevant sectors. The new plan will have a strong focus on implementation, including actions with clear timelines and steps needed to achieve each action, assigning clear lines of responsibility for delivery. The new plan will also be informed by successful approaches in other countries, where such approaches could be adapted for implementation in Ireland. This Plan will build on the previous actions taken by Government, including in the National Mitigation Plan and the National Development Plan, and is to be completed by the end of February 2019.

Ireland's National Mitigation Plan, published in 2017, sets out the sectoral policy measures required in order to manage Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions at a level appropriate for making progress towards our long-term national transition objective, as well as taking into account our EU and international obligations. Although this first Plan does not provide a complete road-

map to achieve our national transition objective to 2050, it begins the process of development of medium- to long-term options to ensure that we are well positioned to take the necessary actions in the next and future decades.

Building on the National Mitigation Plan, the publication in February of the National Development Plan reaffirms the Government's commitment to transitioning Ireland to a low carbon, climate resilient economy and society. Reflecting the strong commitment of Government on this issue, almost €22 billion will be directed, between Exchequer and non-Exchequer resources, to addressing the transition to a low-carbon and climate resilient society. This means that about €1 in €5 spent under the National Development Plan will be on climate action and this capital investment will enable us to deliver a significant reduction in our greenhouse gas emissions over the period to 2030.

Motor Tax

502. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the cost of abolishing the surcharge on non-annual payments of motor tax. [48969/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Based on the number of motor tax transactions in 2017, the estimated cost to the Exchequer of extending the discount for yearly payments of motor tax to the half-yearly and quarterly payment options is €52.7m.

Ports Development

503. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans for new properties at a location (details supplied) County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48850/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue raised is a matter for Iarnród Éireann, as Rosslare Europort is a division of the company. I have forwarded the Deputy's question to Iarnród Éireann for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Córas Iompair Éireann

504. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the fact that CIÉ superannuated pensions have not increased in eight years; his views on whether this should be addressed; and if so, the way in which and when this deficiency will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48927/18]

512. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will ensure the CIÉ Superannuation fund is adequate to cater for pension increases for former CIÉ employees; his views on the fact that these former employees have not received a pension increase since 2008 despite an €18 increase in the rate of State pension in the same period. [49163/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 504 and 512 together.

Issues in relation to Córas Iompair Éireann (CIÉ) pension schemes are primarily a matter

for the trustees of the pension schemes, the CIÉ Group and their employees. Therefore, I have referred the Deputies questions to CIÉ for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Bus Services

505. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a company (details supplied) or TII and-or NTA will be the beneficiaries of revenue from advertising onboard and on the sides of buses; if TII or the company negotiates its advertising revenue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48941/18]

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

Road Network

506. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if consideration has been given to extending the M50 to form a complete ring around Dublin city. [48987/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the planning, design and operation of individual roads is a matter for the relevant road authority in relation to local and regional roads, or for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) in conjunction with the local authorities concerned, in relation to national roads.

Noting the above position, I have referred the question to TII for a direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Dublin Bus Services

507. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount collected by Dublin Bus from advertising revenue from advertisements onboard its fleet; the revenue from full bus wraps and side of bus advertisements and from bus shelter locations for the past three years to date in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49000/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue raised is a matter for Dublin Bus with the exception of the ad revenue from bus shelters which is collected by the National Transport Authority (NTA).

I have therefore forwarded the Deputy's question to Dublin Bus and the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Rail Services

508. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount collected by Irish Rail from advertising revenue from advertisements onboard DART and commuter stock; the revenue from in-station postering and or billboard locations for the past three years to date in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49001/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue raised is a matter for Iarnród Éireann and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the company for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Driver Licence Data

509. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of driver licences issued to 16 to 24 year olds in each of the years 2011 to 2017. [49070/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The operation of the National Driver Licensing Service is the statutory responsibility of the Road Safety Authority. I have referred the question to the Authority for direct reply and ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response is not received within 10 days.

Bus Services

510. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the amended bus network redesign following submissions for BusConnects will be published; and if there will be an opportunity for further submissions on this matter. [49072/18]

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 planning and development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area, including BusConnects.

Noting the NTA's responsibilities on 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.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

511. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the increase or decrease in transport greenhouse gas emissions compared with current levels expected to result from the implementation of the greater Dublin area transport strategy. [49073/18]

513. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the increase or decrease in greenhouse gas emissions compared to current levels expected to result from the implementation of the Greater Dublin Area Transport Strategy. [49167/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 511 and 513 together.

The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the development of the *Greater Dublin Area Transport Strategy* and associated assessment and modelling. I have therefore forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Question No. 512 answered with Question No. 504.

Question No. 513 answered with Question No. 511.

Public Service Obligation Levy Increase

514. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the rationale for the decrease in PSO support to Dublin Bus since 2011 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49237/18]

516. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason for the reduction in Dublin Bus's PSO contribution from the State in view of the surge in passenger numbers from 119 million in 2014 to 139 million in 2017. [49292/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 514 and 516 together.

Since 2010 my Department no longer pays subvention for public transport services directly to operators. The award of Public Service Obligation (PSO) funding falls under the independent statutory remit of the National Transport Authority (NTA). The allocations to the companies 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 questions to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive replies within ten working days.

Bus Services

515. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the net increase in the Dublin Bus fleet since 2016. [49291/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The National Transport Authority (NTA) have statutory responsibility for the development and implementation of public transport infrastructure projects in the Greater Dublin Area, including the procurement of bus fleet.

Noting the NTA's responsibility in relation to this matter, I have forwarded your query to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my office if you have not received a response within 10 working days.

Question No. 516 answered with Question No. 514.

Railway Stations Upgrade

517. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding the proposed upgrade of a train station (details supplied) in County Kildare. [49357/18]

518. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding the proposed upgrade of a train station (details supplied) in County Kildare. [49358/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 517 and 518 together.

As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding of public transport. The operation of the rail network and stations on the network including upgrade of train stations, is a matter for Iarnród Éireann in the first instance.

In view of Iarnród Éireann's responsibility in this matter, I have referred the Deputy's questions to the company for direct reply. Please contact my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Bus Services

519. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the LocalLink bus service will consider providing competitive quotes for voluntary organisations seeking transport for group outings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49371/18]

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 securing the provision of public passenger transport services nationally. It also has national responsibility for integrated local and rural transport, including management of the Rural Transport Programme (RTP) which now operates under the Local Link brand.

In light of the NTA's responsibilities in this matter, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Ministerial Meetings

520. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will meet formally with the chief executive of Bus Éireann before Christmas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49407/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I do not currently have any plans to meet with the Chief Executive of Bus Éireann before Christmas.

Consultancy Contracts Expenditure

521. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the fees paid and services rendered to a person (details supplied) in each of the years 2013 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49433/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): There has been no fees paid or services rendered to Mr. Peter Smyth or Peter Smyth Management Consultancy Ltd

in each of the years 2013 to 2017 and to date in 2018.

My Department publishes information on all expenditure on external services, on a six monthly basis each year. Information from January to June 2018 is available at the following link: www.dttas.ie/corporate/english/expenditure-external-services.

Information for the second part of 2018 (July - December) will be published in early 2019.

Legislative Process

522. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on whether a pre-legislative scrutiny arrangement of one hour and five minutes is adequate preparation for the aircraft noise (Dublin Airport) regulation Bill. [49465/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): In October this year, my officials appeared before the Oireachtas Joint Committee for Transport, Tourism and Sport and gave a full explanation of the requirements of EU Regulation 598/2014. They set how this EU Regulation would be provided for by primary legislation, and the reasons for that. They further elaborated on how the legislation would be closely interlinked with existing planning and development legislation. Any queries that Committee members had which were not addressed on the day, were provided for in follow up briefing.

Previous to that, I myself appeared before the Committee in July this year to answer questions with regard to this legislation. This involved a full and frank discussion with Committee members. Furthermore my officials have attended open briefing sessions with public representatives throughout the development of this legislation to keep Deputies updated and to hear any concerns they may have.

My Department has just finalised the Aircraft Noise (Dublin Airport) Regulation Bill 2018 which will be published this week. I hope to commence Second Stage of the enactment process in the Dáil in the next couple of weeks and Committee Stage as soon as possible thereafter. I am sure there will be robust debate in relation to the contents of the Bill and this will help to further ensure that the final Act will be fair and transparent and will allow for the sustainable development of the airport while also addressing the concerns of local residents and businesses.

Road Network

523. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** 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. [49555/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I refer to your Parliamentary Question (PQ), on behalf of local community members, regarding the Ardee N52 re-alignment (By-pass), and the cul-de-sac issue as outlined in your PQ and local resident correspondence.

While I have noted and recognised the concerns of the Community with regard to this road development, I wish to advise that, 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 construction 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.

However, I understand from TII that the issues raised by the local residents are under active consideration.

Noting the above position, I have referred the question, and the local resident's correspondence, 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.

Climate Change Adaptation Plans

524. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide a timeline for the development of his Department's specific climate change targets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49576/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware reducing carbon emissions is a national challenge and requires concerted action across all sectors. Our climate change targets are national and not sectoral in nature. For this reason a National Mitigation Plan was published in 2017 which begins to set Ireland on a pathway towards decarbonisation. The Plan contains over 100 actions, with defined timelines, that will help reduce emissions from across the whole of Government with specific emphasis on the electricity generation, built environment, agricultural and transport sectors.

The transport sector has a vital role to play in the national mitigation effort, particularly in addressing national non-traded emissions targets. I am acutely aware of the specific challenges we face in transport where travel demand is growing and fossil fuel use is firmly established. To address this challenge, we are strongly pursuing emission reductions and energy efficiencies in transport across four key strands.

Firstly, we are increasing investment in public and sustainable transport to support mode shift and accommodate growing travel demand. An efficient public transport sector is a key priority in meeting our climate change goals. The National Development Plan has committed €8.6 billion to public transport over the next 10 years to 2027. Improving public transport services and infrastructure is central to providing an alternative to the private car, not only to reduce congestion and emissions but also to enable the transport sector to cater, in an environmentally sustainable way, for the increasing demands associated with growing population and employment. Major projects planned include: BusConnects, which will transform the bus network in our cities with new and expanded bus routes, greatly improved bus access, designated segregated cycle lanes and park and ride facilities; investment in the DART Expansion Programme; and the MetroLink. We also have multi-annual urban Cycling and Walking Infrastructure investment underway for our main cities.

Secondly, we are encouraging a transition away from fossil fuels. In the 'National Policy Framework on Alternative Fuels Infrastructure for Transport in Ireland' I firmly outlined my ambition that by 2030 all new cars and vans sold in Ireland would be zero-emission capable. To support this ambition and a Programme for Partnership Government commitment, an interdepartmental Low-Emitting Vehicles (LEV) Taskforce was jointly convened by my Department and the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment. Phase 1 of the Taskforce considered a range of measures and options to accelerate the deployment of EVs. Arising from their recommendations further investment and incentives for EVs were announced as part of Budgets 2018 and 2019 aimed at assisting all drivers in purchasing hybrid or electric cars, including significant toll reductions. Phase 1 of the LEV Taskforce is now complete and the LEV Taskforce Progress Report is available on my Department's website. Phase 2 has begun its work and will consider the options available to Government to support the

deployment of other alternative fuels, including natural gas, biomethane, and hydrogen, with a particular emphasis on the heavy duty vehicle sector.

Thirdly, the Biofuels Obligation Scheme plays a major role in decarbonising the road transport sector in Ireland. The penetration of biofuels as a share of road transport energy has increased significantly over recent years from a share of 4% in 2010 to 8% (by volume) from 2017. It is intended that the biofuel obligation scheme will be incrementally increased on a sustainable basis to help meet the renewable transport target of 10% by 2020 as set under the Renewable Energy Directive. The obligation rate will increase to 10% by volume from 1 January 2019; and a further increase to 11% is likely from 1 January 2020.

Finally, an important role will be played by more efficient standards for vehicles. Ireland continues to push strongly for better EU vehicles 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 vehicle emissions can be decoupled from increased economic activity and population growth.

It is imperative that we continue to broaden our range of mitigation measures. To this end, in 2018, I launched a reduced EV tolling regime as well as a grant aimed at encouraging taxis and hackneys towards electrification. I was delighted to see the positive EV sales this year with over 6500 EVs now on Irish roads - nearly 40 of which are taxis/hackneys providing the opportunity for a wide range of passengers to experience an EV. My Department is also undertaking trials on alternatively fuelled buses to further inform future bus purchasing decisions.

My Department continues to work with other Departments and Agencies to research and develop new sectoral and cross-sectoral measures on a whole of Government and least-cost basis to advance Ireland's decarbonisation policy pathway. The Department actively participates in the cross-Government climate structures and TRAM group, and three specific research projects to examine the role of behavioural change and the pathway to zero-emissions in the heavy duty vehicle sector are being co-funded by my Department to develop proactive, new and innovative tools to help reduce transport emissions.

Child and Family Agency Staff

525. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if the new Tusla facility being developed in Carrick-on-Shannon, County Leitrim, will require new nursing staff; if so, the location in which persons can apply for these positions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48853/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): This is an operational matter for Tusla and I have referred the Deputy's question to Tusla for direct reply.

Youth Services Funding

526. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs when an organisation (details supplied) will receive relevant funding to provide security for the service. [49004/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department has commenced a process to identify service development needs for 2019 and to finalise the 2019 youth funding allocations. The primary purpose of this process is to ensure that youth ser-

vices are sufficiently resourced to meet the needs of young people and particularly those who are at risk of drugs or alcohol misuse, early school leaving, homelessness or who are living in disadvantaged communities.

In this regard, officials within my Department are currently awaiting the return of completed funding renewal applications on behalf of youth projects throughout the country which are due to be submitted by 21 December 2018. On receipt of these completed renewal applications, my Department will be in a position to finalise the funding allocation which will be provided for each youth project in 2019, having regard to the overall budgetary position. Every effort will be made to complete this process as soon as possible and notify all youth services of their allocation at the earliest possible date.

Child and Family Agency Funding

527. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if consideration is being given to providing funding to a service (details supplied) in order that the service can remain open; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48846/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I can inform the Deputy that I have already received numerous queries from members of the Oireachtas and from the management of the service in questions on this matter. My response to Priority Question 4 on 7 November, 2018, and written Question 25 from Deputy Boyd-Barrett on the same date, reflects the current position on the matter.

The provision of family support services is a matter for Tusla. Tusla has advised that it is currently compiling a Commissioning Plan for services in the Dublin South East/Wicklow area, which seeks to assign resources to areas of the greatest need, ensuring the best possible outcomes. Requests for funding from this organisation will be considered in this context. The planning process will help inform any future spending in the area based on evidenced needs. Tusla has invited the organisation to be involved in stakeholder consultations on the planning process early next year.

I have agreed to meet representatives of the organisation, along with Tusla officials, to discuss this matter shortly.

Early Childhood Care and Education

528. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs when a comprehensive plan for Irish language provision in the early years sector as outlined in the Action Plan for the Irish Language 2018 to 2022 will be published; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48888/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department has engaged extensively with both the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and the Department of Education and Skills in agreeing a comprehensive set of actions to be implemented under the Action Plan for the Irish Language 2018 to 2022, launched by the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht in June 2018. This five year action plan sets out a range of agreed actions, with associated timeframes, to be implemented in support of the overarching 20 Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010 to 2030.

A significant area for action within this action plan relates to the early years, and my Depart-

ment has committed to a range of actions in this regard in recognition of the importance of the role that early years settings can play in fostering Irish language proficiency and a revitalisation of the Irish language. The aim of these actions is to build on existing measures, supports and partnerships in the area of Irish-medium early years education and further improve supports and services.

An oversight group has been established by the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht to oversee the implementation of the actions contained within the five year plan, and my Department is represented on that group. The first meeting of that oversight group has already taken place. This group will monitor and report on the progress of the plan.

Furthermore, one of the actions contained within the plan relates specifically to the establishment of a national steering group, comprised of representatives from the relevant departments, agencies and stakeholders, to oversee the implementation of the actions relating to the early years sector. Arrangements are being made for the initial meeting of this group.

There is no commitment to publish a further, separate plan in relation to the early years sector, and I am confident that the implementation of the actions contained within the plan will be progressed and monitored through the channels as outlined above.

A Whole of Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families was launched on 19th November, and this ambitious ten year plan contains two actions specifically aimed at supporting the development of the Irish language within the early years sector. An implementation plan for the actions contained within that Strategy will be published within six months.

HIQA Inspections

529. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to concerns regarding the treatment of children at a unit (details supplied) in which HIQA recently noted a large number of significant events had taken place from January to June 2018 at the centre, including incidents of violence and aggression; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48935/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I can inform the Deputy that a copy of all HIQA inspection reports conducted in relation to children's services are provided to me in advance of publication. This includes inspections of children's Special Care Units.

The HIQA inspection reports of Special Care Units show that the children who are detained by order of the High Court, for their own safety, are well cared for and that there are good relationships between children, carers, and families. The benefit of special care is made absolutely clear by a statement that one of the children made to the inspectors to the effect that it had saved their life.

It is a fact that children are detained for their safety in order to provide the care they need. It is used only where a young person's behaviour poses a real and substantial risk of harm to their life, health, safety, development or welfare.

New regulations were put in place earlier this year. These place special care on a full statutory footing for the first time. The legislation sets a clear time limited and short term period for the use of special care.

Staff working in special care are trained in a range of behaviour management techniques and in de-escalation. As far as possible, staff use the least restrictive practices they can to keep the children safe. However, situations can arise where there is a risk of significant harm to self or to others and, in line with policy, may need the assistance of the Gardaí.

The inspection report to which the Deputy refers includes a Compliance Plan, which was developed by the unit and provided to HIQA. The Plan lays out the actions that will be taken by the unit, its staff or management to address identified areas of non-compliance. I can confirm that the Compliance Plan developed as part of the inspection process included measures to improve the management of challenging or aggressive behaviour, and to reinforce positive behaviours. The plan included a commitment to review all future incidents of aggressive behaviour at staff meetings, and to identify learnings from each incident.

Childcare Services Data

530. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the registered community crèche facilities that are operational here; and the location of each. [48944/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): After seeking clarification from the Deputy's office, I understand that this question refers to the number of community services in the state. The number of community services in contract with my Department to run at least one childcare funding programme is 1175. A breakdown of these services by county is listed in the table.

County:	Number of Community Services:
Carlow	17
Cavan	26
Clare	31
Cork	136
Donegal	73
Dublin	233
Galway	84
Kerry	57
Kildare	12
Kilkenny	24
Laois	18
Leitrim	20
Limerick	54
Longford	14
Louth	19
Mayo	57
Meath	20
Monaghan	34
Offaly	19
Roscommon	25
Sligo	30
Tipperary	45
Waterford	38

County:	Number of Community Services:
Westmeath	22
Wexford	45
Wicklow	22

Childcare Services Funding

531. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the amount that will be allocated to the capital grant scheme for childcare providers. [48945/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): In Budget 2019 I secured €8.68m in base-line capital expenditure for early years and school age childcare programmes, representing an increase of €2m on the 2018 capital programme.

While the specifics of the 2019 capital programme are still under discussion between officials in my department and colleagues in Pobal, it is expected that there will be a focus on building capacity and quality as well as other capital initiatives to support the transition to the Affordable Childcare Scheme.

Once this process is completed, an announcement will issue to childcare providers in the coming weeks to inform them of the general guidelines for the programmes, as well as a timeline for their delivery.

Departmental Operations

532. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the details of the parenting unit that is to be established within her Department; the date by which this unit will be established; and the amount of funding that will be allocated to it. [48947/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Department of Children and Youth Affairs 2015 High Level Policy on Parenting and Family Support highlighted the critical importance of parenting on children's lives in influencing social, emotional, and physical outcomes. While explicit support for parents has been reflected across Irish Government policy for decades, the increasing focus on parenting has developed in a somewhat fragmented way across Government Departments and State Agencies.

The Department established a dedicated Parenting Support Policy Unit on November 5th to lead the important work of co-ordinating policy direction and activity throughout the sector, as well as mapping, streamlining and advancing existing supports. As the work of the unit will be focused on co-ordination and collaboration across Government and State Agencies, the unit does not currently require a specific funding allocation.

Commissions of Investigation Expenditure

533. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the amount that has been spent on the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes and Certain Related Matters in each year since its establishment. [49069/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes and certain related Matters was established

by Government on 17th February 2015 (S.I. No. 57 of 2015).

Since its establishment expenditure of approximately €7.47 has been incurred (to end October) to support salaries, fees and other operational costs relating to the work of the independent Commission and its engagement with former residents and other witnesses.

Year	Commission Expenditure
2018	€1.87 (to end October)
2017	€2.1
2016	€2
2015	€1.5

In addition, my Department has also directly incurred costs of approximately €1.67m to end October in supporting this work and responding to its reports to date. This also includes the processes I have commenced to complement the Commission's work by facilitating former residents of these institutions to directly engage on the issues of concern to them and their families.

Domestic Violence Policy

534. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will provide detailed consideration to the issues raised by an organisation (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49297/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I thank the Deputy for his question. The issues raised by the organisation to which the Deputy refers are indeed concerning.

Domestic violence is a wide-reaching, complex issue, and its effects overlap with the work of many Government Departments. The particular issues raised in the Deputy's question refer to the availability of long-term housing, the availability of grants to offset hardship, and the rate of maintenance payments. These issues fall under the remit of the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government; the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection; and the Department of Justice and Equality respectively. As such, my Department does not play a leading role on any of these issues.

Policy in relation to domestic, sexual and gender-based violence is under the remit of Cosc, The National Office for the Prevention of Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence, which is an executive office of the Department of Justice and Equality. Cosc also coordinates the Second National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (2016-2021).

Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, has statutory responsibility for the care and protection of victims of domestic, sexual or gender-based violence, whether in the context of the family or otherwise. Accordingly, Tusla has provided funding for domestic, sexual and gender-based violence services since its foundation in 2014. This includes rape crisis centres and community-based counselling services for victims of sexual violence, emergency refuge accommodation for victims of domestic violence and community-based domestic violence services. Tusla works, and will continue to work, with statutory and non-statutory stakeholders in relation to the barriers faced by individuals and families to finding a lasting, safe home following experiences of domestic violence. These barriers may include, but are not limited to the issues raised in the Deputy's question.

I am pleased that in my time as Minister, the resources available to Tusla for these services have increased by €4.7m, representing an increase of over 20% in a three year period.

Consultancy Contracts Expenditure

535. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the fees paid and services rendered to a person (details supplied) in each of the years 2013 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49418/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The person referred to was paid the amounts in each of years 2013 to 2017 as outlined in the following table for procurement consultancy services.

Year	Amount
2014	€10,332
2015	Nil
2016	€2,583
2017	€16,359

There were no payments made in 2018.

Child Detention Centres

536. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if all members of the board of Tusla had been given an opportunity to read the operational review of Oberstown before the decision was taken in 2017 to not publish the report. [49476/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The report of operational review of the Oberstown Children Detention Campus was not shared with the Board of Tusla - the Child and Family Agency. Tusla has no operational responsibility in relation to Oberstown.

Climate Change Adaptation Plans

537. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will provide a timeline for the development of her Department's specific climate change targets; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49562/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Ireland's first statutory National Adaptation Framework (NAF) was published in January 2018 and sets out the national strategy to reduce the vulnerability of the country to the negative effects of climate change and to avail of any positive impacts.

Under the NAF, a number of Government Departments are required to prepare sectoral adaptation plans in relation to a priority area that they are responsible for and the formalisation of adaptation planning guidelines to assist in the development of these plans is a key action under the NAF. While my Department is not a lead Department in terms of preparing a sectoral adaptation plan, I am very conscious of the need for all of us to be aware of climate change and what we can do about it.

My own Department is very active with regard to energy efficiency and is fully engaged in the Public Sector Energy Reporting Programme with a view towards achieving an energy efficient public sector by 2020.

I am happy to note that my Department has improved its energy efficiency performance at

the end of 2017 by 47%. I expect my Department's energy efficiency performance to further improve as a result of the move in early 2018 to Miesian Plaza. Miesian Plaza is designed for high energy efficiency and is expected to achieve LEED Platinum accreditation. LEED, (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) is the most widely used green building rating system in the world.

In the coming years 2019 and 2020 my Department will continue to engage with the Public Sector Energy Reporting Programme.

Rural Regeneration and Development Fund

538. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development when a decision will be made on an application submitted by Cork County Council for funding for the Kanturk relief road, Kanturk, County Cork under the rural regeneration and development fund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49175/18]

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. €1 billion is committed to the Fund over a 10 year period to support rural regeneration, economic development and to help build strong communities.

There was an excellent response to the first call, with nearly 300 applications received. Applications for the Fund are currently being examined by the Project Advisory Board, made up of representatives from key Government Departments and external experts, which was established to oversee the assessment process. Category 1 "shovel ready" projects have been prioritised in the assessment process and Category 2 projects - those which need development funding to become potential Category 1 applications in future calls for applications - will be considered thereafter.

Following receipt of the first recommendations arising from the above assessment process, I made the first in a series of announcements of successful Category 1 projects under the Fund on 23rd November 2018. Details of the successful projects are available on my Department's website, www.drkd.gov.ie .

As the work of the Project Advisory Board continues, I expect to be in a position to announce further rounds of approved projects in early 2019. These announcements will cover both shovel-ready Category 1 projects and the project development work in Category 2. Therefore I would expect that a decision on the project referred to would issue early in the New Year.

Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme Funding

539. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the estimated full-year cost if the 2019 budget for the social inclusion and community activation programme increased by 5%; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49316/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme has a funding allocation of €40.628 million nationally for the year 2018. This allows the organisations that implement SICAP to provide front line services to help disadvantaged communities.

An increase of 5% would bring the €40.628 million to €42.659 million.

Charitable and Voluntary Organisations

540. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development when the independent review of Pobal's charitable status will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49365/18]

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

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

Pobal has commissioned an independent review of its charitable status which I understand is now at a very advanced stage. The board of Pobal will receive a final report upon conclusion of the review. I understand that the matter will be put before the Board of Directors at their January meeting.

My Department has had no input into this independent review. However, Pobal will be sharing the outcome of the review with my Department through our corporate governance and oversight arrangements.

Consultancy Contracts Expenditure

541. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the fees paid and services rendered to a person (details supplied) in each of the years 2013 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49431/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): My Department was established on 19 July 2017. Since that date, there have been no fees paid by my Department to the individual or company referenced by the Deputy.

Climate Change Adaptation Plans

542. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if he will provide a timeline for the development of his Department's specific climate change targets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49574/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment is responsible for the overall coordination by Government of mitigation planning in the area of climate change and my Department will support the timelines set out by my colleague, Minister Bruton, in this regard.

While my Department does not have a direct role in relation to climate action targets, we are actively participating on a number of levels in the structures that have been put in place by Government on this issue and are keen to play our part in the overall national effort on climate action.

Supporting the development of resilient and sustainable communities is at the heart of my Department's mission and we are working to contribute to efforts to help Ireland's transition to a low carbon and climate resilient society through the wide range of programmes, supports and initiatives we deliver.

These include the LEADER programme's Rural Environment theme, which will see almost €24million invested in projects during the period to 2020 under the sub-themes of Protection & Sustainable use of Water Resources, Protection & Improvement of Local Biodiversity, and Development of Renewable Energy. Thus far, 69 projects have been approved for funding under this theme by Local Action Groups.

My Department also provides to supports through the Dormant Accounts Fund, through the Social Enterprise and Social Innovation Fund measures, and the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme. These include grants to applicants providing home insulation services, reducing our food waste, sustainable energy actions, bee-keeping and training in thermal insulation installation.

I have also allocated funding supports to those who are exploring the potential of renewable energy and to local projects in that sector.

Additionally, programmes such as the Town and Village Renewal Scheme and Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme support the diversification of the rural economy and the effective use of communities' areas of natural heritage, creating employment opportunities associated with local tourism projects such as greenways and blueways and through funding for enterprise hubs and other projects.

My Department will continue to keep to review all schemes and programmes we administer to ensure they complement the overall objectives of climate change mitigation.

Pension Provisions

543. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will consider reintroducing pension benefits for former CIÉ employees such as the telephone rental allowance and the energy allowance. [49164/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The household benefits package (HHB) comprises the electricity or gas allowance, and the free television licence. My Department will spend approximately €237 million this year on HHB for over 440,000 customers. There have been no recent changes to the eligibility criteria for the HHB package.

The package is generally available to people living in the State aged 66 years or over who are in receipt of a social welfare type payment or who satisfy a means test. The package is also available to some people under the age of 66 who are in receipt of certain welfare type payments.

Persons aged 70 or over including former CIE employees do not have to undergo a means test or satisfy the household composition requirement to qualify for the HHB package. Persons aged between 66 and 70 who are not receiving a qualifying payment from the Department e.g. State pension, must satisfy a means test and also the household composition test. Therefore former CIE employees aged between 66 and 70 can apply for the HHB package and may receive HHB if they satisfy the qualifying criteria.

Any decision to change the qualifying criteria for HHB, e.g. to waive the means test for CIE pensioners under 70 with no state pension, would have budgetary consequences and would have to be considered in the context of budget negotiations. It would also be necessary to consider whether they would be a priority group for the extension of such benefits ahead of other groups.

In Budget 2014, the decision was made to abolish the telephone allowance. The savings arising from the initial reduction and subsequent discontinuance of the telephone allowance meant that my Department was able to retain the other valuable elements of the household benefits package such as the electricity and gas allowance and the television licence. With the improved economic conditions in Budget 2018 I announced a new scheme called the Telephone Support Allowance (TSA). The primary objective of the TSA payment is to allow the most vulnerable people access to personal alarms or phones for security by providing a contribution towards the cost. People in receipt of qualifying Social Protection payments and also in receipt of the living alone increase and fuel allowance automatically qualify for the TSA.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Legislative Reviews

544. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 456 of 13 November 2018, the amendments required to Part 9 of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015; if this will require further legislation; her deadline to amend this Part; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49321/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The sections in Part 9 of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 (CFRA 2015) that the Deputy refers to are amendments to the Civil Registration Act 2004 (CRA 2004) that allow for the registration and re-registration of births of donor-conceived children. These provisions fall within my remit, and as such, I can inform the Deputy that I intend to introduce a number of amendments to correct technical errors in the provisions as they currently stand.

There is a conflict in section 92 of CFRA 2015 concerning the definition in CRA 2004 of ‘Act of 2015’, as this term is also defined in that Act as referring to the Gender Recognition Act 2015. Consequently, sections 93 and 95 require amendment as they also include reference to the ‘Act of 2015’.

Section 99 of CFRA 2015 inserts, in the First Schedule of CRA 2004, the required particulars for registration of details of “Parent”. The list of particulars, however, is incomplete and requires amendment to add: “surname, birth surname, address and occupation of parent; Former Surname(s) (if any) of parent”. This will bring the list of required particulars for registration of details of “Parent” into line with those of “Mother” and “Father” already set out in the First Schedule.

My intention is to correct these technical errors by means of Committee Stage amendments to the Social Welfare, Pensions and Civil Registration Bill 2017, which I hope to see taken early in the new year.

State Pension (Contributory) Appeals

545. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protec-

tion when a person (details supplied) will be contacted about their pension payment which is €14 under the maximum rate; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48848/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): 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. My Department has issued Information Letters to over 70,000 of these pensioners who are resident in Ireland and the person concerned was one of these pensioners. The remaining over 8,000 pensioners resident outside of Ireland are expected to receive these letters in December.

The Information Letter informs pensioners that my Department will contact them directly with the outcome of their individual pension review, or a request for further information regarding gaps in their social insurance record, if required to complete their review. It is not necessary for anyone to contact the Department on this matter.

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 seventy 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 following enactment of the Social Welfare, Pensions and Civil Registrations Bill 2018. In line with this timeframe, 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. Given the numbers involved, it will take my Departments a number of months to work through all the reviews. In all cases, where the outcome of the review results in an increase in state pension (contributory) entitlement, the increase will be backdated to 30 March 2018 or the date of a person’s 66th birthday if later, and arrears will be paid.

Personal pension entitlement rates will not be reduced as a result of this review. 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.

Working Family Payment Appeals

546. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the case of a person (details supplied) will be examined; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48857/18]

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

Working Family Payment (WFP) is a weekly tax free payment which provides additional income support to employees, with children, on low earnings. The applicant, in order to qualify for working family payment, must be engaged in full-time remunerative employment as an employee for no less than 38 hours in a fortnight.

According to our records Mr Miguel's employment ceased on 31 December 2017 and from the 04 January 2018 he was not entitled to Working Family Payment. Mr Miguel continued to receive Working Family Payment up to 21 February 2018 and therefore he was overpaid for seven weeks.

A new application for Working Family Payment was received from Mr Miguel on 31 October 2018. However this application could not be processed because his spouse has a Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) claim pending. The Jobseekers Allowance claim is due to be processed shortly and, once this has been completed, Mr Miguel's Working Family Payment application will be processed without delay and he will be notified of the decision.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Applications

547. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of illness benefit payments for a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48858/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Illness Benefit claim for the person concerned is medically certified and paid up to the 29th November 2018.

If the person concerned remains ill and unfit for work, a further medical certificate should be submitted to the Department in order for further payments to issue.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Applications

548. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a person (details supplied) will receive a decision on an application for disability allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48880/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was referred on 9th November 2018 to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Partial Capacity Benefit Scheme Applications

549. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a decision will be made on an application by a person (details supplied) for a partial capacity allowance at the maximum rate; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48881/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Partial Capacity Benefit (PCB) allows a person who has been in receipt of Invalidity Pension and who may not have full capacity for work, to return to employment and continue to receive a partial or full payment from the Department.

The PCB claim for the person concerned is the subject of an appeal with the Social Welfare Appeals Office.

A submission has been sent to the Social Welfare Appeals Office and on return of the file the PCB claim for the person concerned will be processed as quickly as possible.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Pension Provisions

550. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 327 of 18 January 2018, if the form as requested by her Department from the UK Department of Work and Pensions has been received in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48887/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned is in receipt of the maximum rate of Irish widow(er)’s or surviving civil partner’s contributory pension payable under 66 years of age. The person concerned is also in receipt of a fuel allowance.

The Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) in the UK is the competent authority for the assessment of a person’s entitlement to benefits from the UK. The appropriate form, to request the DWP to examine if the person held a UK pension entitlement, was sent on the 10 May 2017. A further copy was sent on 16th of January 2018, of which receipt was confirmed by the DWP on 25 January 2018.

It is a matter for the DWP to correspond directly with the person concerned regarding their possible entitlement to a UK pension. The person should direct any queries they have in writing to the Department of Work and Pensions, Overseas Benefits Directorate, Tyne View Park, Whitley Road, Benton, Newcastle-on-Tyne, England NE98 1BA, or by telephone to 0044 191 218 7777.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Applications

551. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application for illness benefit by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48890/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned had an Occupational Injury Benefit (OIB) claim for period 3rd September 2018 to 20th October 2018 which was paid up to the final certificate date.

Further medical certificates covering the period 12th November 2018 to the 25th November 2018 were received but no application claim form (IB1) was received.

An IB1 application form has been issued to the person concerned and when this is returned his new OIB claim will be processed and any arrears due will be issued.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Insurance

552. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of the implementation of the policy which excludes Irish citizens from building up A class contributions while working in the European Patent Office despite other Irish citizens in other European institutions being able to do so; if this allowance will be extended to the European Patent Office; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48905/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The issues raised by the Deputy relate to a ruling of the Court of Justice of the European Union in the Gardella case, case C-233/12. This is a complicated ruling and its implications are being considered by the various member States.

The complexity of the Court of Justice ruling on the impact of employments with an international organisation when calculating entitlement to social security old age pensions, requires extensive examination.

It is not possible at this stage to determine the outcome of the ongoing discussions. As previously indicated I will be in contact with the Deputy on resolution of this matter.

Disability Allowance Eligibility

553. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the limit for means to qualify for disability allowance; if there is leeway particularly for a person that has an occupational pension having had to retire early due to a long-term illness; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48907/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Disability Allowance, DA, is a statutory means-tested payment and the provisions governing the assessment of means are set out in legislation. These provisions do not exempt monies received from an occupational pension from assessment.

When deciding on an application for DA, a deciding officer has no discretion regarding the application of this legislation.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the deputy.

Illness Benefit Applications

554. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an illness benefit application by a person (details supplied. [48913/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Illness Benefit claim for the person concerned has been processed and any arrears owing to him have been issued.

The claim is both medically certified and paid up to 27 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.

Disability Allowance Applications

555. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application for disability allowance by a person (details supplied). [48919/18]

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, his application for disability allowance (DA) was disallowed on the grounds that the medical qualifying condition was not satisfied. They were notified in writing of this decision on 30 April 2018.

They requested a review of the decision by a deciding officer (DO) and supplied further medical evidence on the 18 October 2018. A review of this decision was carried out and they have been awarded disability allowance with effect from 3 January 2018.

The first payment will be made on 28 November 2018. Arrears of payment due have been calculated and issued to this gentleman on 22 November 2018.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Applications

556. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if an application for illness benefit by a person (details supplied) will be approved; if supplementary welfare will be approved while they are waiting; if there are arrangements with the Australian authorities for the person to benefit from their seven years work in Australia which ceased due to injuries from an assault. [48920/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Illness Benefit (IB) is payable to persons who cannot work because they are sick or ill, provided they are covered by the appropriate class of social insurance (PRSI) and satisfy the PRSI conditions.

Social insurance contributions that a person may have paid in Australia are not reckonable for the payment of IB.

Unfortunately, my Department appears to have no record of receiving an application for IB from the person concerned.

Any person who has an urgent financial need can apply to the Department's Community Welfare Service in their local Intreo Centre to receive a payment. .

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Paternity Leave Data

557. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of parents that took part in the paternity leave scheme in 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form. [48948/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The information requested in respect of the number of people that have availed of paternity benefit in 2016, 2017 and from 1 January 2018 to 31 October 2018 is set out in the table:

PATERNITY BENEFIT	Recipients
1st January 2018 - 31st October 2018	19,837
2017	26,559
2016 (Commenced 1 September)	5,013

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Maternity Leave

558. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of parents that took part in the maternity leave scheme in 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form. [48949/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The information requested in respect of the number of people that have availed of maternity benefit in 2016, 2017 and from 1 January 2018 to 31 October 2018 is set out in the table:

MATERNITY BENEFIT	Recipients
1 January 2018 - 31 October 2018	32,888
2017	45,331
2016	41,406

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

559. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if all carer's allowance applications are examined by a medical referee before refusal on care requirements as set out in section 179(4) of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 is issued; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48953/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a child or an adult who has such a disability that as a result they require that level of care.

A person is deemed to require full-time care and attention (FTCA) where they require from another person continual supervision and frequent assistance throughout the day in connection with normal bodily functions or continual supervision in order to avoid being a danger to themselves.

They must also be likely to require this level of care for at least 12 consecutive months.

Under social welfare legislation, the decision as to whether the qualifying conditions for receipt of carer's allowance are met is made by a Deciding Officer, having regard to the relevant legislative provisions.

Deciding Officers (DOs) are appointed by the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and charged with making decisions on any and all questions relating to entitlement to social welfare payments having regard to the relevant legislation.

Social welfare legislation also provides that a DO may seek the opinion of one of the Department's Medical Assessors (MAs) as to the care requirement condition. The MA, in such cases, assesses all of the relevant information available to them and provides the DO with their opinion.

Where the MA provides an opinion, the DO must have regard to that opinion but the final decision as to whether the conditions is satisfied or not rests with the DO.

The legislation governing Medical Assessors' opinions is contained in section 300A of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005, as amended.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pension (Non-Contributory)

560. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a person (details supplied) in receipt of the non-contributory pension will have the pension amended following the change in the rules surrounding contributions in view of the fact that they lost on due to the 2012 changes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48956/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): On 23 January last, the Government agreed to allow pensioners, born on or after the 1 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 1 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).

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 seventy 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 fol-

lowing enactment of the Social Welfare, Pensions and Civil Registrations Bill 2018. In line with this timeframe, it is anticipated that the first review outcomes will be notified to pensioners during Quarter 1 2019.

Pensioners currently in receipt of state pension (non-contributory), who had previously established lower state pension (contributory) entitlements, will be included in the review and will be contacted directly by my Department. They will be paid whichever pension qualifies them for the highest weekly rate of entitlement.

Payment of increases, where awarded, will be made immediately following the completion of an individual's review. Given the numbers involved, it will take my Departments a number of months to work through all the reviews. In all cases, where the outcome of the review results in an increase in state pension (contributory) entitlement, the increase will be backdated to 30 March 2018, or the date of a person's 66th birthday if later, and arrears will be paid.

Personal pension entitlement rates will not be reduced as a result of this review. 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 Benefits

561. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to the issue of prisoners not receiving welfare payments and having to reapply upon release from prison. [48998/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department provides support for persons through the various schemes it administers. The legislation provides that persons are disqualified from payment while detained in prison or in legal custody under Section 249 (1) of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act (2005) as amended. On application under a particular scheme following release from prison if there any issues in relation to the payment an exceptional needs payment may be available to the customer.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Part-Time Job Incentive Scheme Data

562. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons in receipt of the part-time job incentive scheme in each of the years 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49021/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The information requested by the Deputy is detailed in the table.

Recipients of part-time job incentive at 31 December 2016 and 2017 and at 31 October 2018

	31 December 2016	31 December 2017	31 October 2018
Part-time job incentive	467	418	283

Part-Time Job Incentive Scheme Data

563. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons that have spent more than one year on the part-time job incentive scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49022/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): At the end of October there were 105 persons that had spent more than one year on the part-time job incentive scheme.

Part-Time Job Incentive Scheme Eligibility

564. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the criteria used to determine whether a person can remain in receipt of the part-time job incentive scheme payment beyond one year; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49023/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Part-Time Job Incentive (PTJI) is a scheme for the long-term unemployed who can take up part-time employment for less than 24 hours per week and continue to receive a weekly payment. The scheme can provide assistance to long-term unemployed who can only find part-time work and who fail the '4 in 7' jobseeker's rule or do not qualify for the Working Family Payment.

The scheme is intended as a stepping stone to full-time work and the person must continue to look for full-time work while in receipt of the payment. It supports those who secure intermittent or temporary part-time employment and facilitates them in re-engaging and participating in the labour market.

To qualify for the part-time job incentive scheme a person must have been unemployed on a long-term basis. In addition, they must have been in receipt of a higher jobseeker's payment rate than the appropriate part-time job incentive supplement payable. The personal rate for PTJI is currently €125.40 per week for a single person or €204.50 per week for those with a Qualified Adult. Earnings from the part-time job do not affect the rate of payment. The duration for which payment under the PTJI scheme can be awarded is initially for up to one year but in exceptional circumstances, subject to review, it may be extended for a further period.

Part-time workers in the educational section such as school-bus drivers and wardens who are participating in the PTJI scheme are paid for the duration of their employment usually in line with the academic year. As they are not paid for holiday periods their claim ceases and they may claim a jobseeker's or other payment for the duration of the school holiday periods. It is open to them to make a new claim for the PTJI scheme when they resume work, provided all other conditions are satisfied.

Any changes to the part-time job incentive scheme would have to be considered in a budgetary and policy context.

Illness Benefit Payments

565. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason a person in receipt of illness benefit is not entitled to a Christmas bonus; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49067/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): A Christmas Bonus payment is paid to all customers on a long term social welfare payment. In

the week commencing 3 December this year, a 100% Christmas Bonus payment will be made to approximately 1.2 million social welfare recipient at an estimated cost of €264.3 million.

However, as illness benefit is a short term social welfare payment, people in receipt of same are not entitled to the Christmas bonus.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Appeals

566. **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. [49076/18]

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 23 October 2018. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought. When these papers have been received from the Department, the case in question 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 appeal 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.

Disability Allowance Payments

567. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will address a matter regarding the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49078/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Disability allowance arrears issued to the person concerned on 21 November 2018. They were in receipt of another social welfare payment, or an increase was paid to another for his benefit, during the period 22 August 2018 to 30 October 2018. Consequently, the amount of social welfare already paid required calculation and was deducted from the arrears due.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Jobseeker's Allowance

568. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the way in which the policy on age-related jobseeker's allowance can continue to be justified as a preventative measure for welfare dependency when there is no basis in evidence (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49087/18]

571. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protec-

tion the equality and poverty proofing measurements in place to protect jobseekers' under 26 years of age particularly those that are experiencing homelessness, those with international protection that are moving out of direct provision and those that have support needs such as mental health and confidence building and that cannot access or participate in activation schemes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49109/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 568 and 571 together.

In line with other EU and OECD jurisdictions reduced jobseeker's allowance (JA) rates for young unemployed people were introduced to deal with high youth unemployment. Receiving the maximum rate of JA without a strong financial incentive to engage in education, training or employment can lead to long-term welfare dependency from a young age. As a result, if a young jobseeker on a reduced JA payment participates on an education or training programme they receive the maximum weekly personal payment of €198.

The Deputy will be aware that in 2013 the EU adopted a Council Recommendation to member states on a Youth Guarantee. The aim of the EU-wide Youth Guarantee, supported by central EU funding of €6 billion, was to provide young people under the age of 25 with a good quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within a short time of becoming unemployed. Many of the elements of a Youth Guarantee were already in place in Ireland prior to the EU Recommendation, so the implementation of the Irish Youth Guarantee focuses on enhancing processes and policies for assisting young unemployed people to secure sustainable jobs. Under the Youth Guarantee process case officers engage with unemployed young people, on a monthly basis, to prepare and implement personal progression plans for employment. Where young people do not find work quickly, additional supports are offered through places on employment and training schemes, which are closely aligned to the needs of the labour market.

The Youth Employment Support Scheme (YESS) which I launched on 24 September 2018 is a new work experience scheme targeted exclusively at young jobseekers, aged 18 to 24, who are either long-term unemployed or face significant barriers to employment. All participants will receive a payment of €229.20 per week from my Department. Participants whose underlying entitlement is in excess of that amount will continue to receive their weekly payment with an additional top-up allowance of €22.50 per week.

These policies have been effective in reducing both youth and long-term unemployment. For example, the most recent data shows that Irish youth unemployment has fallen from a peak of 31.2% in 2012 to 12.0% in October 2018. Irish youth unemployment has thus fallen from well above the EU average in 2012 (23%) to well below the current EU figure of 14.9%.

The Department is also considering the contents of research undertaken by the National University of Ireland, Maynooth, which examined the effectiveness of the reduced rates in encouraging young jobseekers to avail of education, training, employment programmes and opportunities. The University examined the data for 18 and 19 year olds as the reduced rates were first introduced for this cohort. Their findings found positive results noting an overall reduction in unemployment durations.

Age-related reduced rates do not apply to jobseekers with a qualified child, those transferring directly to JA from Disability Allowance or if their claim is linked to a previous JA claim made within the previous 12 months to which the maximum personal rate applied. Jobseekers aged 18-24 years who were in the care of the Child and Family Agency (TUSLA) during the period of 12 months before age 18 are not subject to age-related reduced rates (this also includes young unaccompanied minors who were in the care of TUSLA). The Department ac-

tively engages with Tusla and non-Government organisations to provide supports to vulnerable young people leaving care on a case by case basis who are experiencing homelessness or are in insecure situations.

Under the supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) scheme, the Department may make a single exceptional needs payment (ENP) to help meet essential expenditure which a person could not reasonably be expected to meet out of their weekly income. ENPs can be paid to assist with rent deposits and the costs of setting up home, including to young persons leaving direct provision accommodation and moving into the community.

CWS staff have extensive engagement with a range of stakeholders and advocacy groups working with vulnerable people, and, for example, engages in local inter-agency responses to homelessness through its work in the Homeless Persons Unit in Dublin and engagement with Homeless Action Teams (HATs) throughout the country. The Department also meets with organisations specifically working with migrants including Crosscare through the Migrant Consultative Forum. This is a forum where representatives of NGOs with a specialist interest in issues concerning migrants, meet with Department representatives to discuss problems/issues facing migrants in their dealings with the Department.

I trust that this information is of assistance and if the Deputy is aware of a particular case where a vulnerable young person requires the assistance of my Department, the details should be provided for review.

State Pensions Reform

569. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will address a matter (details supplied) regarding the State pension age; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49088/18]

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. 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, they may qualify for Jobseeker's Benefit. Where a person exits the workforce before reaching State pension age they may apply for either the jobseeker's benefit or jobseeker's allowance schemes. Jobseeker's payments are currently paid to eligible jobseekers aged 18 to 66 years and all recipients of a jobseeker's payment are subject to the rules of the scheme.

Jobseekers Benefit is payable subject to the person satisfying the general scheme conditions. This entitlement is normally paid for nine months (234 days) for people with 260 or more PRSI contributions paid and for 6 months (156 days) for people with fewer than 260 PRSI contributions paid. Arrangements are in place to provide that jobseekers whose benefit expires in their 65th year can generally continue to be paid benefit up until pensionable age (66 years) provided they satisfy the necessary contribution conditions. The jobseekers schemes are kept under review and any further changes, including entitlement beyond the 66th year, will be considered in that context.

It is well known that people are living for much longer. 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 approximately €1 billion every five 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.

Social Welfare Benefits

570. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the details of all social welfare entitlements arising from PRSI contributions for PAYE workers in receipt of widow's and widower's pensions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49099/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The entitlements of PAYE workers in receipt of widow's, widower's or surviving civil partner's pension will depend on the class of social insurance contribution an individual has paid.

Social welfare entitlements are based on the class of PRSI being paid for an individual. For example, Class A contributors pay a higher combined employee and employer PRSI rate and qualify for all social welfare payments, whereas modified rate contributors pay a smaller combined PRSI rate and qualify for a smaller set of entitlements.

The PRSI contributions classes that give entitlement to widow's, widower's or surviving civil partner's contributory pension are Classes A, E, B, C, D, H and S.

A widow, widower or surviving civil partner who pays PRSI at Class A gains entitlement to all social welfare schemes whereas a widow, widower or surviving civil partner who is a Class B modified rate contributor will not qualify for State pension contributory, jobseeker's benefit, maternity benefit, adoptive benefit, paternity benefit, health and safety benefit, treatment benefit, illness benefit, invalidity pension and partial capacity benefit. A Class B contributor also gains entitlement to limited occupational injuries benefits only.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Question No. 571 answered with Question No. 568.

Social Welfare Benefits Data

572. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Pro-

tection the number of social welfare payments available at Ballylongford post office, County Kerry before its closure; the number that were transferred to a nearby post office or to bank accounts, respectively; the reason no application form was available for persons (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49113/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The last full month for which figures are available for Ballylongford post office in County Kerry is August 2018 and in that month there were 923 payments made at the outlet. Figures for the number of persons previously paid at Ballylongford who opted to be paid at a different post office or who opted to be paid by electronic fund transfer (EFT) directly into their bank, post office or credit union account – where payment by EFT was an option – are not available.

When a post office is closing, An Post staff inform welfare customers that the office is closing and that their payments will be redirected to the nearest post office. An Post also display notices about the closure in the office. In addition customers are advised to contact the Department should they wish to make alternative arrangements, that is use a different post office or a different method of payment if appropriate.

My Department's officials also write out to the individual social welfare customers on long-term schemes, e.g. State Pension, who use the post office which is due to close. These customers are informed of the upcoming closure and offered the option of selecting an alternative post office or of using a different method of payment if appropriate.

An Post will automatically redirect payments to the closest post office in the event that social welfare customers have not expressed a preference for an alternative outlet to my Department. Social welfare recipients can at any time contact the Department seeking to change their preferred post office or payment method. It should be noted that it is a requirement for some social welfare schemes that the payment be collected at a post office. However, where alternative payment methods are available customers will be offered the choice.

Rent Supplement Scheme Eligibility

573. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason rent support has not been paid in the case of a person (details supplied) who has provided all the information requested; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49122/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The purpose of Rent Supplement is to assist with reasonable accommodation costs of eligible persons living in private rented accommodation, where they are unable to provide for their accommodation costs from their own resources and do not have accommodation available to them from any other source.

The rent supplement application in the case of the person concerned has been processed and awarded with effect from 1/6/2018. All arrears due will be included in the first payment which will issue to the person concerned on 29/11/2018

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension Eligibility

574. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Pro-

tection when a person (details supplied) in County Sligo will have a decision on their invalidity pension application; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49123/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Invalidity pension (IP) is a payment for people who are permanently incapable of work because of illness or incapacity and who satisfy the pay related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions.

The department received a claim for IP for the gentleman concerned on 22 August 2018. His application was disallowed on the grounds that the medical conditions for the scheme were not satisfied. He was notified on the 22 November 2018 of this decision, the reasons for it and of his right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Applications

575. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a person (details supplied) will receive illness benefit payments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49126/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): An Illness Benefit claim for the person concerned was received on the 23rd August 2018.

The person concerned submitted a medical certificate for the period 14th August 2018 to the 20th August 2018. As no payment is made for the first six days of illness under the Illness Benefit scheme and the customer has not submitted any further medical certificates no payment has issued.

If the person concerned remains ill and unfit for work, a further medical certificate should be submitted to the Department for the periods of illness in order for payments to issue.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Payments

576. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a person (details supplied) will receive illness benefit payments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49127/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Occupational Injury Benefit claim for the person concerned has been fully paid for the period in which she was medically certified as unfit for work. A Final certificate was received covering the period up to the 7th November 2018 and the claim is now closed.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Working Family Payment Data

577. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of households in each county in receipt of the working family payment in tabu-

lar form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49128/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Working Family Payment (WFP) is a weekly tax-free payment which provides additional income support to employees on low earnings with children. WFP is designed to prevent in-work poverty for low paid workers with child dependents and to offer a financial incentive to take up employment.

The number of households currently in receipt of WFP in each county is as follows:

County	WFP Recipients
Dublin	12,465
Cork	5,484
Donegal	2,705
Galway	2,452
Kildare	2,311
Limerick	2,296
Wexford	2,259
Meath	2,090
Louth	2,048
Tipperary	2,006
Waterford	1,755
Kerry	1,690
Mayo	1,499
Wicklow	1,322
Cavan	1,252
Clare	1,173
Westmeath	1,157
Laois	1,032
Monaghan	1,030

County	WFP Recipients
Offaly	1,011
Kilkenny	941
Carlow	932
Longford	758
Roscommon	737
Sligo	719
Leitrim	385
Down	41
Fermanagh	24
Derry	18
Armagh	16
Tyrone	15
Antrim	2
Grand Total	53625

State Pensions Payments

578. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a pension review for a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49131/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): 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 1 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. My Department has issued Information Letters to over 70,000 of these pensioners who are resident in Ireland. The

remaining over 8,000 pensioners resident outside of Ireland are expected to receive these letters in December.

The Information Letter informs pensioners that my Department will contact them directly with the outcome of their individual pension review, or a request for further information regarding gaps in their social insurance record, if required to complete their review. It is not necessary for anyone to contact the Department on this matter.

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 seventy 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 following enactment of the Social Welfare, Pensions and Civil Registrations Bill 2018. In line with this timeframe, 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. Given the numbers involved, it will take my Departments a number of months to work through all the reviews. In all cases, where the outcome of the review results in an increase in state pension (contributory) entitlement, the increase will be backdated to 30 March 2018 or the date of a person's 66th birthday if later, and arrears will be paid.

Personal pension entitlement rates will not be reduced as a result of this review. 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.

Housing Assistance Payment

579. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason persons on the housing waiting list and that have been in receipt of rent supplement on a long-term basis are being instructed to move from rent supplement to housing assistance payment; the supports that have been put in place to assist persons in this regard; if her attention has been drawn to the stress and worry that this is causing persons prior to Christmas; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49156/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The purpose of rent supplement is to provide short-term income support to assist with accommodation costs of eligible people living in private rented accommodation. The scheme plays a vital role in housing families and individuals, supporting approximately 25,700 recipients for which the Government has provided €180 million for in 2018. The strategic policy direction of my Department is to return rent supplement to its original purpose of being a short-term income support scheme.

Under the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme, responsibility for the provision of rental assistance to those with a long-term housing need is being transferring to local authorities. HAP has been rolled out on incremental basis since 2014 and is now available in all 31 local authorities. There are currently over 42,500 HAP tenancies in place of which almost 10,200 have transferred directly from rent supplement.

My Department works closely with local authorities to facilitate the transfer of long-term

rent supplement recipients to HAP tenancies. Under these transfer arrangements, long-term rent supplement tenants are requested in writing to contact their local authority to have their housing needs assessed. It should be noted that this request is not an application for HAP. Where a customer fails to respond to this letter within 6 weeks, they are provided with a further 6 weeks to respond to this request. Where a customer has concerns in relation to complying with this request, they should make contact with the Intreo office administering their rent supplement claim.

State Pension (Contributory) Eligibility

580. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if periods spent caring for an adult needing an increased level of care will count as homecaring periods if the person doing the caring was not in receipt of carer's allowance or benefit as a result of being above the means test threshold for those payments during the period of care; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49165/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Government intends to introduce a Total Contributions Approach (TCA) to establishing the level of entitlement for all new state pension contributory claims from 2020 onwards (TCA2020). It is intended that this scheme will include provisions for periods of home-caring. I launched a public consultation on this proposal earlier this year in May, which closed in early September. The consultation sought input on a range of relevant factors which included the amount of contributions needed for a full rate contributory state pension, the amount of credited contributions a person could avail of, the level of provision of Homecaring periods, and whether there would be a "phase-in period" for the final model.

Following examination and consideration of the submissions to the consultation, my officials will prepare proposals for the design of the new approach for consideration by the Government in due course. Once the model is implemented, calculation of a person's pension will take into consideration all paid contributions, all credited contributions and all periods of homecaring subject to whatever limits are imposed through the implementing legislation.

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. There is no post-1994 restriction on the years during which this caring period will have taken place.

While periods of Carer's Benefit or Carer's Allowance may be taken as evidence of having been a carer, people who did not satisfy the PRSI conditions of the Carer's Benefit scheme, nor the means-test of the Carer's Allowance scheme, may still be awarded HomeCaring periods, if it is established that they were full-time carers during the periods in question. Such awards will be made on a case-by-case basis.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Fuel Allowance Eligibility

581. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protec-

tion if disablement benefit will be disregarded from the financial assessment for payment of fuel allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49169/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The fuel allowance is a payment of €22.50 per week for 28 weeks (a total of €630 each year) from October to April, to over 372,000 low income households, at an estimated cost of €227 million in 2018. The purpose of this payment is to assist these households with their energy costs. The allowance represents a contribution towards the energy costs of a household. It is not intended to meet those costs in full. Only one allowance is paid per household.

My Department also pays an electricity or gas allowance under the household benefits scheme at an estimated cost of €182 million in 2018.

Disablement benefit it is not a qualifying payment for fuel allowance and therefore, no fuel allowance is payable if a person in a household is in receipt of disablement benefit.

The appropriate levels of welfare support including eligibility for fuel allowance are considered by the Government during budget negotiations, with due regard to the available resources.

Under the supplementary welfare allowance scheme, exceptional needs payments may 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.

In 2016 the Government launched a comprehensive Strategy to Combat Energy Poverty following extensive public consultation. This Strategy is spearheaded by the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment. It sets out the Government's commitment to protecting vulnerable households from energy poverty through a combination of supports, investment in schemes to improve energy efficiency, and energy efficiency awareness initiatives. One of the best ways to tackle fuel poverty in the long term is to improve the energy efficiency of the dwelling through proper building and household insulation. The Warmer Homes Scheme, administered by Sustainable Energy Authority Ireland, is designed to do that.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Partial Capacity Benefit Scheme

582. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the case of a person (details supplied) will be investigated; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49170/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): As requested a statement has been issued to the person concerned confirming the amount of money he receives weekly under the Partial Capacity Scheme.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Rural Social Scheme Data

583. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated full year cost if the 2019 budget for the rural social scheme increased by 12%; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49317/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The 2019 allocation for the rural social scheme is €53.11 million. On this basis, a 12% increase in the budget for the scheme in 2019 would cost €6.37 million in a full year.

The costs shown above are on a full year basis and are based on the estimated number of recipients in 2019. It should be noted that these costs are subject to change in the context of emerging trends. Recent budgets have been forward looking, allocating limited resources in a prudent way, to make sure that everyone benefits from the economic recovery.

Working Family Payment Applications

584. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if an application for a working family payment by a person (details supplied) will be expedited. [49325/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Working Family Payment (WFP) is a weekly tax-free payment which provides additional income support to employees on low earnings with children.

The person concerned recently resumed employment.

In order to reinstate WFP further details are required in respect of their current employment.

The Department contacted the person concerned on 22nd November 2018 and has requested written confirmation of their current employment.

On receipt of the requested details from the person concerned, a decision will be made on their entitlement without delay and they will be notified in writing.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pension (Contributory) Eligibility

585. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the position regarding the pension entitlement of a person (details supplied); if the person will benefit from forthcoming pension changes; if compensation will be offered; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49327/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): 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 1 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. My Department has issued Information Letters to over 70,000 of these pensioners who are resident in Ireland and

the person concerned was one of these pensioners. The remaining over 8,000 pensioners resident outside of Ireland are expected to receive these letters in December.

The Information Letter informs pensioners that my Department will contact them directly with the outcome of their individual pension review, or a request for further information regarding gaps in their social insurance record, if required to complete their review. It is not necessary for anyone to contact the Department on this matter.

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 seventy 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 following enactment of the Social Welfare, Pensions and Civil Registrations Bill 2018. In line with this timeframe, 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. Given the numbers involved, it will take my Departments a number of months to work through all the reviews. In all cases, where the outcome of the review results in an increase in state pension (contributory) entitlement, the increase will be backdated to 30 March 2018 or the date of a person's 66th birthday if later, and arrears will be paid.

Personal pension entitlement rates will not be reduced as a result of this review. 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.

Disability Allowance Applications

586. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a disability allowance application by a person (details supplied) will be assessed and decided without further delay; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49351/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Following the submission of further medical evidence by the person concerned, their case has been reviewed and they have been awarded disability allowance (DA) with effect from 23 May 2018. The first payment will be made on 28 November 2018.

Arrears of DA due have been calculated and issued to the person concerned on 23 November 2018.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy

Social Welfare Benefits Payments

587. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the length of time a social welfare inspector can stop payments to a person in receipt of a payment while they investigate a situation. [49359/18]

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

social welfare inspector does not stop payments to a person in receipt of a payment while they investigate a situation. A Deciding Officer may suspend a payment to a person in certain circumstances.

Payments to customers are not suspended unless there is a valid reason for doing so, for example, failure to sign, no reply from the customer to a request for information or insufficient information supplied by the customer in order to progress a claim review or investigation. Claims may be suspended temporarily pending customer investigation. In situations where the customer does not engage with my Department they are advised that their claim will be closed within 14 days.

In cases where there is ongoing co-operation between the customer and the Inspector and/or the Deciding Officer cases can be reviewed without recourse to payment suspension.

Staff in the Department are engaged with customers throughout the entire lifecycle of their claim, including the undertaking of 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 the conditions of the scheme are satisfied. Reviews vary from desk assessments, home visits, written and verbal enquiries, and face to face interviews with customers at the counter, depending on the nature of the review or investigation.

Decisions following a review or investigation are given to customers in a timely fashion once all the information requested is made available to staff in my Department to enable them to complete their investigation.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Community Employment Schemes Operation

588. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason community employment sponsors are not given the same access to potential participants as rural social scheme, RSS, or Tús sponsors; her plans to review this matter; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49363/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department provides a range of activation supports and programmes catering for long-term unemployed jobseekers and those most distant from the labour market. These supports include Community Employment (CE), the Tús programme and the Rural Social Scheme (RSS).

RSS was introduced in 2004 and provides opportunities for farmers and fishermen/women who are currently in receipt of specified social welfare payments to work to provide certain services of benefit to rural communities. Communities benefit from the skills and talents of local farmers and fishermen and participants have the opportunity to improve existing skills, or develop new skills, while performing this valuable work in their local communities. RSS is voluntary and the person applies to participate.

Tús commenced operation in 2011 as a response to the high level of unemployment and the large numbers on the Live Register. It is a community work placement initiative which aims to provide short-term work opportunities for those who are unemployed for more than a year. The duration of the Tús contract is a maximum of 12 months and this ensures that as many people as possible who are unemployed for over 12 months are able to benefit from the initiative.

When RSS and Tús were introduced it was decided that the existing network of local devel-

opment companies and Údarás na Gaeltachta – referred to as Implementing Bodies (IBs) - were best placed to manage the programmes. Tús is managed by 48 IBs, while RSS is managed by 36 IBs.

My Department assumed responsibility for the Community Employment (CE) programme in 2012. The aim of the programme, which began in 1994, is to enhance the employability of disadvantaged and unemployed people by providing work experience and training opportunities for them within their communities. The programme helps break the cycle of unemployment and improve a person's chances of returning to the labour market.

CE schemes are typically sponsored by voluntary and community organisations wishing to benefit the local community. As the employers, these sponsoring organisations contract with the Department, on an annual basis, to provide jobseekers and other vulnerable groups with good quality work experience and training qualifications to support their progression into employment.

Jobseekers receive information about all available employment support options, including Community Employment (CE), through the Intreo Service. They also receive one-to-one support from a case officer and all available and suitable options are discussed.

Sponsors can also 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 CE 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. The process of posting vacancies is relatively straightforward and a tailored video is available online to assist sponsors. There are currently over 1,700 CE vacancies advertised on the site. These are visible to anyone who logs onto the site and users can narrow the search by location.

It is reasonable to assume that any difficulties in filling CE vacancies can be related to the significant drop in the Live Register over the last year or so arising from the much improved labour market. Any sponsor who has any recruitment concerns should contact their nearest Intreo Centre who will provide assistance.

My Department will continue to review these schemes and continue to work with stakeholders in planning the longer term needs of jobseekers and other customers. It remains committed to ensuring that the social inclusion and community benefits that accrue from these schemes continue to be recognised and supported.

JobPath Programme

589. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans for the JobPath providers to establish pilot schemes specific to part-time workers or aimed at other groups of jobseekers; if the JobPath providers have the remit to establish such schemes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49368/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Labour Market activation policies are designed to give jobseekers a better chance of finding employment, and the primary goal of my Department's activation services is to move people from unemployment to full-time and sustained employment. In accepting payment of JobSeeker's Benefit or Assistance, the customer agrees to avail himself/herself of the appropriate support

measures on offer during the course of the activation process.

JobPath is an employment activation service, which supports people who are long-term unemployed, including those working part-time and those at risk of becoming long-term unemployed, to secure and sustain full-time paid employment. All jobseekers over one year on the Live Register are eligible for selection for the JobPath service and clients are chosen by means of a random selection process.

JobPath provides an intensive personal service, which focuses on the skills and experience of each person. For customers who are in part-time employment JobPath providers focus on options or opportunities to increase the level of employment in their current role, or look at possibilities in other areas, which may also involve some training, but could provide a more sustainable income and a move away from jobseekers payments. The activation services currently provided by, or on behalf of my Department through contracted services, have the capacity to provide appropriate activation services for all jobseekers in a one to one case managed way. The providers are obliged to and are encouraged to tailor their activation support to the individual needs of each customer.

There are no current plans to ask the JobPath providers to establish pilot schemes specific to part time workers or aimed at other groups of Jobseekers.

JobPath Implementation

590. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the procedures in place in circumstances in which a person that is engaged with a JobPath provider moves to another county before completing their time on the scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49369/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): As the Deputy will be aware the primary goal of my Department's activation services, including the JobPath service, is to move people from full-time and part-time unemployment to full-time and sustained employment.

Two companies, Turas Nua and Seetec, have been contracted by my Department to deliver JobPath services. All jobseekers are referred to a JobPath service location which is linked geographically to the office at which they are claiming a jobseeker's payment.

If a jobseeker currently engaged with JobPath moves to another location which falls under the remit of their current JobPath provider, the company will handle the transfer internally. All subsequent appointments will be scheduled to an office in the customer's new location.

If however the customer moves to an area which is outside the remit of their current service provider, the original JobPath referral is cancelled and the customer is referred to a provider in their new location.

In a handful of cases due to a specific reason, which are considered on a case by case basis, people have been facilitated to move to a different office within the same area.

I wish to assure the Deputy that the client will not be at a loss of service.

Jobs Initiative

591. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her views on Turas Nua's position regarding part-time employment whereby a Turas Nua client that works on a part-time basis is advised to seek full-time employment from a different employer instead of pursuing full-time employment with their current employer; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49373/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The purpose of the activation services provided by my Department is to enable persons in receipt of a jobseeker's payment who are also in part time employment to move to full-time employment with a sustainable income.

JobPath provides an intensive personal service which focuses on the skills and experience of each person. In the case of clients already in part-time employment this would, in the first instance, focus on any options to increase the level of employment in their current role. If that is not possible the client would be encouraged to explore other opportunities including other full-time job opportunities with different employers.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Support Grant

592. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when it is likely a decision will be made on a carer's support grant claim by a person (details supplied). [49374/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Carer's Support Grant is an annual payment made by my Department to full-time carers.

This application was received on 9th October 2018. The Deciding Officer dealing with the claim has referred the case to a local inspector to provide a report on the level of care the customer provides. The inspector is expediting her report on this issue. Additionally, the person making the application has been asked to provide a written statement from her employer on the number of hours she works each week.

A decision will be made on this claim shortly after all of the requested information becomes available.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pension (Contributory) Eligibility

593. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the criteria for qualifying for the total contributions approach, TCA; and if a person (details supplied) will qualify. [49383/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): 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. My Department has issued Information Letters to over 70,000 of these pensioners who are resident in Ireland and the person concerned was one of these pensioners. The remaining over 8,000 pensioners resident outside of Ireland are expected to receive these letters in December.

The Information Letter informs pensioners that my Department will contact them directly with the outcome of their individual pension review, or a request for further information regarding gaps in their social insurance record, if required to complete their review. It is not necessary for anyone to contact the Department on this matter.

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 seventy 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 following enactment of the Social Welfare, Pensions and Civil Registrations Bill 2018. In line with this timeframe, 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. Given the numbers involved, it will take my Departments a number of months to work through all the reviews. In all cases, where the outcome of the review results in an increase in state pension (contributory) entitlement, the increase will be backdated to 30 March 2018 or the date of a person's 66th birthday if later, and arrears will be paid.

Personal pension entitlement rates will not be reduced as a result of this review. 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.

Carer's Allowance Applications

594. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a decision on a carer's allowance application by a person (details supplied) will issue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49387/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a child or an adult who has such a disability that as a result they require that level of care.

I confirm that my department received an application for CA from the person concerned on 04 October 2018.

The application was referred to a social welfare inspector (SWI) on 23 November 2018 to assess the level of care being provided, assess the applicant's means and establish whether the conditions for receipt of carer's allowance are satisfied.

Once the SWI has reported, a decision will be made and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Consultancy Contracts Expenditure

595. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the fees paid and services rendered to a person (details supplied) in each of the years 2013 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49423/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department has made no payments to the individual referred to by the Deputy during the period 1 January 2013 to date 2018.

Carer's Allowance Applications

596. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a carer's allowance for a person (details supplied) will be awarded; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49458/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a child or an adult who has such a disability that as a result they require that level of care.

I confirm that my department received an application for CA from the person concerned on the 16 October 2018.

The application is currently being processed and once completed, the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Jobseeker's Allowance Payments

597. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a request to backdate a jobseeker's allowance award in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry will be reviewed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49477/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The customer submitted her claim for Jobseekers Allowance on the 27 June 2018 and she requested this claim to be backdated to the 5 April 2018.

Backdating could not approved as the customer was not in a position to demonstrate that she had met all the conditions for Jobseekers Allowance during that period.

A letter confirming refusal of the backdating was issued to the customer on the 27 August 2018. She was also advised on 27 August 2018 that the decision could be appealed. To date no apply has been submitted.

I trust this clarifies the matter.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Eligibility

598. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 317 to 323 of 21 March 2018, the outcome of the consultation process regarding reconfiguring the age of eligibility for domiciliary care allowance and disability allowance which was due to conclude in April 2018 (details supplied). [49530/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Make Work Pay report was published in April 2017 following a commitment in the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for people with disabilities 2015-2024, and was undertaken in order to better identify how people with disabilities could be supported to achieve their employment ambitions.

The report made two recommendations (number 9 and 10) that addressed significant issues around the design of the main income supports schemes. These related to (a) reconfiguration of the starting age of DA from the current age of 16 to 18 years and (b) implementing the principle of early engagement for young persons on Disability Allowance (DA) and on all illness and disability payments.

To fulfil a commitment of the report, a wide consultation was conducted with persons with disabilities and their families in relation to these recommendations. This consultation began in September 2017 and continued until June 2018 with the final meeting of a key stakeholder focus group (this group comprises of persons with experience of disability issues and has helped the Department with the design of the national consultation process).

The public consultation process on recommendations 9 and 10 of the Make Work Pay report concluded in April, 2018. Outcomes from stakeholder submissions, four regional consultations (Dublin, Cork, Sligo, and Limerick), and online questionnaires were compiled. These outcomes were further considered by the key stakeholder focus group.

A report has now been drafted and next steps are currently under consideration prior to a decision being made on its publication.

I hope this clarifies the issue for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Applications

599. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the position regarding an illness benefit claim submitted on 24 September 2018 (details supplied) which has not been lodged or processed by her Department; if she will immediately investigate the reason certificates for the said application have not been processed despite being physically submitted weekly since the claim date to her Department Office in County Sligo; the further reason neither the application or certificates have been processed in Dublin; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49552/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Illness Benefit claim for the person concerned has been processed and arrears owing to him will issue in the coming week.

The claim for the person concerned is certified up to the 18th November 2018 and paid up

to the 17th November 2018.

If the person concerned 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.

Climate Change Adaptation Plans

600. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will provide a timeline for the development of her Department's specific climate change targets; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49567/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department is currently in discussions with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment in the development of specific climate change targets as part of an overall whole of government climate change action plan.

Energy usage is the main contributor to climate change and the Department and agencies under its aegis are mitigating this as part of the Public Sector Energy NEAP 33% 2020 energy saving targets. As at the end of 2017, an energy saving of 32.6% was recorded by my Department and its agencies against the 2009 baseline figures using the SEAI Public Sector Energy Reporting Programme.

My Department also actively engages with the OPW in their OPW's Optimising Power at work energy saving scheme.

The Department continues to ensure that procurement policies include provisions for Green Procurement. Energy efficiency criteria are included in requests for tenders (RFTs) where relevant, including IT equipment and non-IT equipment.

Energy, including electricity, is procured centrally through the Office of Government Procurement to obtain savings through economies of scale.

Vacant Sites Levy

601. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the revenue raised by increasing the rate of the vacant site levy by 1%, 2% and 5% respectively. [48960/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Under the vacant site levy provisions in the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015, planning authorities are empowered to apply a vacant site levy of 3% of the market value of relevant vacant sites where a site exceeds 0.05 hectares in area, was in the planning authority's opinion vacant or idle in 2018, and is in an area identified by the planning authority in its development plan or local area plan for residential or regeneration development. As signalled in Budget 2018, the rate of the levy has been increased to 7% for sites on a local authority vacant sites register from 2019 onwards.

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

online on its website. However, on foot of a recent review of the on-line vacant site registers across all local authority areas, I understand that there are collectively almost 300 individual sites currently on the local registers. Over 140 of these sites were entered on the local vacant site registers on 1 January 2018 and will therefore be subject to the levy in 2019, unless development works are activated in the interim.

The specific information sought by the Deputy in relation to the amount of the levy that would be raised in particular circumstances is not available in my Department. However, based on the current legislative provisions and a recent review of the sites currently listed on local authority registers, it is estimated that the levy proceeds nationally could be €9m in 2019 (applying the current 3% levy rate) and €28.2m in 2020 (applying the increased 7% levy rate). The latter estimate for 2020 is based on the number of sites currently included on the local vacant site registers and in respect of which market valuations have been attached to the registered sites. It is expected that the number of registered sites in respect of which market valuations will be obtained will increase in the coming months which should result in an increase in the estimated levy proceeds nationally for 2020.

My Department continues to monitor implementation of the levy to ensure that it is being effectively applied, in line with its intended purpose of incentivising the development of vacant or under-utilised sites in urban areas.

Housing Policy

602. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the action he will take in terms of reform to address the issue of families having to spend more than half the family income to meet rent payments; if provision will be made in which families can compete with investors in the market place to provide themselves with a home rather than the current situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49483/18]

603. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the action he will take in terms of public expenditure and reform with a view to ensuring that the domestic customer has a reasonable chance of purchasing a home notwithstanding the competition from investors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49485/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 602 and 603 together.

Ensuring that we have a supply of housing that is affordable for people to buy or rent, depending on their choice and circumstances, is a priority for the Government. In overall terms, the key elements of the Government's approach to addressing the issues in our housing sector are set out in the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, and Project Ireland 2040, which set out a comprehensive set of measures designed to restore the housing market to a sustainable equilibrium.

The generally accepted convention is that housing is deemed affordable where households, particularly low or moderate income households, are paying not much more than a third of their disposable income on meeting their accommodation needs. In order to support households that have difficulty in accessing affordable housing, a multi-stranded, targeted approach is being pursued in the areas of the country most affected. The measures are targeted at households earning a maximum of €50,000 for a single applicant or €75,000 for a couple.

Under Budget 2019, the Government has trebled, to €310 million, the funding available for key facilitating infrastructure on local authority sites, to support the provision of affordable

homes to purchase or rent, under the Serviced Sites Fund (SSF).

In terms of the type of affordable housing that will be delivered on local authority sites it may be affordable housing for purchase, for example, under the recently commenced provisions of Part 5 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009, or cost rental, which is being advanced on a number of pilot sites before being rolled out further. These initiatives complement other Government actions which help first-time buyers to buy a home, such as the Help to Buy Scheme and the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan.

The new Land Development Agency (LDA) will also contribute significantly to the delivery of affordable housing. All of the State land developed by the LDA will include 40% social and affordable homes to purchase or rent.

While the State is playing its part in facilitating the additional supply of affordable housing, Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITS) are another component part of a more sustainable, long-term property system. While commercial property investment has been a key focus for some of the REITs launched to date in Ireland, residential property also forms part of the sector's activity. It is expected that the sector will continue to develop over time and increase the supply of professionally managed, good quality, rented accommodation.

Historically, the private rented sector in Ireland has been largely made up of small-scale landlords, who will continue to provide the bulk of private rented accommodation. However, a more diverse sector, which includes institutional investors specialised in providing and managing larger scale residential rental projects, provides more stability and less exposure to property market risk and volatility. Institutional investors can also help provide the range of tenancy options that households need across their lifecycles. Large-scale investment in property has an important role to play in helping to deliver the professional high-standard rental sector required. The fact that institutional investors are entering the rental market, with a clear long-term focus on their investment provides security for tenants who can be confident that their landlord is committed for the long run.

Land Development Agency

604. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the way in which the Land Development Agency will interact with councils and local communities during the development process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48845/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The recently established Land Development Agency (LDA) will act as a new commercial State body to actively manage the strategic development of public land, with particular focus on unlocking the potential of publicly owned brownfield sites.

The Agency will act as a national centre of expertise, working with and supporting local authorities, public bodies and other interests, to harness public lands as catalysts to stimulate regeneration and wider investment and to achieve compact, sustainable growth, with a particular emphasis on complex regeneration projects and the provision of affordable housing. In line with its mandate, the LDA will retain experienced staff with extensive skills and experience in project management, finance, planning, development, law and procurement and will provide professional services to master-plan key sites/areas for development in key urban areas, in partnership with local authorities and other state bodies.

The LDA is in the process of advancing agreements with various State bodies in relation

to a range of sites, including the Housing Agency, the Office of Public Works, the Department of Health, the HSE and the Department of Defence, which are participating in the first tranche of land agreements and is keen to work in partnership and co-operation with local authorities. A detailed business plan for the LDA is currently in development and will provide additional information on its delivery programme.

The LDA will also be subject to the full range of public participation mechanisms provided for under the planning process, which includes extensive provision for community engagement in the development and assessment of specific proposals.

Planning Guidelines

605. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the planning guidelines on the installation of solar panels in both urban and rural areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48847/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): As is the case with the large majority of development types, there are currently no specific planning guidelines in place in respect of solar farms. Proposals for individual solar farm developments are subject to the statutory requirements of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, in the same manner as other proposed developments, with planning applications made to the relevant local planning authority and with a right of appeal to An Bord Pleanála. Within the wider national and local planning context, planning authorities must make their decisions, based on the specific merits or otherwise of individual planning applications.

While I am satisfied that the planning code is sufficiently robust to facilitate the assessment of individual planning permission applications for solar farm developments, the matter is being kept under review, in consultation with the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and the Environment, who leads on renewable energy policy. Our two Departments are exploring the potential for enhancing national planning guidance on solar energy, taking account of solar energy projects being assessed by planning authorities and the scope for future development of the sector in the context of the ongoing development of renewable energy policy.

On foot of this on-going engagement between the two Departments, where the need for specific planning guidance for solar farms is identified, my Department will develop such guidance as appropriate.

Social and Affordable Housing Data

606. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the spending commitment for social housing targets in the national development plan in total and by each year of the plan. [48892/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The National Development Plan 2018-2027, 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.

As reflected in the National Development Plan 2018-2027, some €11.6 billion in capital funding will be provided for the delivery of social homes. The specific capital allocations underpinning the various social housing delivery programmes for each year out to 2027 will be

determined in the context of the annual estimates process and will reflect the blend of delivery methods and approaches required to deliver on the targets set out in the National Development Plan.

Social and Affordable Housing

607. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the projected average unit cost of a new social housing unit to rent or to buy in each of the years 2020 to 2024. [48893/18]

608. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the projected average unit cost of a buy and renew unit in each of the years 2020 to 2024. [48894/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 607 and 608 together.

Under Rebuilding Ireland, funding is available to Local Authorities through a range of build, acquisition and leasing schemes to facilitate constructing, acquiring, leasing and remediating vacant properties that may be suitable for social housing. The blend delivered in each local area will have regard to housing need, value for money, opportunities available for build projects and also the availability of vacant and other second-hand properties of different types.

Going beyond Rebuilding Ireland, the National Development Plan 2018-2027 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.

As reflected in the National Development Plan 2018-2027, some €11.6 billion in capital funding will be provided for the delivery of social homes. The specific capital allocations underpinning the various social housing delivery programmes for each year out to 2027 will be determined in the context of the annual estimates process and will reflect the blend of delivery methods and approaches required to deliver on the targets set out in the National Development Plan.

Cost guidelines and strict approval processes are in place to ensure the highest possible adherence to the principles of ensuring that options pursued represent value for money and maximising output for state investment, not only in terms of quantity but also quality.

Looking ahead, it is not possible to accurately predict potential future costs to deliver social housing units for a variety of different reasons not least geographical location, property values at the time, condition of property and scope of work required where remedial work is necessary, size and property characteristics, construction price fluctuations/construction market trends at the time.

Social and Affordable Housing Expenditure

609. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the projected average unit cost of a housing unit constructed under a scheme (details supplied) in each of the years 2020 to 2024. [48895/18]

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

The cost of constructing new affordable homes is dependent on a range of variables, such as the location, scale of the development, home sizes and infrastructure requirements. Future costs are also obviously dependent on tender price levels and construction market trends at any given time. Any proposals to be brought forward by the body referred to in the 2020 to 2024 period will be a matter for the body itself in the first instance.

The Government's determination to support affordable housing delivery is demonstrated by the €310 million committed to the Serviced Sites Fund (SSF), as part of Budget 2019. The Exchequer contribution is €275 million with €35 million to be contributed by local authorities. In 2019 funding of €100 million will be available under the Fund with a further €142 million in 2020 and €68 million in 2021. The funding is available for key facilitating infrastructure, on local authority sites, to support the provision of affordable homes to purchase or rent.

I envisage a maximum amount of SSF funding of €50,000 per affordable home. On the basis of this infrastructure investment, I expect that some 6,200 affordable homes could be facilitated in this way. The prices at which affordable homes supported under the SSF will be made available will be determined on a project by project basis. I expect to advise the relevant local authorities of decisions on the first round of applications under the Fund shortly.

Planning Data

610. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 1207 of 6 November 2018, the number of applications received by An Bord Pleanála in each of the past five years; the percentage of these applications which were dealt with in each year within the specified 18 week period; the average time for dealing with an application across each of the past five years in tabular form. [48925/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the tables.

Normal Planning Appeals

Year	Number of Cases Received	Number of Cases Disposed	% disposed within statutory objective period	Average Time taken to dispose in weeks
2013	1,396	1,572	72%	19
2014	1,456	1,384	83%	16
2015	1,646	1,637	83%	15
2016	1,827	1,745	82%	16
2017	2,041	1,742	64%	17

Strategic Infrastructure Development Applications

Year	Number of Cases Received	Number of Cases Disposed	% disposed within statutory objective period	Average Time taken to dispose in weeks
2013	14	21	24%	37
2014	20	20	65%	24
2015	9	8	38%	27

Year	Number of Cases Received	Number of Cases Disposed	% disposed within statutory objective period	Average Time taken to dispose in weeks
2016	8	14	14%	50
2017	20	13	92%	22

In relation to strategic housing development applications, since the new arrangements came into operation in July 2017 up until 31 October 2018, the Board has issued decisions in respect of 33 cases, 100% of which were within the 16 week statutory time period specified, with an average time of 14 weeks to dispose of such cases.

Environmental Impact Assessments

611. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 218 of 24 May 2018, if his attention has been drawn to the decision (details supplied) of 16 October 2018; and his plans to ensure that the relevant cross-boundary consultation provided for in the EIA Directive and the Espoo Convention are put in place without further delay. [49074/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department was notified of the decision made by the relevant planning authority in Northern Ireland - the Causeway, Coast and Glens Borough Council - that it had concluded that there is likely to be a significant effect on the environment of Ireland as a result of the proposed development referred to by the Deputy.

Donegal County Council was notified by my Department in this regard and was requested under article 132 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, and in accordance with the United Nations Espoo Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context and the EU Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Directive, to undertake a statutory transboundary EIA public consultation in respect of the proposed development.

Further to this request, Donegal County Council has informed my Department that the arrangements for the public consultation are being finalised and that it will commence shortly. Donegal County Council has been requested to notify the Deputy when the consultation has commenced.

Local Authority Funding

612. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding a discrepancy in funding trends. [49083/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): Local authorities' costs and income bases vary significantly from one another, based on their size, demography, topography and rural/urban mix. Accordingly, the funding system that applies to local authorities is a complex one, as authorities derive their income from a variety of sources including commercial rates, charges for goods and services and funding from Central Government.

Changes in funding over the period reflect the implementation of various Government poli-

cies. For example, the Local Government Fund primarily paid General Purpose Grants to local authorities up to 2014; in 2015 these were replaced by Local Property Tax payments. Also, as a result of the introduction of Irish Water, from 2014 onwards, local authorities no longer received funding directly from the Local Government Fund in respect of the provision of water services.

Funding to local authorities from my Department's Vote includes programme funding primarily in relation to housing and water (up to 2014). It is important to note, however, that the funding reflects how the Department was configured in the years concerned. For instance, in 2016, the environment functions were transferred to the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (DCCAE) and certain rural development functions were transferred to the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. In addition, in 2017, community development functions transferred to the Department of Rural and Community Development. Funding to local authorities in respect of these policy areas is no longer provided through my Department but is reflected in the Votes of those Departments and, in the case of DCCAE, the Environment Fund. Also, fluctuations in funding from one year to the next can reflect the funding of significant capital projects which, by their nature, are time limited.

In overall terms, funding to local authorities from central government (not solely from my Department) totalled €2.66 billion in 2017, an increase of 19.8% on the €2.22 billion in 2016, and an increase of 33.6% on the 2015 figure of €1.99 billion.

A breakdown of funding to each local authority from my Department as it was configured in each year from 2011 to 31 October 2018, broken down between funding from the Departmental Vote, the Local Government Fund and, from 2011 to October 2016, the Environment Fund, before it transferred to the responsibility of the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and the Environment is available at the following link:

[[/debates%20authoring/webattachments.nsf/0/3F563712B30211F98025835300654922/\\$File/ATTP6W16.xlsx?openelement](/debates%20authoring/webattachments.nsf/0/3F563712B30211F98025835300654922/$File/ATTP6W16.xlsx?openelement)] Funding to Local Authorities

Pyrite Resolution Board Data

613. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on whether it is appropriate that an appeal under the pyrite remediation scheme against a decision to refuse would take 694 days to progress; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49234/18]

614. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of appeals to the pyrite resolution board that were made since the inception of the scheme; the numbers of appeals which were upheld with the property subsequently being included in the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49235/18]

616. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the procedure when a resident has had a BCA conducted revealing a DCR of two by a competent engineer on the pyrite list only to have that assessment overruled by the board at a later date meaning the board refuses remediation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49241/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): I propose to take Questions Nos. 613, 614 and 616 together.

The Pyrite Resolution Act 2013 provides the statutory framework for the establishment of

the Pyrite Resolution Board and for the making of a pyrite remediation scheme to be implemented by the Board with support from the Housing Agency. The pyrite remediation scheme is a scheme of “last resort” for affected homeowners who have no other practical option to obtain redress and is limited in its application and scope. The full conditions for eligibility under the scheme are set out in the scheme which is available on the Board’s website, www.pyriteboard.ie.

The scheme is applicable to dwellings, which are subject to significant damage attributable to pyritic heave established, in accordance with I.S. 398-1:2017 - Reactive pyrite in sub-floor hardcore material – Part 1: Testing and categorisation protocol. In this regard, it is a condition of eligibility under the scheme that an application to the Board must be accompanied by a Building Condition Assessment with a Damage Condition Rating of 2. Dwellings which do not have a Damage Condition Rating of 2 are not eligible to apply under the scheme. This ensures that, having regard to the available resources, the focus of the scheme is on dwellings which are most severely damaged by pyritic heave. I have no proposals to amend this eligibility criterion.

The latest figures available indicate that a total of 2,214 applications have been received under the pyrite remediation scheme. Of the 2,214 applications received so far, 1,767 dwellings have been included in the pyrite remediation scheme and the applicants notified accordingly.

A further 88 applications have been validated and referred to the Housing Agency for the Assessment and Verification Process, while another 215 applications are at the initial Application and Validation Process. 144 applications under the scheme were not successful.

Of the 1,767 dwellings that have been included in the pyrite remediation scheme:

- 146 are at remedial works planning stage,
- 78 are at tender / tender analysis,
- 264 are under remediation, and
- 1,279 are complete.

33 appeals have been made to the Pyrite Resolution Board since the inception of the scheme:

- 3 Appeals were upheld and subsequently included in the scheme,
- 14 Appeals were refused by the Board,
- 10 Appeals were withdrawn by the applicants, and
- 6 Appeals are pending the decision of the Board.

A sum of €30 million was announced under Budget 2018 to fund the operation of the pyrite remediation scheme this year. This allocation will facilitate the remediation of some 430 additional dwellings in 2018.

A sum of €32 million was announced under Budget 2019 to fund the operation of the pyrite remediation scheme next year. This allocation will facilitate the remediation of some 460 additional dwellings and is a clear signal of the continuing importance attached by Government to addressing the issue of significant pyritic damage in private dwellings.

In regard to the other matters raised by the Deputy, in accordance with the provisions of the Act, the Board is independent in the performance of its functions, and as Minister, I have no role in the operational matters pertaining to the implementation of the scheme. The Board may be

contacted by phone at Lo call 1890 252842 or by email to info@pyriteboard.ie or alternatively at oireachtasinfo@pyriteboard.ie.

Planning Guidelines

615. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans for building height regulations; when he plans on presenting these proposals to Dáil Éireann; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49238/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): My Department recently published Draft Guidelines for planning authorities for public consultation in relation to how best to encourage increased building height in urban areas.

The Draft Guidelines are intended to set out national planning policy guidelines on building heights in relation to urban areas, as defined by the census, building from the strategic policy framework set out in Project Ireland 2040 and the National Planning Framework.

These Guidelines:

- develop policy outlined in the National Planning Framework, in particular National Policy Objectives 1 and 13;

- outline wider and strategic policy considerations and performance criteria that planning authorities should apply, alongside their statutory development plans, in assessing proposals for taller buildings; and

- support the accommodation of anticipated population growth and development needs, whether for housing, employment or other purposes, by building up and consolidating the development of our existing urban areas.

A public consultation on the Draft Guidelines took place from 9 August to 24 September 2018. A number of submissions were received in the consultation period and these are currently being considered by my Department. The Guidelines will be finalised in the coming weeks having regard to the submissions received, and will be issued by me under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended.

Question No. 616 answered with Question No. 613.

Social and Affordable Housing Eligibility

617. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will provide detailed consideration to the issues raised by an organisation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49298/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Responsibility for the development and provision of services to support victims of domestic abuse rests with the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and the delivery of such services is managed through the Child and Family Agency, Tusla. Housing authorities do not provide or oversee services specifically designed for victims of domestic violence.

Where victims of domestic violence require continued State support to meet their housing

needs, housing authorities are encouraged to work with all service providers to ensure that a victim's housing eligibility and need is assessed in a timely manner. A housing authority may consider a victim of domestic violence as having a housing need to be placed on a housing list where all other criteria are met.

The allocation of social housing is administered by housing authorities in accordance with their allocation schemes made under section 22 of the 2009 Act. In line with commitments in the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness (Action 1.8) and the National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence 2016-2021 (Action 2.30), my Department has issued guidance to all housing authorities in relation to assisting victims of domestic violence with emergency and long-term accommodation needs. The guidance can be accessed using the following link to my Department's website:

Guidance to Housing Authorities

The purpose of this guidance is to ensure an effective and consistent housing response for victims of domestic violence. The guidance covers a range of scenarios that may arise for victims of domestic violence in seeking social housing supports, including provisions around the use of the Housing Assistance Payment scheme, or the Rental Accommodation Scheme, where a victim has a joint interest in the family home, or ownership of alternative accommodation, but would otherwise qualify for social housing support.

Where affordable housing rather than social housing is appropriate, under Budget 2019, the Government has trebled, to €310 million, the funding available for key facilitating infrastructure on local authority sites, to support the provision of affordable homes to purchase or rent, under the Serviced Sites Fund (SSF). The type of affordable housing that will be delivered on local authority sites may be affordable housing for purchase, under the recently commenced provisions of Part 5 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009, or cost rental, which is being advanced on a number of pilot sites before being rolled out further. These initiatives complement other Government actions which help first-time buyers to buy a home, such as the Help to Buy Scheme and the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan.

The new Land Development Agency (LDA) will also contribute significantly to the delivery of affordable housing. All of the State land developed by the LDA will include 40% social and affordable homes to purchase or rent.

Pyrite Issues

618. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when outstanding issues will be dealt with for a person (details supplied) under the pyrite remediation scheme. [49307/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The Pyrite Resolution Act 2013 provides the statutory framework for the establishment of the Pyrite Resolution Board and for the making of a pyrite remediation scheme to be implemented by the Board with support from the Housing Agency. The pyrite remediation scheme is a scheme of "last resort" and is limited in its application and scope. The full conditions for eligibility are set out in the scheme which is available on the Board's website, www.pyriteboard.ie.

All works under the pyrite remediation scheme are completed, by competent builders, to the requirements of I.S. 398-2:2013 - Reactive pyrite in sub-floor hardcore material - Part 2: Methodology for Remediation Works, and are overseen by design professionals in accordance

with the requirements of the Board and the Housing Agency.

In accordance with the provisions of the Act, the Board is independent in the performance of its functions, and as Minister, I have no role in the operational matters pertaining to the implementation of the scheme. The Board may be contacted by phone at Lo call 1890 252842 or by email to info@pyriteboard.ie or alternatively at oireachtasinfo@pyriteboard.ie.

EU Regulations

619. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the signing into law of the statutory instrument to enact the European Union (Licensing of Large-Scale Extraction of Peat) Regulations 2018; the timeframe for completion of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49319/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department is actively progressing the drafting of European Union Regulations with a view to putting in place as speedily as possible a robust and effective legislative underpinning for a new regulatory system for the large-scale peat extraction sector.

Under the new system, the Environmental Protection Agency will be required to carry out environmental impact assessment as part of its examination of licence applications for peat extraction on sites of 30 hectares or more, and such activity will be exempted from the requirement to obtain planning permission.

The draft regulations have been the subject of focused stakeholder input from relevant Government Departments and State bodies, industry representatives and environmental groups. Consultations are continuing with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment and the EPA with a view to finalising the draft regulations, and deciding on the appropriate Minister to sign these regulations, as soon as possible. However, before these regulations can be made, Regulations transposing relevant elements of the 2014 Environmental Impact Assessment (Directive 2014/52/EU) must first be made by the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and the Environment and my Department is awaiting confirmation of the making of those Regulations.

Pyrite Issues

620. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the action he plans to take to address the needs of homeowners in which they require remediation of their homes due to the contamination of the concrete blocks with pyrite and mica; the measures he will take to ensure affected homeowners in north Leinster and particularly in Fingal are covered by all actions to address the contamination of concrete blocks with mica and pyrite; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49336/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): In 2013, the issue of external walls of dwellings displaying significant cracking in Donegal was raised with my Department. The nature of the problem related to the crumbling of the concrete blockwork in the external walls of affected dwellings, thereby compromising their structural integrity and giving rise to considerable personal distress to the many homeowners involved. At that time, several hundred homes were suspected to be affected in north Donegal. The presence of muscovite mica in abundant quantities in the aggregate constituent of the concrete blocks was suggested as being one of the main factors contributing to

the deterioration of the concrete blocks.

By the end of 2013, similar problems had also come to light in both public and private dwellings located in west Mayo and Mayo County Council submitted a report to my Department on problems that had been identified with the concrete blockwork in their social housing stock. In this instance, it was the presence of pyrite in the aggregate constituent of the concrete block that was suggested as being one of the main factors contributing to the deterioration of the concrete blocks. The emergence of similar problems among private households located in County Mayo was also reported in 2013.

Over the course of 2014 and 2015, there were significant representations, media reports and letters from affected homeowners illustrating the increasing scale of the problems emerging in the two counties, the progressive nature of the external wall cracking and the resultant structural distress in the affected properties.

An Expert Panel on Concrete Blocks was established by my Department in 2016 and its terms of reference were limited to the investigation of the problems that have emerged in the concrete blockwork of certain dwellings in Counties Donegal and Mayo.

Under Budget 2019, the Government approved in principle the development of a grant scheme of financial assistance to support affected homeowners in the two counties to carry out the necessary remediation works to dwellings that have been damaged due to defective concrete blocks. Work is underway in my Department on the development of such a scheme and it is intended to revert to Government with proposals for the scheme by the end of the year.

A standardised protocol was published by the National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI) on 13 November 2018 and is available at www.nsai.ie. This standard can be used by homeowners anywhere in the country to assess and categorise the damage in properties where the concrete blocks are suspected to contain the minerals mica or pyrite and it will inform the course of action in relation to remedial works for all such affected properties.

Tenant Purchase Scheme Eligibility

621. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding the tenant purchase scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49344/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme came into operation on 1 January 2016. The Scheme is open to eligible tenants, including joint tenants, of local authority houses that are available for sale under the Scheme. To be eligible, tenants must meet certain criteria, including having a minimum reckonable income of €15,000 per annum and having been in receipt of social housing support for at least one year.

The 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.

In line with the commitment given in Rebuilding Ireland, a review of the first 12 months of the Scheme's operation, including the issue referred to by the Deputy, 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.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

622. Deputy Darragh O'Brien asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the local authorities that were contacted in relation to the first call for affordable housing scheme proposals; the local authorities which responded; when funding for the proposals will be announced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49345/18]

623. Deputy Darragh O'Brien asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when he plans to issue a second call for affordable housing proposals; if he will publish the relevant criteria arising from local authorities assessment of affordability in their areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49346/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 622 and 623 together.

In order to support the affordable housing programmes of local authorities, the Government has committed €310 million, over the three years 2019 to 2021, under the Serviced Sites Fund (SSF) announced as part of Budget 2019. The funding is available for key facilitating infrastructure, on public lands, to support the provision of affordable homes to purchase or rent. I envisage a maximum amount of SSF funding of €50,000 per affordable home and on this basis at least 6,200 affordable homes could be facilitated.

A first call for proposals under the Fund issued to the four Dublin local authorities; Kildare, Meath, Wicklow, Louth and Cork County Councils, and Cork and Galway City Councils.

Fifteen proposals were received, from nine local authorities targeted under this first call. Only South Dublin and Louth County Councils did not make applications under the first call. However, it will be open to those Councils to submit applications under future calls, if they consider it appropriate. I expect to announce funding decisions in relation to the first call applications shortly and for the infrastructure works on approved projects to begin as soon as possible thereafter, with the delivery of affordable homes from late 2019/early 2020 onwards.

More broadly, all local authorities are carrying out economic assessments of the requirement for affordable housing in their areas and the viability to deliver such affordable housing from

their sites. Guidance in this regard issued to local authorities in Circular letter APH/02/2018 of 16 October 2018 and my Department hosted a workshop for local authorities on 8 November to discuss these issues.

A second call for proposals under the Fund will be made shortly. The scope of that call will be influenced by the information received from local authorities, as part of the aforementioned assessments, which they have been requested to submit by 30 November.

As to whether the economic assessments will be published, this will be a matter for the individual local authorities concerned as the information contained therein may be commercially sensitive and its publication could prejudice the outcome of contractual or other negotiations with respect to the development of the sites concerned.

Social and Affordable Housing

624. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when he will publish regulations under Part 5 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49347/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I commenced the relevant provisions of Part 5 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 to provide a statutory basis for the delivery of affordable housing for purchase. Part 5 contains significant detail on the procedures and operation of the new Affordable Purchase Scheme.

The primary legislation will be supported by associated regulations, which are in the final stage of legal drafting following extensive consultation between my Department, the Housing Agency and local authorities. These will be published shortly. Most recently, my Department hosted a workshop for all local authorities on affordable housing and local authority land activation issues on 8 November 2018, where the operation of Part 5 was discussed.

Local Authority Funding

625. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the level of funding allocated to Kildare County Council for the housing adaptation grant, the housing aid for older people grant and the housing disability grant in each of the years 2016, 2017 and 2018; the level of drawdown by Kildare County Council of the funding allocated in each of the years 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49353/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department provides funding under the suite of Housing Adaptation Grants for Older People and People with a Disability to assist people in private houses to make their accommodation more suitable for their needs. The suite of grants include the Housing Adaptation Grant for People with a Disability, the Mobility Aids Grant and the Housing Aid for Older People, which are 80% funded by the Department, with a 20% contribution from the resources of the local authority. Local authorities receive an overall allocation, with the responsibility for the apportionment between the three schemes being a matter for each authority.

Information on the Exchequer funding provided by my Department to Kildare County Council for 2016 and 2017 for these grants is available on my Department's website at the following link:

www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/social-and-affordable/other-local-authority-housing-scheme-statistics.

Details of the allocation for 2018 are available at the following link:

www.housing.gov.ie/housing/special-housing-needs/minister-english-announces-eu6625-million-funding-improve-homes-older.

Kildare County Council have drawn down their full Exchequer allocation for 2018.

National Planning Framework

626. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the progress of the regional spatial and economic strategy with specific regard to the plans for County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49361/18]

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

As a strategic document, the NPF is currently being given further and more detailed expression at the regional level through preparation, by the Regional Assemblies, of statutory Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSESs) for the three Regional Assembly areas.

The RSES process formally commenced earlier this year. The draft Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly RSES is now on public display for consultation until Wednesday, 23 January 2019. The draft RSES, which contains information in relation to plans for County Kildare, is available on the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly's website at the following link: www.emra.ie/rses.

The finalisation of the 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, including County Kildare.

Private Rented Accommodation Standards

627. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to combat the online advertisement of lettings that contravene Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations or legislation relating to overcrowding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49379/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Minimum standards in rental accommodation apply to all properties let or available to let. Where someone believes that a property is being made available to let in breach of the standards, the matter should be referred to the relevant housing authority. Any person who neglects or refuses to comply with requirements under the Act is guilty of an offence. Fines for non-compliance with the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2017, which came

into force on 1 July 2017, have been increased, with the maximum fine increased from €3,000 to €5,000 and the daily fine for a continuing offence increased from €250 to €400.

Overcrowding and unfit houses are legislated for under Part IV of the Housing Act 1966. The 1966 Housing Act already establishes effective limits on the numbers of people that can occupy the same bedroom. The Act requires, *inter alia*, that there is at least 400 cubic feet of free air space for each person in a bedroom.

Local Authorities are responsible for the enforcement of this legislation. Overcrowding may give rise to concerns in respect of fire safety, and may lead to enforcement action by fire authorities. Situations of overcrowding should be reported to the relevant local authority. Under the Act, a local authority can prohibit the use of an overcrowded dwelling, irrespective of whether it is being let or not, and can serve notice on the owner of a dwelling specifying the maximum number of persons that may occupy it without causing overcrowding. If the owner of a house is causing or permitting the house to be overcrowded, the authority can require the owner to desist from this and any person who neglects or refuses to comply with these requirements is guilty of an offence.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

628. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the progress made on the use of factory fabricated homes to address the need for housing to be delivered as quickly as possible and also the reported shortage of construction workers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49380/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Under Rebuilding Ireland, a total of 325 social homes have been completed to date using rapid delivery technologies. There are currently some 27 further rapid delivery schemes, due to yield up to 758 social homes, at various stages of advancement. Rapid delivery projects generally incorporate prefabricated building elements and as a result have shorter construction timeframes.

Updated details in relation to the programme of rapid build projects are included in each Social Housing Construction Projects Status Report, which are published on a quarterly basis on the Rebuilding Ireland website; the most recently available report sets out the position as at end Q2, and is available at the following link: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/install/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Final-Full-Construction-Status-report-Q2-2018.pdf>.

In order to support local authorities and approved housing bodies, a framework of Design Build Contractors for the procurement of Rapid Delivery Social Housing was established on 6 January 2017, by the Office of Public Procurement. While the framework, or indeed off-site construction, may not be suitable for all developments or sites, my Department continues to encourage and support local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) to consider the rapid delivery mechanism in the interest of accelerated delivery. In this regard my Department organised information seminars for local authorities, as well as visits to rapid delivery projects under construction. Local authorities have been asked to consider, in particular, schemes which are suitable for early commencement, particularly in terms of their approved planning status.

In addition, Dublin City Council (DCC) is developing a rapid delivery programme of apartment developments. This could yield in excess of 700 homes and my Department is working very closely with the Council to prioritise some of the larger apartment schemes, given the current demand. To facilitate the efficient delivery of these projects, DCC is in the process of establishing a framework of Design Build Contractors for rapid delivery apartment type build-

ings. The process commenced in August 2018, with a request for expressions of interest. It is intended that the framework will be in place shortly. My Department has supported DCC in establishing this framework and is liaising with other urban local authorities to bring forward proposals for such projects to use the framework as soon as it is in place.

In regard to the reported shortage of construction workers, the capacity of the Irish economy to meet future expected activity in the construction sector has been examined by the Economic and Social Research Institute and details of its findings are available at the following link. <https://www.esri.ie/publications/capacity-constraints-in-the-irish-economy-a-partial-equilibrium-approach/>.

The recently published report indicates that much of the additional labour required for housing supply and other construction and infrastructural work may have to be secured through inward net migration. However, the report concludes the Irish economy would not appear, at present, to be unduly constrained in terms of the labour market.

Increasing housing supply generally, and social and more affordable housing in particular, is, and will remain, a top Government priority. Through the continued delivery on the ambitious programme set out in the Government's Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness, the State intends to fully meet its obligations to those who need a home.

Separately, my colleague, the Minister for Education and Skills, continues to implement a range of measures to ensure that there will be the required number of construction workers in place to support the delivery of the Rebuilding Ireland programme. These measures include:

- expanding the range of apprenticeships on offer to meet the identified skill needs of industry;
- SOLAS-funded construction related further education and training programmes provided by Education and Training Boards; and
- working with the Construction Industry Federation, as industry lead, to further develop the national apprenticeship programme.

Consultancy Contracts Expenditure

629. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the fees paid and services rendered to a person (details supplied) in each of the years 2013 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49427/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): An examination of records indicates that no fees were paid by my Department to, or services provided to it by, the parties referred to in the years 2013 to 2017 or to date in 2018.

Building Regulations

630. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 260 of 21 November 2018, his definition of a dispensation or relaxation of the building regulations for the proposed temporary modular homes; if such a dispensation or relaxation of standards will include fire safety, insulation or energy efficiency standards; and the reason he would allow a dispensation or relaxation of these regulations to British standards or industry standards which are lower than and thus inferior to the

standards that apply here. [49468/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): I refer to the reply to Question No. 260 of 21 November 2018.

While a dispensation or relaxation of the Building Regulations may be required for the modular homes concerned, the specification set out in the request for tender represents the minimum standards in the temporary/portable home sector. It is similar to British Standards and other industry standard requirements for the manufacture of such units. It sets minimum performance requirements in relation to structure, fire safety, ventilation, energy efficiency, heating systems etc. This is to ensure that good quality and safe accommodation, will be provided that is appropriate to the temporary nature of the units.

In particular, fire safety requirements in the tender documents are aligned with the Technical Guidance Document B – Fire Safety of Part B of the Building Regulations for such buildings. Local authorities will also be liaising with the respective Fire Authority on individual hub projects to ensure adequate provision has been made for Fire Safety.

Social and Affordable Housing

631. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 259 of 1 November 2018 if his attention or that of his officials has been drawn towards additional architectural drawings regarding a property (details supplied) that was not within the local authorities boundary for works that included aspirational features such as additional car parking at the end of a public road; the status of the funds extended to the local authority to date for the project; if the local quantity surveyor will attend the next quarterly meeting with departmental officials or that of the contractor; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49469/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): As clarified in responses previously on this matter, the management of this and all other social housing projects are matters for the local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies implementing the projects. Consequently, my Department is not directly involved with the ongoing management of issues that arise in the implementation of this project. As with all similar social housing construction projects, funding is made available to the local authority in line with their advancement of the project.

The quarterly meetings held between the local authorities and my Department are technical meetings with a focus on architectural/quantity surveying issues arising on the social housing construction projects of the local authorities. Issues relating to these projects raised at the quarterly meetings remain the responsibility of the parties to the contract, those being the local authority and the contractor in question.

Approved Housing Bodies

632. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 243 of 21 November 2018, and further to his statement that he has no plans to extend the capital advance and leasing facility, CALF, loans to approved housing bodies, AHBs, for the purposes of developing cost rental accommodation, if there has been discussions of such a change to CALF within his Department, between his Department and other Departments and or between his office and that of other Ministers in the

context of the ongoing review of Rebuilding Ireland, the budget 2019 preparations and or the ongoing confidence and supply talks with Fianna Fáil. [49475/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The position remains unchanged from my reply to Parliamentary Question No. 243 of 21 November 2018. The Capital Advance Leasing Facility (CALF) is a facility, which is exclusively available to Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs), to assist them in accessing private or Housing Finance Agency (HFA) finance for the purchase, construction or refurbishment of homes that will be made available for social housing purposes under long-term availability agreements of up to 30 years. Accordingly, I have no plans to amend the uses for which CALF is made available to AHBs.

This Government's ambition is to make cost/affordable rental a major part of the Irish housing system, with rents set at levels to cover construction costs and the management and administration of developments, but with only a minimal retained profit margin. As previously advised, this will be informed by pilot projects being delivered on sites at Emmet Road, Inchicore, and at Enniskerry Road, Dundrum.

My Department, the Housing Agency, the relevant local authorities and other key stakeholders engage in ongoing dialogue to explore how best to underpin and advance the wider roll out of cost rental in Ireland. This inevitably involved consideration, including in the context of Budget 2019, of the potential role of all delivery partners, including AHBs, and funding schemes (such as CALF). Ultimately the key funding vehicle put in place under Budget 2019 was the €310 m Serviced Sites Fund, under which the first round of successful applications will be decided shortly.

Rental Sector

633. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the changes he is considering making to the exemptions in SI 582 of 2015 in relation to the definition of an excluded in section 3 of the instrument; if this will require persons who have second homes that they let for more than a certain period each year to get specific planning permission for this activity; the consideration he has given to the possible effect of this on rural areas that have a high dependency on tourism; the discussions he has had with the Minister for Rural and Community Development on the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49493/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I have no plans to amend the provisions of the Planning and Development (Amendment) (No. 4) Regulations 2015 (S.I. 582 of 2015) at this time. However, I understand that the Deputy is referring to the recent announcement in relation to proposed planning related reforms in respect of short-term letting.

Under Action 18 of the Strategy for the Rental Sector, a Working Group was established, involving representatives of all major public stakeholders with a policy interest in short-term lettings, to develop guidance in relation to planning applications, changes of use relating to short-term lettings and to examine the need for new regulatory arrangements.

Proposals under consideration by the Working Group have been aimed at facilitating short-term letting of accommodation within permanent residences, known as homesharing, while protecting the existing stock of residential property in areas of high demand.

Having considered the Group's report as well as the recommendations in the report of the

Joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government on short-term lettings, I recently announced plans to introduce a “one host, one home” model in areas where there is high housing demand.

Homesharing will continue to be permissible for a person’s primary residence, and such home-sharers will have to now register with their local authority. In addition, an annual cap of 90 days will apply for the renting out on a short-term basis of a person’s entire home where it is their primary residence, with such short-term lets being restricted to periods of 14 days or less at a time.

Where a person owns a second property and intends to let it as a short-term letting, they will require planning permission to do so unless it already has planning permission to be used for tourism or short-term letting purposes. Planning permission for a change of use to short-term letting can be sought and it will be up to each local planning authority to consider such applications, based on guidance that will issue from my Department, taking account of housing demand pressures in the area and other relevant factors such as cumulative impacts.

These proposed changes will not affect the operation of holiday homes as typically understood, or longer-term flexible lettings which are provided for those coming to Ireland under employment contracts.

It is intended that the proposed new planning changes will come into effect on 1 June 2019, to allow property owners sufficient lead-in time to prepare for and adapt to the proposed new laws. In addition to the making of revised draft exempted development planning regulations, which are being progressed, amendments to primary legislation will also be introduced which will underpin and strengthen the new proposals and this element of the changes proposed is currently being developed.

Climate Change Adaptation Plans

634. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will provide a timeline for the development of his Department’s specific climate change targets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49571/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The National Development Plan and National Planning Framework include significant elements of policy that provide a strong platform for the development of measures and actions in response to climate change. Specific measures my Department is currently developing and implementing include:

- A review of the 2006 Wind Energy Development Guidelines. When finalised, the revised Guidelines will be issued under section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended.

- In collaboration with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment who lead on renewable energy policy, my Department is exploring the potential for enhancing national planning guidance on solar energy, taking account of solar energy projects being assessed by planning authorities and the scope for future development of the sector in the context of the ongoing development of renewable energy policy.

- With regard to the built environment, which accounts for approximately 40% of total energy produced in Ireland, the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (EPBD) sets ambitious goals for energy efficiency and renewables in buildings by requiring Nearly Zero Energy

Building or “NZEB” performance for new buildings from 31st December 2020. In addition, the Directive also requires that major renovations to existing buildings are completed to a cost optimal level, where it is feasible. This has been completed for buildings other than dwellings and will take effect from 1st January 2019. It will be in place for dwellings from mid-2019. These will contribute to emissions reductions from 1st January 2021 onwards.

- Lack of recharging infrastructure is a barrier to the take-up of electric vehicles in the EU and the revised EPBD has new provisions which aim to accelerate deployment. These will be implemented in regulation by my Department by March 2020.

- In relation to social housing, funding of some €116 million has been provided from 2013 to end-2017 to improve energy efficiency and comfort levels in almost 64,000 local authority homes. In addition, energy efficient measures have been incorporated into the 9,000 plus vacant social housing units that have been returned to productive use since 2014. This effectively means that approximately 50% of our social housing stock has been energy retrofitted.

All of the measures outlined above are key actions in contributing to Ireland’s National Low Carbon Transition and Mitigation Plan to address Climate Change.

Appointments to State Boards

635. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the procedure in place to appoint persons to the Irish Film Board; and when vacancies will arise. [48874/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): Fís Éireann (formerly the Irish Film Board) is established under the Irish Film Board Acts 1980 to 2011 to assist and encourage the development of a film industry in the State and to empower the board to provide investments, grants, loans and guarantees of loans for the making of films in the state.

Section 12 of the Act provides that the members of the Board shall be appointed by the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, with the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform for a period of appointment not exceeding four years. Section 13 provides for the appointment of one of the members of the Board as Chair by the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, with the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

There are seven members of the Board of Fís Éireann. Details of Fís Éireann board members can be viewed on their website at the following link <https://www.screenireland.ie/about/board-members>.

Since 2014, the selection of appointees to the Board of Fís Éireann /Screen Ireland follows the system introduced by the Government whereby all appointments are required to be advertised openly on the State Boards portal www.stateboards.ie operated by the Public Appointments Service (PAS). This means that anyone who considers that they have a contribution to make, can apply to be a member of the Board.

Applications made through Stateboards.ie are processed by way of a transparent assessment system designed and implemented by the independent Public Appointments Service to support Ministers in making appointments to State Boards. This is an open, accessible, rigorous and transparent system which has yielded applications from accomplished, experienced and qualified individuals who wish to make a commitment to public service that might not have previ-

ously been identified as available for appointment to State Boards.

All current members on the board of Fís Éireann were selected from applications from candidates deemed suitable by the PAS under the Stateboards system.

Údarás na Gaeltachta

636. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the amount that has been spent by Údarás na Gaeltachta in relation to a planning application (details supplied) to Galway County Council; if Údarás na Gaeltachta has all the required right of way agreements in place with the route the subject of the planning application; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48980/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Seán Kyne): In the context of the job creation and consolidation targets laid out in Údarás na Gaeltachta's Strategic Plan 2018-2020 the planning, design and construction of the upgraded facility referenced in the planning application referred to by the Deputy is a long-awaited priority.

The facility currently *in situ* at the location does not have the capacity to deal with the current demands of the business park and therefore an immediate upgrade is vital - not only to consolidate the 150+ jobs currently on the park but to allow businesses on the park to implement expansion plans. The increased capacity will also facilitate Údarás na Gaeltachta in further developing the business park to attract new companies to the area to create jobs that will in turn be to the benefit of the Gaeltacht community in question.

I understand from Údarás na Gaeltachta that the proposed upgrade to the facility is at an advanced stage of design, planning and implementation. Planning permission was approved in 2016 and the project has advanced to a stage where consulting engineers have been engaged to prepare tender documents for the construction of the facility. Negotiations with landowners regarding all aspects of the new facility are at an advanced stage and Údarás hopes to conclude these negotiations in Q1 of 2019, with a view to commencing construction on the new facility shortly thereafter.

I have been informed by Údarás na Gaeltachta that €77,000 has been spent to date in consultancy and site investigation costs pertaining to the project, while €416 has been spent in relation to the planning application.

Archaeological Sites

637. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her reasoning for the introduction of a scheme similar to the portable antiquities scheme which operates in the United Kingdom to facilitate constructive metal detecting; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49124/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): I am advised that the Portable Antiquities Scheme responds to a situation in the United Kingdom whereby, unlike in Ireland, finds of antiquities, unless held to be treasure trove by a Coroner, become the property of the landowner or the finder, depending on the circumstances of their discovery. I understand that there is no obligation to report such finds and that the aim of the scheme is to encourage finders to report any discoveries and to at least have them recorded, if

not deposited, in a museum.

An entirely different legal framework exists in this jurisdiction, as affirmed by the Supreme Court decision in *Webb v. Ireland* and provided for in the National Monuments (Amendment) Act 1994, under which all finds of archaeological objects with no known owner are automatically State property and their discovery must, by law, be reported to the National Museum of Ireland. No ownership entitlement is vested in either finder or landowner. The 1994 Act provides for a discretionary payment of a reward to finders.

In the circumstances, I see no need and have no plans to introduce any scheme along the lines envisaged by the Deputy.

Consultancy Contracts Expenditure

638. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the fees paid and services rendered to a person (details supplied) in each of the years 2013 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49420/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): I am advised that that no payments have been made or services rendered to the person identified by the Deputy during the specified period.

Special Protection Areas

639. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the reason the Middle Shannon Callows special protection area, SPA, is not eligible for the National Parks and Wildlife Service corncrake farm plan scheme, CFPS, despite this area being a special protection area; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49517/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): Between 2008 and 2014, my Department provided approximately €2.5 m to 136 farmers in the Middle Shannon Callows SPA (Site Code 004096) to maintain habitat for the Corncrake under the National Parks and Wildlife Service farm plan scheme. This is in addition to schemes administered by the Department of Agriculture for Corncrake in the Shannon Callows.

I am advised that, despite these initiatives, the last confirmed record of a Corncrake in the Middle Shannon Callows SPA was in the summer of 2014. Like other agri-environmental schemes including GLAS, the NPWS Farm Plan Scheme is targeted towards areas where the birds exist, and where there will be value for money for the taxpayer.

Should any Corncrakes return to the Shannon Callows to breed, my Department will offer financial support under the Corncrake Grant Scheme to the landowners/farmers involved, which would cater for any necessary delayed mowing dates to allow the bird to rear its young. This scheme is currently available wherever Corncrakes breed.

Should a population begin to re-establish on the Shannon Callows, my Department will review the targeting of the Farm Plan Scheme and the application of agri-environmental measures.

Climate Change Adaptation Plans

640. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will provide a timeline for the development of her Department's specific climate change targets; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49564/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): A Biodiversity Sectoral Climate Change Adaptation Plan is a requirement of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act (2015). A draft plan was prepared earlier this year by the National Parks and Wildlife Service in my Department and circulated to the Interdepartmental Biodiversity Working Group and the independent Biodiversity Forum for consultation and review, from May to the end of July 2018.

The draft sectoral plan was considered by a stakeholder workshop, held by my Department on the 16th October 2018. There were 40 participants at the workshop, from across various sectors including representatives of Regional Climate Change Offices and officials from NPWS. The workshop sought feedback and inputs on a number of important aspects relating to climate impacts and consequences for biodiversity and the biodiversity sector, climate change adaptation actions and also cross-sectoral linkages. The plan is now being redrafted and the revised draft Biodiversity Sectoral Climate Change Adaptation Plan will go to public consultation in Q1 2019.

Climate adaptation planning in the biodiversity sector is a cross cutting issue, with responsibility for biodiversity protection, management and restoration spanning multiple government departments as well local authorities and non-State actors. Nonetheless, I am confident that the work being carried out by my Department, and colleagues across government, will help us meet these challenges.

My Department is also involved in peatland restoration. Irish peatlands are a huge carbon store, containing more than 75% of all the national soil organic carbon. On average, peatlands are estimated to hold about 1,500 tons of soil carbon per hectare, i.e. about 10 times as much as a typical mineral soil. Intact peatlands capture (sequester) carbon from the atmosphere and store it in the form of peat and vegetation, but the carbon is released back to the atmosphere if the peatland is damaged.

The National Raised Bog Special Areas of Conservation Management Plan 2017-2022 sets out how raised bog special areas of conservation are to be managed, conserved and restored and also how the needs of turf cutters are to be addressed. It is intended to restore all designated raised bogs within 3 cycles, with the first cycle operating for the duration of the current Management Plan. Work on this programme has already begun with a €5.4m project 'The Living Bog' which is co-funded by the EU LIFE 2014-2020 programme.