

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 5, inclusive, answered orally.

Cúram agus Oideachas na Luath-Óige

6. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Leanaí agus Gnóthaí Óige cén fáth nach bhfuil an eagraíocht a dhéanann freastal agus comhordú ar na naíonraí atá ag feidhmiú trí Ghaeilge taobh amuigh den Ghaeltacht agus a thugann bun-tacaíochtaí dóibh ag fáil bun-mhaoiniú óna Roinn; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [52227/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Is maith atá a fhios agam faoin luach a bhaineann le tacaíocht a thabhairt do sholáthar seirbhísí sa Ghaeilge do leanaí óga, agus an ról a bhaineann leis an tacaíocht seo chun cumas sa Ghaeilge a chothú agus chun an Ghaeilge a chur chun cinn mar theanga bheo. Mar sin, tá baill ó dhá eagraíocht Ghaeilge i bhFóram na Luathbhlianta, agus mise i mo chathaoirleach ann.

Cé nach dtugann mo Roinn maoiniú tiomnaithe d'aon ghrúpaí Gaeilge ar leith faoi láthair, tacaíonn sí leis an nGaeilge i go leor bealaí eile agus tá sí tiomanta do roinnt gníomhartha suntasacha sa Phlean Gníomhaíochta don Ghaeilge 2018-2022. Tá sé mar aidhm ag na gníomhartha seo ná cur le agus feabhas a dhéanamh ar na bearta, tacaíochtaí agus comhpháirtíochtaí atá ann cheana agus a chuirtear ar fáil trí, mar shampla, Tús Níos Fearr, tríd an Chigireacht Luathbhlianta ag TUSLA, agus trí na Coistí Contae agus Cathrach i gCúram Leanaí.

Tá mo Roinn chun dhá phost a cheapadh atá tiomnaithe do chomhardú a dhéanamh ar thacaíochtaí Gaeilge in earnáil na luathbhlianta, agus beidh an gníomh seo barrthábhachtach. Tá mo Roinn ag obair ar sonraíochtaí na poist seo le comhghleacaithe sa Roinn Cultúir, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta, d'fhonn earcaíocht in 2019.

San iomlán, tugann mo Roinn maoiniú do 228 seirbhís a thugann siad Naíonraí orthu iad féin, laistigh agus lasmuigh de na ceantair Ghaeltachta araon. Gach rud san áireamh, cuireadh maoiniú €16m ar fáil do na seirbhísí sin le ceithre bliana anuas agus tá na tacaíochtaí go léir a sholáthraíonn mo Roinn ar fáil do gach uile sheirbhís luathbhlianta agus naíonra, laistigh agus lasmuigh den Ghaeltacht araon.

Amach anseo, beidh mé ag coimisiúnú athbhreithniú neamhspleách maidir leis na struchtúir in earnáil na Luathbhlianta go luath. Cé nach féidir liom teacht roimh aon cheann de thorthaí an athbhreithnithe, tá súil agam go mbeadh sé ríthábhachtach go mbeidh próiseas plé ann le gach ceann de ghrúpaí páirtithe leasmhara na luathbhlianta, eagraíochtaí Gaeilge ar nós an chinn a luaigh an Teachta san áireamh.

I am very aware of the value of supporting the provision of services in the Irish language to children at an early age, and of the role this can play in fostering Irish language proficiency and

promoting Irish as a living language. As such, the Early Years Forum which I chair, includes membership from two Irish language organisations.

While my Department does not currently provide dedicated funding to any specific Irish language groups, it does support Irish in many other ways and has committed to a number of significant actions within the Action Plan for the Irish Language 2018-2022. These actions aim to build and improve on existing measures, supports and partnerships that are provided through, for example, Better Start, the Tusla Early Years Inspectorate and local City and Country Childcare Committees.

Key among these actions will be the appointment of two dedicated posts to co-ordinate Irish language supports in early years. My Department is currently working on specifying these posts with colleagues in the Department of Culture Heritage and the Gaeltacht, with a view to recruitment in 2019.

In all, my Department funds some 228 services which identify themselves as Naíonraí, both within and outside the Gaeltacht areas. Total funding of some €16m was provided to such services over the past four years and the many supports which are available from my Department are offered to all early years services and naíonraí, both inside and outside the Gaeltacht.

Looking to the future, I will shortly be commissioning an independent review of structures that support the Early Years Sector. While I cannot pre-empt any of the findings of any such review, I would expect that a key component will be a process of engagement with all of the early years stakeholder groups, including Irish language organisations such as that referred to by the Deputy.

Childcare Services Funding

7. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the way in which the €1.2 million funding to provide first aid training for each registered childcare service has been dispersed by county; the number of childcare providers that have availed of the service; and the average amount dispersed to each facility. [52441/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The allocation of €1.2million was made in Budget 2019 and I am pleased to confirm that preparations are well under way for roll-out of training to every registered early learning and care service to meet the new First Aid Response (FAR) standard. Roll out is expected to begin early in 2019, for completion by 1st June 2020. June 2020 is the date after which Tusla will require every service to meet the new standard.

During 2019 and the first half of 2020, my Department will provide funding to allow one free place on a First Aid Response training course for every service provider in the country. The training will be organised through the City and County Childcare Committees.

Early learning and care providers are all familiar with their City and County Childcare Committee and should be in regular contact with them. In early 2019, the City and County Childcare Committee will be in contact with each service in their area to ensure that they have the opportunity to access the first aid training.

The training will be organised and paid for by the City and County Childcare Committees, through funding provided by my Department. The training will be free at the point of delivery for the staff attending. As a result, no money will be disbursed to early learning and care service providers.

There are currently 4,519 early learning and care service providers in contract with my Department. Initially, City and County Childcare Committees will be asked to prioritise services who do not have First Aid Response training already and who have other first aid training that is due to expire soon, but they will ensure that all service providers are given the opportunity to have a staff member attend the training.

Early Childhood Care and Education Data

8. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of take-up of the ECCE free preschool year for 2017 and 2018; the way in which it has been impacted by the change in dates and requirements for entry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52469/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): According to the latest figures there are 105,503 children registered on the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme for 2018/2019.

The comparable figure for the same time last year was 90,589. The figure in the earlier years of ECCE stood at approximately 67,000 children. The increase in participation for this programme year is explained by the extension of the ECCE programme to a full two year provision.

All children meeting the minimum age requirement of 2 years and 8 months are now eligible for a full two programme years on ECCE. This measure increases the duration of each registered child on ECCE from the original entitlement of 38 weeks to a potential duration now of 76 weeks (two programme years).

This delivers fully on a commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government that is good for children, families and Early Learning and Care providers.

Now that we have a full two-year programme, we reduced the number of entry points from three to one in September this year. One enrolment period at the start of the pre-school year helps to streamline the administration process and makes it easier for childcare providers to operate and budget for the programme year.

It also makes it easier for parents to secure places on the ECCE programme for their children. ECCE now mirrors school entry, with one enrolment point.

The minimum and maximum ages for ECCE were chosen based on a number of considerations. These were:

- national experience,
- a review of international practice,
- the regulatory environment for early learning and care,
- issues such as child development readiness,
- adult-child ratios and the policy of the Department of Education and Skills with regard to school start age.

I believe that the new system is right for children and helps ensure that parents and providers can plan with clarity for the needs of children.

Questions - Written Answers
European Council Meetings

9. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the purpose of her recent visit to Brussels; and the way in which the European Solidarity Corps will operate in an Irish context. [52443/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The purpose of my trip to Brussels on 26 November 2018 was to attend the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport (EYCS) Council. The Council of Ministers with responsibility for youth policy in each Member State meet twice a year towards the end of each presidency.

Among the issues discussed at the Council was the European Solidarity Corps which brings a number of opportunities for young people to enhance their personal, educational, social and civic development. It is made up of two strands, the volunteering strand and occupational strand.

The volunteering strand consists of a full-time voluntary unpaid solidarity activity for a period from 2 to 12 months. It gives young people the chance to take part in the daily work of organisations.

Activities can take place either in a country other than the country of residence of the participant (cross-border) or in the country of residence of the participant (in-country).

In the occupational strand, traineeships and jobs provide young people with opportunities for work practice or employment, helping them to enhance their skills and experience thus facilitating their employability and transition into the labour market.

Full-time learning and work practice of between 2 to 6 months is remunerated by the organisation responsible for the traineeship of the Corps participant.

As Minister for Children and Youth Affairs I am excited about the opportunities for Irish young people that the European Solidarity Corps will open up and I welcome the fact that the European Solidarity Corps gives special attention to young people with fewer opportunities as Irish youth policy is particularly concerned with inclusion.

Questions Nos. 10 to 17, inclusive, answered orally.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

18. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will report on the developments related to the working group seeking to streamline children's access to mental health services here; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52228/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Working Group referred to by the Deputy held its inaugural meeting on 19th January 2018. The group is co-chaired by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the Department of Health.

The group is made up of senior officials from both Departments with representatives from Tusla, the Child and Family Agency and the Health Service Executive.

The key objective of the working group is to examine psychological and mental health services for children and young people with the aim of agreeing a clear continuum of provision and strengthening alignment between providers.

In order to secure the best possible output it is essential to establish complete and up-to-

date information on current provision. My officials have been working with Tusla to establish greater clarity around existing service availability and provision, with a view to ensuring that all respective inputs from the agencies provide a comprehensive overview of provision in this area.

Under the Child and Family Agency Act, 2013 Tusla has responsibility for services relating to the psychological welfare of children and families but not for more acute services focusing on complex developmental issues and disabilities and more severe mental health problems. Community-based psychological services are delivered by the HSE with financial support from Tusla.

Tusla also deliver specific psychological services through the Assessment Consultation Therapy Service (ACTS). ACTS provides multidisciplinary consultation, assessment and focused interventions to young people with complex needs.

Tusla and the HSE have in place both a Memorandum of Understanding and a Joint Protocol for inter-agency collaboration among the two organisations. Discussions are ongoing between the two organisations to ensure collaboration is effective and sustained.

A key initiative that will further inform the work of the group is the Youth Mental Health Pathfinder Project, being established by the Department of Health. Progress in this area, aligned to a clear overview of existing provision and proposed plans from the agencies will identify gaps in provision, areas for alignment and areas for further development.

My Department will, in conjunction with the Department of Health, and with colleagues in our respective agencies, continue to collaborate with the aim of ensuring aligned and accessible service provision.

Ministerial Travel

19. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the costs associated with her most recent visit to New York; the meetings she attended over the three days; and if those meetings were related to her brief as Minister. [52442/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I participated in events in my role as Minister of the Government and also as Minister for Children and Youth Affairs.

There were three speeches at the United Nations. First to mark a centenary of Irish women's suffrage with the President of the General Assembly. Poet Eavan Boland and international representatives recited a poem during the celebrations.

I addressed the Security Council on "Cooperation between the UN and regional and sub-regional organisations: the role of States, regional arrangements and the United Nations in the prevention and resolution of conflicts".

Along with the Secretary General of the United Nations, I participated in a high-level Pledging Event on the UN Central Emergency Response Fund, reaffirming Ireland's commitment with €10million annually for the next three years.

There were also bilateral meetings as part of our campaign to become a member of the Security Council.

In addition I met members of our diaspora who are survivors and relatives of survivors of the Mother and Baby Homes.

In a further meeting the Irish American artistic community discussed the role of the arts in truth telling, particularly in respect of our past.

I attended a meeting with Professor Jeffrey Sachs, Special Advisor the Secretary General of the United Nations on the Sustainable Development Goals. This meeting was a follow-up to a workshop I hosted in Dublin on tackling child poverty.

There was a very welcome opportunity to address 100 young Irish people now living in New York. Many recently arrived and spoke of challenges they face. It was also reassuring to experience the support offered to them by our consulate in New York.

At present, the only cost paid is for the flights which comes to a total of €2291.12 for four people.

Early Childhood Care and Education Data

20. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of new ECCE places created nationally, and specifically in Ballincollig, County Cork, as part of the 2018 early years and school age capital programmes announced in June 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52467/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The results of the 2018 Early Years and School Age Capital programmes were announced in June 2018, with successful applicants entering into contract as soon thereafter as possible.

The budget for the 2018 capital programmes was set at €6.86m, and this was delivered under five strands. These allowed for the creation of new early years places, the creation of new school age places, the essential maintenance and repair of community services and the creation of new natural outdoor play areas in early years services.

As the Deputy may be aware, Early Years Capital funding may be used to create either 0-3 places or ECCE places, while School Age Capital funding may be used to create school age childcare places.

I am pleased to say that this year's funding saw applications approved for the creation of 2,757 new childcare places nationwide. This included the approval of 85 applications for 1,950 new early years places, 697 places for children under 3, and 1,253 ECCE places, and 45 applications for the creation of 807 new school age places.

Pobal has indicated that for Cork county, 4 applications were approved for the creation of 46 new childcare places: 13 ECCE places and 33 school age places. None of these were registered as in Ballincollig.

It should be noted that the capital programmes were particularly competitive this year, and many high quality applications did not ultimately receive an offer of funding. I hope to announce my plans for 2019 capital funding very early in the new year.

Finally, it should be noted that the capital programmes have not yet fully concluded and thus the figures mentioned are provisional, based on approved funding.

Family Reunification

21. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her role in the family reunification process; and if her attention has been drawn to the stress and anxiety caused to certain children due to time delays and inefficiency of the process. [52429/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I thank the Deputy for her question. I do not have a role in the family reunification process. Family reunification falls under the policy remit of my Cabinet colleague, the Minister for Justice and Equality.

A separated child seeking asylum may make an application for reunification with family members, depending on the circumstances of their arrival and their status in Ireland. Where the family are already in Ireland, the UK or EU, Tusla will work with the separated child seeking asylum, where it is deemed in their interest, to reunify that child with their family as soon as possible. Children arriving through the Irish Refugee Protection Programme, and who have their status approved prior to, or within a short period of arrival, are in a position to apply for their family to come to Ireland. Decisions about such applications are a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Justice and Equality.

A child seeking asylum who arrives at a point of entry unaccompanied by parents or guardians is taken into the care of Tusla and it is required that their leave to remain status is established before they can apply for family to join them in Ireland. The possibility of family reunification is considered as part of a detailed needs assessment process carried out when a child comes into the care of Tusla. Not all young persons are in a position to make an informed application for international protection on arrival; some are deeply traumatised from their experiences. They need a period of stability and care before being supported in making their application for residency. Some young people may need medical or psychological supports on arrival, and some may need educational supports and intensive social work support in order to prepare them for making the application.

I am aware that the process of applying for asylum, and applying for family reunification where eligible, can be difficult, and in some cases stressful. Every separated child seeking asylum has an allocated social worker, who works with the child to prepare them for the application process, and to secure supports for the child in line with their needs and best interests.

All factors, including potential for family reunification, and reunification with a guardian, are considered by the social worker when evaluating the right time to make an application with a young person. Child-centred practice requires that the individual needs and circumstances of the child/young person, as well as their opinion, are taken into account. In the main, it is on this basis that decisions about the timing of applications is made.

Illegal Adoptions

22. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the progress being made to identify cases of illegal or incorrect adoption registrations; the steps taken to inform the person identified as being illegally or incorrectly registered; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52312/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Following the discovery by Tusla of evidence of illegal birth registrations in the St. Patrick’s Guild files, I initiated a review of adoption records to determine if similar evidence of illegal registration could be identified from the records of other former adoption agencies and other relevant bodies.

A targeted review of adoption records in the custody of the State (i.e. in the custody of Tusla and the Adoption Authority of Ireland) is being carried out in the first instance owing

to the volume of files involved. This review will provide information to assist me to reach a decision about what, if any, subsequent action might be established to identify more fully the scale of illegal registration. It is not possible at this stage to anticipate the type of information that will emerge from the review. Given the sensitive personal data contained in the files, data protection and GDPR issues have arisen, which have delayed the review, but these have now been addressed and the final report of the review is expected to be submitted to me before Easter 2019. Regarding the illegal registrations identified in the St Patrick's Guild files, Tusla is continuing the process of notifying the subjects of illegal registration. Tusla social workers are supporting these individuals as they deal with the news that they are subjects of illegal registration. The information that an illegal birth registration has taken place is potentially life changing and the State has a responsibility to reach a high level of certainty that this has in fact happened before it contacts the individuals concerned. I am keeping the situation continuously under review.

Affordable Childcare Scheme

23. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of the affordable childcare scheme; and the further status of efforts to build an information technology infrastructure and make the scheme more accessible to parents using childminders. [52423/18]

36. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of the affordable childcare scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52395/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 23 and 36 together.

The Affordable Childcare Scheme is a radical new approach to how we deliver accessible, affordable, high quality early learning and care and school age childcare to families in Ireland. The scheme will open to applications in October 2019, with payments flowing from November 2019. Its launch will mark a milestone in our quest to transform Ireland's childcare system from one of the most expensive in the world into one of the best.

I am delighted to report that good progress continues to be made in the development of the legislative, administrative and ICT infrastructure for the scheme.

As you know, earlier this year, with wide cross party support, the Childcare Support Act 2018 was signed into law. Detailed secondary legislation and policy guidelines are now being prepared under the auspices of the Act.

I also hope to sign regulations in the coming weeks which will provide, for the first time, for the registration of school-age childcare services. This will allow these services to participate in the new scheme from the start. It also represents an important first step on the path to full regulation for school-age childcare services.

Our IT development contractor, Codec, is busy working with officials from DCYA and Pobal to develop the scheme's supporting IT system on schedule and in advance of the scheme's October launch.

A comprehensive awareness campaign for parents and the public will commence in the spring, alongside training and information supports for childcare providers and other key stakeholders.

I was delighted in Budget 2019 to have been able to enhance the originally proposed Affordable Childcare Scheme by raising the upper and lower income thresholds. More families will benefit as a result of these revised thresholds. The increase to the lower threshold to €26,000 now poverty proofs the scheme and the increase to the upper threshold to €60,000 net income also ensures that families earning up to €100,000 gross income may benefit from targeted subsidies.

Registration with Tusla will be a requirement for any childminder wishing to take part in the Affordable Childcare Scheme and, therefore, the widening of registration to more childminders will be necessary if parents who use childminders are to benefit from childcare subsidies.

I am committed to publishing a Childminding Action Plan in the near future. The Plan will contain short, medium and long term goals for the sector, setting out steps to move towards the wider regulation, support and professional development of childminders. In the short term, it will include actions to support already eligible childminders to register and participate in the Affordable Childcare Scheme.

Budget 2019 allocated €0.5m to create a team of Childminding Development Officers to support the registration of childminders with Tusla and to help them upskill to the required regulatory standards to be introduced in the coming years.

Recent developments for childminders include the opening of a bursary fund under the DCYA Learner Fund to support childminders to obtain a relevant NFQ Level 5 qualification, which is currently required for childminders to register with Tusla. It is anticipated that this financial support will incentivise more childminders eligible to register with Tusla to do so in advance of the introduction of the Affordable Childcare Scheme.

DCYA also currently provide childminding development grants of up to €1,000 for childminders who provide a home based childminding service. This grant can be applied for every 2 years to make modifications to the service or to purchase toys, educational material or equipment. To be eligible for the grant, a childminder must have completed the Quality Awareness Programme or Children First: Child Protection and Welfare training, and be voluntarily notified to their local City/County Childcare Committee or registered with Tusla.

Parental Leave

24. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the steps she is taking to support stay-at-home parents; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52431/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Government is committed to supporting parents in caring for young children at home in a range of ways.

Within the remit of my Department, a number of schemes provide support to parents whether they work full time, part time, or look after their children at home.

For example, from September of this year, all children are eligible to avail of two years of universal pre-school, without cost, through the Early Childhood Care and Education programme (ECCE) prior to beginning primary school. Some 114,000 children are expected to benefit, many of whom will be children of stay-at-home parents.

Furthermore the current targeted early learning and care subsidy schemes are available to

families where parents are in receipt of certain social welfare payments, medical cards, or GP Visit cards, again many of whom are stay-at-home parents.

A universal subsidy is available to all parents of children under the age of three, or whenever the child becomes eligible for the universal preschool programme, regardless of whether parents are working outside the home or not. The Affordable Childcare Scheme, ACS, which is under development will make early learning and care subsidies available on the basis of family income and will be available to stay-at-home parents. This is underpinned by the Childcare Support Act 2018.

My Department also provides funding for local parent and toddler groups to organise activities for parents and young children in the community to support their development through play. Both working parents and stay-at-home parents participate.

More widely across Government, there are various initiatives that support stay-at-home parents. A child benefit payment of €140 per child per month is available for all children. Budget 2019 announced an increase to the home carer tax credit to €1,500 per year.

There has also been a number of new measures to support parents to spend time at home with children in their early years. Two weeks of paternity leave and benefit for fathers was introduced in 2016. In 2017, there was an extension to maternity leave and benefit to mothers of babies born prematurely. Budget 2019 also announced the introduction of a new parental leave scheme which will be available to both fathers and mothers.

My Department has recently led the development and publication of First 5: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families. The Strategy includes a range of measures to support families given the fundamental importance they play in shaping children's outcomes. A copy of First 5 was recently circulated to all Deputies.

Child and Family Agency Policy

25. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of the implementation of action 1.4 in the corporate plan of Tusla; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52424/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): This question is identical to Priority No. 1 (Dail ref 1) answered on 13 Dec 2018, and therefore the answer is the same.

Home School Community Liaison Scheme

26. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if the home school liaison programme will be expanded to non-DEIS schools; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52298/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): As the Deputy might be aware, both the DEIS programme and the Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) Scheme are initiatives of the Department of Education and Skills (DES). HSCL posts are allocated by the Department of Education and Skills to schools which are part of the DEIS programme.

I am informed by Tusla Educational Welfare Services that in 2017 the DES reviewed the

DEIS programme and this resulted in 16 additional HSCL posts being allocated to schools that were included following that review.

Responsibility for the services formerly provided by the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) rests with the Tusla Educational Welfare Services. However, it should be noted that all HSCL staff are employees of their schools and any extension of the HSCL scheme is a matter for the Minister of Education and Skills.

My Department works closely with the Department of Education and Skills on such issues. One recent development has involved the allocation by the Department of Educational and Skills of additional resources in the form of Home School Community Liaison staff to work on a pilot programme aimed at improving the retention and participation of Traveller children in schools. This is being delivered under the National Traveller and Roma Integration Strategy.

Child Abuse Reports

27. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs when the report of the national review panel which commenced on 16 May 2016 on the care of three children in a foster home in County Galway will be published; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52338/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I thank the Deputy for her important question. The abuse suffered by these very brave young women while in foster care in the early 2000's is shocking, and I am very sorry that their lives were so disrupted and deeply impacted by it. I appreciate that the Deputy is anxious to know the findings of this report. I am also conscious that the matter is the subject of significant public interest.

I have been informed that the NRP has completed the report. In keeping with established procedures the report has been submitted to the Chair of the Board of Tusla. My officials have been informed by Tusla that significant matters are raised in the report, which must be given the proper consideration by Tusla. Tusla is committed to being accountable in respect of the report's findings, but has emphasised to the Department that it is also conscious of the need to protect the rights, privacy, safety and well-being of all of the young people involved.

As part of the review process, all those who participated in the review, including the young people involved, and Tusla staff, were given an opportunity to review and respond to the sections of the report which relate to them. This report concerned an extremely complex and serious matter, and I am aware that it is not easy to predict how long such considerations can take. This may have been a factor in the report being finalised later than expected.

The report is with the Board of Tusla and is being considered at present. When deciding whether to publish any NRP report, Tusla must consider the views of the young people involved, and the potential impact publication may have on them and their families.

I understand that there is dissatisfaction with the length of time that it has taken for the report to be finalised, but I am sure the Deputy can appreciate that any interference with an independent review process would be inappropriate.

Foster Care Supports

28. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if a review of the foster care allowance has been considered; and if she will make a statement on the mat-

ter. [52470/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I have no plans to change the rate of the Foster Care Allowance at this time. However, my Department has begun an extensive review of the Child Care Act 1991, and will examine foster care arrangements as part of this review. This will have regard to income support measures available to foster families generally.

I acknowledge foster carers as the backbone of our child care services. Foster care is the preferred option in Ireland for children who cannot live with their parents or guardians, and approximately 92% of children in care in Ireland are looked after by foster carers. More than a quarter of these children are placed with relative foster carers.

The Foster Care Allowance is currently €325 per week per child under 12 years of age and €352 per week per child aged 12 and over. This payment was protected during recent economic hardships, and it is tax free. It is paid in respect of the child and is provided in order to allow foster carers to meet all of the child's daily living needs including food, clothing, basic travel, education costs and hobbies and sporting activities. The allowance is not considered as means for Social Welfare purposes.

Foster carers receive a number of targeted supports to ensure they continue to function as a recognised and valued part of the alternative care system. Key elements of this support include a link social worker, access to training and support group meetings and the allocation of a social worker for each child in care. It is important that foster carers have access to specialist services to meet the child's identified needs. Respite care for children may be arranged, if it is part of their care plan.

Pre-assessment and ongoing training is compulsory for foster carers in order to equip them with the skills and knowledge to provide high-quality care. Recognising the specific dynamics and the personal nature of relative care, Tusla addresses the training needs of relatives who are foster carers separately. In addition, Tusla provides funding to the Irish Foster Care Association, which offers a range of supports to carers, including advocacy, mediation, training and a phone advice service.

Child Abuse Reports

29. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of reports being prepared by the national review panel; the subject matter of each; the date on which each review was commenced; the anticipated date of publication of each report; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52339/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The National Review Panel (NRP) is commissioned by Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, but is functionally independent. Its purpose is to conduct reviews of child deaths and serious incidents and produce reports that are factually based and identify points of learning with a view to improving the quality of services provided to children and families. The panel consists of independent professionals from a range of disciplines who are engaged for their professional expertise. Reviews are carried out independently by the NRP. The panel has its own independent legal advisors and its Chair reports directly to the Chair of the Board of Tusla. The Department of Children and Youth Affairs has no role in commissioning or overseeing these reports.

Completed reviews are submitted to the Chair of Tusla. The decision on whether and how much of the report is to be published rests with Tusla.

The focus of publication is to ensure that the reports are available to the public; the dissemination of learning to staff and to ensure that progress in relation to recommendations made are monitored and reported upon to the Board of Tusla. The decision to publish is underpinned by a number of principles including, transparency and accountability, the wishes of the family/ individuals involved and consideration of the wishes and best interest of other children from the family who may be in care or living at home. A decision not to publish a report, or elements of it, is only taken where there are compelling reasons not to do. Such reasons might include ongoing legal/criminal proceedings or where it is considered that the report will adversely affect the well-being of those involved, most notably the family of the young person in question.

Child Protection

30. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she is satisfied with Tusla's management of child welfare and protection concerns and reports thereof; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52422/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I am satisfied that Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, act immediately if a child is at immediate risk. All urgent and emergency cases receive immediate attention by the local duty social work team. Other cases are screened as they arrive into Tusla and are referred to family support services or dealt with by child protection teams, as needed.

Children who are in a situation of immediate risk may initially be dealt with by An Garda Síochána or by Tusla, and often both agencies work together in such cases. Tusla, when alerted to a child at immediate risk, for instance a young child left alone at home or abandoned, will contact AGS if the child needs to be removed from that situation.

Cases of neglect or risk are managed in line with Children First National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children. I am happy to add that HIQA, in their inspections of Tusla child protection services, verify that Tusla act appropriately in cases where it becomes known that a child is at immediate risk.

Tusla has also introduced an international evidenced practice methodology called "Signs of Safety" which should help to improve the depth and quality of the screening and assessments of referrals.

I can advise the Deputy that there are oversight mechanisms in place to ensure that the service provided by Tusla meets the high standards that we expect.

Tusla provides me with information on children in care, their placement type, care status and allocation of social workers. This information provides statistical evidence of improvements to child welfare and protection services and highlights challenges and areas where further improvement is required, such as the recruitment of additional social workers.

The Health Information and Quality Authority conducts regular inspections against National Standards of the child protection, foster care and residential care services provided by Tusla. Inspection reports are submitted to me prior to publication. Each report includes an agreed action plan to improve the service which has been inspected. My officials review the issues being raised by HIQA in inspection reports, including the recommendations made to address any failings or shortcoming in practice and meet regularly with HIQA to explore how the process can be improved.

Unaccompanied Minors and Separated Children

31. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to a report by the European Migration Network and published by the ESRI, regarding unaccompanied minors; the measures she has taken to assist unaccompanied minors that come here following the publication of the report; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52432/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I thank the Deputy for his question, which relates to a report published on Tuesday, December 4th, on the important subject of separated children seeking asylum. I would like to take this opportunity to note that children who arrive with their family and seek asylum remain in the care and custody of their parents.

It is also worth noting that a minority of the referrals made to Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, in respect of separated children seeking asylum are either found to be young people over the age of 18, or they are reunited with their parent/guardian who is already in the country. Where a young person is under 18 years of age, they taken into the care of Tusla.

The Tusla Separated Children Seeking Asylum Team have developed an effective model of working with these children to identify the supports they need. I am satisfied that the care provided to separated children seeking asylum is of a high standard. The report notes that the standard of treatment separated children receive in Ireland compares very favourably to the services provided in many European jurisdictions.

All separated children seeking asylum see a social worker on the day of referral, and are placed in the care of Tusla. The children, mainly in the age group 15-17 years are placed initially in a specialist residential unit where they receive supports and undergo a needs assessment which includes an assessment of medical and educational needs. They may move to a foster care placement, supported lodgings, or remain in residential care, depending on their needs.

All separated children have an allocated social worker from the specialist team and have written care plan, which looks at all aspects of a child's health and development. This includes the provision of language, educational, medical and psychological supports, and a clinical assessment and decision on the most appropriate time to support the child in making an application for asylum.

Cúram agus Oideachas na Luath-Óige

32. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Leanaí agus Gnóthaí Óige cén beartas atá aici lena dhéanamh cinnte go speagtar úsáid na Gaeilge i naíonraí agus naíolanna na tíre ó tharla go bhfuil sé cruthaithe gurb é an tráth dá saoil is éasca do leanaí teangacha a thabhairt leo ná nuair atá siad an-óg; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [52226/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tuigim go maith an luach a bhaineann le tacaíocht a thabhairt do sholáthar seirbhísí sa Ghaeilge do leanaí óga, agus an ról a bhaineann le naíonraí agus naíolanna chun an Ghaeilge a chur chun cinn mar theanga bheo. Maidir leis sin, bhí mo Roinn ag plé go réamhghníomhach le comhghleacaithe sa Roinn Cultúir, Oidhreachta agus Gaeltachta agus sa Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna, agus d'aontaigh siad ar sraith chuimsitheach gníomhartha faoin bPlean Gníomhaíochta don Ghaeilge 2018-2022, a sheol an tAire Cultúir, Oidhreachta agus Gaeltachta i mí an Mheithimh 2018. Tá réimse gníomhartha comhaontaithe leagtha amach sa phlean cúig bliana seo, agus na tréimhsí a

bhaineann leo, agus táthar chun iad a chur i bhfeidhm chun tacú leis an Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge uilegabhálach.

Tá ról tábhachtach ag suíomhanna luathbhlianta chun cumas sa Ghaeilge a chothú agus tá mo Roinn tiomanta do réimse gníomhartha atá ceaptha chun an tábhacht sin a dhearbhu. Tá sé mar aidhm ag na gníomhartha seo ná cur leis na bearta, tacaíochtaí agus comhpháirtíochtaí atá ann cheana in earnáil an oideachais luathbhlianta Gaeilge, agus chun tuilleadh feabhais a chur ar tacaíochtaí agus seirbhísí. I measc na ngníomhartha comhaontaithe tá cruthú dhá phost Gaeilge luathbhlianta chun forbairt an tsoláthair don Ghaeilge in earnáil na luathbhlianta laistigh den Ghaeltacht a chomhordú, agus bunlíne na dtacaíochtaí do naíonraí a bhunú chun bonn eolais a chur faoi phleananna maidir le polasaí as seo amach.

Déantar iarrachtaí i mo Roinn chun cumarsáid níos fearr le seirbhísí cúraim leanaí Gaeilge a chinntiú, go háirithe i gcomhthéacs na scéimeanna náisiúnta móra um chúram leanaí atá maoinithe ag mo Roinn. Mar shampla, maidir leis an Scéim Inacmhainne Cúraim Leanaí atá le teacht, beidh an suíomh gréasáin atáthar ag forbairt faoi láthair ar fáil i nGaeilge, chomh maith leis an tairseach an mháthairfheidhmchlár. Beidh scéala maidir le seoladh na Scéime nua ar fáil i nGaeilge freisin. Beidh cainteoirí Gaeilge ar foireann an ionaid tacaíochta teagmhála. Tá an oiliúint don tSamhail um Rochtain agus Cuimsiú (AIM) ar fáil i nGaeilge do shuíomhanna luathbhlianta sa Ghaeltacht – cabhraíonn an scéim seo le leanaí faoi mhíchumas chun go mbeidh siad in ann páirt a ghlacadh sa scéim ECCE. Tá an suíomh gréasáin agus ábhair AIM ar fáil i nGaeilge. Níl ansin ach cuid samplaí de na bealaí a bhfuil mo Roinn ag plé leis, agus ag cinntiú go héascaítear seirbhísí cúraim leanaí Gaeilge a chuid seirbhísí a chur ar fáil trí Ghaeilge.

Seoladh Straitéis Uile-Rialtais do Naíonáin, Leanaí Óga agus a dTeaghlach 2019-2028 ar an 19 Samhain. Tá dhá ghníomhartha sa phlean deich mbliana uailmhianach seo atá dírithe go sonrach chun tacú le forbairt na Gaeilge san earnáil luathfoghlaime agus chúraim. Is iad seo a leanas na gníomhartha:

- Tabhair isteach bearta chun cinntiú go bhfuil rochtain ag leanaí sa Ghaeltacht do Luathfoghlaime agus Cúram trí Ghaeilge.

- Forbairt bealaí chun tacaíochtaí Gaeilge a chur ar fáil do Luathfoghlaime agus Cúram in áiteanna ina bhfuil cuid mhór leanaí ag foghlaim trí Ghaeilge.

Foilseofar plan feidhmithe do na gníomhartha sa Straitéis laistigh de shé mhí.

I am very conscious of the value of supporting the provision of services in the Irish language to children at an early age, and of the role pre-schools and crèches can play in promoting Irish as a living language. In that regard, my Department has participated proactively with colleagues in 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.

My Department has committed to a range of actions designed to affirm the importance of the role that early years settings can play in fostering Irish language proficiency. 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. The agreed actions include the creation of two Irish language early years posts to co-ordinate the development of Irish language provision in the early years sector in non Gaeltacht areas, and the establishment of a baseline of supports for naíonraí that will inform future policy plans.

Efforts are also being made within my Department to ensure improved communication with Irish speaking childcare services, in particular in the context of the major national childcare schemes that my Department funds. For example, in relation to the forthcoming Affordable Childcare Scheme, the website currently in development will be available in Irish, as will the parent application portal. Communications in relation to the launch of the new Scheme will also be available in Irish. The contact support centre will have Irish speakers on staff. Training for the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) that helps children with a disability to participate in the ECCE scheme has been made available through Irish for Gaeltacht pre-school settings, and the AIM website and materials are available in the Irish language. These are just some examples of the ways in which my Department is engaging with, and ensuring that, Irish medium childcare services are facilitated to provide their services through the Irish language.

A Whole of Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families was launched on 19th November. This ambitious ten year plan contains two actions specifically aimed at supporting the development of the Irish language within the early learning and care sector. These actions are as follows:

- Introduce measures to ensure that children in Gaeltacht areas have access to Irish-medium ELC provision;
- Develop mechanisms to provide Irish-language supports to ELC provision where there are high proportions of children who are learning through the medium of Irish.

An implementation plan for the actions contained within that Strategy will be published within six months.

Value for Money Reviews

33. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if a value for money review will be undertaken of the national childcare investment programme which operated from 2006 to 2010 with a particular focus on the private sector capital funding element of the programme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52295/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The NCIP (National Childcare Investment Programme, 2006 - 2010) Capital Programme was a strategic infra-structural programme within the childcare sector with an aim to address local needs and meet local demands in the provision of childcare places.

A total of €177.8m was awarded under the programme to 847 childcare facilities. Of these, 501 were private providers, receiving a total of €33m in funding. The NCIP represents the most recent programme of large-scale capital investment in childcare in the country. Pobal produced a closure report in 2013 which provided data on the outputs from the programme.

The model of early learning and care and school age childcare currently in operation in Ireland is one of a market model, relying on private businesses as well as community / not for profits. Hence, NCIP and indeed ongoing annual capital schemes are open to both to continue to build capacity and meet demand.

As the Deputy may be aware, under the National Development Plan 2018-2027 and the National Planning Framework, I ensured that childcare was included as a key strategic priority, and I secured €250m in capital funding as part of this.

My Department has started work with Pobal :-

- to consider how best this investment can be used to increase access to high quality places in the medium and long term

- to audit existing capital infrastructure on a national level

- to understand the need that exists now and will exist in the coming years as the Affordable Childcare Scheme is rolled out, and

- to learn from previous capital investment schemes, including the NCIP.

I will be happy to brief Deputies further as this work progresses and as the detail of our plans emerge.

Tribunals of Inquiry Reports

34. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the response she has received from the board of Tusla following her engagement with the board on matters raised on the findings of the disclosures tribunal in respect of Tusla. [52440/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The recommendations of the report are mainly a matter for An Garda Síochána. A relatively small portion of the report concerns Tusla. Although it does not make specific recommendations about Tusla, the report does identify some very serious issues that existed in a social work office in one area at the time.

Arising from the Tribunal's report, I wrote to the Chairperson of Tusla on 6 November 2018. In the letter, I noted the failures in the management of the referral made in respect of Garda Sergeant Maurice McCabe.

I asked the Board to consider what steps it would take in terms of a management response (including training, performance management and leadership) and in terms of changing the culture of the organisation to ensure it learns from previous mistakes. I received a response from the Board on 11th December. It addresses the issues raised in my letter, notes actions underway and provides the basis for further consideration of these serious matters.

I met with the Board of Tusla on 25th October regarding the implications of the Disclosures Tribunal (Charleton) Report for the agency. At the meeting I expressed serious concern about a number of conclusions and findings of the Tribunal. Among the issues I raised were the:

- Serious practice issues at local level
- Failure to follow national procedures and policy
- Attempt at local level to conceal the extent of the errors made
- Breakdown between local, regional and national level in relation to roles and responsibilities
- Questions about organisational culture at local level in allowing so serious an error to go uncorrected

The Deputy will be aware that a number of the issues were also identified in HIQA's Statutory Investigation into Tusla's management of allegations sexual abuse that I established in 2017, and which was published in June of this year.

These issues included poor record keeping and management, and an inconsistent approach to the implementation of national policies and procedures. Following the publication of the HIQA report, Tusla committed to a Strategic Action Plan, approved by the Board.

Many of the issues relevant to Tusla which were raised in Mr. Justice Charleton's Report are addressed in this plan. Others which have not been covered to date will be incorporated into the Action Plan, once agreed by the Board.

The Strategic Action Plan has been submitted to my Department and to the Expert Assurance Group (EAG) I have established to monitor the implementation of the recommendations, and advise Tusla and my Department. The Group meets regularly to assess the status of the key actions under its remit and I expect that its first quarterly report will be submitted to me in the coming days.

There is much to learn from both the Tribunal report and HIQA's statutory investigation. I believe that the process of addressing these matters within Tusla is well underway. Progress will be monitored and encouraged by the Board, the EAG and by my department.

Departmental Budgets

35. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which she remains satisfied regarding the adequacy of the budget available to her Department to cater for the full extent of its responsibilities including the protection of children, the monitoring of at risk cases the follow-up as necessary; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52438/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that the gross amount of funding being made available to my Department in Budget 2019 will be €1.511 billion which represents an increase of 9% over its allocation for 2018. The allocation includes a current provision of €1.479 billion and a capital allocation of €32 million.

Just over half of the total funding, or €786 million, is targeted at public services within Tusla to protect children and to provide for their welfare. A further €574 million will help us to build an accessible, affordable and high quality childcare system.

I have secured an additional €110 million for Tusla since becoming Minister in 2016. With regard to 2019 funding, I am pleased to confirm that the agency will receive an additional €33 million.

This will bring Tusla's overall allocation to €786 million which represents an increase of 4% over the 2018 allocation. €25 million of the overall increase will be used to meet increasing costs associated with existing services.

In addition to this, the extra funding I secured for Tusla will be used to progress a number of key priorities including the implementation of recommendations made by HIQA following its investigation into the management of child sexual abuse allegations.

Together with experts from Tusla, the Gardaí, children's rights campaigners and advocates I have been examining how we can improve our support and help to children who have been sexually abused.

Funding has now been secured to allow us to pilot a new approach which will ensure that

children do not have to relive their abuse by having to retell their experience over and over again. A new *One House* model will be piloted in 2019, and this represents a joint approach across three Government Departments and three statutory agencies.

Throughout the country I have seen at first hand the work of Family Resource Centres in transforming lives. I secured additional funding for Family Resources Centres in 2018 and I am pleased to be able to provide further support again with an increase of €1.5 million in funding in 2019.

I am satisfied that the significant additional resources secured for 2019 will enable my Department and its agencies build on the good work achieved to date. The extra funding continues this Government's commitment to provide high quality services for children and young people.

Question No. 36 answered with Question No. 23.

Child Protection

37. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which she remains satisfied that adequate protection is in place to ensure early reporting and prompt action in cases of suspected child abuse whether in State institutions, foster care or in the home; the number of outstanding cases awaiting attention; the average timescale for investigating such issues; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52439/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The safety of all children, and particularly those living in State care, is a key priority for me. On December 11 2017, I commenced the remaining provisions of the Children First Act, 2015. This saw the introduction of mandatory reporting of child protection concerns. The Children First Act 2015 places a statutory obligation on persons, who have been identified by virtue of their position, training, qualifications and experience, to make reports of concerns of harm, above a defined threshold, to Tusla, The Child and Family Agency. All institutions providing services to children who are not in the company of their parents are now legislatively bound to undertake a risk assessment which should inform their Child Safeguarding Statement.

The additional resources secured for Tusla in 2019 will assist in meeting key priorities. The additional investment allows Tusla to recruit a range of additional staff to respond to areas of key risk, and to meet increased demand for services. The Deputy will be aware that referrals to Tusla are increasing on a year on year basis. This increase in funding is also enabling the further management of unallocated cases. To improve the overall functioning of Child Protection Teams, Tusla is in the process of recruiting more administrative staff as well as social work practitioners.

Tusla has introduced an international evidenced practice methodology called "Signs of Safety" which aims to provide a greater depth and quality of the screening and assessments of referrals.

The first consideration when receiving a referral is the immediate safety of the child. All referrals to Tusla Social Work Services are screened on the day they are received, irrespective of the source.

The criteria for a member of the public or a mandated person to consider a referral of a child protection or welfare concern is also detailed in Children First National Guidance and in Tusla's Children First Guide for the Reporting of Child Welfare and Protection Concerns .

Questions - Written Answers

While the number of cases waiting allocation has risen by 13% compared to Q3 last year, the number of High Priority cases awaiting allocation fell by 14% to 829 at the end of Q3 2108. All cases waiting the allocation of a dedicated social worker are held on the social work duty team who review all cases regularly to identify any changes in a child's circumstances and who will respond accordingly.

The table below provides a breakdown of cases awaiting allocation by priority level and time waiting. These figures are published on the Tusla website on a quarterly basis.

Cases Awaiting Allocation by Priority Level and Waiting Time

High Priority / Time Waiting	Q4 2017*	Q1 2018*	Q2 2018	Q3 2018
<1 month	196	250	421	259
1-3 months	189	158	249	244
>3 months	346	274	317	326
Total	731	682	987	829

*Based on incomplete returns (15/17 areas)

Medium Priority / Time Waiting	Q4 2017*	Q1 2018*	Q2 2018	Q3 2018
<1 month	623	923	958	560
1-3 months	717	607	999	947
>3 months	1,248	1,126	1,323	1,606
Total	2,588	2,656	3,280	3,113

*Based on incomplete returns (15/17 areas)

Low Priority / Time Waiting	Q3 2017*	Q1 2018*	Q2 2018	Q3 2018
<1 month	167	187	394	579
1-3 months	355	164	624	624
>3 months	519	496	571	835
Total	1,041	847	1,589	2,038

*Based on incomplete returns (15/17 areas)

Family Support Services

38. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of family support workers working with homeless families in each of the years 2015 to 2017 and to date in 2018; the ratio of families to support worker for each of those years; if there is a waiting list for allocation of support workers; if so, the average length of time each family is waiting for the support; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52229/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): As these are operational matters, I have asked Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, to respond directly to the Deputy with the most up-to-date information.

Question Heading

39. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of educational welfare officers in each of the years 2015 to 2017 and to date in 2018,

by county; her plans to increase these numbers; if schools can apply for additional educational welfare officers; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49224/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): As the Deputy may be aware, Tusla Educational Welfare Officers (EWOs) work with young people who are experiencing difficulty with school attendance and their families. EWOs are employed throughout the country, working with all recognised schools to offer advice and guidance to parents who need support in ensuring that their child attends school regularly. I am attaching a document containing the information in relation to the number of EWO's for 2015 to 2018 per county as requested by the Deputy.

I am also advised by Tusla EWS that seven further EWOs are in the process of being recruited, four of whom will be allocated to work with the Traveller and Roma communities, on a pilot programme aimed at improving the retention and participation of Traveller and Roma children in schools. This initiative is an action outlined in the National Traveller and Roma Integration Strategy, 2017 - 2021.

EWOs are not assigned to individual schools, therefore schools cannot apply for additional EWOs. However, schools can make a referral to Tusla EWS and an EWO will be allocated the case providing it is an appropriate referral.

Child Protection Guidelines

40. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the protections and protocols in place to avoid a repetition of the traumatic removal of a child from the breast-feeding mother in a maternity hospital in view of a recent High Court decision (details supplied). [52427/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Deputy will be aware that I am not in a position to comment on individual cases, or on matters which are the subject of court decisions. I therefore propose to answer the question in general terms.

The decision to remove a child from the care of their parents is not one that is taken lightly, particularly at a young age. In all cases, the safety, well-being and best interests of the child must be the primary concern. Situations where a child is taken into care generally take place with the agreement of all concerned and do not give rise to controversy or traumatic circumstances for the child or parent.

In some situations, such as when a parent resists attempts for a child to come into care, or there is an assessed high risk of violence or risk of harm to the child or adult, the assistance of the Gardaí may be called on. In situations where the Gardaí are involved they make an assessment of the risk and the most appropriate steps to be taken.

I have been advised that, in these cases social work staff follow Garda instructions, while at all times trying to minimise the difficulties for the child and parent. Taking a child into care is an extraordinary event, and transparency and planning are important. In situations where a child may be at immediate or serious risk, it may not always be appropriate to communicate plans to parents in advance.

Defence Forces Remuneration

41. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the position

regarding the restoration of pay for members of the Defence Forces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52493/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Similar to other sectors in the public service, the pay of Permanent Defence Force personnel was reduced as one of the measures to assist in stabilising national finances during the financial crisis.

The recovery in the economy has provided the fiscal resources to provide for a fair and sustainable recovery in public service pay scales.

Pay is being restored to members of the Defence Forces and other public servants in accordance with public sector pay agreements. The focus of these increases is weighted in favour of those on lower pay.

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

In 2016, the Government established the Public Service Pay Commission to provide objective advice to Government in relation to Public Service pay policy. Following the publication of the Public Service Pay Commission report in May 2017, the Government initiated negotiations on an extension to the Lansdowne Road Agreement.

The Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020, provides for increases in pay ranging from 6.2% to 7.4% over the lifetime of the Agreement. The focus of these increases is weighted in favour of those on lower pay. The increases due from 1 January 2018 and 1 October 2018 have been paid to Permanent Defence Force personnel. Further increases in pay are scheduled for 2019 and 2020.

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

New entrants who joined the Defence Forces since 2011, will also benefit from the measures which were recently announced in relation to interventions at points 4 and 8 of the relevant pay scales for all such new entrants to the public service. This measure, should it be accepted by the Permanent Defence Force Representative Associations, will be effective from 1 March 2019.

In accordance with the provisions of Public Services Stability Agreement 2018-2020, the Government has tasked the Public Service Pay Commission with conducting a more comprehensive examination of the specific recruitment and retention challenges in the Defence Forces, which the Commission identified in Chapter 6 of its report in May 2017.

The Commission's work is on-going. The Government will give due consideration to the findings and recommendations that arise from the work of the Commission.

Public Relations Contracts Expenditure

42. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the amount spent on third party public relations advice, communications advice, online advertising and public awareness campaigns to date 2018, by month and company engaged in tabular form; and

if he will make a statement on the matter. [52544/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The information requested by the Deputy in relation to the amount spent on third party public relations advice, communications advice, online advertising and public awareness campaigns to date in 2018 by my Department, by month and company engaged, is set out in the following table.

Company	Month	Amount	Description
Be Winter Ready Campaign			
Spark Foundry	November	€25,221.96	Radio Advertisements
Spark Foundry	November	€5,535.00	Twitter campaign
Spark Foundry	November	€2,583.00	Management of Twitter campaign
Irish Independent	November	€6,150.00	Advertisement
O'Sullivan Safety	November	€5,528.61	HiViz waistcoats and backpacks
Word Perfect	November	€656.94	Irish translation of winter ready leaflets, Ministers speeches etc.
Bridge Interpreting Services	November	€238.80	Sign Language Interpreter at launch
The Annual Easter Sunday Commemoration			
Spark Foundry	July	€4,222.14	Advertisement
The 60th anniversary of participation by Ireland in United Nations peace-keeping operations			
Word Perfect	July	€46.64	Translation services
Spark Foundry	July	€20,372.05	Newspaper advertisement
Total		€70,555.14	

Army Equitation School

43. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if funding will be made available for the purchase of additional horses for the Defence Forces equitation school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52545/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The mission of the Army Equitation School is to promote the Irish horse through participation in national and international competitions at the highest level. The Equitation School has discharged this task with considerable distinction through the years. Through its participation and numerous successes in equitation events both at home and abroad it successfully promotes the qualities of the Irish horse.

The Army Equitation School continues to source suitable Irish bred horses that meet the required standard as judged by the School's Horse Purchase Board. Horses are acquired through either purchase or lease agreement.

The School currently has a stock of 37 horses made up of show jumpers and eventers.

While it is difficult to predict the number of future acquisitions, the Deputy should note that the Army Equitation School purchased 4 horses in 2017. To date in 2018, the School has acquired two horses with plans for a further acquisition before the end of the year.

Defence Forces Reserve Strength

44. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the estimated full year cost of increasing the number of personnel in the Reserve Defence Forces to 4,500; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52546/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The White Paper on Defence sets out a developmental path for the Reserve Defence Forces (RDF). It provides for an overall establishment of the Army Reserve and Naval Service Reserve of 4,169 personnel, which will be achieved by increasing the Naval Service Reserve establishment from 200 to 300 personnel. Currently, the establishment for the RDF is set at 4,069 personnel.

Providing for numbers beyond the current establishment would require consideration of the capability requirements underpinning such an increase and an assessment of the associated cost implications which, as with the PDF, would include personnel and equipment costs. The Department does not retain such costings.

Defence Forces Reserve

45. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of reservist recruits who have been assigned to combat and combat service support units within the Defence Forces, that is, units other than core units in the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52547/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Military Authorities have advised me that from July 2013 to 28th September 2018 (latest figures to hand), 138 RDF recruits have been assigned to Combat Support (Army CS) functions and 9 have been assigned to Combat Service Support functions (Army CSS).

The organisational structure co-locates Reserve Combat Support and Reserve Combat Service Support elements alongside their Permanent Defence Force (PDF) counterparts in PDF installations. This approach has ensured optimum access to equipment and expertise and facilitates appropriate training. Reserve Infantry Units are located both within PDF installations and also at sixteen other locations throughout the State. Intending members of the Reserve are welcome to apply and serve at the location best suited to their particular needs.

I remain committed to the ongoing development of the RDF within the framework set out in the White Paper in order to achieve a sustainable and fit for purpose Reserve Defence Force.

Ministerial Meetings

46. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to meet formally with the US Secretary of Defence. [52548/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I currently have no plans to meet with the US Secretary for Defence, Mr. James Mattis.

Brexit Issues

47. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has spoken to his UK counterpart since the deferred vote in the UK Parliament on the draft withdrawal treaty. [51796/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Brexit is a priority issue for this Government, and the Taoiseach, my cabinet colleagues and I have taken every opportunity to engage with EU partners and the UK to advance Ireland's priorities. On 10 December, I met with Jeremy Hunt, in Brussels, in the margins of the Foreign Affairs Council, prior to Prime Minister May's decision to postpone the meaningful vote on the Withdrawal Agreement in the House of Commons and I have been in contact with David Lidington since. The Government, together with the President of the European Council, Donald Tusk, and the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, have made it very clear that the Agreement cannot be renegotiated. This includes the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland, which is an integral part of the Withdrawal Agreement and which includes the back-stop provisions. The Withdrawal Agreement, which was endorsed by the EU and agreed with the UK Government, is the best possible deal to protect UK and EU interests and to ensure an orderly withdrawal.

As President Tusk has stated, the European Council is ready to discuss how to facilitate UK ratification of the Withdrawal Agreement. It may be possible to provide the UK with reassurances or statements of clarification, but the EU, and the Government, have made it clear that these can in no way contradict or change the meaning of the legal text agreed in the Withdrawal Agreement.

Passport Data

48. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of passports issued to date in 2018; the type of passport in each case, that is, first time, renewal and so on; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52491/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Between January 1 and November 29 this year the Passport Service issued 745,345 passports. Of these, 171,377 were issued to first time applicants and 573,968 were issued to renewal applicants. 458,908 passports were issued to adults and 286,437 passports were issued to children. The Online Passport Renewal Service was launched on 30 March 2017. From January 1 to November 29 this year 193,724 passports were issued on foot of applications made through the online service. This figure represented over half of eligible applicants. The Online Passport Renewal Service has recently expanded to include the online renewal of children's passports, to introduce a passport card for children and to expand the cohort of adults eligible to renew online. The service brings significant benefits for citizens with faster turnaround times of 10 working days for all online applications, excluding postage. In addition, the cost of renewing a passport online is significantly cheaper than alternative methods, with fees for all online applications being reduced by €5 across all application types. The expanded service is now available to all adults and children who wish to renew their passport.

As the online service is the most convenient and most efficient method of renewing a passport, I would urge all applicants who are eligible to do so, to consider using this application channel.

Northern Ireland

49. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the progress in dealing with legacy issues in Northern Ireland and the provision of necessary support to victims and survivors as outlined in a report (details supplied) ten years ago; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52578/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Comprehensive progress on legacy issues from the Troubles is crucial in order to meet the legitimate needs and expectations of victims and survivors, and to contribute to broader societal reconciliation as an integral part of the Peace Process. The Government will continue to engage in support of that, consistent with our role and responsibilities as a co-guarantor of the Good Friday Agreement. The Programme for a Partnership Government commits to building on the progress made to establish the comprehensive institutional framework for dealing with the past that is provided for under the 2014 Stormont House Agreement, maintaining the needs of the victims and survivors at the core of our approach. Victims and survivors have had to wait for far too long for a suitable and effective system in Northern Ireland to deal with the legacy of the Troubles. Successive efforts over the last ten years, from the commencement of the Eames-Bradley process in June 2007, have sought to address legacy issues, in particular to meet the legitimate needs and expectations of victims and survivors. However, this is still sought and is urgently needed.

Over the last 18 months, I have engaged intensively with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and with all of the political parties to support a way forward on the implementation of the comprehensive legacy framework that was agreed under the Stormont House Agreement of 2014. I have also consistently emphasised in these discussions the need to ensure proper resourcing of legacy inquests in Northern Ireland, and I continue to raise this matter with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, seeking urgent progress.

Secretary of State Bradley and I are agreed on the imperative of moving ahead with the full implementation of the Stormont House Agreement legacy framework.

On 11 May, I welcomed the launch of a public consultation by the British Government on their draft legislation to establish the legacy bodies provided for in the Stormont House Agreement as an important step forward. The consultation closed for submissions on 5 October and the responses are now being considered by Secretary of State Bradley ahead of a British Government response to the consultation.

While that consultation is about UK legislation to establish the institutions, legislation will also be required in this jurisdiction to provide for cooperation with the Stormont House Agreement legacy bodies. The drafting of legislative proposals for consideration by the Government and Oireachtas is advancing, led by my colleague, the Minister for Justice and Equality.

Brexit Negotiations

50. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the position on the backstop following the deferred vote in the UK Parliament. [52118/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): On 10 December, the UK Government decided to defer the meaningful vote in the House of Commons on the Withdrawal Agreement. The European Council will discuss Brexit developments at its meeting on 13 December, taking account of an update from Prime Minister May. The Govern-

ment's position on the backstop remains unchanged. Throughout the negotiations it has been a priority to protect the Good Friday Agreement in all its parts, and to ensure that there will be no hard border on the island of Ireland under any circumstances. This remains our position, which is shared by our EU partners and is fully protected in the Withdrawal Agreement.

The President of the European Council, Donald Tusk, and the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, have made it very clear that the Agreement cannot be renegotiated. This includes the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland, which is an integral part of the Withdrawal Agreement and which includes the backstop provisions.

President Tusk has stated that the European Council is ready to discuss how to facilitate UK ratification of the Withdrawal Agreement. It may be possible to provide the UK with reassurances or statements of clarification but the EU and the Government have made it clear that these can in no way contradict or change the meaning of the legal text agreed in the Withdrawal Agreement.

We are hopeful that, when the vote is rescheduled, the UK Parliament will decide to approve the Withdrawal Agreement and the Political Declaration on the Framework for the EU-UK Future Relationship, which have been agreed following long and difficult negotiations and which represent a fair and balanced outcome.

Foreign Conflicts

51. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the steps Ireland is taking by way of diplomatic efforts through the EU to ensure that the peace deal in South Sudan holds; if Ireland will continue to support the humanitarian efforts in South Sudan that are addressing the root cause of this conflict; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52626/18]

52. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to ensure that funding is continued and support provided for the vital conflict resolutions and peace-building efforts at community level by an organisation (details supplied) in partnership with INGOs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52627/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): I propose to take Questions Nos. 51 and 52 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. It is estimated that almost 400,000 people have died, and 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. Her most recent visit took place in November.

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' meditation 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.

European Council Meetings

53. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the issues discussed at the recent Foreign and General Affairs Councils; the outcome of such discussions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52631/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I attended the Foreign Affairs Council in Brussels on Monday 10 December. EU Foreign Ministers discussed Western Balkans, EU-African Union cooperation, Iran, Ukraine and Venezuela. Ministers exchanged views on the Western Balkans and took stock of progress in the past year

and expectations for the region in 2019. We discussed EU-African Union cooperation, ahead of the inaugural AU-EU Ministerial taking place in January. The Finnish Foreign Minister, Timo Soini, and I had written to High Representative Mogherini to underline the importance of ensuring an active role for youth and women in the prevention, management and mediation of conflicts in Africa, and I called for greater prioritisation of this area.

My colleagues and I also discussed relations with Iran. While we have concerns in relation to Iran and actively pursue these, Iran is fulfilling its commitments under the nuclear agreement which is very important for nuclear non-proliferation. We support the continued implementation of the agreement and the development of the trade links it is also intended to facilitate.

We had an opportunity discuss recent events in Ukraine with the Ukrainian Foreign Minister. Ireland continues to firmly support the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of Ukraine.

We also addressed the situation in Venezuela, and our concern at the deteriorating political, economic and humanitarian situation there.

The Minister of State for European Affairs, Helen McEntee T.D., attended the General Affairs Council on 12 November 2018.

The General Affairs Council held a policy debate on the multiannual financial framework for 2021-2027. Ministers outlined their views on issues of importance for a future agreement, in the light of work done so far. Minister McEntee identified the protection of the Common Agricultural Policy as a priority for Ireland. The guidance provided by Ministers guided further discussions between Member States at technical level in the run-up to this week's European Council.

Ministers also discussed the state of play of the Article 7(1) TEU procedure concerning Hungary.

The Commission provided the Council with an update on the latest developments regarding judicial reform in Poland.

The Council started preparations for the European Council meeting on 13-14 December by discussing an annotated draft agenda.

The Council held its fourth annual rule of law dialogue which focused on trust in public institutions and the rule of law. With the participation of the Director of the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, Michael O'Flaherty, Ministers discussed the main factors which determine the level of trust in public institutions, and how the media, civil society, the EU and Member States can help to encourage this trust.

Ministers exchanged views on the 2019 Commission work programme.

The Commission presented its subsidiarity package published in October.

As part of the preparation of the next European Semester, the Austrian Presidency and the incoming Romanian Presidency presented the 2019 European Semester roadmap.

Citizenship Status

54. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the residency status and eligibility for naturalisation and consequently an Irish passport

in the case of persons (details supplied) in view of the fact that one of their children's passports was withdrawn and that matters have not progressed since; if the matter will be examined with a view to clearing up confusion arising from failure to qualify under a case; if the deportation order in question will be set aside to facilitate a full evaluation of the case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52660/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The case referred to by the Deputy is a matter under the responsibility of the Minister for Justice and Equality. I am able to comment only in relation to the broader question of how eligibility to hold an Irish passport is established.

All passport applications are subject to the provisions of the Passports Act, 2008 ("the Act"), as amended. Under the Act, before a passport can issue, the Passport Service must be satisfied as to the identity of the applicant and that he or she is an Irish citizen. Irish citizenship is determined by the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act, 1956 Act ("the 1956 Act") as amended. Under the 1956 Act, a person is entitled to Irish citizenship (and therefore a passport) if they were born on the island of Ireland before 1 January 2005 or after that date subject to certain conditions. Section 6A of the 1956 Act, provides that person born in the State on or after 1 January 2005 where neither parent is an Irish or British citizen or otherwise entitled to reside in the State or Northern Ireland without restriction, may claim citizenship by birth in the State where a parent has been lawfully resident in the State for 3 years of the 4 years preceding their birth.

A person who has obtained Irish citizenship through naturalisation is also entitled to an Irish passport. Information on the documents required for a first time applicant who is naturalised is available on the website www.dfa.ie/passport.

VAT Rate Increases

55. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance if an independent review will be conducted of the VAT rate increase in the hospitality sector after three months of its implementation in order to assess its impact; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52487/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The 9% VAT rate was introduced as a temporary measure in Finance (No. 2) Act 2011, to cease at the end of 2013. This period was subsequently extended but during last year's Finance Bill a commitment was given to undertake a review of the 9% VAT rate.

This Review, which was published in July 2018, assessed the relevance, cost, value-for-money and impact to date of the 9% VAT rate. However, the Review also undertook an analysis of the estimated impact on the various tourism sectors of removing the VAT rate. The review found there is a lack of competitiveness in the sector and that if the 9% rate were to be increased, this would likely not materially impact demand or employment in the sector.

The review found that tourism expenditure is more sensitive to income growth and the economic cycle than to price changes. The economy is currently performing well, with high levels of employment and strong demand in the tourism sector. Growth is also expected to continue in the medium term. This positive economic outlook means that the income channel of demand is likely to ensure that economic activity within the sectors to which the 9% VAT rate applies remains strong.

Given the impact of an increase in the VAT rate on the hospitality sector has only recently been reviewed by the Department, there does not seem to be a case for reviewing the impact of

the increase three months after its implementation.

Consultancy Contracts Data

56. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance the audit and consultancy fees paid by his Department and agencies or bodies attached to or under the remit of his Department to companies (details supplied) in each of the years since 2009; the percentage of audit consultancy fees that these payments represented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52500/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The details of the audit & consultancy fees paid by the department to KPMG, Ernst & Young, Deloitte and PriceWaterhouseCooper in each of the years since 2009 are provided in the following table:

Year	Supplier	Expenditure €	Percentage of Audit Consultancy Fees that these payments represent
2016	PriceWaterhouseC- ooper	€73,031	45.60%
2018	KPMG	€69,938	0.02%
2014	Deloitte LLP (UK)	€97,937	0.02%

Of the seventeen bodies under the aegis of my Department, I am informed that six have not made payments in respect of audit and consultancy services to the specified companies since 2009. These are the Credit Union Advisory Committee, the Disabled Drivers Medical Board of Appeal, the Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman, the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council, the Irish Financial Services Appeals Tribunal and the Credit Union Restructuring Board (ReBo). While ReBo made no audit and consultancy payments during the period in question, a payment was made by this Department for €69,937.80 in 2018 to KPMG for professional services relating to the wind-down of ReBo in 2017.

The Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General, the National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA), the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) and the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) were not in a position to provide the information requested in the time available. Therefore I will make arrangements to provide a response with respect to these three bodies in line with Standing Orders.

Details provided by the remaining seven bodies are in the following table.

Body	Year	Company & Fees Paid	Percentage of audit & consultancy fees
* Central Bank	2009	Deloitte - €621,000 Ernst & Young - €178,000 KPMG - €2,009,000 PwC - €1,733,000	94.5%
	2010	Deloitte - €209,000 Ernst & Young - €188,000 KPMG - €7,000 PwC - €1,213,000	26.7%
	2011	Deloitte - €2,637,000 Ernst & Young - €2,483,000 KPMG - €98,000 PwC - €75,000	16.2%

Questions - Written Answers

Body	Year	Company & Fees Paid	Percentage of audit & consultancy fees
	2012	Deloitte - €399,000 Ernst & Young - €2,634,000 KPMG - €684,000 PwC - €223,000	20.4%
	2013	Deloitte - €615,000 Ernst & Young - €9,613,000 KPMG - €5,855,000 PwC - €40,000	72.2%
	2014	Deloitte - €2,152,000 Ernst & Young - €11,617,000 KPMG - €6,165,000 PwC - €450,000	84.8%
	2015	Deloitte - €179,000 Ernst & Young - €396,000 KPMG - €46,000 PwC - €944,000	21.7%
	2016	Deloitte - €184,000 Ernst & Young - €779,000 KPMG - €299,000 PwC - €865,000	29.0%
	2017	Deloitte - €206,000 Ernst & Young - €1,989,000 KPMG - €556,000 PwC - €426,000	29.5%
	2018	Deloitte - €342,000 Ernst & Young - €1,272,000 KPMG - €53,000 PwC - €309,000	12.9%
Credit Review Office	2009 - 2014	N/A	Nil
	2015	Ernst & Young - €3475.98	100%
	2016	N/A	Nil
	2017	Ernst & Young - €3475.98	100%
	2018	N/A	Nil
**Investor Compensation Company Limited	2009	PwC - €13,365	100%
	2010	N/A	Nil
	2011	PwC - €10,285	100%
	2012	PwC - €32,595	100%
	2013	KPMG - €9,225	100%
	2014	KPMG - €9,225	100%
	2015	KPMG - €9,225	100%
	2016	N/A	Nil
	2017	KPMG - €18,450	100%
	2018	N/A	Nil

Body	Year	Company & Fees Paid	Percentage of audit & consultancy fees
***Irish Bank Resolution Corporation	The information provided is for the period from 2013 to date. Information prior to the appointment of the Special Liquidator in 2013 is not readily available and the compilation of this information would incur a significant expense given that all legacy systems are no longer operational. Given IBRC is in liquidation, there are no audit fees since the date of liquidation.		
	2013	Deloitte - €367,000PwC - €4,197,788	2.45%28%
	2014	Deloitte - €68,233PwC - €1,261,433	2.6%47%
	2015 - 2018	N/A	Nil
Office of the Revenue Commissioners	Data is not readily available for the years 2009-2012. Revenue is pursuing the retrieval of the relevant data, and this information will be provided in line with Standing Orders.		
	2013 - 2017	N/A	Nil
Social Finance Foundation	2018	Ernst & Young - €46,000	100%
	2009	PwC - €16,000	100%
	2010	PwC - €21,000	64%
	2011 - 2017	N/A	Nil
	2018	Deloitte - €15,000	49%
Tax Appeals Commission	2009 - 2017	N/A	Nil
	2018	KPMG - €4,900	8% of all consultancy fees paid in 2018

*The Central Bank of Ireland, in support of its mandate, engages external vendors as required for a range of specialist services. Fees incurred can also include the provision of services to the Central Bank such as the provision of services in support of IT functions. A significant portion of fees incurred are in turn recovered from the banks or wider industry.

** Fees disclosed for ICCL all relate to statutory audit services. ICCL would have incurred fees in relation to the certification of claims in accordance with the Investor Compensation Act, 1998 from individuals who are partners of PwC and KPMG. However, ICCL do not consider those fees to be consultancy as they relate to a statutory role and the appointment is made by the Court and not ICCL.

*** While KPMG have been paid significant fees from the liquidation of IBRC, these do not constitute either audit or consultancy fees so have not been included.

Revenue Documents

57. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance if copies of previously issued P45 documents can reissue to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52560/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Revenue has advised me that it does not issue P45 documents to taxpayers. These documents are provided directly to employees by employers where an employment is ceased.

Revenue has however been in direct contact with the person in question and has provided them with written statements setting out the required details (per Revenue's records) in respect of the employments listed by the Deputy.

Mortgage Book Sales

58. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the year in which the Central Bank code of practice on the transfer of mortgages was established; if it is still deemed applicable by the Central Bank; if it has been superseded by the consumer protection code; if it is voluntary or mandatory; if, under the code of practice, the Central Bank deems written consent to be given when the mortgage contract is signed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52598/18]

59. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if consideration has been given to placing the code of practice on the transfer of mortgages on a statutory footing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52599/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 58 and 59 together.

The Code of Practice on the Transfer of Mortgages (the Code of Practice) was issued by the Central Bank of Ireland in 1991 to institutions involved in mortgage credit. It may be applied on a voluntary basis by any institution involved in mortgage credit.

The Code of Practice applies to a loan secured by the mortgage of a residential property. For the purposes of this Code of Practice, a residential property is not limited to a principal private residence.

This Code of Practice remains in place, but as it is a voluntary code, it does not have a legislative basis and is not subject to the Central Bank of Ireland's administrative sanctions process. In relation to written consent being given when the mortgage contract is signed, the Central Bank has informed me that it cannot comment on individual mortgage contract terms.

The Central Bank's Consumer Protection Code 2012 (the Code) is a statutory Code which must be complied with by all regulated financial services providers providing financial services within the State. This Code requires that, where a regulated lender intends to transfer all or part of its loan book, it must provide advance notification to both the Central Bank and affected consumers. I would draw Deputies' attention to Provision 3.11 of the Code which states: "Where a regulated entity intends to cease operating, merge with another, or to transfer all or part of its regulated activities to another regulated entity it must: a) notify the Central Bank immediately; b) provide at least two months notice to affected consumers to enable them to make alternative arrangements; c) ensure all outstanding business is properly completed prior to the transfer, merger or cessation of operations or, alternatively in the case of a transfer or merger, inform the

consumer of how continuity of service will be provided following the transfer or merger; and d) in the case of a merger or transfer of regulated activities, inform the consumer that their details are being transferred to the other regulated entity, if that is the case.” Where the transferee is an unregulated entity, the Code requires that the regulated lender also notify the consumer of the regulated entity that will be ‘servicing’ the loan for the unregulated entity.

In addition, the Consumer Protection (Regulation of Credit Servicing Firms) Act 2015 ensures that borrowers whose loans are transferred retain the same protections which they had prior to the transfer, including protections under the Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears and the Consumer Protection Code. I do not have to remind the Deputy of his own Private Member’s bill which will require the regulation of loan owners. Therefore I do not have any plans to put the Code onto a statutory footing at present.

Licensed Moneylenders

60. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance when proposals will be brought forward on the regulation of moneylenders and the rates that are charged; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52634/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Consumer Credit Act 1995 already provides for the regulation of moneylenders though it does not provide for a maximum rate of interest. The legislation provides that the Central Bank can refuse to grant a licence to a moneylender if it is of the opinion that the cost of credit to be charged is excessive. Since the Central Bank assumed responsibility for the licensed moneylending sector in 2003, I understand that it has not permitted an increase to the maximum APR charged in the sector. During the Central Bank’s engagements with new or potential applicants It examines, on a case-by-case basis, if the proposed costs of credit are excessive and I understand that it has successfully challenged firms in this regard. In addition, the Bank has not licensed any moneylender to provide a ‘pay-day loan’ service such as exists in other jurisdictions such as the UK.

As the Deputy may be aware, Deputy Doherty initiated a Private Member’s Bill which would cap the amount of APR chargeable on loans issued by licensed moneylenders at 36 per cent APR. As outlined during the debate, the following work needs to be done before an interest rate restriction is introduced:

- consider how to persuade the other approximate 50% of credit unions to take part in the “It makes sense” loan scheme.
- consider how to cater for individuals on low incomes who are NOT social welfare customers since the PMC scheme only works for social welfare recipients.
- analyse the sector in more detail to see the impact that setting interest rate restrictions is likely to be on the various types of moneylenders, and
- examine illegal moneylending as far as we can.

Both the Social Finance Foundation and the Interest Rate Restriction report made it clear that the recommendation that rates be restricted should not be separated from the proviso that these restrictions are to be conditional on there being a reliable alternative to licensed moneylenders and key to this is getting the credit union movement to commit to serve the community currently serviced by the moneylending firms, subject to adherence to prudent credit guidelines.

Insurance Industry Regulation

61. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the implications for an insurance company if it does not fulfil its duties and obligations under the Solvency II Directive; the role the Central Bank plays in enforcing Solvency II for companies operating here under freedom of services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52644/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): At the outset I would like to say that as Minister for Finance, I am responsible for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation, and have no role in the day to day supervision of insurance companies. I have therefore consulted with the Central Bank on the matters raised by the Deputy.

The Central Bank has advised that the Solvency II Directive represented a substantial overhaul of European insurance regulation. It set out new, more comprehensive EU-wide requirements on capital adequacy and risk management for insurers with the key aim of increasing policyholder protection. The Directive entered into force on 1 January 2016, and is transposed into Irish law by the European Union (Insurance and Reinsurance) Regulations 2015 (SI 485 of 2015). All insurance undertakings across the European Union must comply with the requirements of the Directive (with certain limited exceptions). Failure to comply with its duties and obligations can result in the withdrawal of an insurance company's authorisation under Article 144 of the Directive. Further detailed provisions are also in place around their capital requirements and what happens should they breach them (Articles 136 to 143).

A central element of Solvency II Directive is that it allows an insurance undertaking authorised in one member state to conduct business in another EU/EEA state either through:

- establishing a branch operation in the host country and thus conducting business on a 'freedom of establishment' (FOE) basis; or
- writing business from the home country (i.e. where authorised) into the host country on a 'freedom of services' (FOS) basis.

Where an insurer conducts business in this State either through FOE or FOS, the supervisory authority who has authorised the company (Home supervisor) is responsible for the prudential supervision and regulation of the Irish business of such undertakings. However, I have been informed that the Central Bank actively engages with the National Supervisory Authorities of all entities writing material levels of business in Ireland in order to keep itself up to date on developments. In this regard, I understand that the Bank has developed close working relations and established regular contact with relevant Home supervisors to discuss concerns, issues and market changes and challenges.

However, it should be noted that as a Host Supervisory authority, the Bank is empowered under Article 155 of Solvency II to take steps in the event an insurance undertaking is not complying with legal provisions applicable to it when operating here. This Article therefore facilitates the Bank's supervision of undertakings authorised in another Member State in relation to how they conduct their business in this country.

In conclusion, while the provision of cross-border insurance is an essential part of the Single market, it is acknowledged that there are obvious difficulties which arise when an insurer fails. It is important therefore that EU supervisors properly and consistently supervise the insurers that they authorise, and that there is greater communications between supervisors across the EU about their respective companies conducting cross-border business. It should be noted that as part of the ongoing review of the European Supervisory architecture, there is a proposal to further improve cross-border co-operation and communication through the strengthening of

Cross-Border Collaboration Platforms. These already operate on an ad-hoc basis, however this proposal would ensure a more formal structure is put in place where an insurer is doing a lot of cross border business. This would therefore give the supervisors of countries into which insurance is written a greater insight into how the business is being conducted.

Insurance Industry Regulation

62. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the implications for regulating authorities, such as the Central Bank, in the European Union which do not enforce the Solvency II Directive and other EU rules in regard to insurance companies effectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52645/18]

63. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the role the European Insurance and Occupational Pensions Authority plays in enforcing the Solvency II Directive and other EU rules in regard to insurance; if it has the role of holding national authorities to account; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52646/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 62 and 63 together.

At the outset I would like to say that as Minister for Finance, I am responsible for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation, and have no role in the day to day supervision of insurance companies. I have therefore consulted with the Central Bank on the matters raised by the Deputy.

The Central Bank has advised me that all firms conducting business within the EU must comply with the requirements of the Solvency II Directive, which came into force from 1 January 2016. Solvency II was designed to modernise supervision, deepen market integration and increase the competitiveness of European insurers.

EIOPA is part of the European System of Financial Supervision which is an integrated network of national and European supervisory authorities that provides the necessary links between the macro and micro prudential levels, leaving day-to-day supervision to the national level.

EIOPA's core responsibilities are to support the stability of the financial system, transparency of markets and financial products as well as the protection of policyholders, pension scheme members and beneficiaries. EIOPA is commissioned to monitor and identify trends, potential risks and vulnerabilities stemming from the micro-prudential level, across borders and across sectors.

EIOPA, where necessary, provides for non-legally binding guidelines and recommendations concerning the implementation of the provisions of the Solvency II Directive and its implementing measures in order to enhance the convergence of supervisory practices.

EIOPA and the supervisory authorities of the Member States collaborate closely with each other to facilitate the supervision of insurance and reinsurance within the EU and including the examination of any difficulties, which may arise in the application of the Solvency II Directive.

National Supervisory authorities are required to inform EIOPA of any major difficulties in the application of the Solvency II Directive and both EIOPA and the supervisory authorities of the Member States concerned in such situation shall examine those difficulties as quickly as

possible in order to find an appropriate solution.

In accordance with their founding EU Regulation (1094/2010 EU), EIOPA may investigate non-application by national supervisory authorities of the Solvency II Regulations, or their application in a way, which appears to be a breach of Union law, resulting in a written recommendation to that supervisory authority. Where the competent national authority does not follow the recommendation, the EU Commission may issue a formal opinion taking into account the EIOPA recommendation, requiring the competent authority to take the actions necessary to ensure compliance with Union law. Finally, in exceptional situations of persistent inaction by the competent authority concerned, EIOPA may, as a last resort, adopt decisions addressed to individual financial institutions. In addition, EIOPA is required to report regularly and at least every two years to the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission on the progress of the supervisory convergence in the EU.

The Central Bank has indicated that it fully participates, endorses and supports EIOPA's mandate to contribute to the establishment of high quality common regulatory and supervisory standards and procedures and regularly contributes and provides feedback to enhance such convergence.

In February 2017, EIOPA developed a cross-border platform of cooperation between National Supervisory Authorities, and the Central Bank of Ireland has advised me that they participate fully in these platforms with other relevant supervisory authorities. These platforms provide all National Supervisory Authorities with the opportunity to discuss concerns in relation to specific undertakings, local markets and share general market developments. It should be noted that as part of the ongoing review of the European Supervisory architecture, there is a proposal to further improve cross-border co-operation and communication through the strengthening of these Cross-Border Collaboration Platforms in order to give supervisors of countries into which insurance is written a greater insight into how the business is being conducted.

Finally, I understand that the Central Bank of Ireland was also part of the EIOPA working group set up to amend the General Protocol to increase the level of information shared between National Supervisory Authorities. In January 2017, EIOPA revised the General Protocol now called EIOPA Decision on the collaboration of the insurance supervisory authorities. The new Decision addresses new flows of information and increased collaboration between supervisory authorities and strengthens EIOPA's role as the central hub for information collection and sharing.

Insurance Industry Regulation

64. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if managing general agents in the insurance industry have a role in ensuring the companies they represent are financially healthy or acting in compliance with European regulations; the level of regulation in place for such agents here; if the Central Bank has a register of such agents; the number operating here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52647/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): At the outset I would like to say that as Minister for Finance, I am responsible for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation, and have no role in the day to day supervision of insurance companies. I have therefore consulted with the Central Bank on the matters raised by the Deputy.

The Central Bank has advised that under European law, the Home supervisory authority is responsible for the prudential supervision and regulation of undertakings operating in Ireland

on a freedom to provide services and freedom of establishment basis. In the case of freedom of service business the role of a managing general agent (MGA) is in general terms, to provide access to the market for the cross border insurer. In carrying out this function it must comply with the relevant domestic insurance distribution legislation and the conduct of business rules. While an MGA has a responsibility to its consumers to treat them in a fair and transparent way, and it is in their interests to be selling products from a financially sound insurer, it has no insight into the underlying financial health of such companies other than any publically available information. In addition the overarching prudential framework (Solvency II) is designed to provide them with the necessary certainty that any insurer they act on behalf of is financially sound

Despite the many safeguards in the solvency framework which are designed to minimise the likelihood of insurance failure and the costs to policyholders in the event of failure, it should be noted that Solvency II is not a 'no-failure' regime. It is not possible to build a viable system that provides a cast iron guarantee that no insurer will ever fail. Solvency II is a risk based approach and it is not feasible for insurers to hold sufficient capital to cover every possible event. Instead, it provides that sufficient capital be held in order to ensure that insurers will be in a position, with a probability of 99.5%, to meet their obligations to policyholders and beneficiaries over the following 12 months. In the design of any regulatory system, it must be kept in mind that protection comes at a cost, in other words the higher the level of the guarantee, the higher the cost to policyholders and the economy as a whole. A balance has to be struck in order that insurers can offer affordable, yet sufficiently safe insurance products.

The Deputy should also note that the Central Bank actively engages with the National Supervisory Authorities of all entities writing material levels of business into the Irish market. I understand that it has developed close working relations and established regular contact with the Home Authorities to discuss concerns, issues and market changes and challenges.

In relation to the regulation of MGA's the Central Bank is the competent authority in Ireland for the authorisation and supervision of insurance intermediaries under the European Communities (Insurance Distribution) Regulations 2018 (IDR). The supervision process for an insurance intermediary mirrors the general supervision approach of the Central Bank. This general supervision approach seeks to ensure that all regulated financial services providers meet their responsibilities to have strong management, internal control and compliance procedures in place, and have people of integrity and competence at all levels in their organisations.

The Central Bank recently published the findings from a thematic inspection of Retail Intermediaries acting as Managing General Agents (MGAs). The report can be found here:

<https://centralbank.ie/news/article/findings-of-managing-general-agents-thematic-inspection-and-motor-insurance-research-released>

The Central Bank maintains a register of Insurance Intermediaries that is publically available on its website. As MGAs are authorised under the IDR they are included in this register. The register can be found here: *<http://registers.centralbank.ie/>*.

Insurance Industry Regulation

65. Deputy Michael McGrath asked the Minister for Finance if he has raised issues with his European counterparts regarding insurance regulation, consistent enforcement of European insurance regulation and the need for compensation mechanisms to be put in place across the EU; the dates on which these issues were raised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52648/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): At the outset, the Deputy should note that I am very conscious of the problems caused in recent years by a number of non-life companies passporting into the Irish market particularly on the motor side. I am very unhappy that supervisors in the authorising countries in question have not done their job adequately, and as a result the Irish Compensation Fund and by extension, Irish policyholders have had to pay the price for these failures. On the other hand, however, Ireland is a major beneficiary of the cross border passporting regime particularly on the Life insurance side. In addition, as you are aware all interested observers of the Irish motor insurance market in recent years have been signalling the need to make it more competitive by encouraging new entrants. Generally because of the relatively small scale of the Irish market most new entrants will be freedom of service operators. Consequently, whilst there are undoubtedly some problems with the passporting model, it is likely that consumers would have greater difficulty getting competitively priced cover in its absence.

In relation to engaging at European level, my officials attend the Commission Expert Group on Insurance issues which is held at least three times per year (e.g. 6 February, 29 May and 20 September 2018 this year). This Group provides a forum to discuss issues such as the consistent application of Solvency II as well as proposals for any amendments to the Directive including Commission Delegated Regulations. As it has been some time since the Council has discussed insurance matters I have not to date directly raised with my European counterparts issues regarding insurance regulation, consistent enforcement of European insurance regulation and the need for compensation mechanisms to be put in place across the EU. However, the Deputy can be assured that as and when appropriate I will do so.

At present, there is no harmonisation of insurance guarantee schemes across Europe. However, there have been a number of reports and initiatives in this area in recent years including:

- A 2010 Commission white paper on the introduction of an EU wide framework of Insurance Guarantee Systems. No significant progress was made on this framework subsequently as the development of Solvency II was the priority piece of work.

- A 2015 Commission discussion paper on the possibility of introducing a recovery and resolution regime for insurance undertakings which could include an Insurance guarantee Scheme.

- In 2017 the Commission issued a questionnaire to all Member States seeking information on Recovery and Resolution including experiences with failures and near-failures of insurers.

- The European Systemic Risk Board published a report "Recovery and Resolution for the EU insurance sector: a macro prudential perspective" in August 2017. The Central Bank of Ireland was represented on the drafting team.

- EIOPA published an Opinion to Institutions of the European Union on the Harmonisation of Recovery and Resolution Frameworks for (Re) Insurers (July 2017).

- Work is also underway at an EIOPA level, where a project group has been set up to examine more broadly recovery and resolution within insurance and in relation to Insurance Guarantee Schemes, a discussion paper was published on this topic:

https://eiopa.europa.eu/Publications/Consultations/EIOPA-CP-18-003_Discussion_paper_on_resolution_funding%20and.pdf

Recently, in May 2018 the European Commission proposed an amendment to the Motor Insurance Directive which would oblige member states to set up Insurance Guarantee Schemes to cover the cost of insolvent motor insurers. This is still subject to negotiation so the technical details are being worked out, but you can rest assured that my Department and the Central Bank

are continuing to work closely with their European counterparts on this issue.

Finally, while the provision of cross-border insurance is an essential part of the Single Market, it is acknowledged that there are obvious difficulties which arise when an insurer fails. It is important that EU supervisors properly and consistently supervise the insurers that they authorise, and that there is greater communications between supervisors across the EU about their respective companies conducting cross-border business. It should be noted that as part of the ongoing review of the European Supervisory architecture, there is a proposal to further improve cross-border co-operation and communication through the strengthening of Cross-Border Collaboration Platforms. These already operate on an ad-hoc basis, however this proposal would ensure a more formal structure is put in place where an insurer is doing a lot of cross border business. This would therefore give the supervisors of countries into which insurance is written a greater insight into how the business is being conducted.

Ireland Strategic Investment Fund Investments

66. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the amount invested by the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund in absolute return funds; the annual return from such funds in each year since 2014; the way in which these returns compare to other investments in equities; the rationale for investing in such funds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52649/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The current design of ISIF's Global Portfolio is the most effective way to meet its requirement to ensure that capital is available as investment opportunities in Ireland are executed and drawn down, while making a significant contribution towards ISIF's investment return objective.

ISIF's legislative mandate – to invest on a commercial basis in a manner designed to support economic activity and employment in Ireland – requires it to transition, over a period of years, from a largely global portfolio into an Irish portfolio. Immediately converting the Global Portfolio into cash is not a preferred option, as interest rates on cash are negative.

Therefore, the overall objective of ISIF's Global Portfolio is to preserve capital by limiting downside valuation exposure and ensuring that capital is available for investment in Ireland as required over the transition period, while also making a positive contribution towards ISIF's investment return objective. This requires ISIF, through its investment managers, who are procured on a competitive basis, to implement a dynamic, diversified, highly liquid, low-risk global portfolio that includes a mix of asset classes including cash, debt instruments, equities, property and alternative investments such as absolute return funds. ISIF's absolute return strategies, by design, have (i) low correlation to global markets, thereby delivering diversification benefits, and (ii) much lower volatility than equity markets.

As part of the wider Global Portfolio strategy, absolute return strategies comprise €1.8bn (27%) of the Global Portfolio as at end September 2018. ISIF publicly discloses the investment performance of its Discretionary Portfolio and of the Global and Irish sub-portfolios. Performance numbers for 2018 will be published in early February 2019.

Central Bank of Ireland Properties

67. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated cost of building a skybridge between the Central Bank buildings; if a full cost-benefit analysis has been

undertaken for such a project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52650/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Commission of the Central Bank of Ireland is solely and independently responsible for administering the provision of accommodation and office and other equipment with a view to enabling the Bank to perform and exercise its functions and powers, as enshrined in Section 6B of the Central Bank Act, 1942 (as amended).

I am informed that the Central Bank Commission decided in October 2018 to enter into exclusive negotiations to purchase premises at the Dublin Landings development, (directly to the rear of the Bank's North Wall Quay (NWQ) building). This intended purchase is in line with the Bank's overall long term accommodation strategy and will provide the most cost effective approach to the Bank's property requirements.

The vendor has submitted a planning application to provide a foot bridge between the Dublin Landings properties and the Central Bank's NWQ building. While this planning application has been submitted with the agreement of the Central Bank, there is no obligation to construct the foot bridge and a decision on the matter, which is subject to planning application approval and cost benefit analysis, will be made in due course.

Garda Stations

68. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of the reopening of Bawnboy Garda Station, County Cavan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52574/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Programme for Government included a 'pilot programme of Garda Station re-openings' throughout the country, including Bawnboy Garda Station. OPW undertook technical surveys on the building and issued a report on the works required, indicative costs involved and proposed layout to Garda Estate Management earlier this year.

Subsequently, An Garda Síochána (AGS) has forwarded a revised 'Brief of Requirements' containing some minor amendments. The deliberative process between An Garda Síochána and the OPW to finalise proposals is on-going. Upon final Garda sign-off, OPW will prepare and submit the necessary Part 9 planning application and progress the procurement of works required to re-open the Station.

Children's Science Centre

69. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of the development of the national children's science centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52575/18]

71. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the estimated cost of the development of the national children's science centre; the financial model which will be applied; the funding sources for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52577/18]

74. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the Department that has the responsibility to undertake a cost-benefit analysis for the children's science centre; if his Department has undertaken such an analysis; if he has or will be publishing

a report on the project; the estimated amount it would cost for the initial investment and operational costs, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52618/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 69, 71 and 74 together.

Having obtained planning permission for the provision of premises for the proposed interactive Children's Science Centre at Earlsfort Terrace, the Commissioners of Public Works are in the process of procuring technical consultants to prepare tender/contract documentation with a view to preparing a request for tenders in the latter part of 2019. It is not possible at this stage to provide an accurate estimated cost. The construction cost of the premises, which largely involves the refurbishment of existing State owned buildings, will be met from Exchequer funding. A detailed business plan has been completed by the promoters of the project and further cost benefit analysis will be undertaken in the course of next year in regard to the establishment and operation of the proposed Centre. The financial model for operation of the proposed Centre has not been finalised as yet. It is not proposed to publish a report on the proposed project at this time.

Flood Prevention Measures

70. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if ongoing flooding at a location (details supplied) will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52505/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Kerry County Council with funding provided by the Office of Public Works is currently undertaking a feasibility study to ascertain what measures could be put in place to protect this property from flooding.

Question No. 71 answered with Question No. 69.

Public Procurement Regulations

72. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if a person (details supplied) who has defaulted on payments to the Revenue Commissioners can hold a public contract with a local authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52579/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Public Procurement is governed by EU legislation and National rules and guidelines. The aim of these rules is to promote an open, competitive and non-discriminatory public procurement regime which delivers best value for money.

When carrying out procurement procedures, contracting authorities require suppliers to comply with a wide variety of legislation in areas that would include taxation, social policy, the environment and employment law. Compliance with the legislation covering these areas is rightly a matter for the relevant Departments and/or Agencies.

Public procurement procedures require applicants to meet certain standards when applying for public contracts. The criteria upon which contracting authorities may exclude applicants from the award procedure of public contracts are set out in Regulation 57 of S.I. No. 284 of 2016 – European Union (Award of Public Authority Contracts) Regulations 2016 and Article 57 (4a) and Recitals (100) and (101) of Directive 2014/24/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 February 2014 on public procurement. Before an applicant, in relation

to certain breaches, is excluded, they may make a case and provide supporting evidence as to why it should not be excluded. The contracting authority must consider this evidence before deciding whether to exclude or include an applicant. In addition, the qualifying tenderer must submit signed declarations stating that none of the circumstances (e.g. participation in a criminal organisation, corruption, terrorist offences etc.) outlined in Regulation 57 of S.I. No. 284 or Article 57 of 2014/24/EU apply.

Flood Relief Schemes Status

73. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans for flood relief schemes in County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52596/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The position on flood relief schemes in County Wexford is as follows:

Work on the development of the proposed Enniscorthy Flood Defence Scheme is progressing well. A public information day was held in June 2018 which was very well attended and provided some important feedback on the proposed scheme. A formal Public Exhibition of the scheme is planned for early 2019. Following this the detailed design of the scheme will be finalised which will allow an application to be made to the Minister of Public Expenditure and Reform for confirmation of the scheme under the Arterial Drainage Acts. Subject to the proposed scheme receiving approval it is anticipated that construction will commence in 2020.

An outline flood relief scheme has been identified for Wexford Town under the CFRAMS program and this was included among the 50 priority schemes to be progressed in an initial tranche of flood projects announced by Minister of State Moran on 3 May 2018. Wexford County Council (WCC) and the OPW are working in collaboration to bring this scheme forward. The initial task will be to appoint consultants to develop the detailed design of the scheme and this is in hands.

WCC, in conjunction with its consultants RPS, has investigated the problem of coastal erosion and flooding at Rosslare and has identified initial proposals to address these problems. Further study is required to identify the most financially, environmentally, and technically viable measures, and the OPW and WCC are working together in considering this.

Flood defence works in New Ross are substantially completed by WCC. The OPW is currently considering potential funding support for the WCC scheme in the town.

There are currently no applications on hand from Wexford County Council under the OPW's Minor Flood Works and Coastal Protection Scheme

A coastal minor works project at Arthurstown was completed in 2018, and funding of €126,000 was approved for a project at Wexford Racecourse in 2018.

Minor Works projects at Donaghmore Graveyard & Ballyhack were completed in 2016.

Question No. 74 answered with Question No. 69.

Public Procurement Regulations

75. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if section

38 or section 39 health organisations have an obligation to follow State procurement policies or guidelines; if obligations surrounding procurement policies are outlined in the service level agreement with such organisations; his views on the fact that public money is being spent on procurements that have not followed public sector procurement guidelines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52619/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Public procurement is governed by EU and National rules. The rules are transposed into Irish law and apply to tenders for public contracts whose monetary value exceeds certain thresholds.

The National Public Procurement Policy Framework sets out the overarching policy for public procurement in Ireland. It sets out the procurement procedures to be followed by Government Departments and public bodies under national and EU rules. The Framework covers contracting authorities including individual Departments, Offices, commercial and non-commercial State bodies, and private entities which are subsidised 50% or more by a public body, when awarding contracts for goods and services.

However, it is a matter for individual contracting authorities to ensure that their public procurement function is discharged in line with their governance and accountability arrangements including procurement rules and procedures. While the OGP's policy framework and public procurement guidelines facilitate and enable compliance with public procurement rules, it is the responsibility of each contracting authority to ensure they adhere to these rules.

Schools Building Projects Status

76. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 119 of 6 December 2018, if the housing of the new school in the existing permanent facility will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52552/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): It is not intended that the school will be housed within the existing permanent accommodation on site which is a third level college facility. The intention is to phase the construction of the new school building so as to provide access to newly built permanent accommodation for September 2019

The School Building project when complete will provide a new 16 classroom school plus ancillary accommodation. The school, through its patron body, will be kept informed as to the progression of the project.

School Transport

77. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there is a compulsory retirement age for school bus drivers; and if so, the details. [52562/18]

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.

In response to the expressed wishes of many school bus drivers - both Bus Éireann and private contractor school bus drivers - who wanted to remain in the position upon reaching retirement age at sixty-six years, and following the advice of their Medical Department, the Company decided to alter the compulsory retirement age for school bus drivers who provide services under the School Transport Scheme to enable experienced personnel to remain on in the position for a maximum of four more years if desired.

School bus drivers who opt to remain on after sixty-six years of age may do so up to the age of seventy, if they are satisfied to do so, subject to annual medical review and once they continue to hold the requisite driving licence.

Autism Support Services

78. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the schools in Galway city with a dedicated autistic unit; the services available in each unit; the schools that have as part of this service dedicated early intervention services for children under six years of age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52592/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Details of all special classes for children with special educational needs, in county order, are available on the NCSE website at the following link:

<http://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/NCSE-List-of-Special-Classes-for-September-2018updated.pdf>

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible for the establishment of special class and special school placements in various geographical areas where there is an identified need, in consultation with the relevant education partners and the Health Service Executive (HSE).

The NCSE is aware of emerging need from year to year, and where special class or special school provision is required, it is planned and established to meet that need.

There are 88 special classes attached to mainstream schools in Galway City and County. Of these, 3 are ASD early intervention classes, 35 are primary ASD classes and 22 are post primary ASD classes. The number of ASD special classes in Galway has increased from 17 in 2011/2012 to 60 in 2018/2019.

While it is not always possible or practical that a special class placement would be available in the child's local school, the NCSE has informed the Department that, in general, they are satisfied that there are sufficient ASD special class placements to meet existing demand in Galway.

Special classes for students with ASD are staffed with a pupil-teacher ratio of 6:1 at primary level (including early intervention classes) and 6:1.5 at post primary level, and also have a minimum of two SNAs for every class of 6 children.

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.

ASD Early Intervention special classes are available for children aged 3-5 with a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Early intervention classes are intended to provide early

support for children with ASD before they start school. Following early intervention, children will attend a mainstream class unless there is professional guidance that they require a special class or a placement in a special school.

The greater proportion of children with ASD attend mainstream class, where they may access additional supports if required.

Some students with ASD, although academically able to access the curriculum in mainstream, may find it too difficult to manage full-time placement there and placement in an ASD special class should be considered.

Special classes are part of a continuum of educational provision that enables students with more complex special educational needs to be educated, in smaller class groups, within their local mainstream schools. They offer a supportive learning environment to students who are unable to access the curriculum in a mainstream class, even with support, for most or all of their school day.

Students enrolled in special classes should be included in mainstream classes to the greatest extent possible, in line with their abilities.

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. Enrolment of a child in a special school is based on a professional assessment in consultation with the National Council for Special Education (NCSE).

The Department is aware that the establishment of special provision in some schools and communities can be challenging. The Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018 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 commenced 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.

Language Schools Closures

79. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding teachers whose money was taken from them by their employer (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52597/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): On Monday 3rd December 2018 my Department was informed of the closure of the school referred to by the Deputy. This school was a private English language school. The relationship between teachers and private providers of education is based on a private contract and issues relating to working conditions including payment are a matter between the two parties and do not come under the remit of the Department of Education and Skills. I understand that a liquidator is being appointed to the school in question. I regret that this situation has arisen for the teachers and students of this school. My colleague Minister Mitchell O'Connor and I have separately met with some of the affected teachers.

There is an extensive range of legislation in Ireland which protects the employment rights of workers in relation to equality, employment contracts, payment of wages and related matters. It

is the responsibility of the employer in the first instance to ensure that their employees receive their employment rights. Where an employee considers that their rights have been breached, the individual can bring a claim under the appropriate legislation to the Workplace Relations Commission. In addition, the WRC is responsible for monitoring a range of employment rights through its Inspection Service.

The Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection is currently progressing a new piece of legislation through the Oireachtas which will further strengthen the regulatory framework in this area. The Employment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2017 includes requirements that employers provide employees with certain terms of employment within a certain period after commencing employment; to impose sanctions for certain offences; to further provide for a minimum payment due to employees in certain circumstances; to prohibit contracts specifying zero as the contract hours in certain circumstances and to provide for the introduction of banded contract hours; to further provide for prohibition of penalisation and for those purposes to amend the Terms of Employment (Information) Act 1994 and the Organisation of Working Time Act 1997; to amend the Workplace Relations Act 2015.

In addition, the Deputy may be aware that legislation is also being progressed by my Department which will strengthen the regulation of the English language sector. The Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) (Amendment) Bill 2018 is currently before the Seanad. This new Bill will establish the International Education Mark (IEM). The IEM is a core component of the Government's policy for the English language sector and will provide a full quality framework for the provision of education to international learners in the future. Only those providers who meet the robust quality assurance procedures of Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) will be allowed to carry the Mark.

The Bill also contains provisions to provide QQI with additional statutory powers to examine a provider's financial sustainability and to evaluate a provider's corporate fitness. These provisions will enable QQI to examine the bona fides of a provider in addition to assessing that the provider has the capacity and capability to implement the quality assurance processes and provide programmes of education and training consistent with the requirements of the Act. All providers, including English language providers, will have to satisfy QQI in relation to issues such as the legal personality, ownership and corporate governance arrangements in addition to examining that adequate financial resources are in place to ensure the viability of these businesses.

At Committee Stage reading of the Bill which was initiated on 5th December 2018 Minister Mitchell O'Connor announced her intention to appoint an experienced mediator to meet with bodies representing employers and employees in the English language education sector to explore the potential for a Registered Employment Agreement to be developed for workers in the English language sector. The necessary arrangements for the appointment of this mediator are being progressed by my Department.

Early School Leavers

80. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the supports available for school leavers under 18 years of age still living at home and dependent; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52622/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): There are significant supports in place within the school system to support retention of students to the end of post-primary. These include the package of measures delivered through DEIS and

the various elements of the School Completion programme, managed by Tusla. These measures have made a significant contribution to the steady and significant improvement in school retention rates over the last number of years.

The most significant intervention for early school leavers delivered by the education and training sector is that the Youthreach programme is available for early school leavers. Youthreach provides up to two years integrated education, training and work experience for unemployed early school leavers without qualifications or vocational training who are between 15 and 20 years of age. It includes a considerable amount of personal development and exploration, where participants needs, interests and capacities are fully taken into account. There is a strong emphasis on personal development, on the core skills or literacy/numeracy, communications and IT, along with a choice of vocational options and a work experience programme. The programme offers participants the opportunity to identify and pursue viable options within adult life, and provides them with opportunities to acquire certification. Youthreach includes a work experience element to prepare participants for progression on to further study, further training or working life.

Youthreach participants can receive an allowance of €40 for attending the programme, based on their age. There is also a small meals allowance and, where applicable, a travel allowance.

The treatment of child dependents who are not attending school for the purposes of social welfare payments is a matter for the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

Parliamentary Questions

81. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if it is deemed acceptable for SUSI by way of answer to a parliamentary question to refer to an email address rather than a direct reply in line with parliamentary procedure as has been the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52663/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): As part of a comprehensive customer service and communications strategy provided by Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI), to ensure that all necessary avenues are open to applicants to receive the information they need, a dedicated email and phone line service is provided by SUSI for Oireachtas members. This was established to meet an identified need for applicants who choose to engage the assistance of their public representatives in making enquiries about their grant applications.

This service, which was set up at the behest of Oireachtas members, complements the established channels provided by SUSI which include online application tracking, a dedicated website, a telephone helpdesk, email and social media, including Facebook and Twitter. Enquiries may be emailed direct to SUSI at oireachtas@susi.ie. Staff in SUSI are responding to email queries within a matter of days.

With regard to the specific application, I have been advised by my officials that the student in question submitted an application to SUSI. The application was subsequently refused last August on the basis that the college attended is not an approved institution under the student grant scheme. There are statutory time limits for making an appeal. I've been advised that the applicant did not appeal this decision and is now outside of the statutory time limits for doing so.

Wards of Court

82. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if wards of court continue to benefit adequately from their status in the case of children or adults that have been made wards of court; the extent to which questions have been raised on this issue by family members; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52683/18]

100. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the extent to which further legislative changes are anticipated in respect of the legislation affecting wards of court with a view to better recognition of the changes in circumstances over time which may affect detrimentally the families of wards of court; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52670/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 82 and 100 together.

As the Deputy will be aware, the High Court has jurisdiction in wards of court matters and management of the courts is the responsibility of the Courts Service, which is independent in exercising its functions under the Courts Service Act 1998.

However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has informed me that between 20 and 30 minors (children under the age of 18) are taken into wardship by the President of the High Court each year. There are a number of reasons why it might be necessary to take a minor into wardship, with some being discharged from wardship when they turn 18. The most common reason is that the child has been awarded substantial damages by the Court and has special housing or care needs.

The Courts Service has advised that wardship is declared only where it is considered to be necessary for the protection and/or benefit of the child. In the cases where there are ongoing care and related needs, it is often more efficient and less costly to the child if such matters can be looked after by the Wards of Court Office in consultation with the child's guardians and under the direction of the President of the High Court. The guardians appointed by the President of the High Court are usually the child's parents.

The Wards of Court Office appoints a case officer for each ward of court when he/she is brought into wardship. The case officer meets with the guardian(s) and will liaise with them throughout the wardship to ensure that the care and monetary needs of the child are met, taking into account the initial award. Any questions raised by family members regarding any issue or concern are dealt with by direct contact between the guardian(s) and the case officer.

As the Deputy is aware, wardship funds are not public funds. The funds of a person who is taken into wardship move into the custody and supervision of the High Court which then holds and invests those funds as appropriate for the benefit of the ward. The Courts Service has advised that the management of court funds by the Courts Service is sensitive to, and takes full account of, the needs of the wards of court.

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

The Deputy will also be aware that I have signed the Commencement Order bringing Parts 1, 2 and 3 of the Civil Liability (Amendment) Act 2017 into operation with effect from 1 October 2018. The Act, which allows courts the power to award periodic payments rather than a

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

In terms of other legislation, the Deputy will be aware the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 was signed into law on 30 December 2015 and provides a modern statutory framework to support decision-making by adults with capacity difficulties. New administrative processes and support measures, including the setting up of the Decision Support Service within the Mental Health Commission (a body under the Department of Health), must be put in place before the substantive provisions of the Act can be commenced.

The Act provides for the repeal of the Lunacy Regulation (Ireland) Act 1871 and the Marriage of Lunatics Act 1811. The current Wards of Court system for adults will be phased out over a three year period from the commencement of Part 6 of the Act. The Act offers a continuum of options to support people in maximising their decision-making capability.

Each adult ward (a ward who has attained the age of 18 years by the date of commencement of Part 6 of the Act) will be reviewed in accordance with the new system. A ward who is found to have capacity will be discharged from wardship. A ward who continues to have capacity needs will be discharged from wardship and offered the support option most appropriate to his or her needs.

I wish to inform the Deputy that no further legislative changes are anticipated at this time.

Court Accommodation Provision

83. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans for a new court house in Tralee, County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52488/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy is aware, under the provisions of the Courts Service Act 1998, management of the courts, including the provision of accommodation for court sittings, is the responsibility of the Courts Service, which is independent in exercising its functions.

However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has informed me that, as part of its provincial capital building programme, one of the objectives is to provide improved court accommodation in Tralee which is one of a number of provincial city/county town venues nationwide still requiring new or upgraded courthouse accommodation. Collectively these venues will be the next priority for investment in courthouse facilities outside the capital.

The Courts Service has advised that it envisages a courthouse comprising four courtrooms and related facilities (consultation rooms, custody facilities, facilities for juries and vulnerable witnesses, and legal practitioner's suites) as being required to meet current and future needs in Tralee and that this will require a building significantly larger than the existing courthouse on Ashe Street. The scope for refurbishing and developing the existing courthouse on Ashe Street to provide the envisaged accommodation is extremely limited due to the nature of the building and the constrained nature of the site.

The Courts Service has also advised that it is currently considering a number of options for Tralee Courthouse, including the level of extension and refurbishment achievable within the

confines of the existing courthouse site; whether it would be feasible to acquire an adjacent town centre site and the degree of extension and refurbishment this would allow. Previous efforts to acquire adjacent sites on Ashe Street have not been successful as the sites could not be acquired at a price that represented value for money.

A further option is to build a new modern courthouse on a greenfield/brownfield site and a number of potential sites are being considered in this regard.

The Courts Service has further advised that the Chief Executive of the Courts Service has recently met with the Chief Executive of Kerry County Council in Tralee to discuss the future provision of court facilities there. The Courts Service has informed me that a decision has not yet been made and that all options are under review.

A number of developments in relation to Courts Service accommodation requirements are outlined in the Government's recent National Development Plan 2018 - 2027. They include:

- Further new or refurbished courthouses in regional cities and county towns where facilities remain substandard (including Galway City, Wicklow Town, Portlaoise, **Tralee** and Roscommon) and further provincial locations such as An Clochan Liath (Dungloe) to serve as the Gaeltacht court for the region, and Tuam;

- Regional Family Law Centres;

- A nationwide condition survey of all court buildings in the estate will be undertaken to determine their condition and identify works required in relation to any issues identified and meet ongoing maintenance requirements.

The precise allocation and timing of additional funding over the entire ten year period remains to be fully determined. It will be dependent on the outcome of further detailed planning and analysis of costs which will determine prioritisation of projects from a timing and budgetary perspective.

Garda Vetting Applications

84. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a Garda vetting application will be expedited in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52490/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, the processing of vetting applications by the National Vetting Bureau is an operational matter for the Garda Authorities and is carried out in accordance with the provisions of the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012-2016 and other relevant law. My Department has no role in the processing of individual vetting applications.

I am informed by the Garda Authorities that as of 11 December, records at the National Vetting Bureau indicate that no valid Garda vetting application has been received in respect of the person who is the subject of the Deputy's question.

In the circumstances, I would advise the person concerned to contact the relevant registered organisation to ascertain the status of their vetting application.

Garda Recruitment

85. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to review the maximum age limit of 35 years of age for normal entry into An Garda Síochána in order to maximise recruitment opportunities and diversity as suggested in the review of entry routes to An Garda Síochána advice by the Garda Inspectorate published in May 2018. [52495/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, recruitment to An Garda Síochána is governed by the Garda Síochána (Admissions and Appointments) Regulations 2013 which provide that the age at which a person may apply to join An Garda Síochána as a full time member is not more than 35 years.

In light of the Garda Inspectorate Report referred to by the Deputy and the more recent Report of the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland, it is my intention to review the maximum entry age for recruitment to An Garda Síochána as part of the overall response to the recommendations made in both reports in relation to ‘entry routes’ to An Garda Síochána.

Insurance Fraud

86. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the estimated cost of establishing a publicly funded Garda insurance fraud unit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52497/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will be aware that the Cost of Insurance Working Group proposed exploring the possibility that a specific unit, funded by the insurance industry, be established within the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau (GNECB) to tackle insurance fraud.

I can inform the Deputy that the GNECB had exploratory talks with Insurance Ireland in relation to this matter, and submitted a mechanism for further cooperation to Insurance Ireland in early 2017. Following receipt of the reply from Insurance Ireland in July 2018, I met with the GNECB and the Assistant Commissioner, Special Crime Operations, on 30 August 2018 to discuss this recommendation further. Following those discussions, I understand the recommendation is receiving further consideration within An Garda Síochána. I am advised that the cost of establishing a publicly funded Garda insurance fraud unit has not as yet been determined.

My officials remain in ongoing contact with An Garda Síochána in relation to this matter. In addition, my colleague, Michael D’arcy, Minister of State in the Department of Finance, will be meeting with the Garda Commissioner in the coming days to determine what progress can be made on this issue.

Garda Transport Provision

87. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the office holders and non-office holders, both political and non-political, provided with a car and driver; the cost associated with each; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52510/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The use of State cars and Garda drivers is confined to the President, the Taoiseach, the Tánaiste, the Minister for Justice and Equality, the Chief Justice and the Director of Public Prosecutions, the security of such persons being the responsibility of An Garda Síochána. I am informed by An Garda Síochána that total costs for 2017, which include an estimate in respect of the provision of drivers (pay-roll costs etc.), running costs and capital expenditure (where applicable), are indicated in the

following table.

Vote	2017
President's Establishment	€197,005
Taoiseach	€200,698
Justice & Equality (a)	€185,000
Department of Business and Enterprise (a)	€78,000
Foreign Affairs & Trade (a)	€15,000
Director of Public Prosecutions	€186,958
Chief Justice	€179,841

(a) The Office of Tánaiste was partly held by the Minister for Justice and Equality, the Minister for Business Enterprise and Innovation and the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade during 2017.

Separately, within my Department, and in line with similar arrangements for Ministers and Ministers of State across Government, Minister of State David Stanton has 2 civilian drivers employed on a week-on, week-off basis, at an estimated average weekly cost of €695.

Furthermore, a driver and vehicle service is available to the State Pathologist/Deputy State Pathologists when they are called to cases outside Dublin. The cost amounted to €29,708.65 in 2017 and to €25,386.25 up to 10th December 2018. The current service provider was selected through a procurement process undertaken in conjunction with the Office of Government Procurement.

A previous arrangement for the provision of a driver to the Office of the Inspector of Prisons, was discontinued in 2016.

State Pathology Service

88. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the policy on the provision of transport for persons (details supplied); the cost associated with same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52511/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Office of the State Pathologist (OSP) provides independent expert advice on matters relating to forensic pathology and performs post mortem examinations in cases where foul play is suspected.

The work of the State Pathologist and the Deputy State Pathologists is 24/7 and year round. A driver and vehicle service is available to these officials when they are called to cases outside Dublin. A procurement process for this service is held at regular intervals. The current provider was selected through a procurement process undertaken in conjunction with the Office of Government Procurement (OGP) using its National Framework for Passenger Ground Transportation Services for all public sector bodies.

The cost of the driver and vehicle service so far in 2018, up to 10 December, is €25,386.

Immigration Status

89. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the determination of applications pursuant to section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) in the case of persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52536/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that, in response to a notification pursuant to the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), written representations have been submitted on behalf of the persons concerned.

These representations, together with all other information and documentation on file, will be fully considered, under Section 3 (6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and all other applicable legislation, in advance of a final decision being made.

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.

Deportation Orders

90. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a deportation order will be deferred in the case of a person (details supplied); if the deportation order will be revoked in order to accommodate a comprehensive review of the case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52628/18]

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

Representations were received from the person concerned, pursuant to the provisions of section 3(11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), requesting that the Deportation Order be revoked. Following the detailed consideration of the information submitted in support of the request, the Deportation Order was affirmed and notified to Ms. Fernandes by letter dated 27 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.

Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal Data

91. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of cases with the Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal that have not been completed; if he will provide an age analysis of the number of these cases on a year by year basis; and if he will make a

statement on the matter. [52636/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Because of the manner in which cases are recorded by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal, 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, however, requested an assessment of the caseload of the Tribunal and have asked my officials to examine this assessment and seek the views of the Criminal Injuries Tribunal in this regard. I can update the Deputy further when this exercise has been completed.

I can also advise the Deputy that, in view of the length of time since the Scheme was last revised, my Department has submitted a request for a review of the Scheme to the Law Reform Commission (LRC) for consideration in the context of its Programme of Law Reform.

Furthermore, in view of a number of large awards from the General Scheme in the current year, I can inform the Deputy that I have obtained approval for an increased allocation of €2.4m for 2018, as part of a Supplementary Estimate for the Vote which will bring the total compensation allocation to €6.416m.

For the Deputy's information, the number of applications received and the amount of compensation paid under both schemes operated by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal 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

Immigration Status

92. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when stamp 4 will issue to meet employment requirements in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52655/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned was granted temporary permission to remain until 26 August 2018. I am further advised that INIS are awaiting a report from the Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB) in relation to the outcome of a technical examination of the person's passport. The matter will be considered further by INIS on receipt of a GNIB report.

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.

Temporary Travel Documentation

93. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when travel documents or stamp 4 are likely to issue in the case of persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52656/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that, in response to a notification pursuant to the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), written representations have been submitted on behalf of the persons concerned.

In terms of the question regarding a Temporary Travel Document, the applicant was issued a Temporary Travel Document on 13 December 2017 for a period of one year on a discretionary basis to facilitate travel outside the State. The applicant has a current application for renewal of their permission to remain in the State. The person concerned should await the outcome of their application for renewal of their permission to remain before any other steps would be taken. I am advised that a decision on that application will be made in the coming weeks.

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.

Naturalisation Applications

94. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of an application for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied); if all documentation required has been submitted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52658/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the processing of the application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy is ongoing. On completion of the necessary processing the application will be submitted to me for decision as expeditiously as possible. If further documentation is required it will be requested from the applicant in due course.

As the Deputy will appreciate, the granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation is a privilege and an honour which confers certain rights and entitlements, not only within the State but also at European Union level, and it is important that appropriate procedures are in place to preserve the integrity of the process.

It is recognised that all applicants for citizenship would wish to have a decision on their application without delay. The nature of the naturalisation process is such that, for a broad range of reasons, some cases will take longer than others to process. In some instances, completing the necessary checks can take a considerable period of time.

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

Citizenship Applications

95. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if all required documentation has been submitted in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52659/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person referred to by the Deputy was invited to attend a citizenship ceremony which took place on 21 May 2018 in The Killarney Convention Centre, Gleneagle Hotel, Killarney, Co. Kerry but failed to attend.

The records indicate that the current permission to reside in the State granted to the person concerned expired on 22 May 2018. It is up to the person concerned to seek permission to remain beyond the expiry of his current permission. All non-EEA nationals are required to keep their permission to remain in the State up to date at all times, and to have such permission registered. Failure to do so may adversely affect an application for a certificate of naturalisation

As the Deputy will appreciate, the granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation is a privilege and an honour which confers certain rights and entitlements, not only within the State but also at European Union level, and it is important that appropriate procedures are in place to preserve the integrity of the process.

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.

Residency Permits

96. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the residency status and eligibility for naturalisation and consequently an Irish passport in the case of persons (details supplied) in view of the fact that one of their children's passports was withdrawn and that matters have not progressed since; if the matter will be examined with a view to clearing up confusion arising from failure to qualify under a case; if the deportation order in question will be set aside to facilitate a full evaluation of the case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52661/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that, in response to a notification pursuant to the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), written representations have been submitted on behalf of the persons concerned.

The applicant was granted permission to remain in the State based on the parentage of an Irish citizen child. This permission was valid until 06 February 2018. By letter dated 10 January 2018, the applicant was informed that this permission was revoked as it came to the attention of the Department that the child from which the permission was derived was not entitled to an Irish passport.

The applicant has been issued with a notification pursuant to the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended). Written representations have been submitted on behalf of the persons concerned.

These representations, together with all other information and documentation on file, will be fully considered, under Section 3 (6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and all other applicable legislation, in advance of a final decision being made.

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

Immigration Status

97. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current and expected residency and or naturalisation status in the case of a person (details supplied); if all documentation required has been submitted by them in respect of their case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52665/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the processing of the application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy is ongoing. On completion of the necessary processing the application will be submitted to me for decision as expeditiously as possible. Should further documentation be required it will be requested from the applicant in due course.

The records indicate that the current permission to reside in the State granted to the person concerned expired on 11 December 2018. It is up to the person concerned to seek permission to remain beyond the expiry of his current permission. All non-EEA nationals are required to keep their permission to remain in the State up to date at all times, and to have such permission registered. Failure to do so may adversely affect an application for a certificate of naturalisation

As the Deputy will appreciate, the granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation is a privilege and an honour which confers certain rights and entitlements, not only within the State but also at European Union level, and it is important that appropriate procedures are in place to preserve the integrity of the process.

It is recognised that all applicants for citizenship would wish to have a decision on their application without delay. The nature of the naturalisation process is such that, for a broad range of reasons, some cases will take longer than others to process. In some instances, completing the necessary checks can take a considerable period of time.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to the INIS of my Department by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically

established for this purpose. This service enables up to date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from the INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Proposed Legislation

98. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if legislative changes are proposed in respect of inheritance legislation with particular reference to minimising the opportunities for misrepresentation to the detriment of family members; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52668/18]

99. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if, in the case of inheritance, adequate provision is made to safeguard the interests of all parties with particular reference to ensuring the minimisation of duress and undue influence on the testator, testatrix or disponent when composing their last will and testament; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52669/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 98 and 99 together.

The position is that Part VII of the Succession Act 1965, sets out the legal requirements for the making of a valid will. These are as follows:

- it must be in writing;
- the testator must be over 18 years of age (the testator may be under 18 if he or she is or has been married);
- the testator must be of sound mind;
- the testator must sign or mark the will in the presence of two witnesses;
- the two witnesses must sign the will in the testator's presence;
- the witnesses cannot be beneficiaries of the will;
- the witnesses must see the testator sign the will;
- the signature of the testator must be at the end of the will.

It is possible for a person to challenge a will on the grounds of the diminished capacity of a testator to make a valid will, or their ability freely to make decisions in disposing of their property by will.

Under current law, the following criteria are to be taken into account in determining whether or not a testator had the capacity to make a will:

- (a) whether the deceased understood the nature of the act of making a will and its effect;
- (b) whether the deceased understood the extent of the property of which he or she was disposing; and
- (c) whether the deceased understood and appreciated the claims to which he or she ought to give effect.

Where undue influence is alleged, the law places the onus of proving undue influence on the person alleging it. In order to succeed it must be proven:

- (a) that the person alleged to exert the influence had the power or opportunity to do so;
- (b) that undue influence was in fact exerted; and
- (c) that the will was the product of influence.

In my view, the statutory provisions referred to above and relevant case law provide adequate safeguards for the making of valid wills. While I have no current plans to amend legislation in this area, the operation of the law in this area is kept under review in my Department.

Question No. 100 answered with Question No. 82.

Immigration Status

101. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when stamp 3 will upgrade to stamp 4 in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52671/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that there is no record of a request from the person concerned for a change in their immigration status to Stamp 4 conditions.

I am further advised that INIS granted the person concerned a further year extension of their permission to reside in this State on Stamp 3 conditions on 24 October 2018 as the spouse of a Minister of Religion. The person may wish to note that, in line with current immigration policy, the person concerned may not apply for a change to their immigration status in the State on the basis of their current permission as the family member of a Minister of Religion.

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.

Health Services Provision

102. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which the most common causes of stress among young persons continues to be identified and provisions made to accommodate needs arising; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52682/18]

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

103. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health his plans to reconsider the school

leavers process with special attention to the application process and allocation of funding for adult service placement (details supplied); if action will be taken to provide autism specific adult services which are in high demand but unavailable in County Kerry; the steps he will take to increase full-time adult day services for students transitioning from second level to adult day services in County Kerry in view of the shortfall in service provision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52498/18]

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 Staff Provision

104. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health when a specialist Parkinson's disease nurse will be appointed for south County Tipperary (details supplied). [52499/18]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

105. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on a waiting list for Mayo University Hospital; the number of persons on a waiting list for the same period in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52501/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Improving access to hospital treatment is a key priority for Government.

This year has seen ongoing improvements with the number of patients waiting for inpatient and daycase procedures (IPDC), now at 72,001 from the peak of 86,100 in July 2017. This represents a 16% reduction in the overall number of patients waiting for an inpatient or day case procedure. The number of patients waiting over 9 months has reduced from over 28,100 to just over 17,500 in the same period equating to a 37% reduction.

The ongoing collaboration between the HSE and NTPF to maximise the number of patients treated in both a public and private capacity has resulted in over 21,200 patients accepting offers of treatment for a hospital procedure to the end of October this year.

Budget 2019 announced that the Government had further increased investment in tackling waiting lists, with funding to the National Treatment Purchase fund (NTPF) increasing from €55 million in 2018 to €75 million in 2019.

In 2019, the NTPF plans to deliver 25,000 Inpatient Day Case treatments. In addition, 5,000 Gastro Intestinal Scopes will be carried out, bringing to 9,000 the additional scope activity provided by the NTPF since the start of 2018. Furthermore, 40,000 Outpatient appointments will

be arranged as part of 2019 activity. It is expected that a further 34,000 patients who no longer need treatment will be removed from the waiting lists by the NTPF Central Validation Unit.

As a result, the number of patients waiting for a hospital procedure is projected to fall to below 59,000 by the end of 2019.

My Department is working closely with the NTPF and the HSE to finalise a Scheduled Care Access Plan for inpatient/daycase and outpatients for 2019.

In 2019, the NTPF and HSE will continue to work closely with Hospital Groups, inviting proposals to improve access for patients waiting for either inpatient/daycase or outpatient procedures.

The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the attached tables.

IPDC Mayo University Hospital

	0-3 mths	3-6 mths	6-9 mths	9-12 mths	12-15 mths	15-18 mths	18-24 mths	24-36 mths	36-48 mths	Total
Latest	885	519	340	189	95	50	24	16	4	2122
2017	900	478	250	98	68	37	23	12	0	1866

Outpatient Mayo University Hospital

	0-3 mths	3-6 mths	6-9 mths	9-12 mths	12-15 mths	15-18 mths	18-21 mths	21-24 mths	24-36 mths	36-48 mths	48 +	Total
Latest	2755	1224	946	501	485	393	397	353	1037	522	109	8722
2017	2875	1000	702	606	635	526	477	306	918	200	3	8248

Home Help Service Provision

106. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health if the case of a person (details supplied) will be investigated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52503/18]

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.

Parental Leave

107. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the way in which hospitals within the HSE are operating the unpaid parental leave scheme; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that nursing staff fall outside its remit; the number of applicants for the scheme in 2017, to date in 2018 and 2019 by job role (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52504/18]

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

Home Help Service Provision

108. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health if the case of a person (details sup-

plied) will be investigated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52507/18]

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.

Charitable and Voluntary Organisations

109. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Health when the independent review group formed in July 2017 and chaired by a person (details supplied) will publish its findings. [52509/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Independent Review Group established to examine the role of voluntary organisations in health and personal social services began its deliberations in September 2017.

The Group's terms of reference provided for:

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

Consideration of issues currently arising, and those likely to arise in the future; and

Recommendations on how the relationship between the State and voluntary organisations should evolve in the future.

The Group was composed of Dr Catherine Day (Chair), Professor Jane Grimson and Professor Deirdre Madden.

The Independent Review Group has now submitted its final report. The report is currently under consideration in my Department, and I hope to bring it to Government soon. The intention is to publish it shortly thereafter. This will most likely be in the New Year.

Hospital Appointments Status

110. **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. [52513/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

111. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the number of children with scoliosis by age and length of time waiting to be seen at Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52516/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the data requested, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Healthcare Professionals

112. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the reports and or data citing evidence of a worldwide shortage of psychiatrists; the steps such reports recommend to tackle the shortage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52517/18]

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 National Service Plan

113. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health when the HSE service plan will be introduced; the reason for its delay; if it will include initiatives to improve recruitment and retention of mental health staff; if the service plan will plan outcomes for mental health services in view of the fact that there is no clear HSE mental health division; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52518/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Act 2004 (as amended), allows me to extend the period provided to the HSE to prepare, adopt and submit its Service Plan, if required and the HSE were most recently provided with an extension until 12th December.

Following the submission of the National Service Plan, the legislation provides 21 days for me to examine the proposed plan and where necessary to seek amendment to, or approve, the plan. The National Service Plan must be laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas within 21 days of its approval. Once the Service Plan is laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas the HSE will ensure it is published at the earliest possible time.

As the Service Plan for 2019 has not yet been approved, it would not be appropriate to comment on what may appear in the final content of the plan.

However, it would be expected that the Service plan would outline detail on the health service workforce, including the recruitment and retention of mental health service staff and priorities and actions for mental health services in 2019.

HSE National Service Plan

114. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE service plan will be compatible with recommendations contained in the Sláintecare report for mental health services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52519/18]

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.

Orthodontic Services Waiting Lists

115. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting for braces by age and the length of time they have been waiting in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52520/18]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

116. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons as of 1 December 2018 waiting for orthopaedic surgeries in UHK; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52521/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Improving access to hospital treatment is a key priority for government. This year €55 million was allocated to the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) to provide treatment for patients. This has been increased to a total of €75 million for 2019 and as a result of this additional funding, my Department is working closely with the NTPF and the HSE to finalise a Scheduled Care Access Plan for inpatients/day case and outpatients for 2019.

Waiting list figures are published by the NTPF on their website www.ntpf.ie. Figures for October 2018 show that the number of patients waiting for an Inpatient or Daycase procedures has fallen to 72,000 from the peak of 86,100 in July 2017. This represents a 16% reduction in the overall number of patients waiting for an inpatient or day case procedure.

In 2019, the NTPF and the HSE will continue to work closely with Hospital Groups, inviting proposals to improve access for patients waiting for either Inpatient/Daycase or Outpatient procedures.

According to the latest NTPF figures, there 177 patients on the Orthopaedic waiting list in UHK, and of these 76% (134) are waiting 6 months or less, 98.8% are waiting 9 months or less and 2 patients are waiting longer than 12 months.

The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the following table.

IPDC Orthopaedic Waiting List – University Hospital Kerry

0-3 Months	3-6 Months	6-9 Months	9-12 Months	12-15 Months	Total
67	67	41	0	2	177

Health Services Staff

117. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 444 and 452 of 27 February 2018 and the deferred reply from the HSE, the number of office staff and the number of trained medical staff that have availed of the shorter

working hours scheme by hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52525/18]

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

Vaccination Programme

118. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if matters (details supplied) regarding the HPV vaccine will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52526/18]

119. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if matters (details supplied) regarding the HPV vaccine will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52529/18]

120. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if matters (details supplied) regarding the HPV vaccine will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52530/18]

121. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if matters (details supplied) regarding the HPV vaccine will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52531/18]

122. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if matters (details supplied) regarding the HPV vaccine will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52532/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 118 to 122, inclusive, together.

The Health Service Executive is committed to providing accurate information for parents about diseases, the vaccines to prevent them and potential side effects to allow them to choose whether or not to give consent to vaccination.

The HSE's National Immunisation Office has developed a comprehensive range of materials for parents, schools and medical practitioners as part of the immunisation programme. All the information provided to parents about vaccination takes into account the available licensed documentation for each vaccine, the Summary of Product Characteristics (SPC) and Patient Information Leaflet (PIL).

The Patient Information Leaflet provides information on the vaccine, its uses and on any precautions that require advice from a healthcare professional before it is administered. Therefore, like other countries providing school immunisation programmes, the Patient Information Leaflet is replaced by an information leaflet which provides the same information on the potential side effects of the vaccine in a manner that ensures that it is easily understood.

The information is presented in clear and simple language which has been approved by the National Adult Literacy Agency, ensuring that it can be understood by all adults. The Health Information and Quality Authority guide 'Communicating in plain English' (2015), developed in partnership with NALA, states that "one in six people find reading and understanding everyday texts difficult: for example, reading a health leaflet, bus timetable or medicine instructions".

Prior to all school immunisations, parents receive an information pack in a sealed package with an information leaflet, consent form and cover letter. The information packs for all im-

munisations are standardised nationally. The information booklets include information on all the known potential side effects that can occur after each vaccination (as is the case with the HPV vaccine, Gardasil). Parents are also given contact details for their local immunisation office and advised to speak to a member of the school immunisation team if they have any further questions.

It is not the case that parents are being denied the information on the Patient Information Leaflet. In fact, the HSE parent information leaflet refers parents to the HPV website (hpv.ie) where links to additional information including the licensing documentation, the Summary of Products Characteristics and the Patient Information Leaflet for each vaccine can be found. The HPV website has been endorsed by the World Health Organisation.

While no medicine (including vaccines) is entirely without risk, the safety profile of Gardasil has been continuously monitored since it was first authorised in September 2006 both nationally and at EU level.

The Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) is responsible for monitoring the safety and quality of all medicines including vaccines that are licensed in Ireland. The HPRA operates a national adverse reaction reporting system, which members of the public and healthcare professionals are encouraged to submit any suspected adverse reactions through this system. All Reports received by the HPRA are routinely transmitted to the European Medicines Agency's adverse reaction database for inclusion in global signal detection and monitoring activities.

The HPRA and the European Medicines Agency (EMA) continually monitor adverse events to vaccination. Gardasil is one of the most closely studied and monitored medicinal products. The vast majority of reports received by the HPRA have been consistent with the expected pattern of short term adverse side effects for the vaccine, as described in the product information. The most frequently reported side effects are local redness and /or swelling at the point of injection and fever. These are usually mild and temporary reactions to any kind of vaccination. Fainting has occurred after vaccination with Gardasil, especially in adolescents. Mild and temporary reactions to any kind of vaccination are not unusual.

It is important to reiterate that all medicines, including vaccines are subject to on-going review and evaluation of all available data from a range of sources, including systematic scientific literature review, to consider any impact that their data may have on the overall assessment of the benefits and risks of a medicinal product. Taking into account the totality of the available information, the benefits of the HPV vaccines continue to outweigh their risks. The safety of these vaccines continues to be monitored at EU level through the EMA and its expert committees, which includes representatives from member state competent authorities such as the HPRA.

I would also like to reassure anyone who is suffering ill health is eligible to seek medical attention, and to access appropriate health and social care services, irrespective of the cause of their symptoms. As there is no scientific evidence that the vaccine causes long term illnesses, the HPV vaccine cannot be held responsible for these illnesses.

I would urge any parent who has doubts or questions about vaccination to engage with your family doctor, or alternatively to visit the HPV website.

General Practitioner Services Provision

123. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the impending retirements of general practitioners at medical centres (details supplied); his plans to ensure that services do not diminish due to possible delays in securing replacement

general practitioners; his plans to ensure the recruitment campaign for these specific medical centres is adequate in securing the services required; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52537/18]

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

Health Services Provision

124. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health if an application by an organisation (details supplied) for increased funding will be considered based on its increased caseload of psychotherapy in the instances of bereaved children; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the charity provides a service with most referrals originating from hospitals here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52539/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): There is no specific funding made available directly by the Department of Health to voluntary organisations. Health specific grants are usually provided through the HSE or other lead agencies. In the case of this organisation, I understand that funding is provided by Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, and so is a matter for my colleague the Minister for Children & Youth Affairs, Katherine Zappone, T.D.

Maternity Services Provision

125. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 406 of 2 October 2018, the parties involved in the discussions regarding the draft legal framework; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52551/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Government remains committed to the National Maternity Hospital relocation project, which involves the development of a new maternity hospital on the campus of St Vincent's University Hospital at Elm Park. My Department is currently engaging with the National Maternity Hospital and the St Vincent's Healthcare Group in relation to the legal framework required to protect the State's investment in the new hospital. The proposals will require consideration by Government before they are finalised.

Health Services Funding

126. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the level of funding made available for the treatment and research of motor neurone disease; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52555/18]

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

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

Health Services Funding

127. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the level of funding made available for the treatment and research for neurological services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52556/18]

128. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the number of patients here with a neurological disorder; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52557/18]

129. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the steps he is taking to ensure the best possible care for patients with a neurological disorder; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52558/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I propose to take Questions Nos. 127 to 129, inclusive, together.

The National Neuro-Rehabilitation Strategy, published in 2011, made a number of recommendations in respect of services for people with rehabilitation needs, including clinical, therapeutic, social, vocational and community supports. Since then the HSE established a Rehabilitation Medicine Programme which aims to ensure the optimal care pathway for different clinical needs.

This Programme provides a national, strategic, and coordinated approach to a wide range of clinical services and includes the standardisation of access to and delivery of high quality, safe and efficient hospital services nationally as well as better linkages with primary care services. The scope of the Programme covers the whole of the patient journey from self-management and prevention through to primary, secondary and tertiary care.

The Model of Care for Neurology was launched by the HSE in late 2016. This was developed by the HSE's National Clinical Programme for Neurology in collaboration with consultants, nurses, health and social care professionals and patient support groups. It aims to address the need for strategic development of neurology services in the provision of better care for these patients.

In 2018 a number of significant investments were made for the diagnosis and treatment of a number of neurology related conditions. This year, funding has been allocated by the HSE to commence development of peri- and post-operative services to support patients receiving Deep Brain Stimulation. Also, additional funding has been allocated to further develop the national narcolepsy services, in particular the transition of adolescents from Children's University Hospital to St. James's Hospital.

Other improvements across neurology services include the development of nurse led clinics, condition specific outpatient clinics and the development of links across specialties including stroke, old age medicine and genetics.

The Government is committed to providing services and supports for all people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in assessing 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 and is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

I have also asked the HSE to reply to you directly.

Nursing Staff Recruitment

130. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health his plans to recruit more nurses for an association (details supplied); if not, the reason therefore; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52559/18]

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.

Hospitals Capital Programme

131. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if the capital submission request from the HSE in respect of the upgrade of St. Patrick's Community Hospital, Fermoy, County Cork has been approved. [52563/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the management and maintenance of healthcare infrastructure, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to you in relation to this matter.

Hospital Appointments Status

132. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) who has been waiting three years and five months for an appointment in the Midland Regional Hospital, Portlaoise, County Laois, will receive same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52564/18]

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.

Trade Union Recognition

133. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the decision of the HSE to refuse to recognise a trade union that represents ambulance drivers will result in industrial action by those workers; his plans to deal with such a dispute; the effects this will have on hospital services nationally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52565/18]

134. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE will be instructed to recognise the union chosen by workers in the ambulance service to represent them; if the decision to withdraw from cooperation with this union was notified to him by the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52566/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 133 and 134 together.

I understand that the HSE has received a series of formal notifications from the General Secretary of the Psychiatric Nurses' Association (PNA), advising that the PNA ambulance personnel members are taking industrial action. Phase 1 of the industrial action commenced on 10 October 2018 and phase 2 followed on 7 November 2018. A letter dated 28 November 2018 advised that whilst Phase 1 will continue, Phase 2 of the action is suspended with immediate effect. It also informed the HSE that NASRA members will engage in strike action on Wednesday 19 December 2018. I am pleased to advise that the PNA have, today, further advised that this strike action has been deferred to late January 2019.

The National Ambulance Service Representative Association (NASRA), which is affiliated with the PNA, is a group which is not recognised by the HSE and therefore does not have negotiating rights. The PNA do not have negotiating rights for ambulance personnel. As a non ICTU affiliated union, the PNA have negotiating rights for nurses working in psychiatry and intellectual disability sectors. The union which is recognised by the HSE for ambulance grades is SIPTU.

The NAS are monitoring the situation closely and are currently working on contingency plans to be put in place to minimise any disruption that may arise in January to ensure that patient safety is not compromised. I am clear that industrial action is never the solution to industrial relations issues. The interests of patients are always best served through negotiation and by avoiding any such action.

Hospital Staff

135. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health his views on reports that Cork University Hospital has only one medical registrar at night due to staff shortages and that the hospital cannot procure a replacement. [52571/18]

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

Ambulance Service Provision

136. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health if additional resources will be provided for the National Ambulance Service in the north-east region with particular reference

to the urgent need to upgrade the services in counties Cavan and Monaghan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52573/18]

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

Hospital Facilities

137. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health the status of the reopening of a ward (details supplied); if funding has been released to recruit the staff required; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52584/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Deputy will be aware, hospitals are increasingly operating at or above capacity, with year-round demand pressures that are further challenged over the winter months. It is against this background that the Health Service Capacity Review 2018 recommended an increase in acute hospitals beds of over 2,600 by 2031 to support the projected increase in demand for services in the years ahead.

Increasing capacity is therefore a priority for the Government. Over the past 12 months, an additional 240 beds have been opened and a further 78 additional beds are planned for early 2019.

The Winter Plan 2018/19, which was published on 6 December, will also seek to increase capacity and my Department is currently in discussions with the HSE, in the context of the National Service Plan 2019, to identify the sites for investment and the associated number of beds, as part of an agreed capacity programme for 2019. The question of increasing bed capacity in Letterkenny University Hospital will be considered as part of this process.

Health Services Provision

138. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health his plans to ensure additional resources are provided for orthopaedic assessment and procedures in the north east, in particular in counties Cavan and Monaghan, in view of the long delays for persons accessing such services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52586/18]

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

Motorised Transport Grant

139. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health the status of the replacement schemes for the motorised transport scheme and the mobility allowance; when he plans to announce the details of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52590/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Deputy will be familiar with the background to the closure of both the Mobility Allowance and Motorised Transport Grant schemes in February 2013.

My colleague, the Minister for Health and I brought a Memorandum to Government on proposals for a new Transport Support Payment Scheme towards the end of the last Dáil ses-

sion. Following consideration of the matter, it was decided to withdraw the Memorandum from the Cabinet Agenda at the time. I intend to revert to Government in due course with revised proposals to reflect the discussions at that Cabinet meeting and further discussions between myself and Minister Harris.

With regard to the Motorised Transport Grant, this scheme operated as a means-tested grant to assist persons with severe disabilities with the purchase or adaptation of a car, where that car was essential to retain employment. The maximum Motorised Transport Grant, which was payable once in any three-year period, was €5,020. Following closure of the scheme in February 2013, no further Motorised Transport Grants have been payable.

It is important to note that the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers scheme operated by the Revenue Commissioners, remains in place. This scheme provides VRT and VAT relief, an exemption from road tax and a fuel grant to drivers and passengers with a disability, who qualify under the relevant criteria set out in governing regulations made by the Minister for Finance. Specifically adapted vehicles driven by persons with a disability are also exempt from payment of tolls on national roads and toll bridges. Transport Infrastructure Ireland has responsibility for this particular scheme.

There are improvements in access to a range of transport support schemes available to persons with disabilities in the State and on-going work is being carried out by Government Departments, agencies and transport providers to further improve access to public transport services. Under the National Disability Inclusion Strategy, the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport has responsibility for the continued development of accessibility and availability of public transport for people with a disability.

Health Services Funding

140. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health if the funding requirement for an association (details supplied) for 2019 will be fully met; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52595/18]

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 Groups

141. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health if the management at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda, County Louth, and the HSE have undertaken an examination of the cost involved in renaming and rebranding the hospital in terms of stationery, signage and associated costs; the cost involved; the budget allocated to the initiative for 2018 and 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52604/18]

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

Hospital Groups

142. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health the process in place for the proposal to change the name of Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda; the person or body that has ultimate responsibility for a decision in this regard; when he was advised of the plans; when the final decision will be taken on the proposed name change; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52605/18]

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

Hospital Groups

143. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health if the management at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda or the HSE engaged independent consultants to advise on a proposed name change and rebranding for the hospital; the amount spent to date on the initiative; if the hospital plans to broaden the consultation process to include the wider community in the Drogheda area; when the consultation process will conclude; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52606/18]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

144. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be provided with medical treatment either here or abroad; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52607/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): While the Deputy may be aware that I am unable to comment on the specific care of an individual, I would like to update the Deputy on progress of a number of important system actions to address the safety and effectiveness of mesh implant use on foot of the release of the Report, entitled The Use of Uro-gynaecological Mesh in Surgical Procedures, which was published on the 21 November 2018 on the Department of Health website.

A Synthetic Mesh Devices Advisory Group has been convened by the National Women and Infant Health Programme which includes three patient representatives, and representatives of stakeholder organisations to advise on and progress all the recommendations. 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. 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. 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.

The Department has written 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.

Long-Term Illness Scheme Eligibility

145. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Health the entitlements of persons qualifying for the long-term illness scheme; if provision is made for persons within this category to be included in vocational training opportunities and employment schemes; and the circumstances in which persons qualifying under the scheme could be deemed eligible for workplace programmes and training courses on which they do not receive a social welfare payment. [52616/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Long Term Illness (LTI) Scheme was established under Section 59(3) of the Health Act 1970 (as amended). The conditions covered by the LTI are: acute leukaemia; mental handicap; cerebral palsy; mental illness (in a person under 16); cystic fibrosis; multiple sclerosis; diabetes insipidus; muscular dystrophies; diabetes mellitus; parkinsonism; epilepsy; phenylketonuria; haemophilia; spina bifida; hydrocephalus; and conditions arising from the use of Thalidomide. Under the LTI Scheme, patients may receive drugs, medicines and medical and surgical appliances directly related to the treatment of their illness, free of charge.

Eligibility under the scheme does not entitle a person to vocational training opportunities or employment schemes.

Public Procurement Regulations

146. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health if section 38 or section 39 health organisations have an obligation to follow State procurement policies or guidelines; if obligations regarding procurement policies are outlined in the service level agreement with such organisations; his views on the fact that public money is being spent on procurements that have not followed public sector procurement guidelines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52620/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Most works and related services contracts awarded by a private entity, which are subsidised 50% or more by a public body, are covered by the EU Directives if they exceed the EU thresholds. Contracts below the EU thresholds which are funded or part-funded from public funds, awarded by private sector entities, should, as far as possible, be awarded in accordance with the national guidelines.

My Department does not enter into contracts with section 38 or section 39 organisations.

The HSE has established a framework of governance over funded organisations including a requirement for those organisations to sign a service level agreement or a grant aid agreement depending on the level of grant funding being provided. Agencies in receipt of funding in excess of €250,000 are subject to a service level agreement and agencies in receipt of funding less than €250,000 are subject to a grant aid agreement.

Since the details contained in those service arrangements and conditions set regarding the services in question are a matter for the HSE, I have referred this PQ to the HSE for direct reply.

Health Services Funding

147. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the number of section 38 health organisations that are availing of public funds; the amount each is receiving in 2018; the amount each received in each of the years since 2014; the number of section 39 health organisations that are availing of public funds; the amount each is receiving in 2018; the amount of same provided in each year since 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52621/18]

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

Health and Social Care Professionals Registration Boards

148. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Health the accreditation system in place for the registration of occupational therapists; when same became operative; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52625/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Occupational therapists are one of several professions regulated by Ireland's multi-profession regulator, CORU. CORU was set up under the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005 and is made up of the Health and Social Care Professionals Council and Registration Boards for the professions named in the Act.

The Occupational Therapists Registration Board was established on 14 February 2013 and their register opened on 31 March 2015. The Board has responsibility for establishing and maintaining the register of members for that profession, approving and monitoring education and training programmes for entry to the register, establishing the Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics and standards of performance to which occupational therapists must adhere and recognising qualifications gained outside the State. Registration is now mandatory for all practising occupational therapists in Ireland and the professional title of occupational therapist is protected under Irish law.

National Maternity Hospital Location

149. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health if he will report on the relocation of the national maternity hospital to St. Vincent's University Hospital; the timeframe for same; the issues arising with regard to ownership; if religious ethos will not be a factor in clinical practice in the hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52632/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have been quite clear that care in the new maternity hospital on the St. Vincent's University Hospital campus will be delivered without religious, ethnic or other distinction and as such any medical procedure which is in accordance with the laws of the land will be carried out there.

Considerable work has been undertaken to develop a legal framework to protect the State's significant investment in the new hospital and to ensure that the new hospital building will remain in State ownership. This legal framework will also underpin the operational and clinical independence of the new hospital. The proposals will require consideration by Government, the National Maternity Hospital and the St Vincent's Healthcare Group before they are finalised.

National Maternity Strategy

150. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health if he will report on the relocation of the Rotunda Hospital to Connolly hospital; the timeframe for same; the issues arising with regard to ownership; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52633/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The model of stand-alone maternity hospitals is not the norm internationally. In line with the National Maternity Strategy, Government policy is to co-locate all remaining maternity hospitals with adult acute services in order to provide optimal clinical outcomes. Co-location of maternity services with adult services provides mothers with access to a full range of medical and support services should the need arise. The availability of these services helps ensure the delivery of an optimum, safe service, particularly for high risk mothers and babies.

Project Ireland 2040 and the National Development Plan 2018-2027 provide capital funding to support implementation of the Maternity Strategy, including the relocation of the Rotunda. I have been advised that the Rotunda hospital has prepared a Design Brief for the new facility. In addition, a Development Control Plan for the Connolly campus has been commissioned to support the orderly development of future capital projects on that campus, including the Maternity Hospital. As the project is at an early development stage, it would be premature to provide any indicative time frames for completion at this point.

HSE Waiting Lists

151. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the number of children under 18 years of age in each LHO area waiting for a podiatry appointment in primary care; and the number waiting zero to 12, 12 to 26, 26 to 52 and more than 52 weeks, respectively. [52637/18]

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.

HSE Waiting Lists

152. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the number of children under 18 years of age in each LHO area waiting for an ophthalmology appointment in primary care; and the number waiting zero to 12, 12 to 26, 26 to 52 and more than 52 weeks, respectively. [52638/18]

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.

HSE Waiting Lists

153. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the number of children under 18 years of age in each LHO area waiting for an audiology appointment in primary care; and the number waiting zero to 12, 12 to 26, 26 to 52 and more than 52 weeks, respectively [52639/18]

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.

HSE Waiting Lists

154. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the number of children under 18 years of age in each LHO area waiting for a dietetics appointment in primary care; and the number waiting zero to 12, 12 to 26, 26 to 52 and more than 52 weeks, respectively. [52640/18]

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.

HSE Waiting Lists

155. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the number of children under 18 years of age in each LHO area waiting for an oral health appointment in primary care; and the number waiting zero to 12, 12 to 26, 26 to 52 and more than 52 weeks, respectively. [52641/18]

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.

HSE Waiting Lists

156. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of children waiting for assessment by early intervention teams in each LHO area and in CHO 7; and the number waiting zero to three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12, 12 to 18, 18 to 24 and more than 24 months, respectively. [52642/18]

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

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

Medical Card Applications

157. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when arrangements will be made to issue a full medical card in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52654/18]

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

Health Services Provision

158. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when diagnosis and treatment will be offered in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52657/18]

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 Eligibility

159. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the position in regard to the determination of eligibility for a medical card in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52662/18]

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

Health Services Provision

160. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 515 of 12 July 2018, if a programme of diagnostics and treatment has been put in place in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52666/18]

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.

Agriculture Scheme Data

161. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of farmers in County Kerry waiting for BPS and ANC payments for 2018 to issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52492/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Payments under the 2018 Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) scheme commenced on the 17 September. A total of 7,630 applications were received from farmers in County Kerry who hold eligible designated ANC lands. To date a total of 6,888 of these applications have been paid and payments are continuing to issue on a weekly basis. It is not possible at this point to accurately ascertain the number of the remaining applicants who will be paid under the scheme. In particular, this is due to the fact that individual farmers who have yet to meet their stocking density requirements may or may not do so by the end of the year depending on their farming practice/decisions.

In relation to the 2018 BPS, payments commenced on schedule on the 16 of October and balancing payments also commenced at the start of December. There are currently 7,561 applications in county Kerry, of which 7,435 are paid.

Twice weekly pay runs will take place to ensure any of these cases that become clear for payment are paid as quickly as possible. In cases where material required in response to queries from my Department is outstanding, I would urge farmers to respond to any outstanding queries at their earliest convenience.

Harbour Fees

162. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when the review of the 2012 harbour charges order will be available for public consultation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52515/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department owns, manages and maintains the six State-owned Fishery Harbour Centres, located at Castletownbere, Dingle, Dunmore East, Howth, Killybegs and Ros An Mhíl. At present, the Fishery Harbour Centres (Rates and Charges) Order 2012 (S.I. No. 214 of 2012), which came into effect on the 1st July 2012, sets out the fee schedule applicable at the six Fishery Harbour Centres.

My Department is currently undertaking a review of the 2012 Order and expects to engage in a Public Consultation on the matter in early 2019 as part of the review process.

Statutory Instruments

163. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he has taken since May 2018 when the serious fishing infringement statutory instrument was rescinded by Dáil Éireann; if he will provide a detailed report on the interested parties which he has met with since May 2018 on this matter; the discussions he has held; the persons and or bodies he held discussions with in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52527/18]

164. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will compile a report on the status of the of the alternative statutory instrument forwarded to him and all other Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas by this Deputy following the rescinding of the statutory instrument concerning serious fishing infringements by Dáil Éireann in May 2018; the various steps he has taken on each occasion that this Deputy placed a parliamentary question on the matter since the vote to rescind the statutory instrument; the reason he has failed to engage with other political parties since the vote was taken by Dáil Éireann; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52528/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 163 and 164 together.

As the Deputy is aware, on 20th March 2018 I signed into force the European Union (Common Fisheries Policy) (Point System) Regulations 2018, S.I. No. 89 of 2018. However, S.I. No 89 was annulled by Dail Eireann on 29 May 2018.

I am at present considering, with my legal advisors, next steps following that annulment. I expect legal advice to be to hand in the near future and once it has been fully considered, I will

determine next steps in this matter. In that regard, I asked my officials to examine the proposed amendments submitted by the Deputy and I have asked for legal advice on possible amendments to inform my consideration.

As the Deputy may be aware, S.I. No. 89 adopted the requirements of Article 92 of Council Regulation (EC) No. 1224/2009 and Title VII of Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) No. 404/2011 of 8 April 2011. It should be noted that both of these EU regulations went through the ordinary legislative procedure at EU level which would have included widespread consultation with interested parties including the Member States, Advisory Councils, NGOs and the fishing Industry. The matter has also been discussed at industry liaison meetings over the years. The EU regulations on this matter are highly prescriptive in relation to licence holders, leaving little room for further negotiation.

Fishing Vessel Licences

165. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of hours expended by senior officials in his Department both at national and EU level to secure a licence for a boat (details supplied) in the period 1999 to 2005; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52540/18]

166. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of temporary fishing licences issued for a boat (details supplied) until a permanent licence was secured; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52541/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 165 and 166 together.

The Atlantic Dawn Company applied to introduce the MFV “Atlantic Dawn” SO914 into the Irish fleet under EU rules as set out in Council Decision 413/97 (1997 – 2002) concerning the management of the capacity of European fishing fleets.

The MFV Atlantic Dawn entered the Irish fishing fleet in August, 2000. The vessel operated on a succession of 11 short term fishing boat licences (August 2000 – March 2002) pending resolution of certain issues with the European Commission. At that time the vessel was precluded from fishing in E.U. waters under the terms of its short term licences and during this period operated in Mauritanian waters under a private agreement between the vessel owner and the Mauritanian authorities.

In January 2002 the Commission adopted a formal decision approving the licensing and registration of the Atlantic Dawn vessel to fish in E.U. waters.

Departmental staff carried out its normal official functions in regard to this application. The Department does not record the number of hours expended on this or any other application.

Fishing Vessel Safety

167. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the hardship schemes in place from 2005 to 2008 and 2008 to 2013 to support fishermen under financial pressure or with fishing boats which did not meet the required safety standards at that time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52542/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Depart-

ment did not implement any hardship schemes as described in the Deputy's question. However, during the years in question, Bord Iascaigh Mhara implemented a Fleet Safety Scheme, which provided grants to the owners of fishing vessels to improve the safety of the vessel and crew, including for the purposes of meeting National and European Union safety standards. Details of the grants awarded by BIM under the Scheme are presented in tabular form in the BIM Annual Reports for the years concerned, which are available at the following link:

<http://www.bim.ie/our-publications/corporate-&-other-reports/>.

A Salmon Hardship Scheme was implemented by BIM on behalf of the then Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources. The Scheme was introduced following a decision in 2006 to cease, for conservation reasons, the commercial salmon mixed stock fishery in the sea. In excess of €25 million was allocated to the scheme to facilitate payments to fishermen with a further €5 million provided for community development projects. Under the Scheme, fishermen active in the fishery could opt to voluntarily cease fishing in the commercial drift net and draft net sectors and undertake not to seek a licence in the future. Payments to individuals were based on verifiable track record and recorded catches in the five years prior to its introduction. The average payment under the Scheme was almost €23,000. The Scheme closed for applications on 31 December 2007 and ceased in 2008 and all funds were expended.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Eligibility

168. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason the area of Stonehouse, Kilmeaden, County Waterford, was not included in the review of areas qualifying for payment under the areas of natural constraint scheme; the criteria used to determine these areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52550/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Under the current Rural Development Regulation (and subsequent amendments under the Omnibus Regulation) Member States are required to change the approach to the designation of land under the Areas of Natural Constraints Scheme. To date my Department had been identifying eligible areas using a range of socio economic indicators such as family farm income, population density, percentage of working population engaged in agriculture, and stocking density.

From 2019, eligible areas must instead be designated using the following list of bio-physical criteria:

- Low temperature
- Dryness
- Excess soil moisture
- Limited soil drainage
- Unfavourable texture and stoniness
- Shallow rooting depth
- Poor chemical properties
- Steep slope

This process has now been completed and in recent weeks I have published details in rela-

tion to the outcome and have completed a series of consultation meetings with key stakeholders.

The townland in question has not met the thresholds set out in the EU Regulations in relation to the above bio-physical criteria. In such cases, it is also possible for townlands to be deemed eligible as “areas of specific constraint”. In Ireland’s case, we have agreed an approach with the EU Commission to identifying such areas by reference to criteria pertaining to areas of specific environmental importance, townlands facing structural issues relating to farm size and farm fragmentation, and townlands facing constraints relating to the level of permanent grassland cover and field size. The townland in question did not, however, satisfy any of the thresholds in this regard.

For any farmer who wishes to appeal the status of a particular townland in the 2019 ANC scheme, an independently chaired appeals process is available. Should a farmer wish to make such an appeal, my Department will provide full information in relation to the data underpinning the status of the townland in order that an appeal can be based on full information. My Department is currently writing to impacted farmers and this letter includes a form to instigate an appeal. The appeals form is also available on www.agriculture.gov.ie.

Animal Slaughtering Data

169. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the name and location of beef processors (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52570/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Carcase classification and carcase presentation controls in slaughter plants are carried out by a dedicated team of specialist staff in the Beef Carcase Classification Section within my Department.

To date in 2018 there have been 521 inspections carried out by inspectors across 32 slaughter plants and 44,332 carcasses have been inspected. A total of 19 carcasses were fined for non compliance with the EU reference carcase trimming specification. Under legislation (SI 363/2010), non-compliance with the carcase trim specification attracts a maximum on the spot fine of €200 per carcase.

It has been agreed that from the 1st January 2019, processors will introduce a payment to the farmer supplier to reflect any loss in each case where my Department applied a trim fine on a particular carcase. Such payment will be identified on the payment remittance docket, so that farmers will be aware of the penalty. In addition my Department has had a number of seminars to ensure the rules around trim are clearly understood and properly executed, and these have been well attended by plant personnel.

In addition, my department will publish the names of plants in which on the spot fines have been applied with effect from 1st January 2019. I also intend to publish the names of plants in which such fines were levied in 2018 and 2016 before year end, subject to the completion of a number of formalities.

Agriculture Scheme Appeals

170. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a directors review of an appeal decision will be completed in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52582/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Agriculture Appeals Office has confirmed that an appeal was received on 28 July 2016 from the person named. A decision was issued by an Appeals Officer to the appellant on 6 April 2017 following an oral hearing of the appeal and a full analysis of the case.

The request for a review of the Appeals Officer's decision was received by the Agriculture Appeals Office on 25 May 2017. The review of the Appeals Officer's decision will establish if the Appeals Officer made an error of fact or law in that decision. Every effort is being made to finalise the review as soon as possible.

Single Payment Scheme Payments

171. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when single farm payments for 2013 relating to a herd (details supplied) will be issued to the beneficiaries of the probate taken out in May 2014; the reason these payments have not been made to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52591/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): An application was submitted under the 2013 Single Payment Scheme (SPS) by the legal representatives of the estate of the named on person 30 April 2013. In January 2014, the legal representative of the above named estate died and the current owners of the herd number became the administrators of the estate.

Following the receipt of the necessary documentation, the entitlements were transferred to the current owners. All payments due issued for the scheme years from 2014 for both SPS and the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS). The 2013 payment did not issue at the time, primarily due to the difference between the date of the assignment of the herd number and the date of receipt of the SPS application. This matter has now been rectified.

The payment due for 2013 is expected to issue in the middle of January 2019.

An official from my Department has been in touch with the nominated contact for the herd number and has explained the circumstances of the case.

Farm Inspections

172. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if farm inspections were carried out on the farm of a person (details supplied) on 2 June and 16 November 2017 as part of an appeal process; the protocol that applies to such inspections; if there is an obligation on the part of his Department to notify the farmer prior to the inspection under the farmers' charter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52593/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Officials in my Department are required to carry out certain on-farm inspections to ensure compliance with EU Regulations governing farm payments under the Common Agricultural Policy. Land eligibility inspections are generally announced and the protocol on notification in the Farmers' Charter of Rights would apply. However, in certain circumstances inspection of individual land parcel(s) may be carried out as rapid field visits and this type of inspection is usually unannounced. In particular, inspections of commonage parcels associated with an application selected for inspection are normally inspected by means of rapid field visits and, as such, prior notification would generally not apply.

The 2017 Basic Payment and Area of Natural Constraints Schemes application of the person named was selected for a land eligibility inspection. Inspections of the commonage parcels associated with this application were carried out as rapid field visits on 31st May, 6th June and 8th June, 2017.

A further inspection of the non-commonage parcels in the application was carried out on 5th September 2017. For this inspection, the person named was notified in advance in accordance with the protocol the Farmers' Charter of Rights. At the end of the inspection the person named was informed in writing of the inspection findings, including findings on the previously inspected commonage parcels. The person named indicated that they would like a second opinion in relation to the lands being deemed ineligible. A further follow-up inspection was carried out on 16th November by two inspecting officers who were not involved in the initial inspection on the ground.

Live Exports

173. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the initiatives he plans to take to increase live exports in view of the oversupply of cattle available to meat factories that are unable or unwilling to provide a fair price to farmers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52609/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Live exports play a vital role in stimulating price competition and providing an alternative market outlet for farmers. Accessing and developing new markets is a priority for my Department, in line with the Food Wise theme of market development.

Live exports for 2018 (data to 10 November) amount to 238,514 head, compared to 179,269 in 2017, an increase of 33%, driven by increased exports to other EU markets, mainly Spain, the Netherlands and Italy.

Live exports to third countries have decreased this year, due in part to severe currency fluctuations in Turkey. Nevertheless, nearly 13, 000 head of cattle were exported to Turkey to date this year.

Live exports to Libya more than doubled (from 1,830 to 4,489) compared to 2017. At the end of November, my Department reached agreement with the Libyan authorities on new veterinary health certs for the export of breeding, fattening and slaughter cattle. Agreement was also reached on an increase in the age of cattle that can be exported to Libya, from 24 to 30 months.

Progress has also been made in discussions with the Egyptian authorities on amendments to existing export certificates for live exports.

My Department will continue to engage with third countries and to seek out new markets for live exports.

TAMS Eligibility

174. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if meal bins on dry stock farms will be made eligible for TAMS grants in view of the significant underspend under the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52610/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The expendi-

ture on TAMS II to date is €96.9m. Applications continue to be received and processed under the Scheme with over 2,000 applications submitted under the latest tranche that closed on 7 December last. It is expected that the budget of €395m for the period of the RDP will be fully spent.

The inclusion of additional items such as meal bins for all sectors including the dry stock sector can only be considered in the context of the overall budgetary position which is being closely monitored.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Eligibility

175. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the eligibility for the new ANC scheme will not delay payments in 2019; if the appeals process for farmers that are unhappy with their eligibility status will be put in place as soon as possible; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52611/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Under the current Rural Development Regulation (and subsequent amendments under the Omnibus Regulation) Member States are required to change the approach to the designation of land under the Areas of Natural Constraints Scheme. To date my Department had been identifying eligible areas using a range of socio economic indicators such as family farm income, population density, percentage of working population engaged in agriculture, and stocking density.

From 2019, eligible areas must instead be designated using the following list of bio-physical criteria:

- Low temperature
- Dryness
- Excess soil moisture
- Limited soil drainage
- Unfavourable texture and stoniness
- Shallow rooting depth
- Poor chemical properties
- Steep slope

This process has now been completed and in recent weeks I have published details in relation to the outcome and have completed a series of consultation meetings with key stakeholders.

The outcome of the review project can be summarised as follows. The vast majority of land that was eligible under the existing Scheme will remain eligible under the new approach. Some 700 townlands that would have previously been eligible are not eligible under the new designation. Farmers impacted financially by this change will receive a degressive phasing out payment in 2019 and 2020. Over 2,000 townlands will now be eligible under the new approach and will be eligible to receive a payment for the first time in 2019.

An independent appeals process is now being put in place for any farmers who wish to appeal the status of a particular townland following this process. Farmers who hold land in townlands that are no longer eligible in 2019 are being written to, and included in this letter is an

application form to begin the process of an appeal should they wish to take up this option. This form is also available on the Department's website. The appeals committee will be chaired independently, and will also have an independent technical expert on it. I have now announced the details of the membership of this Independent Appeals Committee.

It is intended to issue payments under the 2019 Scheme in line with the timelines set out in the EU Regulations.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Data

176. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of applicants and the amount paid to same for each scheme (details supplied) in 2018. [52623/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Under the 2018 Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) Scheme some 100,800 applicants hold eligible designated lands. However, not all these applicants will be eligible for payment. To date some 91,190 applicants have been paid a total of €219.2m under the 2018 ANC Scheme. Payments under the scheme are continuing on a weekly basis.

Balancing payments for BPS and Greening commenced on schedule on the 3rd of December with €1.15bn issuing to 121,200 farmers to date (98.5% of cases currently with entitlements). This includes €17 million that has been paid to participants under the Young Farmers Scheme. Regular pay runs will continue to take place to ensure that cases that become clear for payment are paid as quickly as possible.

Advance payments under the Sheep Welfare Scheme issued at the end of November at a rate of 85% with a total of €15.1 million paid to 18,600 participants.

Payments under the 2018 Beef Data and Genomics Programme are scheduled to commence shortly.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Eligibility

177. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if consideration will be given to ensuring that under the appeals process for the new areas that have been listed as eligible under the area of natural constraints that an island application can be considered and not one that is already contiguous in an existing ANC and can be facilitated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52624/18]

179. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans on the new areas to be considered eligible under area of natural constraints in relation to examining areas under the appeals system for new areas to be considered eligible under the area of natural constraints; his further plans to consider special areas of conservation in well documented flood plains to be the criteria for such inclusion rather than official man-made boundaries in respect of townlands and district electoral divisions which were made decades or centuries ago and which have no basis for areas of natural constraints or special areas of conservation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52653/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 177 and 179 together.

Under the current Rural Development Regulation (and subsequent amendments under the Omnibus Regulation) Member States are required to change the approach to the designation of land under the Areas of Natural Constraints Scheme. To date my Department had been identifying eligible areas using a range of socio economic indicators such as family farm income, population density, percentage of working population engaged in agriculture, and stocking density.

From 2019, eligible areas must instead be designated using the following list of bio-physical criteria:

- Low temperature
- Dryness
- Excess soil moisture
- Limited soil drainage
- Unfavourable texture and stoniness
- Shallow rooting depth
- Poor chemical properties
- Steep slope

It is a requirement of EU regulations that “compliance with those conditions shall be ensured at the level of local administrative units (LAU 2 level)”. In line with this requirement, designation was completed at townland level. In addition, the condition of proximity or the contiguous nature of a townland with reference to other eligible townlands is not set out in the relevant EU Regulation as a criterion for eligibility.

The designation process has now been completed and in recent weeks I have published details in relation to the outcome and have completed a series of consultation meetings with key stakeholders.

An independent appeals process is now in place for any farmers who wish to appeal the status of a particular townland following this process. Farmers who hold land in townlands that are no longer eligible in 2019 are being written to, and included in this letter is an application form to begin the process of an appeal should they wish to take up this option. This form is also available on the Department’s website. The appeals committee is chaired independently, and also has an independent technical expert.

Animal Slaughtering Standards

178. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the name and location of each beef processor that has broken EU trimming regulations regarding beef carcasses in each of the years 2015 to 2017 and to date in 2018. [52651/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Carcase classification and carcase presentation controls in slaughter plants are carried out by a dedicated team of specialist staff in the Beef Carcase Classification Section within my Department.

To date in 2018 there have been 521 inspections carried out by inspectors across 32 slaughter plants and 44,332 carcasses have been inspected. A total of 19 carcasses were fined for non compliance with the EU reference carcase trimming specification . Under legislation (SI 363/2010),

non-compliance with the carcass trim specification attracts a maximum on the spot fine of €200 per carcass.

It has been agreed that from the 1st January 2019, processors will introduce a payment to the farmer supplier to reflect any loss in each case where my Department applied a trim fine on a particular carcass. Such payment will be identified on the payment remittance docket, so that farmers will be aware of the penalty. In addition my Department has had a number of seminars to ensure the rules around trim are clearly understood and properly executed, and these have been well attended by plant personnel.

In addition, my department will publish the names of plants in which on the spot fines have been applied with effect from 1st January 2019. I also intend to publish the names of plants in which such fines were levied in 2018 and 2016 before year end, subject to the completion of a number of formalities.

Question No. 179 answered with Question No. 177.

Broadcast Advertising Standards Regulation

180. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the way in which State advertising is regulated in view of the disbanding of the strategic communications unit; the mechanisms and criteria used in selecting publications for same; the body charged with monitoring State and political advertising; and his plans to introduce regulation of political online advertising. [52506/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am responsible for Broadcasting Policy and my current role in relation to political advertising is limited to the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland's role in ensuring that Irish Radio and Television broadcasters comply with the prohibition on political advertising provided for in section 41(3) of the Broadcasting Act 2009. The Authority is a statutorily independent regulator established by the that Act and I have no role in relation to its operations.

The Deputy's question refers to a number of matters and policy areas which are outside my remit. I do not have responsibility for political advertising on any other medium other than those referred to above. Questions in relation to the procurement of State advertising services should be directed to the Office of Government Procurement.

In relation to the regulation of online political advertising, in March 2018 the Department of the Taoiseach established an interdepartmental group chaired by that Department on the security of the electoral process and disinformation. The other members of that group are the Departments of Housing, Planning and Local Government; Business, Enterprise and Innovation; Education and Skills; Justice and Equality; Defence; Foreign Affairs and Trade; and my own Department, along with the Defence Forces and An Garda Síochána.

The Group published its first report in July, which recommended that Government seek to regulate transparency in Online Political Advertising. The report noted that this should be pursued in the first instance through consultation with all stakeholders. The Department of the Taoiseach conducted a public consultation in recent months, which informed the organisation of the Open Policy Forum on the regulation of transparency in political advertising which was held on 6 December 2018.

The forum focussed on identifying and discussing possible policy solutions that respect the right to freedom of expression and relevant EU law while promoting the transparency necessary

in a democracy that will protect our electoral processes from hidden influences and disinformation.

The Interdepartmental group will now consider the submissions received to the public consultation, and the discussions which took place at the Forum.

Post Office Network

181. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if the Rural Independent Group motion passed in Dáil Éireann in November 2016 on the post office network will be enacted. [52522/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): An Post is a commercial State body with a mandate to deliver a postal delivery service and a viable post office network. The motion referred to by the Deputy recognised the commitment to protect the post office network in the Programme for a Partnership Government and called on the Government to undertake a number of actions to act on this commitment. The Programme for Government envisaged that An Post, the Irish League of Credit Unions and other interested stakeholders would be asked to investigate and propose a new model of community banking, such as the Kiwibank model in New Zealand. The Programme for Government also includes a commitment to investigate the German Sparkassen model for the development of local public banks.

A project team comprising officials from the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Department of Finance was established to progress this commitment. The final report was published by the Minister for Finance and Minister for Rural and Community Development on 4 July 2018. The final report indicates that the Department of Finance will continue to engage in dialogue with Irish Rural Link and other stakeholders and that it will commission an independent external evaluation of ways in which the local public banking concept could possibly be promoted in Ireland. The Department of Rural and Community Development will continue to focus on rural and regional development generally and will provide a coordinating role across Government in relation to this priority area.

As a result of the actions taken by Government, An Post has been able to construct and begin implementing a strategic plan for a sustainable future. Government remains fully committed to a sustainable post office network which is a key piece of economic and social infrastructure for both rural and urban areas. Reflecting its commitment to sustaining a nationwide post office network and daily mails service, the Government made €30m available in State funding to An Post to support the renewal of the post office network and the continued fulfilment of a 5 day per week mails delivery service.

There is widespread acceptance that the post office network requires modernisation to build, maintain and protect a service that meets the needs of communities across the country. Investment by An Post of €50 million in the network is about getting communities to use the enhanced services in their local post office.

An Post is already in the process of diversifying and growing the financial services products it provides for individuals and SMEs to include loans, credit cards and more foreign exchange products; local banking in association with the major banks and a full range of State Savings products. In addition, a partnership with Avantcard announced in September will see personal loan services available in every post office across the country.

Electric Vehicles

182. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if e-car charge points will be installed at a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52569/18]

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. An interactive map showing the locations of charging points throughout Ireland is available at <https://www.esb.ie/our-businesses/ecars/charge-point-map>.

Currently, there are public chargers available at 15 locations in Co. Kerry. 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 grant of up to €600 was introduced to support the installation of electric vehicle home chargers. Charging at home is the primary method of charging for the majority of electric vehicles both internationally and in Ireland. In addition, my Department, in conjunction with the SEAI, is also working on how best to support the provision of greater levels of on-street public charging. Funding for public charging in local communities can also be accessed through the Better Energy Communities Scheme. The scheme, which is administered by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI), supports community based partnerships to improve the energy efficiency of homes, businesses and community facilities in a local area. I announced the successful projects under the first Call for Applications Assessment Stage under the Climate Action Fund on 28 November. I am delighted to have approved funding of up to €10 million to a project from ESB eCars that will develop a nationwide, state-of-the-art electric vehicle charging network capable of facilitating large-scale electric vehicle uptake over the next decade. Further details on this project, and the other projects approved from the fund, are available on my Department's website at www.dccae.gov.ie.

Renewable Heat Incentive

183. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the position regarding the opening of the second phase of the renewable heat support scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52603/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Support Scheme for Renewable Heat (SSRH) has been developed to financially support the adoption of renewable heating systems by commercial, industrial, agricultural, district heating and other non-domestic heat users not covered by the EU Emissions Trading System. Under Project Ireland 2040, the National Development Plan published earlier this year sets out an allocation of €300 million for the roll-out of the scheme for the period 2018 to 2027. The first phase of the scheme, an installation grant for heat pumps, opened for applications on 12 September 2018. This phase of the scheme will support ground, air and water source electric heat pump installations providing grant-aid of up to 30% of the installation cost. The first phase of the scheme was implemented under the State aid General Block Exemption Regulation (GBER) and did not require prior approval from the European Commission.

The second phase of the scheme, an operational support for biomass boilers and anaerobic

digestion heating systems, cannot be accommodated within the provisions of the GBER and, therefore, must follow the full State aid notification process. It is intended to open the second phase of the SSRH for applications early in the new year, subject to the state aid process. My Department is engaging with the European Commission in order to obtain this approval.

The Scheme Overview is available on my Department's website at the following link:

<https://www.dccae.gov.ie/documents/Scheme%20for%20Renewable%20Heat%20Scheme%20Overview.pdf>.

The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI), as scheme administrator of the SSRH, is currently finalising the detailed Terms and Conditions for the operational support element of the scheme.

In order to assist stakeholders, the SEAI has published a working draft of the Terms & Conditions for the Scheme on their website. This can be found at:

<https://www.seai.ie/resources/publications/Support-Scheme-Renewable-Heat-Draft-Terms-and-Conditions-.pdf>.

Post Office Network

184. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the plans of An Post for mail centres nationally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52612/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): As Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, I have responsibility for the governance of An Post, ensuring the company is fully compliant with the 2016 Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies, as well as the governance functions included in the statutory framework underpinning An Post. Day to day operational matters, including decisions relating to the post office network and mail centres, are a matter for the Board and management of An Post.

Road Projects Status

185. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of plans for the upgrade of the N4 from Mullingar to Longford (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52494/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the planning, construction and improvement 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 your question to TII for a more detailed, direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Road Improvement Schemes

186. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of a funding application (details supplied) by Sligo County Council under the non-national safety scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52496/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of the relevant local authority in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from the Council's own resources supplemented by State road grants.

My Department has recently received 2019 Safety Improvement Works applications for funding from Sligo County Council which includes works on the footpath at Collooney to Ballysadare.

A response will issue to Sligo County Council when grant allocations have been finalised in January 2019.

Public Transport Initiatives

187. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the Royal Canal walkway and cycleway works will commence; the expected date for completion on the section from Castleknock to the boundary of Fingal County Council with Kildare County Council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52533/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The NTA has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area, including the Royal Canal cycleway and walkway.

Noting the NTA's responsibility for implementation of public transport in the Greater Dublin Area, 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.

Marine Casualty Investigations Board

188. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a copy of a report (details supplied) will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52534/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): MCIB published reports are available on their website @ <http://www.mcib.ie/reports.7.html>.

The MCIB is an independent body with its own funding provided for by the Oireachtas under Section 19 of the Act. The MCIB is independent of the Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport in the performance of its functions.

Public Service Vehicles

189. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the use of a service (details supplied) here; if an impact assessment or analysis has been

carried out by his Department or an agency under the remit of his Department on the merits or otherwise of it being permitted here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52600/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I understand the Deputy is referring to a company which provides limousine services in Ireland and which in other countries provides a ridesharing service. As you know, the NTA as Regulator of the small public service vehicle sector here has regulatory oversight of the limousine sector also, including the licensing of vehicles and drivers. The current regulatory regime is in place to protect the consumer and to help ensure personal safety. My view is that the regulation of ride-sharing services should also be determined in the context of these important objectives. While my Department keeps abreast of emerging technologies and is open to consider innovative initiatives, a full impact assessment as regards ridesharing has not been completed as yet.

Given their role as Regulator, I have also referred your question to the NTA for direct reply to you as regards any analysis or impact assessments they have undertaken. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

Roads Maintenance Funding

190. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to ensure that local authorities are notified at an early date of their roads allocations for 2019 in view of the fact that late notification causes problems in the design, procurement and commencement of roadworks programmes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52652/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of each local authority, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from local authorities' own resources supplemented by State road grants.

The regional and local road grant allocations, which are finalised following the publication of the Revised Estimates Volume and take into account the expenditure outturn on projects and programmes in the preceding year, are notified to local authorities as early as possible in January.

Child and Family Agency Funding

191. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to increase Tusla's partial funding to a charity (details supplied); if her attention has been drawn to the fact that the caseload of the organisation has almost trebled since 2012 while Tusla funding has decreased by 16% over the same period; if she will meet with the organisation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52538/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, administers funding through its Counselling Grants Scheme to voluntary organisations offering marriage/relationship counselling, child counselling, rainbows peer support and bereavement counselling and support.

It should be noted that the allocation of funding within the Counselling Grants Scheme is an operational matter for Tusla. I have no role in the allocation of funding to individual centres.

In 2018, Tusla allocated €6.155m in funding to organisations under its Counselling Grants Scheme. Tusla has advised me that it provides annual funding of €82,389 to the organisation

to which the Deputy refers. The purpose of this funding is to provide information, support and counselling to bereaved parents.

Due to overall budget cuts, all community and voluntary organisations experienced funding reductions between 2012 and 2016. However, Tusla has maintained the same level of funding to this organisation since 2016.

Tusla no longer provides funding to this organisation to maintain the National Paediatric Register. In 2017, the Register transferred to Temple Street Children's University Hospital.

Tusla is committed to working with service providers throughout the country to ensure services are available to vulnerable children and families. As part of its commissioning approach, Tusla continuously seeks to assign resources to areas of greatest need, ensuring the best possible outcomes.

I highly value the work of Tusla and its partner organisations in the provision of child and family services nationwide.

Care Orders

192. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of emergency and interim care orders that have been sought and implemented by Tusla; the county in which they were enforced; the ages of the children involved; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52629/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I have requested information from Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. I will forward the reply to the Deputy once I have been furnished with this information.

Child Poverty

193. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she is satisfied the targets for the reduction of consistent child poverty are ambitious enough; the reason there is no explicit strategy to eliminate consistent child poverty within a set timeframe; the specific reason targets on reducing child poverty are unlikely to be met; the cohorts of children in poverty that have been least impacted by her strategy to date; and the way in which she is seeking to progress the target in relation to same. [52630/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I have a strong personal commitment to reducing child poverty. This is a key political priority for me and the Government. The Taoiseach has described tackling child poverty as a moral imperative and this is an issue that needs to be addressed urgently. Under the Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures National Policy Framework for Children and Young People (2014-2020), my Department and other relevant Departments, are taking a whole-of-government approach to tackling child poverty.

The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection has the lead role in coordinating government strategies on child poverty. It also has lead responsibility for the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion and has identified child poverty as a key cross-sectoral priority to be addressed. My officials are working closely with that Department on this important issue.

In recognition of the higher risks and life-long consequences of child poverty, the Govern-

ment set a child-specific poverty target in Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures to reduce consistent child poverty by at least two-thirds on 2011 levels by 2020.

When we set ourselves this target in 2014, it was a challenging ambition. It aimed to lift 70,000 children out of poverty by 2020. The baseline target against 2011 means that today we need to lift 102,000 children out of consistent poverty by 2020.

Consistent poverty means that these children are living in households with incomes below 60% of the national average income and experience deprivation according to official Government indicators. Consistent poverty involves a diverse cohort of children and it is an issue that we are determined to resolve.

We have made some modest progress. From a peak of 152,000 children in consistent poverty in 2014, we have seen a 9% decrease in 2015 of 13,680 children in consistent poverty. This downward trend continued with an 11.1% rate of consistent poverty in 2016, a further reduction of 6,320 or 4.5%, with a total of 132,000 children deemed to be in a consistent poverty. I understand that updated child poverty data (Survey on Income and Living Conditions data) for 2017 will be released by the Central Statistics Office next Monday, 17th December.

It is clear that the target to reduce child poverty by more than 100,000 children, or two thirds of the 2011 rate, is unlikely to be met. However, there is nothing inevitable about child poverty, and there is clear evidence about what works in terms of reducing child poverty rates. Ireland's historical approach to tackling child poverty has focused on cash transfers, and this approach has resulted in Ireland consistently ranking as one of the top performing EU countries in the poverty reduction effect of social transfers.

The paper on the Whole-of-Government Approach to Tackling Child Poverty, which was published in October 2017, outlines six key priorities including;

- Providing universal access to GP care for under 18s
- Reducing the cost of education
- Housing
- Affordable childcare
- Labour activation
- Provision of in-work benefits.

These priority actions are being advanced by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, the Department of Health, the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government and the Department of Education and Skills, through the Better Outcomes, Brighter Future implementation structures. While the targets are increasingly challenging, we will continue our work across government on these priority actions to try to ensure that those most impacted by child poverty experience real and positive progress.

Youth Services Funding

194. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which her Department continues to support a group (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52672/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department administers a range of funding schemes and programmes to support the provision of youth services to young people throughout the country including those from disadvantaged communities. The funding schemes support national and local youth work involving approximately 1,400 youth work staff working in youth services and communities throughout the country.

The overall budget for the youth sector in 2018 is € 58.9m in current expenditure, an increase of €7m in the youth funding provided in 2016. The additional funding is being used for programmes that target disadvantaged young people and to assist national youth organisations in their work to support local voluntary youth services.

In 2018, an amount of €539,282 was allocated for the projects and services under Kildare Youth Services, which operates under Youth Work Ireland. My Department provides funding to Kildare Youth Services under the Special Projects for Youth Scheme in respect of six local youth projects in Athy, Naas, Leixlip, Newbridge, the Curragh and Kildare town and a Youth Information Centre in Naas.

Cyberbullying Issues

195. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the ongoing efforts by her Department to counteract Internet bullying in respect of children and young adults outside of an educational environment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52673/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I am conscious of the issue referred to by the Deputy. The internet is an increasingly valuable resource for everyone, including children and young people, but it also exposes people to new risks including cyberbullying.

A range of Government Departments and agencies have a role in relation to internet safety both inside and outside of educational environments. In recognition of the whole of government approach required, in July 2018, the Taoiseach launched the Action Plan for Online Safety 2018-19. The Action Plan involves a wide range of actions, across six Government Departments - Departments of Communications, Climate Action and Environment; Education and Skills; Justice and Equality; Children and Youth Affairs; Health and Business Enterprise and Innovation, recognising that online safety is not the responsibility of any one Department and signifying the range and breadth of the issues involved. A Sponsors Group, involving the six Departments and chaired by the Department of Education & Skills, has been established to drive implementation of the Action Plan.

Children First operates on the premise that it is the responsibility of everyone in society to keep children and young people safe from harm. This responsibility includes keeping children safe from harm online. As part of the Action Plan for Online Safety my Department has committed to amending the Children First Guidance to include a specific reference to the need to consider online safety in the completion of a Child Safeguarding Statement. An addendum to the guidance, clarifying the need to consider online safety in the preparation of risk assessments and Child Safeguarding Statements, is currently being finalised and will be published on my Department's website in the new year.

In addition, the Child and Family Agency - Tusla has revised its template for the completion of Child Safeguarding Statements to refer to the need to consider online risks to children if a service provides access to the internet.

Children in Care

196. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which adequate accommodation exists to the placement of children that may be at risk; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52674/18]

197. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of children deemed at risk in various forms of residential accommodation including fosterage or institutional care; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52675/18]

198. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the degree to which ongoing monitoring of children in various forms of care continue to be monitored with a view to ensuring the highest standards of protection, safety and accommodation apply; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52676/18]

202. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which adequate places remain available for children at risk and in need of residential care; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52680/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 196 to 198, inclusive, and 202 together.

Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, has a statutory duty under the Child Care Act 1991 to promote the welfare of children who are not receiving adequate care and protection, and if necessary, to receive a child into the care of the State.

The placement of children in care is governed by Regulations and National Standards. These provide for the welfare of the child, including their health, education, assessment of need, care planning, supervision of placement, contact with family, general care practices, care records, and safety precautions.

A range of accommodation is available to meet the needs of children at risk. Children and young people, depending on their identified needs, may be placed in foster care, either with relatives or general foster carers, in residential care, high support or special care or other placement types. The majority of children are placed in long term stable placements and currently over 92% of children are placed in foster care.

A key part of the social worker role is to ensure the quality and safety of the child's placement, and to meet with the child on a one to one basis on all visits. There are safeguards surrounding each child's care placement, whether foster or residential care and all placements are supervised by a professionally qualified social worker.

All foster care services and statutory residential centres are subject to inspection by the Health Information Quality Authority (HIQA). Private and voluntary residential centres are inspected by Tusla against National Standards. Inspection reports of children's residential centres, fostering services and child protection services are also reviewed and analysed by Department officials. The overview of these reports provides the Department with a level of assurance on the overall capacity of Tusla to identify and provide services to families and children who are at risk.

Foster care is the main form of alternative care for children in need of care and protection, and is the preferred option for children who cannot live with their parents or guardians. As of the 30 September 2018, of the children in care, 92% were in foster care nationally; there were 4,005 children in general foster care, 1,595 in relative care and 374 children were in a residen-

tial care placement, with the remaining children in other care placements appropriate to their assessed needs.

There are regular area recruitment campaigns to meet foster care demands. Fostering teams are responsible for the recruitment and assessment of foster carers. When an assessment is complete, a report is presented to the Foster Care Committee who decide whether or not to approve the applicant.

The recruitment and retention of an appropriate range of foster carers is part of Tusla's business plan. Tusla are particularly interested in recruiting foster carers with the skills required to look after children with complex needs, or from a range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

For children who cannot live either at home or in an alternative family environment such as foster care, there are a number of types of residential care settings that may be appropriate, of which secure care is one type.

A very small number of children (1.6%) are in other care placements. Such placements can include supported lodgings, at home under a care order, detention centre/prison, youth homeless facilities, other residential centres e.g. therapeutic, disability, residential assessment, designated mother and baby units.

It is a fact that sometimes 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.

Child Protection Services Provision

199. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which her Department remains in a position to quickly respond to complaints of children at risk with particular reference to the time taken to intervene; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52677/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, is the statutory body with responsibility for child protection in Ireland. If I, or my officials, become aware of a situation in which a child is at risk, that risk is communicated to Tusla as a matter of urgency.

If a child appears to be at risk of harm or neglect, concerns should be reported to Tusla. Anyone can report a concern about a child to Tusla, and information on how to do so is available on the Tusla website. If a child is at immediate risk or in danger, the Gardaí should be alerted without delay.

Tusla act immediately on notification of an immediate risk to a child. Children who are in a situation of immediate risk may initially be dealt with by An Garda Síochána or by Tusla, but in

the main both agencies work together in such cases. Tusla, when alerted to a child at immediate risk, for instance a young child left alone at home or abandoned, will contact AGS if the child needs to be removed from that situation.

Gardaí have specific powers under Section 12 of the Child Care Act to remove a child from a situation of danger, and under Section 13 of to deliver that child into the custody of Tusla. Tusla will at that point carry out an assessment to determine the child's needs. This may in some cases include applying for an Emergency Care Order. In all cases, a plan will be put in place to ensure that the child is safe from harm.

In relation to returning a child to accommodation from which they were removed, this may occur if the person who posed the risk is no longer there, or if a protective adult is in place.

Children in Care

200. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which adequate protection remains available to children exiting residential care facilities in the public or private sector; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52678/18]

201. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of children who have exited care facilities of various forms in the past three years; if adequate supports have been made available; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52679/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 200 and 201 together.

I can advise the Deputy that the most recent figures on the number of young people exiting care is published in the Tusla Review of Adequacy, which covers the three-year period of 2014-2016. The table below refers:

Care Type	2014	2015	2016
Returned home/with family	1,140	959	677
Remained with foster carers	115	267	330
Independent living	22	42	47
Supported lodgings	7	50	13
Other	76	102	157
Total	1,360	1,420	1,224

The figures above show that between 1200 and 1400 (approximately) children left care in each of the three years 2014 to 2017. Around 500 of these children left State care by virtue of reaching their majority. As illustrated above, 330 young adult remained with their former foster carers on leaving care. Ninety two percent of the total number of children in care are placed with foster carers while the majority of those in residential care are aged between 12 and 17 years.

Where a young person under 18 is remaining in care, and is moving from residential care to another type of care placement, Tusla take steps to ensure that this transition takes place in a planned way. The young person's Care Plan is reviewed and updated as necessary, and the young person's social worker works with service providers to ensure that the transition is as minimally disruptive as possible. The views of the young person are taken into consideration,

in keeping with their age and level of understanding.

Young people turning 18 and leaving care have an aftercare plan prepared which outlines supports they may need. Aftercare workers engage with young adults leaving care to support them access these supports and to help them in their transitioning to adulthood.

Children who return home from a residential placement, either by way of a Care Plan outcome or as directed by the Courts, will have an allocated social worker to supervise their care and safety. In some instances a Supervision Order may be granted by the Courts to support this process.

Tusla provides equal supports to children in residential care, irrespective of the ownership or management of the residential centre in which they are placed.

Question No. 202 answered with Question No. 196.

Unaccompanied Minors and Separated Children

203. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the degree to which support services and accommodation remains available for undocumented and refugee children; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52681/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Child Care Act, 1991 applies to all children resident in the State irrespective of their immigration status. Under the Child Care Act, 1991 and the Child and Family Agency Act 2013, Tusla has a duty to promote the welfare of children who are not receiving adequate care or protection. The Agency is obliged to provide care for these children for as long as their welfare requires it.

When a child who is undocumented and living with his or her parent or guardian is taken into care, their needs are given priority. A social worker is assigned to the child and prepares a care plan, in consultation with the child. The plan should be dynamic and formally reviewed regularly. Intrinsic to this process is ensuring that the voice and best interest of the child are central. When outlined in the care plan, Tusla will assist the child with the process of establishing residency.

Unaccompanied asylum seeking children who seek the assistance of the State are placed in the statutory care of Tusla. Their needs are assessed by an allocated a social worker from a specialist team who work exclusively with unaccompanied minors. They receive appropriate educational, social, medical and counselling support.

Children who, with their parents, live in Direct Provision, are provided with welfare supports as required. Tusla have seconded an experienced social worker to the Department of Justice and Equality to liaise directly between Direct Provision and Tusla services.

Youth Services

204. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which she and bodies under the aegis of her Department maintain regular and adequate contact with the various youth groups throughout the country with particular reference to identifying their needs and taking on board their anticipated requirements; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52684/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Youth Officers of the 16 Education and Training Boards operating country wide provide an important support role to my Department in the co-ordination and administration of youth services at local level across the country. In order to keep my Department informed of their ongoing work, officials hold quarterly meetings attended by all Youth Officers from across the country. These meetings assist my Department in identifying service needs and emerging issues, particularly for vulnerable young people.

My Department also maintains close contact with the national youth organisations and my officials and I meet formally with these organisations twice a year to share knowledge and information on developments in the youth sector.

My Department works closely and meets regularly with the national and major regional youth organisations, including the National Youth Council of Ireland, which has a representative role for the voluntary youth services.

My Department also administers a range of funding schemes and programmes to support the provision of youth services to young people throughout the country including those from disadvantaged communities.

In 2018, €58.9 m has been allocated in current funding to support the provision of youth services.

In addition, I was pleased to approve the establishment the Capital Funding Scheme in 2018. The primary focus of this scheme is to provide small to medium capital grants to qualifying youth projects which are in receipt of funding from this Department. Some €2m has been made available nationally.

Counselling Services Provision

205. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which she envisages improved counselling services for children at risk and their families; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52685/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Under the Child and Family Agency Act, 2013, Tusla, the Child and Family Agency is required to support and promote the development, welfare and protection of children. Tusla provides funding to voluntary organisations offering a range of counselling, psychotherapy and support services to children and families including:

- Marriage and relationship counselling,
- Child counselling,
- Rainbows Peer Support Programme for children,
- Bereavement counselling and support on the death of a family member.

In 2018, Tusla is providing funding of approximately €6.155m to support organisations providing counselling services, the majority of which are voluntary. The funding provided by Tusla focuses on the development of support services in the community for families to enhance stability in family life and to assist children and families and their members in dealing with difficult periods in their lives.

Tusla's priority is to ensure that counselling services provide support and promote the development, welfare and protection of children and the effective functioning of families. Tusla has committed to formulating an overall plan for Tusla therapeutic services. In its examination of available services, Tusla is considering how best to deliver community-based therapeutic and counselling services.

In 2018, all counselling services funded by Tusla signed a new service level agreement which introduced comprehensive governance standards and included a provision to ensure accessibility of these services to all family types.

Mental health policy is under the remit of my colleague the Minister for Health, and Tusla works closely with other care providers including the Health Service Executive (HSE), in respect of access to child and adolescent mental health services.

Tusla will continue to work closely with service providers to support children and young people at risk and the effective functioning of families.

Youth Services Funding

206. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the reason County Meath has the lowest level of youth funding. [52812/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): As the Deputy is aware my Department administers a range of funding schemes and programmes to support the provision of youth services to young people throughout the country including those from disadvantaged communities and the total youth funding provided by my Department was €58.9m in 2018.

Budget 2019 provided an additional €1.5m in current funding to my Department to support the provision of youth services. This additional funding will be used for programmes that target disadvantaged young people. My Department has commenced a process with national organisations and local services to identify service development needs for 2019 and to finalise the 2019 allocations. Every effort will be made to complete this process as soon as possible.

In 2018, an amount of €143,026 was allocated for the targeted youth projects and services in County Meath, as follows:

Projects - Meath	2018 Grant
Youth Work Ireland	€95,242
Involve - Meath Youth Traveller Project (Navan)	€47,784
Total	€145,026

The Local Youth Club Grant Scheme supports youth work activities at a local level. In 2018, I provided an additional 13% in funding for this scheme, bringing the total allocation to €1.79m with an allocation of €111,464 to Louth Meath Education and Training Board.

In addition, in 2017 the Local Youth Club Equipment Scheme provided €6.35m funding nationally which included an allocation of over €431,000 to Louth Meath ETB. The primary focus of this scheme was to assist volunteer led clubs and groups that work with young people in communities throughout the country.

Youth Officers of the Education and Training Boards have an important support role to my

Department, in the administration and coordination of youth services at local level. In 2017 I provided additional funding to Louth and Meath Education and Training Board recruit a second youth officer during 2017.

Funding to these staff-led youth services has generally been targeted at areas of disadvantage and not in proportion to the youth population of each county. My Department completed an exercise with Pobal and each Education and Training Board which mapped youth service provision across the State.

Future development and investment in youth services will be informed by this mapping exercise in conjunction with area profiling and needs analysis surveys carried out by Education and Training Boards (ETB) which will develop a detailed social demographic profile in terms of both population numbers and deprivation levels. My Department is committed to working with Louth and Meath Education and Training Board to identify need and explore ways to address this need where it emerges.

Registration of Births

207. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her views on concerns raised by a person (details supplied) on the prescribed process regarding the registration of a newborn; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52549/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Section 22 of the Civil Registration Act 2004 provides for registration of births where the parents are not married to each other. Specifically, section 22(3) sets out how a person other than a husband may be registered as father of the child.

In this particular case section 23(3)(a) applies, as there is no decree of divorce, deed of nullity, or deed of separation. Under these provisions the husband must sign a statutory declaration rebutting paternity in order for the mother to avail of this provision.

Alternatively, it is open to the individual concerned to apply for a Court Order under Section 45 of the Status of Children Act 1987 naming the person other than the husband as the father of the child. Upon receipt of this court order, the birth will be registered with the named person as the father of the child in accordance with section 22(2)(d).

The individual concerned also raised questions in relation to the appropriateness of the current legislation. In this context I can inform the Deputy of the following, although it would not have any application in this case as the provisions are not retrospective:

Section 6 of the Civil Registration (Amendment) Act 2014 amends Section 22 to make it possible, in certain circumstances, for a person other than the mother's husband to be registered as the father of the child without any of the decrees, deeds or court order mentioned above. These provisions, however, remain to be commenced pending agreement from HSE to the roll-out of training to staff of the Civil Registration Service, who are employees of the HSE.

The General Register Office (GRO) is in a position to provide this training as soon as the HSE notifies it of the dates and venues. Work has been ongoing to progress this matter and as a result an advance party attended a session over the summer. It is not possible, at present, to indicate a date for the full roll out of training but it is hoped that this can be commenced shortly.

Officials from my Department, the GRO, the Department of Health, and the HSE are maintaining their best efforts to ensure that commencement of this legislation can be brought about

as soon as possible.

I will arrange for officials from my Department to contact the Deputy to follow up in relation to the circumstances outlined in this matter.

Rent Supplement Scheme Data

208. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons in County Kerry in receipt of rent allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52486/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): At the end of October there were 25,654 recipients of Rent Supplement nationally, of whom 825 were resident in Kerry.

At the same time, there were 71 recipients of a Rent Allowance payment nationally. This is an allowance payable to tenants of certain dwellings affected by the de-control of rents on 26 July 1982. I regret that a breakdown of this figure by county is not available.

Social Welfare Payments Administration

209. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the processing times for all applications under the remit of her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52489/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The information requested by the Deputy (where available) is detailed in the attached tabular statement.

Average time to award claims at the end of October 2018.

Scheme	Average Weeks to Award
State Pension (Contributory)	7
Widow(er)'s Contributory Pension	2
State Pension (Non-Contributory)	11
Jobseeker's Allowance	2
Jobseeker's Benefit	1
One-Parent Family Payment	4
Supplementary Welfare Allowance Basic	1
Maternity Benefit	6
Paternity Benefit	6
Carer's Allowance	17
Carer's Benefit	16
Disability Allowance	11
Invalidity Pension	6
Illness Benefit	N/avail*
Occupational Injury Benefit	N/avail*
Child Benefit	3

Scheme	Average Weeks to Award
Working Family Payment	6
Domiciliary Care Allowance	10
Household Benefits	1
Free Travel	2
Treatment Benefit	N/avail*

* Department will revert directly to the Deputy once this information has been compiled.

Carer's Benefit Applications

210. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a decision has been made on a review of a carer's allowance application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52512/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): It is a condition for receipt of Carer's Benefit (CARB) that the person being cared for must have such a disability that they require full-time care and attention.

This is defined as requiring from another person, continual supervision and frequent assistance throughout the day in connection with normal bodily functions or continual supervision in order to avoid danger to him or herself.

The application for CARB was disallowed on the grounds that the evidence submitted did not indicate that the requirement for full-time care was satisfied.

The person concerned requested a review of this decision and submitted additional evidence to support her claim which has now been accepted by the Department.

However, the person concerned is currently in receipt of Illness Benefit and this cannot be paid concurrently with CARB.

She was notified on 5 December 2018 that she will have to choose between the two payments. If she opts for CARB, she will have to submit a final certificate to the Illness Benefit section.

Once the person concerned notifies the Department of her choice, a decision made and she will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Eligibility

211. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the position on illness benefit certificates; if the majority of general practitioners are using the new forms; if general practitioners that used old forms and photocopies have received payment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52514/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Illness Benefit certificates continue to be processed as normal and payments made to eligible people. Following on from consultation with GPs it is expected that any agreement between the

GPs and the Department will cover all certification. The Deputy can be assured that the Department will continue to support and engage with GPs during the period of transition and operation of the new system.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits Payments

212. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason a person (details supplied) did not receive a Christmas bonus; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52523/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Christmas bonus for this customer has been processed and will be included in the payment that will be in the post office on the 18 December 2018.

I trust this clarifies the matter.

Carer's Allowance Eligibility

213. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of correspondence (details supplied) sent to her on carer's allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52535/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a child or an adult who has such a disability that as a result they require that level of care.

An increased payment can be made where full-time care is being provided to two people.

The legislation for CA states that a person shall be regarded as requiring full time care and attention where the person has such a disability that s/he requires -

- (a) continual supervision and frequent assistance in connection with normal bodily functions, or

- (b) continual supervision in order to avoid danger to himself/herself.

and is likely to require such full-time care and attention for at least 12 consecutive months.

The exact amount of hours or days for which care must be provided is not defined in legislation.

However, one of the tests to decide if full-time care and attention is being provided is whether the care given addresses the above issues.

The Department takes the view that full-time care and attention does not necessarily mean 24 hours in each day. Full-time care and attention can be considered to apply where there is an on-going and daily commitment by the carer and which also generally results in the carer not being able to support him/herself through normal full-time employment.

The care provided must be, in nature, more personal care than housekeeping assistance and

must match the level of care required by the care recipient.

The time spent giving care each week could also be regarded as being, at the very minimum, equivalent to the time that would be spent at a full-time job.

Generally, this is considered to be at least 35 hours per week.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Support Grant

214. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the decision to refuse a carer's support grant in the case of a person (details supplied) will be reviewed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52561/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Carer's Support Grant is an annual payment made to carers who look after certain people in need of full-time care and attention.

This application was refused, on 5th December 2018, on the grounds that the Deciding Officer was not satisfied that the person being cared for required this level of care. The customer was advised that the decision would be reviewed on receipt of any additional medical evidence. However, no such evidence has been received to date.

The customer was also advised of her right of appeal against this decision. An appeal must be received by the Social Welfare Appeals Office within 21 days of the date of decision.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Benefit Applications

215. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a decision will issue on a carer's benefit application by a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52568/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's benefit (CARB) is a PRSI based payment, made to a person 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.

Before a decision can be made on entitlement to CARB, evidence must be provided in respect of the care recipient's care requirement, the level of care the carer provides, the carer's hours of employment and their PRSI record.

An application for CARB was received from the person concerned on 19 September 2018.

Additional information in relation to the person's application was requested by a deciding officer on 11 December 2018.

Once the information is received the application will be processed without delay and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Appeals

216. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when the revised decision on the carer's allowance application by a person (details supplied) will be made and arrears issued; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52572/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a child or an adult who has such a disability that as a result they require that level of care.

An application for carer's allowance (CA) was received from the person concerned on 19 April 2018.

This application was disallowed on the grounds that the person concerned was engaged in employment outside the home in excess of 15 hours per week and also that they had failed to provide requested information that was required to determine if their means were below the statutory limit.

The person concerned requested a review of this decision and submitted additional evidence to support her claim and to show that she is no longer working in excess of 15 hours per week.

On this basis the person concerned was awarded CA from 13 September 2018. The first payment will issue to her nominated bank account on 20 December 2018.

Arrears of allowance due from 13 September 2018 to 19 December 2018 will also issue on 20 December 2018.

The person concerned was notified on 11 December 2018 of this revised decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Overpayments

217. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 214 of 15 November 2018, if the review referred to is now complete; if so, the result of same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52664/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The review referred to in Parliamentary Question No. 214 of 15 November 2018 is under-way. The person concerned has been contacted and has been asked to provide further information to an officer of my Department.

Pending the receipt of this information and finalisation of the review, the weekly recovery of €25 per week has been temporarily suspended.

I trust that this clarified the matter for the Deputy.

Jobseeker's Allowance Payments

218. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social

Protection the correct amount of jobseeker's allowance payable in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52667/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Deciding Officer has reviewed the circumstances of the person concerned. From the 12th December 2018 he will be in receipt of a Jobseekers Allowance payment of €213.90 per week. This is comprised of a personal rate of €198.00 and ½ rate child dependent rate of €15.90. Ar-rears have been approved.

This is the correct level of Jobseekers Allowance payable.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Rental Accommodation Scheme Data

219. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of persons on RAS tenancies in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52485/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) was introduced in 2005 to meet the accommodation needs of people in receipt of Rent Supplement for 18 months or longer, and who were assessed as having a long-term housing need.

A total of €134.3 million was allocated to support RAS in 2018 and this funding is going towards supporting 600 additional RAS tenancies nationally in 2018 and the ongoing cost of supporting continuing RAS contracts in place at the end of 2017. As of 30 September 2018, there were a total of 906 tenancies supported by RAS in County Kerry, and of this number, 45 were new transfers from Rent Supplement to RAS in the period 1 January to 30 September 2018.

Looking forward, as the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme continues to be rolled out nationally and replaces Rent Supplement completely for those with a long-term housing need, it is expected that the number of new transfers to RAS will reduce considerably.

RAS continues to be an effective and secure form of social housing support, and remains a significant part of the suite of options currently available to those who are assessed as being in need of social housing.

Housing Assistance Payment Data

220. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of persons on HAP tenancies in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52524/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme is a flexible and immediate housing support that is now available to all eligible households throughout the State. At the end of Q3 2018, there were more than 40,000 active tenancies in receipt of HAP support.

HAP commenced in County Kerry on 1 December 2016. At the end of Q3 2018, the total number of active HAP tenancies in Kerry County Council was 776.

Housing Adaptation Grant Data

221. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the level of funding provided to Cavan County Council in 2018 for the administration of the housing adaptation, the disabled persons grant and the mobility aids grant schemes; if his attention has been drawn to the need to increase the level of such grant aid in view of delays that occur in approving applications; if an increased level of funding will be provided in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52580/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): For 2018, I announced funding of €66.25m nationally for the Housing Adaptation Grants for Older People and People with a Disability. This included an allocation of €1,457,964 for Cavan County Council, comprising exchequer funding of €1,166,371 and €291,593 from the local authority. Following a request for increased funding, the Council was approved additional exchequer funding of €160,000, bringing their total exchequer allocation to €1,326,371, to which €331,592 will be added from the resources of the local authority. The Council has drawn down €1,143,436 exchequer funding to date from my Department this year.

Funding for these schemes has been increasing year on year since 2014 and in addition to a series of annual increases over recent years, my Department continues to work closely with local authorities throughout each year, to monitor spend and to achieve a full drawdown of the available funding. This allows any underspends to be redistributed to local authorities with high levels of grant activity who seek additional funding.

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

Housing Adaptation Grant Data

222. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the level of funding provided to Monaghan County Council in 2018 for the administration of the housing adaptation, the disabled persons grant and the mobility aids grant schemes; if his attention has been drawn to of the need to increase the level of such grant aid in view of delays that occur in approving applications; if an increased level of funding will be provided in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52581/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): For 2018, I announced funding of €66.25 million nationally for the Housing Adaptation Grants for Older People and People with a Disability. This included an allocation of €1,237,425 for Monaghan County Council, comprising exchequer funding of €989,940 and €247,485 from the local authority. Following a request for increased funding, the Council was approved additional exchequer funding of €487,013, bringing their total exchequer allocation to €1,476,953, to which €369,238 will be added from the resources of the local authority. The Council has now drawn down the full €1,476,953 of exchequer funding from my Department.

Funding for these schemes has been increasing year on year since 2014 and in addition to these annual increases, my Department continues to work closely with local authorities throughout each year, to monitor spend and to achieve a full drawdown of the available funding. This allows any underspends to be redistributed to local authorities with high levels of grant activity who seek additional funding.

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

Social and Affordable Housing Eligibility

223. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the review of income eligibility limits for social housing will be published; when the limits will be increased; if his attention has been drawn to the particular difficulties in areas such as in counties Cavan and Monaghan in which income limits are very low; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52583/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011 prescribe maximum net income limits for each local authority, in different bands according to the area concerned, with income being defined and assessed according to a standard Household Means Policy.

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

As part of the broader social housing reform agenda, a review of income eligibility for social housing supports in each local authority area, including Cavan and Monaghan, is underway. The Housing Agency is continuing to carry out the detailed statistical work, which will underpin this review on behalf of my Department.

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

Tenant Purchase Scheme Review

224. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to introduce amendments to the tenant purchase scheme; if tenants that were allocated council houses provided under Part V regulations can avail of the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52585/18]

227. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the review of the tenant purchase scheme; if same will be published before the end of 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52589/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 224 and 227 together.

The provisions of Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, are designed to enable the development of mixed tenure sustainable communities. Part V units are excluded from the Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme 2016 to ensure that units delivered

under this mechanism will remain available for people in need of social housing support and that the original policy goals of the legislation are not eroded over time. The continued development of mixed tenure communities remains very important in promoting social integration.

Local authorities may also, within the provisions of the Regulations, exclude certain houses which, in the opinion of the authority, should not be sold for reasons such as proper stock or estate management. It is a matter for each individual local authority to administer the Scheme in its operational area in line with the over-arching provisions of the governing legislation for the scheme, and in a manner appropriate to its housing requirements.

In line with the commitment given in Rebuilding Ireland, a review of the first 12 months of the Scheme's operation, including the issues referred to, has been undertaken. The review is now complete and a full report has been prepared setting out findings and recommendations.

I hope to be in a position to publish the review shortly, following completion of consideration of a number of implementation issues arising.

Local Authority Housing Funding

225. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the level of funding provided to Cavan County Council in 2018 for social housing programmes including construction, acquisition and upgrading of social housing; his plans to increase this level of funding for 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52587/18]

226. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the level of funding provided to Monaghan County Council in 2018 for social housing programmes including construction, acquisition and upgrading of social housing; his plans to increase this level of funding for 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52588/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 225 and 226 together.

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

There is no precise amount of funding notified to individual local authorities for their social housing programmes on an annual basis. Instead, my Department provides funding for individual projects as they are advanced by the authorities against their social housing delivery targets. Earlier this year, I wrote to all local authorities, including Cavan and Monaghan, setting out their individual social housing targets for 2018 across all delivery streams, including build, and details are available on the Rebuilding Ireland website at the following link:

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

The final position regarding the funding provided to Cavan and Monaghan County Council for 2018, will not be known until after the end of the year, when all project activity is completed

and validated.

In relation to funding to be provided for 2019 for housing activities in Cavan and Monaghan, this will once again relate directly to the level of projects that are advanced by the authorities against their social housing delivery targets. I will issue 2019 targets for all local authorities, including Cavan and Monaghan, in the new year based on the increased national social housing targets for 2019. An overall housing budget of almost €2.4 billion is available in 2019 to support delivery by local authorities and others against these targets. I look forward to their good progress and have assured them that the funding is in place and available to support their delivery.

Question No. 227 answered with Question No. 224.

Water Supply Contamination

228. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if a matter will be addressed regarding water supply in an area (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [52594/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Since 1 January 2014, Irish Water has statutory responsibility for all aspects of the planning, delivery and operation of public water and wastewater services at national, regional and local levels. As Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, I have no direct role in relation to the planning, delivery and operation of water and wastewater services, and I must respect the statutory authority that the Oireachtas has conferred on Irish Water in this regard.

I understand from my Department, which has made contact with Irish Water in relation to this issue, that Irish Water is taking steps to address public health and safety risks associated with the Glenderry water supply. Consequently, Irish Water plans to connect customers to the adjacent Ballyheigue public water supply. Irish Water is aware that customers may have concerns about the hardness of the water supplied from the Ballyheigue water supply; however, it should be noted that hard water poses no health risk to consumers.

I am advised that the Glenderry water supply, which has its treatment plant located in the school yard of the local national school, poses a significant health and safety risk.

The Deputy may wish to note that Irish Water has established a dedicated team to deal with representations and queries from public representatives. The team can be contacted via email to oireachtasmembers@water.ie or by telephone on a dedicated number, 1890 578 578.

Planning Guidelines

229. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he is satisfied that the new urban development and building heights guidelines for planning authorities under section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 will not lead to significant delays in the development of strategic development zones; if a regulatory impact assessment has been carried out to assess the potential impact of these guidelines in terms of planning delays and land pricing; and if SDZs were specifically assessed as part of this process. [52643/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): On 7 December 2018, I issued 'Urban Development and Building Height' Guidelines for Planning

Authorities and An Bord Pleanála, pursuant to Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended). Publication of the guidelines, which were called for widely in the wider planning and development sector, followed a period of public consultation and consideration of over 100 submissions and a thorough assessment by my Department.

The development of the guidelines specifically addressed their application to areas covered by Strategic Development Zone Planning Schemes, and therefore the SDZ aspects were fully considered. SDZs can be reviewed at any stage by their respective development agencies to reflect changing implementation and policy circumstances and development agencies frequently go through these review mechanisms.

Accordingly, I do not anticipate significant delays in SDZ implementation as a result of these guidelines which are also focused on securing the best strategic planning outcomes for generations to come as well as addressing issues of a more immediate nature.

The guidelines build upon the strategic policy framework set out in Project Ireland 2040 and the National Planning Framework. In particular the 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 copy of the Guidelines and associated Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Statement, are available on my Department's website at the following links:

Link 1 and Link 2

The SEA Statement has been prepared as part of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the Guidelines in accordance with the relevant national and EU legislation. This document provides information on the decision-making process and records how environmental considerations have been integrated into the Guidelines. Furthermore it summarises how the SEA environmental report and submissions and observations made by the public and designated statutory consultees have been taken into account during the preparation of the Guidelines.

In determining planning policy and making planning decisions around appropriate building heights, the planning process has to strike a careful balance between on the one hand enabling long-term and strategic development of relevant areas, while ensuring the highest standards of urban design, architectural quality and place-making outcomes on the other. I am satisfied that these guidelines are necessary and appropriate to give clear context and direction to the overall requirement to promote increased density and building height in appropriate locations within our urban centres.

Archaeological Sites

230. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the steps she is taking in conjunction with Westmeath County Council to designate part of the

Mayne high bog as a protected area due to its historical and archaeological significance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [52608/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): In line with general practice for peat extraction, a rolling series of survey work, investigation and excavations have been carried out at Mayne Bog over a number of years. In 2006, with the co-operation of the landowners, my Department commissioned a full survey of the then known togher (constructed of planks) followed by the excavation of a single cutting across the togher. During the course of this excavation, a second togher (of brushwood construction) was identified slightly to the north of the plank togher and running parallel to it. This was also fully surveyed and recorded.

In 2013, the landowners commissioned an environmental impact statement in connection with a peat extraction licence application to the Environmental Protection Agency. As part of the assessment process, the peatlands were fully examined by a qualified archaeological consultant and, aside from the plank togher, no further finds or features of archaeological significance were identified at that time.

In 2014, at my Department's request, another inspection was commissioned by the landowners to assess the status of both toghers. During 2015, and also at the request of my Department, the landowners commissioned a series of excavations which were carried out at three separate locations on both toghers.

In 2016, with the permission of the landowners, my Department commissioned an Induced Polarisation Survey (an advanced geophysical technique) to examine an area of high bog to the east of the open industrial bog at Mayne. This methodology was previously used successfully at Edercloon, County Longford, to identify wooden structures outside the road corridor where other parts of the structures were under excavation by the National Roads Authority. Due to the heavily waterlogged nature of the high bog at Mayne, the geophysical survey was inconclusive in tracking the togher into the higher peatlands. During 2017, my Department commissioned a further survey using metal probes inserted through the peat, as developed and employed successfully in research at Céide Fields in North Mayo. The survey successfully identified that the togher continues to the east from the edge of the high bog for a minimum distance of 200 metres at depths from the surface varying from 1 to 2.4 metres.

In the course of 2018 my Department licensed a further assessment by the landowners of the archaeological potential of the area of the bog that is subject to peat extraction. The fieldwork component of this project has been completed and under the conditions of the licence, the archaeologist is obliged to submit a report to the Department's National Monuments Service which will be shared with the local authority.

My Department also hopes to commission a further survey in 2019 of the area of Mayne Bog which has not been subject to peat extraction, with a view to further clarifying the location and state of preservation of the area of trackway in that part of the bog. The Department is and will continue to engage with all stakeholders, including the local authority and the landowners, to progress the preservation of the togher in the high bog.

I am satisfied that the measures being taken with regard to the protection of the toghers uncovered at Mayne represent the best approach to securing an optimal outcome. Unlike cases involving delivery of key infrastructure which are supported by the Codes of Practice agreed and in place between my Department and the various State utility providers, archeological discoveries arising from private development have to be dealt with on a case by case basis. In such instances the practice is to seek the co-operation of private landowners with the protection and recording of monuments in line, for example, with my Department's engagement with farmers

under Glas, the current agri-environmental scheme. Such engagement is undertaken in a collaborative and transparent manner and I am satisfied that it is proving to be the best mechanism for guaranteeing the survival of these monuments into the future.