

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 8, inclusive, answered orally.

Questions Nos. 9 to 39, inclusive, resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 40 to 49, inclusive, answered orally.

Urban Development

50. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will report on his recent statement on the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund. [50451/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The €2 billion Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) was launched as part of Project Ireland 2040, to support the compact growth and sustainable development of Ireland's five cities, regional drivers and other large urban centres.

A total of 189 applications were submitted to my Department under the first call for proposals. All submissions were assessed following a three stage process and against a 10 point pre-assigned assessment criteria framework. An initial appraisal process on all submissions was carried out within my Department, with preliminary recommendations being made to a Project Advisory Board (PAB) who provided high-level input and advice as applicable per category or proposal. Following this process, preliminary proposals were presented to a management committee who brought the final recommendations to me for consideration.

On 26 November 2018, I announced details of the 88 successful applicants for funding, details of which are published on my Department's website. This included two types of project: Category A - projects that are 'ready to go' and Category B - projects which are at an earlier stage (Master-planning/Feasibility) and which will assist in forming a future pipeline of projects, as the URDF is a rolling fund, with €2 billion available to 2027.

Successful bid proposals have been approved in principle, subject to final agreement of technical details with my Department, and the funding allocations should be regarded as an initial investment of support for the projects. My Department will be meeting with successful applicants, as necessary, over the coming weeks to discuss the detailed progression of proposals on foot of which contract agreements and associated documentation will be finalised.

It became apparent during the assessment process that there was a further category of Project, described as 'Category C', which comprised projects that could not be funded as part of the initial call, but are likely to have strong potential as part of future calls, subject to further development and, in some cases, refinement. My Department is providing feedback to the proposers of these projects also.

It is expected that a second call for proposals under the Fund will be launched later in the first quarter of this year.

Housing Data

51. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of rapid build properties constructed under Rebuilding Ireland to date; the number tenanted to date; the number of properties delivered to date via the vacant housing funds including the rolling €70 million allocated to the Housing Agency, the repair and lease scheme and the buy and renew scheme; and the reason there is such a large gap between the targets set in 2016 and delivery to date. [1433/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Since 2016, some 40 rapid delivery projects have been added to the social housing construction pipeline and these are expected to yield in the region of 1,100 homes over the period to 2021. While data in relation to Q4 2018 outputs is currently being compiled, data up to Q3 2018 shows that 325 homes had been delivered under the programme. The allocation and tenanting of these and all social housing homes is a matter for the relevant local authority.

In relation to the repair and leasing scheme- to end Q3 2018, a total of 1,214 applications had been received from property owners; 48 homes had been brought back into use and were tenanted; and a further 122 agreements for lease had been signed. In addition, over 250 social housing homes have been delivered to date through the buy & renew scheme, including some properties that may have initially been considered under the repair and leasing scheme.

Under the Housing Agency €70 million Fund, the Agency had bids accepted on 874 homes at end November 2018, 814 of which were vacant. Contracts have been signed for 571 homes and 531 of these purchases have closed.

Each local authority now has a dedicated Vacant Homes Office, whose work includes establishing a co-ordinated approach towards the implementation of their Vacant Homes Action Plans. Having undertaken initial vacancy assessments within their administrative areas, and drilling down into the available vacancy statistical data, it appears that a significant proportion of potentially vacant residential properties are not in areas of high demand for housing. Notwithstanding this, my Department will continue to work closely with local authorities and other key stakeholders to ensure that all reasonable avenues for addressing vacancy are pursued.

Question No. 52 answered orally.

Social and Affordable Housing Eligibility

53. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the review of income limits for social housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1469/19]

68. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Govern-

ment his plans to review the income thresholds to qualify for social housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1295/19]

69. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the review of the income eligibility limits for social housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1313/19]

86. **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. [1419/19]

95. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the review of income eligibility limits for social housing will be finalised and published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1420/19]

102. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if there has been an assessment in recent years of the qualification criteria needed to qualify for social housing in particular in regard to income thresholds applied by local authorities. [1296/19]

1142. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the review of income eligibility for social housing will be completed. [54543/18]

1150. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the 2018 review of income eligibility levels for social housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1076/19]

1171. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the review into the income eligibility limits for social housing applications will be published. [1326/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 53, 68, 69, 86, 95, 102, 1142, 1150 and 1171 together.

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 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 also have regard to current initiatives being brought forward in terms of af-

fordability and cost rental and will be completed when the impacts of these parallel initiatives have been considered.

Approved Housing Bodies

54. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if a cost benefit analysis of the provision of funding to approved housing bodies towards the construction of social homes in 2018 built for local authorities has been conducted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1361/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) are an important social housing delivery partner, working closely with local authorities throughout the country to deliver new homes. In 2018, they again contributed significantly to the output of new build social housing and there was a clear demonstration of increasing capacity to deliver. Of particular importance are AHBs' potential to harness non-Exchequer investment in social housing, as well as their specialist expertise in tenant and estate management and in the provision of special needs housing.

Through local authorities, my Department provides AHBs with access to a range of funding streams to assist with the delivery of social housing, including construction activity. All funding schemes seek to secure value for money for the Exchequer and the highest quality social housing homes for those on local authorities' waiting lists. This is done by ensuring that the relevant local authority is fully supportive and approves of the project, requiring independent valuations of costs for all construction, acquisition and leasing projects, adhering to unit cost ceilings which also apply to local authorities, and undertaking an independent financial appraisal of certain projects.

As part of the 2018 Spending Review process, an analysis of current and capital expenditure on social housing supports, including the supports available to AHBs, was carried out by the Irish Government Evaluation and Economic Service (IGEES). The findings of this review, together with the work of my own Department and local authorities in respect of the management of the individual funding streams, provide assurance that appropriate value for money scrutiny is in place in relation to AHB activity in the provision of social housing.

Commercial Rates

55. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to address the negative impact of rates on small businesses in small villages and towns in rural Ireland. [52144/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): Local authorities have a statutory obligation to levy rates on property used for commercial purposes, in accordance with the details in the valuation lists prepared by the Commissioner of Valuation. The Annual Rate on Valuation (ARV), decided by local authority members annually, is applied to the valuation determined by the Valuation Office, to calculate the amount payable. Rates income is vital to the delivery of local services and the elected members adopt the ARV they consider necessary in order to provide those services.

The national average ARV has not changed significantly in recent years. It decreased slightly each year from 2010 to 2015 and increased, only slightly, each year from 2016 to 2018.

Local authorities may offer assistance or money in kind in order to promote the interests of the local community, which includes the economic and general development of the administrative area of the authority concerned. Local authorities also work closely with ratepayers experiencing difficulty in the payment of rates and facilitate flexible payment options that reflect capacity to pay.

The Local Government (Rates) Bill 2018 was published in August 2018 and includes provisions to allow local authorities to introduce rates alleviation schemes to support policy objectives, including, local economic and community plans; development objectives and national planning policies. I hope the Bill can be progressed through both Houses as early as possible this year.

Housing Assistance Payment

56. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will address the perceived inadequacies with the new housing assistance payment scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1309/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) provides fast, flexible housing support to all eligible households in their area of their choice. Individuals, who in the past were reluctant to avail of full time work as they would lose their Rent Supplement support, can now move to HAP and avail of full-time employment and retain their housing support, with an adjustment in their differential rent.

At the end of Q3 2018 there were more than 40,000 households having their housing needs met via HAP and over 25,000 landlords and agents in receipt of monthly HAP payments. As HAP is a social housing support and consequently households are not eligible to remain on the main housing waiting list, Ministerial directions have issued to ensure that, should they so choose, HAP recipients can avail of a move to other forms of social housing support through a transfer list.

Guidelines on inter-authority movement were introduced in 2017 to allow local authorities to facilitate movement of HAP households currently on one local authority's waiting list, who wish to access rented accommodation with HAP support in another local authority area, subject to conditions.

The Homeless HAP Place Finder Service provides all local authorities with the option to pay deposits and advance rental payments for any households in emergency homeless accommodation, in order to secure accommodation via the HAP Scheme. I continue to keep the operation of HAP under review but I am currently satisfied with how the scheme is operating.

Pyrite Issues

57. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to commission a review of the pyrite remediation scheme. [1188/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The pyrite remediation scheme is a scheme of "last resort" for affected homeowners who have no other practical option to obtain redress and is limited in its application and scope. The full conditions for eligibility under the scheme are set out on the

Pyrite Remediation Board's website at www.pyriteboard.ie.

The provisions of the Act apply only to dwellings affected by significant damage attributable to pyritic heave consequent on the presence of reactive pyrite in the subfloor hardcore material and not to damage arising in any other circumstance, e.g. such as pyrite in concrete blocks. It is a condition of eligibility under the scheme that an application to the Board must be accompanied by a Building Condition Assessment with a Damage Condition Rating of 2. Dwellings which do not have a Damage Condition Rating of 2 are not eligible to apply under the scheme. This ensures that, having regard to the available resources, the focus of the scheme is on dwellings which are most severely damaged by pyritic heave.

I have no proposals to amend this eligibility criterion or to commence a review of the scheme more generally.

Pyrite Issues

58. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the action he plans to take to help homeowners in Fingal that require remediation work for their homes due to the contamination of concrete blocks with pyrite and mica; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1217/19]

85. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to expand the pyrite scheme to support homeowners with evidence of mica contamination in blocks in north Leinster and beyond; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1187/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): I propose to take Questions Nos. 58 and 85 together.

Neither I, nor my Department, are aware of any existing issue that has emerged in the concrete blockwork of certain dwellings in the Fingal area.

As you are aware, an Expert Panel on Concrete Blocks was established by my Department in 2016, and its terms of reference were limited to the investigation of the problems that have emerged in the concrete blockwork of certain dwellings in Counties Donegal and Mayo.

In 2017, the report of the Expert Panel was published and included eight recommendations, which my Department is actively progressing. Further to recommendation 1 of the report of the Expert Panel, a standardised protocol was published by the National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI) on 13 November 2018 and is available at www.nsai.ie.

This standard can be used by homeowners anywhere in the country, including Fingal, to assess and categorise the damage in properties where the concrete blocks are suspected to contain the minerals mica or pyrite and it will inform the course of action in relation to remedial works for all such affected properties.

Previously, there was no common way for engineers or homeowners to assess the damage caused by defective concrete blocks, in order to decide what, if any, remedial work could be carried out. It is important, however to note, that in general, building defects are matters for resolution between the contracting parties involved: the homeowner, the builder, the developer and/or their respective insurers, structural guarantee or warranty scheme.

Local Authority Housing Applications Data

59. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of new local authority builds here in 2018. [1457/19]

90. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the output of social housing new build in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1315/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 59 and 90 together.

Over the course of the 6-year Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan, the Government is committed to meeting the housing needs of over 137,000 households. The implementation of Rebuilding Ireland is well underway and making significant progress. Annual delivery targets were exceeded in 2016 and again in 2017. By end September 2018, over 63,700 additional social housing solutions had already been provided under the plan.

The latest data in relation to social housing delivery sets out the position at end Q3 2018 and is published on my Department's website. This shows that some 18,781 additional housing solutions had been provided across all local authorities in the first nine months of 2018. This represents 74% of the overall target for 2018 and an increase of 6,423 on the position at end Q2.

In terms of build activity, 2,369 social housing homes, or 48% of the target for 2018, were delivered in the first 9 months of the year. Excluding voids, 1,764 new build homes were delivered at end Q3 2018, comprising 833 local authority build, 582 Approved Housing Body build and 349 Part V homes.

Data in relation to Q4 2018 is currently being compiled and will be published shortly. I am satisfied that the overall national social housing target of delivering approximately 25,500 social housing solutions in 2018 will be met and that, within that, a strong performance on new build delivery will have been achieved.

The picture will, of course, vary from one local authority area to another, in terms of what was achieved. Last January, I committed to publishing individual targets for housing delivery in each Local Authority area in 2018, to enable greater transparency and accountability when it comes to increasing the stock of social housing. The Government has committed over €6 billion to Rebuilding Ireland and it is vital that taxpayer funding is used efficiently and transparently to deliver new homes.

Targets for 2018 were published and, in conjunction with delivery information for the fourth quarter of last year, I will publish full year delivery details by local authority, measured against the targets set at the beginning of the year. Following another Housing Summit later this month, this process will be repeated for 2019.

With the policy, resources and funding in place, it is up to local authorities to ensure delivery, and I will continue to work with them to ensure the accelerated delivery of much needed homes for our citizens.

Housing Issues

60. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the roll-out of the Rebuilding Ireland programme in County Sligo; and if

he will make a statement on the matter. [1311/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Rebuilding Ireland sets out a range of actions to tackle the challenges in the housing sector across a number of key areas. Specifically the Plan sets out a number of actions, with substantial public funding support, to address the social housing needs of over 137,000 households over the period 2016 to 2021. This includes delivering an additional 50,000 social housing units, with a further 87,000 households having their housing need met through the Housing Assistance Payment and the Rental Accommodation Scheme, all supported by over €6 billion of investment.

Sligo County Council is progressing the delivery of social housing under a range of programmes, in line with the targets set for them under the Plan. Their progression in this regard can be seen through the information that is made publicly available as part of the implementation of Rebuilding Ireland. The social housing delivery targets out to 2021 for all local authorities, including Sligo, 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/>. Each local authority's delivery against these targets is published on a quarterly basis on my Department's website, with data on delivery up to end Q3 2018 available at the following link: <https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision>. Data on social housing delivery for end Q4 2018 is being collated and will be published shortly.

A detailed breakdown of the new social housing build programme is available at the following link, which also covers the period up to end Q3 2018: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/install/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/CSR-Q3-2018-Final-Report-1.pdf>.

I am pleased to see concrete progress being made on this programme by Sligo County Council, where 66 new social homes commenced construction at Knappagh Road, Rosses Point, Ballymote, Collooney and St Joseph's Terrace in late 2018. Sligo Council added a further 82 social housing homes to their construction pipeline last year and I understand they are working to bring forward more projects at various locations to meet local housing need.

In general terms, Sligo County Council had a target for delivery of 239 social housing homes in 2018. To end Q3 2018, the Council had delivered a total of 328 homes across all programmes. I am pleased to see this progress with new projects, on top of what has been already delivered, and I have assured them that the necessary funding to support their activity is available.

Vacant Properties

61. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will report on the vacant homes action plan with details across the country of the repair and lease scheme, compulsory purchase of vacant homes and the vacant site levy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1386/19]

103. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he is satisfied that the vacant site levy is working to its full potential in its current format; his views on whether site owners are utilising loopholes in the legislation to avoid paying the tax; his plans to amend the legislation with a view to tightening up the definition of a vacant site; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1475/19]

105. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on whether local authorities are not utilising their powers under the compulsory

purchase order to supply land for social and affordable housing; his further views on whether certain local authorities appear to be ignoring their requirement under the legislation enacting the vacant site levy; his plans to issue a new circular with regard to the vacant site levy to local authorities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1478/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 61, 103 and 105 together.

All local authorities have drawn up Vacant Homes Action Plans to identify the scale of vacant residential homes and to set ambitious but realistic targets for the number of vacant homes that can be brought back into use. In addition, each local authority now has a dedicated Vacant Homes Office, whose work includes establishing a co-ordinated approach towards the implementation of their Vacant Homes Action Plans. I have also published the *National Vacant Housing Reuse Strategy*, containing a range of objectives and key actions which will be pursued in partnership with stakeholders across the housing sector to address vacancy in our housing stock. It draws together the strands of ongoing work in one document with a clear vision for the areas to be prioritised for continued action.

My Department and local authorities have already been proactive in dealing with vacant properties and there are a number of schemes available to incentivise reactivating suitable dwellings into the liveable housing stock. While the initial national rollout of the innovative Repair and Lease Scheme did not yield as much progress as hoped for, the scheme was reviewed and improvements were made to render it more effective. Up to end Q3 2018, a total of 1,214 applications had been received under the scheme from property owners; 48 homes had been brought back into use and were tenanted; and a further 122 agreements for lease had been signed. In addition, over 250 social housing homes have been delivered to date through the buy & renew scheme, including some properties that may have initially been considered under the repair and leasing scheme.

In relation to compulsory purchase, the approval or confirmation of proposals for the compulsory purchase of land is a matter for An Bord Pleanála. In this connection, the 2017 Annual Report of the Board - the latest report available - outlines that there was an increase in the number of compulsory acquisition cases coming before the Board. Much of this increase was attributable to the increased use of CPO powers by local authorities to acquire individual vacant or derelict houses for social housing purposes, which is a positive development.

The use of CPO powers by local authorities to acquire land specifically for social and affordable housing is not presently a notable feature of local authorities' housing delivery programmes with the primary focus currently being on the use of existing local authority or State-owned land banks for this purpose. Instead, where local authorities have been using their CPO powers to acquire land for housing related purposes, it has been more focused on the acquisition of land to facilitate the provision of site access and other enabling infrastructure to support the development of housing schemes through the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF).

In relation to the vacant site levy, planning authorities are empowered under the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015 (the 2015 Act) to apply a vacant site levy of 3% of the market value of relevant vacant sites where a site exceeds 0.05 hectares in area, was in the planning authority's opinion vacant or idle in the previous year, and is in an area identified by the planning authority in its development plan or local area plan for residential or regeneration development. As signaled in Budget 2019, the rate of the levy has been increased to 7%, which will be payable for the first time in January 2020 in respect of sites listed on a local authority vacant site register for 2019.

My Department has actively engaged with local authorities in relation to the implementation of the vacant site levy in order to ensure the consistent application of the levy provisions by all local authorities and to facilitate the sharing of best implementation practice. My Department has also provided detailed guidance on the implementation of the levy and organised information seminars for local authorities in this regard.

While my Department does not maintain a central register of vacant sites, as each local authority administers the vacant site register in respect of their own functional areas, on foot of a recent review of the on-line vacant site registers across all local authority areas, it is understood that there are collectively over 380 individual sites currently listed on the local registers. Over 140 of these sites were entered on the local vacant site registers on 1 January 2018 and will therefore be subject to the levy at the 3% rate in 2019, unless development works were activated in the interim, with all sites listed on the local registers in 2019 being subject to the higher 7% levy in January 2020, unless development works have been activated in the meantime.

My Department will continue to monitor implementation of the levy to ensure that it is being effectively applied, in line with its intended purpose of incentivising the development of vacant or under-utilised sites in urban areas. In that context, my Department is currently examining the most recent progress reports received from local authorities in relation to the levy's implementation.

Appointments to State Boards

62. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on whether a possible conflict of interest arises in view of the appointment of a person (details supplied) to the board of An Bord Pleanála due to the role of the person as head of planning for a publically listed company; the number of persons that applied for the appointment to the board; if the appointment of the person was an unanimous decision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1476/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): An Bord Pleanála operates under a strict Code of Conduct as required by section 150 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, one of the purposes of which is to ensure that any potential conflicts of interest relating to its statutory functions are dealt with in an appropriate manner. This Code is available for viewing on the Board's website at the following link:

<http://www.pleanala.ie/about/conduct.htm>.

Section 13 of the Code outlines the procedures for dealing with conflicts of interest in the context of Board meetings, where appeals and other planning cases are determined. Section 15.2 of the Code specifically requires that a Board member shall not deal with any case in any capacity on behalf of the Board where the member had any involvement at any time in the matter, either on a personal basis or on behalf of a previous employer or as a member of any other organisation or voluntary body.

Furthermore, section 15.4 of the Code requires that a Board member shall not knowingly deal with a file relating to a planning authority or a private practice where he or she was previously employed during the previous 2-year period or any voluntary or professional organisation of which the person is or was a member during the previous 2-year period.

In effect, the highest standards of integrity and impartiality are expected to be adhered to by Board members so that no conflict of interest issues arise in the discharge of their planning functions. Where a conflict of interest situation arises, Board members are expected to declare

same and to exclude themselves from any involvement in the case in question in accordance with the Code of Conduct.

The appointment process for ordinary Board members of An Bord Pleanála is set out under section 106 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, and the associated Regulations. This provides that appointments to the Board by the Minister are generally made from candidates nominated by panels of prescribed bodies which are representative of a broad range of societal interests.

For the purposes of filling a Board vacancy arising on 31 December 2018, I initiated the relevant appointment process in August 2018 and in accordance with the provisions of the Act, nominations were sought from the relevant prescribed bodies. A total of 11 individuals were nominated for consideration for appointment. Following detailed consideration of the nominations received, I, as Minister, made my decision and signed an Order on 5 December 2018 to appoint the individual concerned as a Board member of An Bord Pleanála, an appointment which will take effect on 1 February 2019.

Expert Panel on Concrete Blocks

63. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the establishment of the MICA redress scheme; the proposed commencement date of the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1279/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The Expert Panel on Concrete Blocks was established by my Department in 2016, to investigate problems that have emerged in the concrete blockwork of certain dwellings in Counties Donegal and Mayo.

In 2017, the report of the Expert Panel was published and included eight recommendations, which my Department is actively progressing with the relevant stakeholders, prioritising the implementation of Recommendations 1 and 2.

With regard to Recommendation 1, the National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI) established a Technical Committee to scope and fast track the development of a standardised protocol. The standardised protocol will inform the course of action in relation to remedial works for all affected householders.

The standardised protocol was published by the NSAI on 13 November 2018 and '*I.S. 465:2018 - Assessment, testing and categorisation of damaged buildings incorporating concrete blocks containing certain deleterious materials*', is available at www.nsa.ie.

The standard can be used to assess and categorise the damage in properties where the concrete blocks are suspected to contain the minerals mica or pyrite. Previously, there was no common way for engineers or homeowners to assess the damage caused by defective concrete blocks, in order to decide what, if any, remedial work could be carried out.

This standard:

1. establishes a protocol for assessing and determining whether a building has been damaged by concrete blocks containing certain excessive amounts of deleterious materials (free or unbound muscovite mica, or aggregate with potentially deleterious quantities of pyrite);
2. describes methods for establishing the extent of the problem;

3. describes the scope of any testing required; and
4. categorises buildings, in accordance with this Standard, providing competent persons with guidance on the appropriate measures to be taken.

With regard to Recommendation 2, my Department has been in contact with Engineers Ireland in relation to the establishment of a register of competent engineers for homeowners/affected parties' reference. Engineers Ireland has provided assurance that they are in the process of finalising measures to establish such a register now that the standardised protocol is in place. Engineers Ireland have recently issued a call for suitably qualified engineers to participate on the register.

In 2017, I visited Donegal and Mayo and met with key stakeholders, including affected homeowners, elected members and officials of the local authorities and other interested parties. I made similar visits to both counties last year and I will continue to monitor the situation and to update affected parties on progress.

Under Budget 2019, the Government approved in principle the development of a grant scheme of financial assistance to support affected homeowners in the two counties to carry out the necessary remediation works to dwellings that have been damaged due to defective concrete blocks.

Work on the development of such a scheme is well underway, including discussions with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in relation to the operation and funding of the scheme. It is intended to revert to Government with proposals for the scheme as soon as possible, with a view to publishing details of the scheme thereafter.

Land Development Agency

64. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the work of the Land Development Agency to date; when it expects to deliver its first sites; if the primary legislation regarding the land development agency has been drafted; when he expects the role of permanent chairperson to be filled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1474/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Land Development Agency (LDA) was established on 13 September 2018 by way of Establishment Order under the Local Government Services (Corporate Bodies) Act 1971. The Agency is a commercial State body and national centre of expertise, working with and supporting local authorities, public bodies and other interests, to harness public lands as catalysts to stimulate regeneration and wider investment and to achieve compact, sustainable growth, with a particular emphasis on complex regeneration projects and the provision of affordable housing. In line with its mandate, the LDA will retain experienced staff with extensive skills and experience in project management, finance, planning, development, law and procurement and will provide professional services to master-plan key sites/areas for development in key urban areas, in partnership with local authorities and other state bodies.

On establishment, the Agency had access to an initial tranche of 8 sites that have near term delivery potential for 3,000 new homes. Significant preparatory work is underway in relation to these sites, with feasibility, planning and other preparatory works already initiated. Construction activity is envisaged to commence on the first homes in 2019 for delivery in 2020, pending grant of planning permissions.

The LDA is also developing a strong pipeline of additional publically owned sites. In this regard, Departments were requested, in respect of lands owned directly and by agencies under their aegis, to identify additional lands over and above the initial tranche of eight sites published when the Agency was launched. The LDA is undertaking an in-depth analysis of the information that has been provided in response to this request, with a view to building a longer term pipeline of sites.

A detailed business plan for the LDA is currently being developed and, once approved by the LDA Board, will provide additional information on its long-term delivery programme. Development of LDA managed lands will make a substantial contribution to the achievement of wider Government targets for housing delivery in general and social housing specifically, as set out in Rebuilding Ireland, enhancing supply, aiding the moderation in increases in housing costs and enabling new sources of affordable housing supply, including for cost rental accommodation.

A general scheme of a Bill to establish the LDA on a primary legislative footing is expected to be published in the coming weeks, with pre-legislative scrutiny to follow shortly thereafter in parallel with the drafting of the Bill. On enactment, a permanent Chairperson and Board will be appointed.

Local Authority Housing

65. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the policy in relation to local authorities building one-off local authority houses in rural locations at which the family of the applicant can provide a site at a nominal cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1418/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Local authorities have a number of options available to them in meeting social housing needs. These include, if they consider it appropriate, the transfer of a site from a person qualified for social housing to the local authority, and the building of a social house on the site by the local authority, to be tenanted by the person who transferred the site.

It is of course open to any person, who is qualified for social housing support to make any particular proposal to the relevant local authority, for their consideration, in connection with the provision of a site. However, the actual operation of such an approach to social housing provision continues to be a matter for the relevant local authority concerned.

Social and Affordable Housing

66. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he has met with either Cavan or Monaghan county council to discuss social housing strategies; the housing targets for new builds in both counties for 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1308/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I have met with all local authorities at senior level in relation to the advancement of social housing. In particular, I have held a number of Housing Summits with the local authority Chief Executives, including those from Cavan and Monaghan. The most recent of these Summits was last September and I intend to hold a further similar engagement in the near future.

Separately, both I and Minister of State English regularly visit individual local authorities to discuss progress on social housing. Minister English visited Monaghan County Council in November 2018, where he met the Chief Executive and the Council's housing team and visited a number of social housing projects. A similar engagement was held with Cavan County Council in May 2018.

With regard to social housing targets, I wrote to all local authorities, including Cavan and Monaghan, in early 2018 setting out their social housing targets for 2018-21 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/>. I will issue specific 2019 targets shortly, including to Cavan and Monaghan, which will be based on the increased national social housing targets for 2019.

An overall housing budget of almost €2.4 billion is available to support housing delivery in 2019 by local authorities and others against these targets. I and Minister English will continue, in 2019, to meet directly with local authorities on this important work.

Fire Service Staff

67. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will consider introducing a medal to honour bravery specifically for members of the fire service including retained firefighters; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1318/19]

1159. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to introduce annual medal presentations for bravery, as takes place for members of An Garda Síochána, specifically for members of the fire service, both full-time and retained firefighters; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1185/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 67 and 1159 together.

As I indicated in replying to the Deputy's Question No 263 of 12 December 2018, persons from all walks of life and all sections of society, including staff of local authority fire services, are eligible to be nominated for an award under the National Bravery Awards. Under this scheme, Deeds of Bravery Awards are given to people who have saved a human life involving personal risk to themselves.

Comhairle na Míre Gaile - the Council for the recognition of Deeds of Bravery – is under the remit of the Minister for Justice and Equality, and it meets on an annual basis to consider and decide on the awards to be made. The scheme has been in operation since 1947 and awards are presented in four categories – gold, silver, bronze and a certificate of recognition. Further information relating to the Bravery Awards may be found at: www.bravery.ie.

I wish to take this opportunity to again place on the record my appreciation of the vital contribution made to our society by the men and women of the local authority fire services. Fire services are trained to operate as teams, to evaluate each emergency situation and to undertake appropriate risk assessments to ensure the safety of the public they serve as well as their colleagues and themselves. Given the focus on teamwork and risk assessment, I have no plans to introduce a separate bravery awards scheme for individual members of local authority fire services staff.

In 1992, a scheme of long service awards for personnel in the local authority fire services

was launched. There are four categories of awards, marking service of ten years, twenty years, thirty years and forty years. The ten-year award is a certificate presented locally, while the twenty, thirty and forty year awards all involve the presentation of medals and certificates at a national ceremony. The twenty-year award is a medal bearing the traditional logo representation of the fire service - a helmet and crossed axes. The thirty-year award is a flame emblem. The forty-year award is a bar; both the emblem and bar attach onto the medal ribbon.

The first national awards presentation was organised in 1998 and is now held every two years at a national presentation ceremony. The latest of these ceremonies was held in November 2018 at which 288 fire service personnel were eligible for awards.

Questions Nos. 68 and 69 answered with Question No. 53.

Rental Sector

70. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to establish a register of rental prices in order to enable effective implementation of rent pressure zones. [1470/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Residential Tenancies (Amendment)(No. 2) Bill 2018 was published on 19 December 2018.

Subject to legal advice from the Office of the Attorney General, it is the intention to introduce an amendment to the Bill, as it makes its way through the legislative process in the Houses of the Oireachtas, to empower the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) to publish rent details as part of its register of tenancies.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

71. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the initiatives he has planned to encourage the development of affordable homes in County Kildare for those who wish to purchase their own homes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1466/19]

94. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if and the way in which he plans to address the inability of those on middle to low incomes to afford a home in view of the fact the average house price is €379,923 in County Dublin. [1471/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 71 and 94 together.

A multi-stranded approach is being taken to the targeted delivery of affordable housing, in particular for those households earning up to €50,000 for single income households and €75,000 for dual income households.

As part of that approach, I commenced the relevant provisions of Part 5 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 last year to provide a statutory basis for the delivery of affordable housing for purchase. In addition, a new Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan was introduced on 1 February 2018, under which home loans, at affordable, fixed rates over the term of the loan can be made available to credit worthy home purchasers meeting the above income limits.

In order to support local authorities in delivering affordable homes, €310 million will be made available from 2019 until 2021 under the Serviced Site Fund (SSF). The (SSF) will fund facilitating infrastructure, on local authority sites. At a maximum funding rate of €50,000 per affordable home, at least 6,200 will be facilitated in total.

On foot of a first call for proposals which issued to local authorities in Dublin, the Greater Dublin Area (including Kildare), Cork and Galway City, I issued approval for ten projects costing €43m, which will support 1,400 affordable homes, in December 2018. I expect infrastructure works on these projects to begin as soon as possible and delivery of affordable homes from early 2020 onwards. Five other projects submitted are still under active consideration and my Department is working with the local authorities concerned to progress them.

A second call for proposals will issue shortly. In order to inform that process all local authorities wishing to be considered for funding have been asked to submit economic assessments of the potential to deliver affordable homes from their sites.

The Government is also committed to the introduction of a not-for-profit, cost rental sector in Ireland. Together with delivering more affordable and predictable rents, cost rental will make a sustainable impact on national competitiveness and the attractiveness of our main urban centres as places to live and work. It is estimated by the National Development Finance Agency (NDFA) that rents of between 15-25% below market are achievable.

There are currently two cost rental projects at Enniskerry Road, in Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown and St. Michael's Estate, Inchicore, which will deliver 50 and 330 cost rental homes, respectively. The experience on these projects will inform a national cost rental framework under which similar projects will be rolled out on a wider scale.

Local Authority Members

72. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the date on which the final report on councillor's pay and conditions will be published; and if the recommendations in the report will be adopted regardless of the outcome. [1424/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): On 21 June 2018, I announced that, with the agreement of the Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform, I was commissioning a review of the role and remuneration of local authority elected members and published the terms of reference for same. I appointed Ms. Sara Moorhead SC to conduct the independent review.

In accordance with the terms of reference, Ms Moorhead submitted an interim report at the end of November 2018, which is published on my Department's website at the following link: https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/20181205_interim_report_-_review_of_the_role_and_remuneration_of_councillors.pdf.

The interim report details the range of actions undertaken and sets out the further complex work necessary to complete the review. This work is proceeding and Ms Moorhead's intention is that her final report will be ready for submission by the end of quarter 1, 2019.

When the review is complete, its findings will be the subject of discussion between my Department and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. It will be submitted thereafter for the consideration of the Government. Details of the outcome will be announced following the conclusion of this process.

Regeneration Projects

73. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will report on the housing announcement he attended recently. [49137/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I assume the question refers to my visit to the Dolphin House Regeneration Project, which I attended with An Taoiseach. Details of this visit are available on my Department's website at the following link:

<https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/regeneration-scheme/taoiseach-and-minister-eoghan-murphy-visit-phase-1>.

Phase 1 of this project, which provides 100 social housing homes, was supported by funding of €26 million from my Department, and involved the refurbishment of 63 existing homes and the construction of 37 new homes.

Over the lifetime of the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, some €211 million is being made available under the National Regeneration Programme to support the delivery of over 1,000 new social housing homes. Together with providing a significant number of new homes the projects seek to address the causes of disadvantage in these communities through a holistic programme of physical, social and economic regeneration. A programme of large-scale regeneration projects in Dublin, Cork and Limerick and smaller projects in Tralee, Sligo and Dundalk, are being supported.

Housing Issues

74. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to address the housing crisis in County Wexford; if he will consider establishing Gorey as a rent pressure zone; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1409/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Over the course of the 6-year Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan, the Government is committed to meeting the housing needs of over 137,000 households. The implementation of Rebuilding Ireland is well underway and making significant progress. Annual delivery targets were exceeded in 2016 and again in 2017. By end September 2018, over 63,700 additional social housing solutions had already been provided under the plan. The level of progress being made is reflected in social housing waiting lists, which have reduced by 22% nationally, from 91,600 households to 71,858, between 2016 and 2018. In Wexford, the number of households on waiting lists has reduced by 15% in one year alone, falling from 2,577 in 2017 to 2,177 in 2018.

In relation to social housing construction activity, my Department publishes comprehensive status reports on a quarterly basis of all social housing construction schemes for all local authority areas. The most recent of these reports covers the period up to the end of quarter 3 2018 and contains information on the progress of over 17,536 new social housing homes, which are currently approved and progressing through planning, design and construction, as well as homes delivered to end quarter 3 2018.

The report shows that Wexford County Council, and the Approved Housing Bodies it is working with, have a social housing construction programme of 54 projects already complete or at planning, design, tender or construction stage, which will deliver 591 homes when complete.

Local authorities have also been undertaking targeted acquisitions with a particular focus

on vacant properties in order to avoid increasing pressure and competition in local property markets.

My Department continues to engage actively with all local authorities, including Wexford County Council, to deliver social housing through all available avenues, with a particular emphasis on additional construction projects.

In relation to the rental sector, section 24A of the Residential Tenancies Act 2004, as amended, provides that the Housing Agency, in consultation with housing authorities, may make a proposal to the Minister that an area should be considered for designation as a Rent Pressure Zone. Following receipt of such a proposal, the Minister requests the Director of the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) to conduct an assessment of the area to establish whether or not it meets the criteria for designation and to report to the Minister on whether the area should be designated as a Rent Pressure Zone. For the purpose of the Act, 'area' is defined as either the administrative area of a housing authority or a local electoral area within the meaning of section 2 of the Local Government Act 2001.

For an area to be designated a Rent Pressure Zone, it must satisfy the following criteria set out in section 24A(4) of the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 (as inserted by section 36 of the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016):

(i) the annual rate of rent inflation in the area must have been 7% or more in four of the last six quarters; and

(ii) the average rent for tenancies registered in the area with the RTB in the last quarter must be above the average national rent (the National Standardised Rent in the RTB's Rent Index Report) in the last quarter (€1,122 per month in Q3 2018).

The RTB Rent Index Report includes a summary in Table 9 of the data used to establish whether each Local Electoral Area fulfils the criteria for designation as a Rent Pressure Zone. This ensures transparency in relation to the position of individual areas in terms of average rent levels and increases.

Further information on Rent Pressure Zones and designations is available on my Department's website at <https://www.housing.gov.ie/PUBLICATIONS>, by searching 'rent pressure zones - information'.

The data from the Rent Index Report for Q3 2018 relating to the local electoral area of Gorey, County Wexford is detailed in the table.

Local Electoral Area	Quarters > 7%	Average 2018 Q3
Gorey	5	€853.81

In Gorey, while more than 4 of the last 6 quarters have seen rent inflation of 7% or greater, the average monthly rent is below the national standardised rent of €1,122 per month. Therefore, the Local Electoral Area of Gorey does not meet the criteria for designation at this time.

The Housing Agency continues to monitor the rental market and may recommend further areas for designation. Where, following the procedures set out in the Act, it is found at a future date that additional areas meet the criteria, they will be designated as Rent Pressure Zones.

Social and Affordable Housing Data

75. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the expected number of affordable houses to be provided under the scheme following the announcement in budget 2019 of funding of €310 million for affordable housing in each of the years 2019 to 2021; the number of these houses which will be in the Dublin area; the price range he expects them to sell for; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1438/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): In order to support the affordable housing programmes of local authorities, the Government has committed €310 million, over the three years 2019 to 2021, under the Serviced Sites Fund (SSF) announced as part of Budget 2019. The funding is available for key facilitating infrastructure, on public lands, to support the provision of affordable homes to purchase or rent. I envisage a maximum amount of SSF funding of €50,000 per affordable home and on this basis, at least 6,200 affordable homes could be facilitated.

On 11 December 2018, I issued approval in principle for ten infrastructure projects across five local authority areas, in Dublin and Cork, under the first call for proposals. The first tranche of funding of €43 million will enable delivery of 1,400 affordable homes on local authority lands. I expect infrastructure works on these projects to begin as soon as possible in 2019 and delivery of affordable homes from early 2020 onwards. Details of the projects are set out in the table below. There are five further projects under active consideration by my Department, with the potential to facilitate the delivery of an additional 230 affordable homes. A second call for proposals will issue shortly.

As regards the price range within which the homes will be made available to eligible households, the cost of constructing new affordable homes is dependent on a range of variables, such as the location, the scale of the development and the size and type of the homes involved. However, in preparing their bids for funding under the SSF, local authorities were advised to be guided by the Unit Cost Ceilings (UCCs) for social housing in determining the cost of the affordable homes to be delivered under this programme.

These UCCs are based on the analysis of returned data from tendered social housing schemes over an extended period, and market tender index information. Construction cost is reflective of building costs (including VAT) and also includes normal site works and site development. All-in cost includes cost of construction, land cost, professional fees, utility connections, site investigations/surveys, archaeology where appropriate, VAT and contribution to public art. Abnormal costs are excluded from these figures.

The relevant UCC data for the Dublin local authorities is set out in the tables below.

An important factor in the allocation of funding under the SSF is the capacity to translate that funding into a discount on the affordable homes. In addition, local authorities must consider the market price of similar homes on sale in the equivalent private market and the level of discount on market price envisaged, which will be required under the Affordable Purchase Scheme terms. The objective is to maximise the benefits from public money by funding the best value for money proposals possible.

Table 1: List of projects that have received approval in principle under the SSF first call for proposals

Local Authority	Project/Location	Total Provisional Cost of Proposal €	Provisional Exchequer Grant Amount €	Provisional Local Authority Contribution €	Affordable Housing Potential
Cork County	Glanmire	€1,500,000	€1,335,000	€165,000	20
Cork City	Boherboy Road	€4,968,366	€4,421,846	€546,520	103
Cork City	Kilmore Road, Churchfield	€1,410,551	€1,255,390	€155,160	21
Dublin City	Cherry Orchard	€7,645,415	€6,804,419	€840,996	183
Dublin City	Balbutcher, Ballymun	€4,135,351	€3,680,462	€454,889	74
Dublin City	Sillogue, Ballymun	€3,975,000	€3,537,750	€437,250	83
DLR	Enniskerry Road	€4,537,576	€4,038,443	€499,133	50
Fingal	Church Fields, Mulhuddart	€11,000,000	€9,790,000	€1,210,000	753
Fingal	Dun Emer, Lusk	€1,500,000	€1,335,000	€165,000	74
Fingal	Hackettstown, Skerries	€2,198,667	€1,956,814	€241,853	49
Total		€42,870,926	€38,155,124	€4,715,801	1410

Table 2: Houses, average costs (2017 Unit Cost Ceilings)

	1 bed	1 bed	2 bed (1 storey)	2 bed (1 storey)	2 bed (2 storey)	2 bed (2 storey)	3 bed	3 bed	4 bed	4 bed
	Construct	All-in	Construct	All-in	Construct	All-in	Construct	All-in	Construct	All-in
DCC	216,800	275,900	223,200	283,600	232,200	293,800	242,300	305,300	252,800	316,900
DLR	182,000	234,500	187,800	240,300	195,900	249,600	205,300	260,100	214,600	270,600
Fingal	166,800	217,000	172,600	224,000	180,800	232,100	190,100	242,600	199,500	253,200
SDCC	182,000	234,500	187,800	240,300	195,900	249,600	205,300	260,100	214,600	270,600

Table 3: Apartments, average costs (2017 Unit Cost Ceilings)

	1 bed	1 bed	2 bed	2 bed	3 bed	3 bed
	Construct	All-in	Construct	All-in	Construct	All-in
DCC	227,700	289,600	234,400	297,800	256,100	324,000
DLR	191,100	246,200	197,200	252,300	216,000	275,200
Fingal	175,100	227,800	181,200	235,200	199,300	255,900
SDCC	191,100	246,200	197,200	252,300	216,000	275,200

Local Area Plans

76. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to publish legislation to provide for local area committees for towns and cities in which expansion into neighbouring counties requires planning across county boundaries; his plans to set up these committees in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[54555/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): It is my intention, in the coming months, to publish legislation to place local authority cross boundary cooperation on a statutory basis in certain circumstances where urban settlements have extended beyond county boundaries.

These provisions envisage the establishment of urban area committees where the results of a population census show that at least 1,500 persons or 10% of the area's population are living in the administrative area of another local authority. This will apply to urban areas with a population between 1,500 and 100,000, thereby encompassing Athlone, Bray, Carlow, Carrick-on-Shannon, Drogheda, Limerick, Portarlinton and Waterford. It is envisaged that urban area committees will perform local area planning functions for towns and their contiguous areas as determined by the committee, or failing that, as ordered by the Minister.

Membership of the committee would be equally drawn from both local authorities and would consist of councillors from the relevant local electoral areas as well as the Cathaoirleach of each of the local authorities. Provision for participation in a non voting capacity for experts in the areas of transport, infrastructure, housing or business is also envisaged.

The legislative proposals will be developed further to enable wider consultation ahead of their ultimate publication.

Regeneration Projects Funding

77. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to continue the social intervention fund as part of the Limerick regeneration project beyond 2022 in view of the high number of local organisations that depend on the fund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1280/19]

1170. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the supports that will be put in place to help organisations create an exit strategy for self-funding that will be required as part of applications for funding from the social intervention fund from 2020 onwards; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1306/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 77 and 1170 together.

The Limerick Regeneration Framework Implementation Plan (LRFIP), launched in September 2013, provides a roadmap for the regeneration of Limerick over a 10 year period, integrating measures relating to the physical, social and economic environment. Good progress has been made to date on implementation, as demonstrated in the review of the LRFIP published in 2016.

The Social Intervention Fund is a valuable part of the overall approach under regeneration and helps to leverage additional mainstream funding for the benefit of the areas. As the Limerick regeneration programme moves forward, I expect that Limerick City & County Council will continue to monitor the impact of all the measures, including the Social Intervention Fund. It will be important that evidence of these impacts is gathered and assessed to best identify ways to reinforce and sustain the benefits that are being achieved through the regeneration programme. Until those evaluations are made, it would be premature to decide what form future supports will take. However, the Government is committed to working with the Council and the other Agencies, as well as community groups, to sustain the benefits being achieved.

Constitutional Amendments

78. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of his amendments to the 35th Amendment of the Constitution (Water in Public Ownership) Bill 2016; and if a referendum on this issue will be held in 2019. [1435/19]

1153. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when it is planned to hold a referendum on the ownership of Irish Water; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1117/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 78 and 1153 together.

It will be a matter for the Oireachtas to decide on the holding of a referendum on the ownership of public water services and the wording to be put to the people.

The Government is firmly committed to public water services remaining in public ownership and this is reflected in the Water Services Acts and in the Water Services Policy Statement 2018-2025 approved by Government in May 2018. There is widespread support for this view, as recognised in the Oireachtas approval of the Report of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Future Funding of Domestic Water Services in April 2017 which supports the concept of a referendum on the issue of water services continuing in public ownership. The Committee recommended that the wording of this amendment must be carefully scrutinised to ensure that it does not impact upon the status of Group Water Schemes and individual domestic water supplies.

The matter of the holding of a referendum is addressed in the Thirty-fifth Amendment of the Constitution (Water in Public Ownership) (No. 2) Bill 2016, a Private Member's Bill initiated by Deputy Joan Collins. The Bill is currently at Dáil committee stage. Detailed examination of the wording of this Bill as it stands which I have undertaken with the Attorney General indicates that it would give rise to unacceptable risks. Reflecting upon the advices that I have received, I have articulated these concerns in my correspondence and engagement on the Bill with the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government to date. The Office of the Parliamentary Legal Adviser has separately and independently advised the Committee in relation to the Bill.

In November 2018, I received Government approval for the priority drafting of proposed amendments to the Private Member's Bill to provide for a constitutional amendment which will focus on retaining the entity charged with the provision of public water services in public ownership. My intention is that the draft wording, once finalised, will be brought back to Government for approval and can then be brought forward as a proposed amendment to the existing Bill.

Reflecting this position, and the work that needs to be completed, the referendum was not included amongst those identified by Government to be held in May 2019. The development of the wording is currently being given priority attention by the Office of the Attorney General. I will continue to keep the Joint Oireachtas Committee updated on progress in the matter.

Local Authority Housing Waiting Lists

79. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the annual growth of local authority housing lists has been accurately established with a view to ensuring the provision of an adequate number of local authority direct build

houses on an annual basis thereby ensuring waiting lists do not expand further; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1422/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Details on the number of households qualified for social housing support in each local authority area are provided in the statutory Summary of Social Housing Assessments (SSHA), which has been carried out on an annual basis since 2016.

The 2018 assessment shows that 71,858 households were assessed as qualified and being in need of social housing support. This represents a decrease of 13,941 households or 16.2% on the last assessment in June 2017. Indeed, since the Government's Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan was launched in 2016, the numbers have decreased from 91,600 to 71,858, a reduction of 22%.

It should be noted that the SSHA is a point in time exercise and does not necessarily reflect the dynamic nature of entry to and exit from the list. It is also important to note that social housing is a demand led service and for that reason it is difficult to predict the degree to which housing lists will decrease or increase over the next 12 months. The number of homes delivered by local authorities in a given time period does not necessarily equate to the 'net need' for social housing support reducing by an equivalent number. The nature of the list is dynamic in that, as households are added to it, the needs of others are met and further households will leave the list for various reasons including the households themselves indicating that they no longer require State support.

Over the course of the 6-year Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan, the Government is committed to meeting the housing needs of over 137,000 households through the provision of social housing supports. The implementation of Rebuilding Ireland is well underway and significant progress has been made. Annual delivery targets were exceeded in 2016 and again in 2017. By end September 2018, over 63,700 of the 137,000 additional social housing solutions envisaged under the plan had already been provided.

The latest data in relation to social housing delivery to end Q3 2018 is published on my Department's website at the following link:

<https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordble/overall-social-housing-provision>.

Data in relation to Q4 2018 outputs is currently being compiled and will be published shortly.

Homeless Persons Data

80. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of children that spent Christmas night in hotel rooms or hubs; the type of emergency accommodation they were in in each case; the number aged 0 to 5, 6 to 10, 11 to 15 and 15 to 18 years of age, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54381/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department currently publishes data on a monthly basis outlining the number of homeless persons accommodated in emergency accommodation funded and overseen by housing authorities. These reports are based on data provided by housing authorities, produced through the Pathway Accommodation & Support System (PASS). The reports are collated on a regional basis and are published on my Department's website. The most recent figures currently available are for

November 2018. These figures show that 6,157 adults and 3,811 associated dependents accessed emergency accommodation nationwide during the relevant count week. The corresponding figures for December 2018 will be published later this month.

While these monthly reports include a breakdown of adults by accommodation type, details in relation to dependents (typically children but may include dependent adults) are not available in my Department and are a matter for the relevant housing authorities. My Department is currently reviewing its homeless data reporting methodology.

Housing Estates

81. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the progress that has been made on the development of a policy for the taking-in-charge of estates with developer-led waste water infrastructure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1467/19]

1143. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the review of the taking-in-charge initiative measure two will be published; the level of funding that will be available in measure two; when it will reopen for applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54546/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 81 and 1143 together.

Findings and recommendations on the National Taking-in-Charge Initiative, which my Department launched in April 2016 to trial new approaches and working methods in supporting and accelerating overall national and local action on the taking-in-charge process of housing estates (including estates with developer-provided water services infrastructure), were included in a report that my Department published on 17 December 2018. The report is available on my Department's website at the following link -

https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/national_taking_in_charge_initiative_report_dec2018.pdf

The publication of the report is of value in applying the lessons from the trial initiative in a more general roll-out of a streamlined approach to taking-in-charge, including through co-ordination with capital works by Irish Water. In this regard, the National Development Plan includes provision of €31 million for the period 2018-2021 for taking-in-charge of developer-provided infrastructure, demonstrating the Government's commitment to transition from the pilot phase to a programme phase.

My Department is finalising plans for the introduction of this programme phase for taking in charge of developer-provided infrastructure and an announcement will be made in this regard shortly.

Approved Housing Bodies

82. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his Department has conducted an activity audit of approved housing bodies in the provision of social homes for 2017 and 2018; the details of the budget provided to each AHB; the number of units provided by each body in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1362/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):

Under Rebuilding Ireland, there are a number of mechanisms used to monitor and provide details on social housing activity, including activity delivered through the Approved Housing Bodies (AHB) sector. Examples include the Social Housing Construction Status Report and the Social Housing Data on a Council-by-Council Basis report, which are published on a quarterly basis.

My Department collates detailed social housing data in relation to each local authority area from each local authority. The Social Housing Data on a Council-by-Council basis Report provides details on the numbers on the social housing list, social housing targets, social housing delivery (broken down by build, acquisition, leasing, HAP / RAS and including both local authority and AHB delivery) and the social housing construction pipeline; the most recently published reports are available at <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/quarter-3-council-by-council-social-housing-update-published/>.

The number of social housing solutions delivered in 2017 and for Q1-Q3 2018, by local authority area, are available at <https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision>. Details for Quarter 4 2018 are being compiled and will be published as soon as possible.

Funding under the relevant schemes is provided by my Department directly to local authorities, which in turn advance the funding to AHBs, as appropriate, with robust arrangements and agreements in place in order to ensure value for money and quality delivery. Funding provided to AHBs is project specific; my Department does not provide annual operating budgets to AHBs.

In 2017, my Department provided funding of just over €228 million for the relevant funding schemes available to the AHB sector and, in 2018, some €337 million was provided.

In terms of regulation, a voluntary regulatory system is in place for the AHB sector, ahead of the introduction of a statutory regulatory regime, which will be put in place under new legislation which is at an advanced stage of drafting.

NAMA Portfolio

83. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he has met or is considering meeting NAMA to discuss the part it can play in the delivery of social housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1387/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): In 2011, my Department, the Housing Agency and NAMA commenced a process of engagement to determine whether properties from NAMA's loan portfolio could be delivered for social housing. A Steering Group with representatives from each of the three stakeholders was established in 2012 for the purpose of managing the flow of information between NAMA, local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs).

The Steering Group established a co-ordinated process, which enabled NAMA to match the residential stock of its debtors and receivers with housing requirements of local authorities. Once demand was confirmed, NAMA facilitated delivery, through its debtors or receivers, by way of either direct sale or lease to local authorities or AHBs.

Local authorities, together with the Housing Agency and my Department, have worked systematically through the full list of properties identified by NAMA as potentially available, to determine if there is a social housing demand for the homes involved. This process is ongoing.

ing and demand has been confirmed by the local authorities for 2,718 homes to end September 2018. To date, a total of 2,475 of these properties have been delivered for social housing.

In order to expedite delivery, NAMA also established a special purpose vehicle, National Asset Residential Property Services DAC (NARPS), in July 2012, which operated by purchasing properties from NAMA's debtors and receivers and making them immediately available to local authorities or AHBs through a standardised long term lease. Since 2012 NARPS has delivered/contracted over 1,300 properties for lease to local authorities and approved housing bodies. These properties are included in the 2,475 figure referred to earlier.

I am advised that as NAMA is now well advanced on its deleveraging programme, there is no longer any suitable stock available for purchase from debtors and receivers and accordingly there is no scope to expand the NARPS portfolio further.

Rental Sector

84. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the details of the most recent statistics on residential landlord profits here. [1456/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The information requested is not available in my Department.

Question No. 85 answered with Question No. 58.

Question No. 86 answered with Question No. 53.

Homeless Persons Data

87. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of housing first tenancies created in each of the years 2016, 2017 and 2018; the target for 2019; and the rationale for the regional targets for 2019. [1436/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Housing First enables people who may have been homeless and who have high levels of complex needs to obtain permanent secure accommodation with the provision of intensive supports to help them maintain their tenancies. The National Implementation Plan for Housing First, published in September, is designed to provide this response, by delivering permanent housing solutions and associated supports for rough sleepers and long-term users of emergency accommodation. The plan contains targets for each local authority, with an overall national target of 663 tenancies to be delivered by 2021. 221 of these are targeted for 2019.

Regional targets were agreed by local authorities based on a review of homelessness data and a national survey of the support needs of homeless individuals conducted with service providers. The survey results, national targets, and regional targets are available in the Housing First National Implementation Plan document.

The Housing First programme has been operating in the Dublin region since 2014, following a successful pilot. A total of 290 tenancies have been created to date in the Dublin region, with 34 of these created in 2014, 33 in 2015, 34 in 2016, 106 in 2017, and 83 in 2018.

Housing Data

88. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of social housing units completed in 2018 nationally; the number constructed under the aegis of local authorities; the number of voids refurbished and re-allocated in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54556/18]

106. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of new homes completed in 2018; the number of social housing units completed; the number of market housing units completed during 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1091/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 88 and 106 together.

During the 9 months to the end of September 2018, data published by the CSO indicates that new dwellings completed totaled 12,582, representing a 28% increase on data for the first 9 months of 2017. These figures do not include homes reconnected, houses completed in unfinished housing estates, or new student dwellings. Data for the fourth quarter of 2018 is expected to be published shortly.

Over the course of the 6-year Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan, the Government is committed to meeting the housing needs of over 137,000 households. The implementation of Rebuilding Ireland is well underway and significant progress has been made. Annual delivery targets were exceeded in 2016 and again in 2017. By end September 2018, over 63,700 of the 137,000 additional social housing solutions envisaged under the Plan had already been provided.

The latest data in relation to social housing delivery to end Q3 2018 is published on my Department’s website at the following link:

<https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision>.

Some 18,781 additional housing solutions were provided across all local authorities in the first 9 months of 2018. This is 74% of the target for 2018 and an increase of 6,423 on the position at end Q2.

Looking specifically at build, the cumulative output to end Q3 2018 was 2,369 homes, or 48% of the target for 2018. It should be noted that new build output over the first three quarters of 2018 was up significantly on the same period in 2017. The 2,369 homes comprised 1,764 new build homes, including 833 local authority build, 582 approved housing body build and 349 Part V homes. In addition, 605 homes were delivered under the Department funded voids programme, which provides exchequer funding to support local authorities in remediating vacant houses. The voids figure does not reflect the number of vacant properties or the full extent of vacant properties repaired or refurbished as local authorities undertake significant activity in those areas from their own resources. The tenanting of social housing homes is a matter for individual local authorities.

Social housing delivery data in relation to Q4 2018 is currently being compiled and will be published shortly.

Rent Pressure Zones

89. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on the recommendation of an institute (details supplied) that rent pressure zones

should be extended nationwide; his plans to remove the exemption for new properties and those that have not been let for two years; and if the zones will be extended when the deadline arrives at the end of 2019. [1437/19]

1139. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to extend the date of expiration for rent pressure zones which are due to expire in December 2019; the period of time he plans to extend the zones for; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54507/18]

1185. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans for rent pressure zones on the expiration of the three year period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1557/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 89, 1139 and 1185 together.

Section 24A of the Residential Tenancies Acts provides that the Housing Agency, in consultation with housing authorities, may make a proposal to me, as Minister that an area should be considered as a Rent Pressure Zone. Following receipt of such a proposal, the Minister requests the Director of the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) to conduct an assessment of the area to establish whether or not it meets the criteria for designation and to report to the Minister on whether the area should be designated as a Rent Pressure Zone. The Housing Agency continues to monitor the rental market.

For an area to be designated a Rent Pressure Zone, it must satisfy the following criteria set out in section 24A(4) of the Residential Tenancies Act 2004, as amended:

(i) The annual rate of rent inflation in the area must have been 7% or more in four of the last six quarters; and

(ii) The average rent for tenancies registered in the area with the RTB in the last quarter must be above the average national rent (the National Standardised Rent in the RTB's Rent Index Report) in the last quarter (€1,122 per month in Q3 2018).

The RTB Rent Index Report also includes a summary of the data used as the criteria for designating Rent Pressure Zones in relation to all Local Electoral Areas in the country. This allows full visibility regarding exactly where individual areas stand in relation to average rent levels and increases.

For the purpose of the Act, 'area' is defined as either the administrative area of a housing authority or a local electoral area within the meaning of section 2 of the Local Government Act 2001. There is no provision for any other type of area to be designated as a Rent Pressure Zone.

The Housing Agency continues to monitor the rental market and may recommend further areas for designation. Where, following the procedures set out in the Act, it is found at a future date that additional areas meet the criteria, they will be designated as Rent Pressure Zones.

The RTB publishes its quarterly Rent Index and advises my Department on the residential rental market on a continuous basis. This and wider ongoing careful analysis of the rental market will inform future policy decisions in relation to the rental sector, including decisions regarding the future of RPZ designations and exemptions from the RPZ regime.

Question No. 90 answered with Question No. 59.

Student Accommodation

91. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if a study or research has been carried out to ascertain the way in which the increase in student accommodation has addressed housing demand issues; and if the increase in student accommodation has seen a corresponding reduction in the numbers on housing lists. [1178/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Specific research into the provision of student accommodation nationally was undertaken by the Higher Education Authority in 2015. The ‘*Report on Student Accommodation: Demand and Supply*’ identified a significant unmet demand nationally for student accommodation in the context of a forecast student population increase to nearly 193,000 by 2024.

An Inter-Departmental Working Group on Student Accommodation was established by the Department of Education and Skills in 2015 comprising stakeholders from the Higher Education Institutes, Union of Students in Ireland, NAMA and other relevant Government Departments. Policy measures to increase the supply of purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA) were formulated by the group, including addressing the planning and development finance aspects in assembling new development projects. The Government’s *Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness* identified the under-supply of PBSA in Ireland and the significant related adverse impact that this deficit was having on the wider private rental sector. The increased provision of PBSA was established as a key priority in addressing the challenges in the wider housing sector and a target of 7,000 additional PBSA bed spaces to be delivered by end 2019 was set.

Related reforms were included in the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016, which provided for the fast-tracking of planning applications for student housing construction projects of greater than 200 bed-spaces to An Bord Pleanála, and this commenced on 3 July 2017. In addition, the legislation provides for the availability of low-cost financing from the Housing Finance Agency to the Higher Education Institutes specifically to support the delivery of new student accommodation projects.

These and other measures by my Department have assisted in delivering a significant increase in the provision of student accommodation developments nationally. Recent analysis from the Higher Education Authority has indicated that, by September 2018, over 5,500 bed-spaces had been delivered since the publication of Rebuilding Ireland. Some further 4,800 plus bed-spaces are currently under construction nationally, with over 7,900 further bed-spaces having received planning permission and are yet to commence construction. These figures indicate that the PBSA construction targets will be met, and indeed surpassed, and that important progress is being made in the provision of newly constructed accommodation for this distinct segment of housing demand.

The increase in new student accommodation, as detailed above, is contributing to the increase in the overall stock of residential accommodation nationally. As it is targeted specifically at students, it would not be expected to have a direct impact in terms of reducing social housing waiting lists; however, its direct impact in reducing student-related housing demand pressures in the general private rental sector indirectly supports the capacity to deliver social housing supports through schemes such as the Housing Assistance Payment. This is one of a range of factors that has contributed to the reductions in social housing waiting lists over recent years, as set out in the annual statutory Summary of Social Housing Assessments (SSHA). The most recently published SSHA indicates that there were 71,858 households on all local authority waiting lists as at 11 June 2018, a reduction of 22% on the comparable figure in 2016. Full details in relation to the 2018 SSHA are available on my Department’s website at the following

link:

https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/summary_of_social_housing_assessments_2018_-_key_findings.pdf.

Homeless Persons Data

92. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the percentage of the homeless population that are female; and the details of comparable data for other EU countries. [1460/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department publishes data on a monthly basis outlining the number of homeless persons accommodated in emergency accommodation funded and overseen by housing authorities. These reports are based on data provided by housing authorities and are produced through the Pathway Accommodation & Support System (PASS). The reports are collated on a regional basis and are published on my Department's website. The most recent figures currently available are in respect of November 2018. These figures show that 6,157 adults accessed emergency accommodation nationally during the relevant count week, 2,635, or 42.8%, of whom were female.

My Department does not collate data on homelessness in other jurisdictions.

Radon Control Strategy

93. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if actions in the National Radon Control Strategy 2014 for the surveying and control of radon in the private rental sector and in privately owned housing used in the social housing sector have been implemented; if the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations now include obligations to test for and remediate radon; the steps that have been taken through the PRTB in relation to radon; if a survey has been carried out of landlords, tenants and other relevant stakeholders to assess the baseline levels of awareness on radon; if information on radon testing has been included in the inspections of privately rented houses by local authorities; and if local authorities carry out radon testing on privately owned accommodation used for social housing. [1472/19]

98. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to introduce minimum thermal efficiency standards for rented accommodation in view of the linked problems of fuel poverty in the private rented sector and lack of progress in achieving thermal retrofit of private rented accommodation. [1473/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 93 and 98 together.

Policy measures relating to radon detection and remediation are primarily a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment. While the issue of radon was considered during the preparation of the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2017, it was not introduced at that time and I have no plans, at present, to amend the regulations to introduce mandatory radon testing in rented accommodation. I will, however, keep the matter under review, in consultation with the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment.

The purpose of the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2017 is to provide

a basic standard for decent, safe and secure accommodation. These Regulations focus on tenant safety and include new measures covering heating appliances, carbon monoxide and window safety. With very limited exemptions, these apply to social housing as well as private rented residential accommodation.

All landlords have a legal obligation to ensure that their rented properties comply with the regulations. Responsibility for enforcement rests with the relevant local authority.

While there is no obligation on local authorities to carry out radon testing on their own social housing stock, they have long been encouraged to do so. Specific advice for local authorities in this regard is included on the website, www.radon.ie. The EPA has also produced a booklet, 'Guidance Notes to Local Authorities on Implementing a Radon Measurement Programme', which is available at the Agency's website at the following link:

<http://www.epa.ie/pubs/advice/radiation/radonadvicetolocalauthorities.html>.

At the time of the launch of the National Radon Control Strategy (NRCS), it was stated that 'most local authorities in high radon areas have made very significant progress in testing their social housing stock. To date, approx. 20,000 local authority homes have been measured, and where necessary, remediated'. Comprehensive data on further progress made since then is not available.

The aim of the Building Regulations is to provide for the safety and welfare of people in and about buildings. In general, Building Regulations apply to the construction of new buildings and to extensions and material alterations to existing buildings. In addition, certain parts of the Regulations apply to existing buildings where a material change of use takes place. Otherwise, Building Regulations do not apply to buildings constructed prior to 1 June 1992.

The minimum performance requirements that a building must achieve are set out in the Second Schedule to the Building Regulations. These requirements are set out in 12 parts classified as Parts A to M. Part C – Site Preparation and Resistance to Moisture (1997), requires that reasonable precautions shall be taken to avoid danger to health and safety caused by substances (including radon) found on or in the ground to be covered by a building.

Technical Guidance Documents (TGDs) provide technical guidance on how to comply with the building regulations in practical terms. TGD C contains guidance, compliance with which will, prima facie, indicate compliance with Part C.

Radon is addressed in sections 2.7-17 which require the provision of sumps in all dwellings for remediation in the event of a high radon reading and also for the provision of a radon barrier in areas with a high radon risk.

Extract 2.10 of the TGD deals with Dwellings (below):

“2.10 Dwellings or other long-stay residential buildings

(a) High Radon Areas: measures should be taken to protect the building from Radon in the ground. For example, in the case of a noncomplex building of normal design and construction, a fully sealed membrane of low permeability over the entire footprint of the building and a potential means of extracting Radon from the substructure such as a standby Radon sump or sumps with connecting pipework or other appropriate certified systems should be provided.

(b) Areas other than High Radon Areas: the building should be provided with a potential means of extracting Radon from the substructure should that prove necessary after construction. For example, in the case of a non-complex building of normal design and construction, the

provision of a standby Radon sump or sumps with connecting pipework or other appropriate certified systems should be adequate.”

As part of the National Radon Control Strategy, my Department, in conjunction with the EPA's Office of Radiological Protection, developed a training program for the construction industry to aid in the proper installation of sumps and barriers as per the requirements. Assigned Certifiers under the Building Control regulations have a responsibility to ensure the correct installation and require certification where considered appropriate.

The Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) was established as an independent statutory body under the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 to operate a national tenancy registration system and to resolve disputes between landlords and tenants. The RTB has no role in relation to radon testing.

The Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment has established an Advisory Group to examine the feasibility and implications of setting minimum thermal efficiency performance standards in properties offered for rent or lease in the residential sector. The Group, on which my Department is represented, will advise DCCAE on how best to progress energy efficiency upgrades in the rental sector and on the approach to public consultation on the issue having regard to the relevant issues. Key considerations will focus on appropriate approaches to regulation, and the timescale for introduction of any requirements, as well as any associated potential supports.

Question No. 94 answered with Question No. 71.

Question No. 95 answered with Question No. 53.

Tenant Purchase Scheme Review

96. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when it is planned to publish the report on the tenant (incremental) purchase scheme 2016; his plans to implement its recommendations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1417/19]

99. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the review of the tenant purchase scheme will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1312/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 96 and 99 together.

The Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme came into operation on 1 January 2016. In line with the commitment given in Rebuilding Ireland a review of the first 12 months of the Scheme's operation has been completed 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 Mortgages

97. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Gov-

ernment if the eligibility criteria for the Rebuilding Ireland home loan will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1468/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan scheme was launched in February to replace the existing House Purchase and the Home Choice Loan schemes. It has been established under the Housing (Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan) Regulations 2018, which also provide for the issuance of a statutory Credit Policy. The purpose of the Credit Policy is to set out in more detail the eligibility criteria for obtaining a loan and procedures to be followed by local authorities in considering loan applications.

In order to assist the on-going administration of the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan, I have asked my Department to undertake a review of the operation of the scheme, which is due to be finalised shortly. It will have regard to the views of local authorities, the Housing Agency, and the Housing Finance Agency, and will also take account of the issues raised by public representatives since the scheme's commencement.

This review will incorporate an examination of queries that have been raised concerning the Credit Policy and the corresponding eligibility criteria. However, in making any recommendations in relation to the operation of the scheme, it must also take account of the need to ensure that lending issued under it is provided on a prudential basis, so as to protect the financial interests of the borrowers and the local authorities.

Question No. 98 answered with Question No. 93.

Question No. 99 answered with Question No. 96.

Rental Sector

100. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if new laws relating to landlords and notice to quit will be retrospective and include those on eviction orders. [1177/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Residential Tenancies (Amendment)(No. 2) Bill 2018 was published on 19 December 2018.

Section 7(1)(c) of the Bill amends Table 1 to section 66 of the Residential Tenancies Acts 2004-2016 to extend the notice periods that a landlord provides in serving a notice of tenancy termination to any tenant who has occupied a dwelling for more than 6 months and less than 5 years. Section 7(2) of the Bill provides that the new notice periods will apply to any period of notice to be given in a notice of termination served by a landlord on a tenant on or after the date of commencement of section 7(1); accordingly, the provision will not apply to notices served before that date.

Rental Sector

101. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on the trend of large-scale developments of apartment units being sold in bulk to investment and pension funds; his further views on whether this is contributing to a rental cartel; his plans to draft legislation in conjunction with the Minister for Finance to make it a requirement for developments with over 100 units to advertise these units on the open market; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1477/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):

There are approximately 340,000 tenancies registered with the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB), of which approximately 310,000 are private rented tenancies. The majority of landlords, just over 70% own just one property, with a further 16% owning just two properties. The table shows that almost 86% of the registered rental housing stock is possessed by landlords with less than 10 properties, reflecting the fact that the overall percentage of stock held by institutional investors is relatively low. Against that background, I have no plans for legislation of the kind suggested.

Table: Percentage of tenancies held by landlords in 2018

No. of Properties Owned by Landlord	Cumulative % Tenancies
Up to 1 prop	39.5%
Up to 2 prop	57.4%
Up to 3 prop	66.8%
Up to 4 prop	72.7%
Up to 5 prop	76.9%
Up to 6 prop	80.1%
Up to 7 prop	82.6%
Up to 8 prop	84.3%
Up to 9 prop	85.9%
10+ prop	14.1%

Question No. 102 answered with Question No. 53.

Question No. 103 answered with Question No. 61.

Homeless Persons Data

104. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will recall the housing consultative committee data sub group to undertake a review of the monthly homeless report to review the methodology used in the production of the reports; and if the Departments of Justice and Equality, Children and Youth Affairs and Tulsa will be included to determine the best way to capture the homeless households in accommodation funded by those Departments in the monthly figures. [1434/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department publishes a monthly homelessness report, which includes details of the numbers of individuals, families and their associated dependents accommodated in emergency accommodation funded and overseen by the housing authorities. These reports are based on data provided by housing authorities, produced through the Pathway Accommodation & Support System (PASS). The reports are collated on a regional basis and are published on my Department's website.

In September 2017, I established the Homelessness Inter-Agency Group to ensure that there was a coordinated approach to the delivery of homeless services. The Department of Justice and Equality, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and Tulsa are all members of this group. Accordingly, I am satisfied that there is a suitable forum in place to provide for dialogue between my Department and these Departments and agencies, including on homeless reporting. I have no plans to change the monthly homelessness reports in the manner proposed by

the Deputy.

Question No. 105 answered with Question No. 61.

Question No. 106 answered with Question No. 88.

Local Authority Housing Mortgages

107. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the situation faced by many persons that are ineligible for social housing or HAP and are living in private rented accommodation to save a deposit to allow them apply for a Rebuilding Ireland home loan; his plans to address the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1439/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan is designed to enable credit worthy first-time buyers, who are unable to access a mortgage from a commercial lender to obtain sustainable mortgage lending to purchase a new or second-hand property. The low rate of fixed interest associated with the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan provides first-time buyers with access to mortgage finance that they may not otherwise have been able to afford at a higher interest rate.

To support prudential lending and consistency of treatment for borrowers, a Loan to Value ratio of 90% applies to the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan as per the Central Bank's prudential lending guidelines. Therefore, in order to avail of the loan, applicants must have a deposit equivalent to 10% of the market value of the property.

Applicants must provide bank or similar statements (such as post office, credit union, etc.) for a 12-month period immediately prior to making an application, clearly showing a credible and consistent track record of savings. The cash savings should be no less than 3% of the market value of the property. Gifts are permissible up to 7% of the market value of the property, where their source is verified.

Exceptions to the above can be made where an applicant/applicants can clearly demonstrate a consistent and credible record of savings or rent payment through their bank account which at a minimum is equal to -

- In the case of a fixed rate loan, the proposed monthly loan repayment or
- In the case of a variable rate loan, the proposed stress tested monthly loan repayment.

Given the need to administer the loan in a financially prudent manner, in order to protect the financial position of both the borrower and local authorities, I have no plans to reduce these deposit requirements.

For prospective purchasers of newly-built properties, the availability, through the Revenue Commissioners, of the Help to Buy Initiative for first-time buyers may provide additional assistance to help prospective applicants for the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan secure the required level of deposit.

Homeless Persons Data

108. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government

the number of homeless persons categorised as homeless for a period of 12 months or more. [1458/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department's role in relation to homelessness involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of housing authorities in addressing homelessness at local level. Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of homeless accommodation and related services rests with individual housing authorities.

While data in the format sought is not collected by my Department, quarterly performance reports provide information at the end of each quarter of time spent in emergency accommodation for periods of less or more than 6 months. The most recent reports show that at the end of September 2018, 43% of adults recorded as in emergency accommodation at that time, were resident there for less than 6 months, and 57% were resident for more than 6 months.

The performance reports also provide details of the numbers of adults who exited from homelessness into an independent tenancy. In 2017, 4,729 adults exited homelessness and it is expected that this figure will have been exceeded in 2018.

Unemployment Data

109. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Taoiseach the number of persons in unemployment, by county and city, in tabular form. [1792/19]

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

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) is the official source of estimates of unemployment (ILO) in the State. This survey replaced the Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) from Q3 2017. The most recent LFS figures available are for Q3 2018.

Due to methodology and sample size it is not possible to produce reliable county or city estimates from the LFS. Estimates of unemployment however, are produced by NUTS2 and NUTS 3 Regions.

The table shows the number of unemployed (ILO) persons aged 15-74 years classified by NUTS2 and NUTS3 regions and in the State for Q3 2018.

Unemployed persons (ILO) aged 15-74 years classified by NUTS2 and NUTS3 regions, Q3 2018.

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Area	Unemployed
Northern and Western	24.0
Border	9.5
West	14.5
Southern	51.2
Mid-West	16.5
South-East	17.4
South-West	17.3
Eastern and Midland	68.7
Dublin	38.9

Area	Unemployed
Mid-East	20.1
Midland	9.7
State	143.8

Source: Labour Force Survey, Central Statistics Office.’;

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

Data may be subject to future revision.

Reference period: q3=Jul -Sep.

Taoiseach’s Meetings and Engagements

110. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his recent conversation with Chancellor Merkel. [1432/19]

The Taoiseach: I spoke by phone with Chancellor Merkel on Thursday 3 January.

The main focus of our discussion was Brexit, and the importance of the Withdrawal Agreement that was agreed between the EU and the UK last November being ratified.

We agreed that we would be ready to offer additional reassurances and clarifications to the UK, but that there could be no renegotiation or contradiction of the Withdrawal Agreement, including on the backstop.

We reiterated our wish to start negotiations on the future relationship as soon as possible after the UK’s withdrawal, and for that relationship to be as close, comprehensive and ambitious as possible. We also discussed our work on preparedness, including contingency planning for a no-deal scenario, recognising that the closer we get to 29 March without Ratification of the Withdrawal Agreement, the more urgent this work becomes.

We also spoke about my planned attendance at the CSU conference in Germany the following day.

Departmental Expenditure

111. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Taoiseach the cost incurred by his Department in 2018 for the use of taxi services. [54217/18]

The Taoiseach: Expenditure on taxis from January - December 2018 totalled €26,053.46. Taxis are used for official purposes where there is no other practical or suitable alternative mode of transport available.

My Department has a taxi account for official business purposes with a company selected by the Office of Government Procurement under a Framework Agreement for services in the Greater Dublin Area, following a public tender process. Staff may also from time to time use other taxi providers when it is not possible to use the contracted company or they are in a location outside the contracted area or on official business abroad.

It should be noted that the figure provided for 2018 is based on provisional outturn and may

be subject to revision, as part of the finalisation of my Department's 2018 Appropriation Account.

Departmental Correspondence

112. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Taoiseach the customer complaints received by his Department in each of the years since 2016; if the complaints are grouped into categories; the nature of the complaints; the resolution of same; and the number progressed to the relevant Ombudsman in each of the years since 2016. [54242/18]

The Taoiseach: Eleven customer complaints were received in my Department since 2016. Two complaints were received in 2016, five complaints were received in 2017 and four complaints were received during 2018. No customer complaints have been received in 2019 to date. These complaints are not categorised, but nine of the complaints related to issues experienced with other Government Departments and the other two complaints related to content on my Department's website. Each complaint was investigated by the Customer Services Officer in my Department and the outcome was explained to the customer in each case. None of the complaints received progressed to the Ombudsman.

EU Bodies

113. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on the nine nominees of the Government to the European Economic and Social Committee; the term of office of each of the nominees; and the number of terms to date each member has served, in tabular form. [54250/18]

The Taoiseach: The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) is an advisory body whose function is to represent economic and social interests in the Union's decision-making process.

The EESC has 350 members, who are drawn from economic and social interest groups in Europe, nominated by national governments and appointed by the Council of the European Union for a renewable five year term of office. The latest renewal was in October 2015, for the 2015-2020 term of office.

The members of the Economic and Social Committee are completely independent in the performance of their duties, in the Union's general interest.

The number of members is in proportion to the country's population. Ireland has nine places on the EESC, as follows:

Name	First Appointed
1. Séamus Boland	10/10/2011
2. John Bryan	25/02/2015
3. John Comer	21/09/2015
4. David Croughan	21/09/2010
5. Cillian Lohan	25/02/2015
6. Thomas McDonogh	21/09/2002
7. Patricia McKeown	21/09/2015
8. Michael McLoughlin	21/09/2015
9. Jack O'Connor	21/09/2015

Departmental Expenditure

114. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Taoiseach the budget and spend in his Department for marketing, media and social media in each of the years 2016 to 2018; and the projected spend for 2019. [54471/18]

115. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Taoiseach the number of staff in his Department employed to work on marketing, media and social media in 2018. [54488/18]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 114 and 115 together.

The following table shows spend on the purchase of space in various media, along with creative work.

The spend includes a number of major cross-Government public information programmes aimed at improving citizens' lives that the Department funded centrally during 2018. Examples of these include the Healthy Ireland campaign, which encourages people to take small steps to improve their health or the Self-Employed benefits campaign, which highlights the range of resources and supports available to those who are self-employed.

Project Ireland 2040 and Global Ireland are also included in this spend. Additionally, it includes communications about recruitment and consultations regarding Government policy.

Over 90% of this expense was incurred prior to July 2018, due to information campaigns being run centrally. Following a budget cut of €2.5m in mid 2018, public information campaigns are now largely funded by the relevant line Department, as opposed to being funded centrally from this Department. As a result, spend for 2019 will be significantly less.

Please note that Digital space as outlined in the table includes the following:

1) Ensuring the public is directed via search engines to the sites that deliver the services/information they are looking for; and

2) Sponsored posts on social media, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube, to ensure strong dissemination of Government information.

GIS is the team with responsibility for communications in my Department. The GIS team has a number of responsibilities including:

- Delivery of a Government-wide communications reform programme
- Running the Government Press Office
- Maintaining Government websites and digital media channels.

There are 17 posts in GIS.

	2016	2017	2018
Purchase of space in various media (print cinema, radio etc) along with creative production	10,628.67	71,365.45	1,830,232.65
Of which Digital Space	0	0	437347.5

It should be noted that the figure provided for 2018 is based on provisional outturn and may be subject to revision, as part of the finalisation of my Department's 2018 Appropriation Account.

Departmental Legal Cases Data

116. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of cases lodged to date against his Department in regard to the exclusion of members of the Defence Forces from the protections of the Working Time Act 1997; and the number of those cases still pending. [54155/18]

117. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the sum in settlements paid out to date by his Department following successful cases taken by members of the Defence Forces in regard to their exclusion from the protections of the Working Time Act 1997. [54156/18]

118. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the sum paid by his Department to date defending litigation initiated by members of the Defence Forces in regard to their exclusion from the provisions of the Working Time Act 1997. [54157/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 116 to 118, inclusive, together.

There are currently 18 cases pending in relation to the application of the Working Time Directive to members of the Defence Forces. One case has been disposed of and the terms thereof are confidential. An Order, on consent of the parties, was made by the Court in recognition of the plaintiff's personal circumstances. That Order provided that the Plaintiff be entitled to the costs of the proceedings, to be taxed in default of agreement. This process is ongoing.

The Office of the Chief State Solicitor (CSSO) is responsible for providing legal representation in relation to the litigation referred to by the Deputy. The CSSO is responsible for the costs of the State's legal teams in cases that it manages on behalf of the Department. Such costs are paid directly by that Office as appropriate.

Given that there is litigation still pending, it would be inappropriate to comment further.

Childcare Services Provision

119. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the details of the crèche planned by the Defence Forces; and the location, capacity and cost per child of same. [54158/18]

120. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of members of the Defence Forces canvassed for their views in regard to the proposal to create a Defence Forces crèche; and if a formal survey in regard to demand for same was carried out. [54159/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 119 and 120 together.

There are no plans for the introduction of crèche facilities in the Defence Forces.

The issue of the provision of crèches was explored by the Defence Forces a number of years ago, having regard to a number of factors, including childcare policy and regulations, the findings of the Civil Service Childcare Initiative Focused Policy Assessment, the various models of childcare provision currently in use in other State and Semi-State bodies, the availability and provision of appropriate facilities, cost and the availability of the service in the private sector.

Defence Forces Data

121. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of complaints lodged by members of the Defence Forces under administrative instruction A7 in each of the years from 2011 to 2018 and to date in 2019. [54160/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): It has not been possible for the military authorities to collate this information within the time available for reply. The information will be passed to the Deputy as soon as it becomes available.

Departmental Expenditure

122. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the cost incurred by his Department in 2018 for the use of taxi services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54207/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): My Department incurred expenditure of €6,510.69 on taxi services in 2018. Such expenditure arises in relation to official business of the Department.

Food Safety Standards Inspections

123. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if the recent closure order issued to the officers' mess in the Air Corps came about as the result of a routine HSE inspection; if not, if it was due to the actions of a whistleblower; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54221/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I am advised that following a random inspection of the Officer's Mess Casement Aerodrome, Baldonnell, the HSE Environmental Health Inspector issued a Closure Order on Tuesday 11 December 2018 which necessitated remedial works. These works were expeditiously executed and a Re-Opening Order was issued on Friday 14 December, 2018. Military management have advised that it is their understanding that the inspection was a random one. That being said, the basis on which premises are selected for inspection is a matter for the HSE.

Departmental Properties

124. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the reason the sale of the married quarters in Cathal Brugha Barracks has been stalled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54230/18]

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

the proposed sale of the former married quarters at Cathal Brugha Barracks has been on going for some time now. During this period, it emerged that there were legal difficulties in selling the properties as originally intended. In December 2016, the Chief State Solicitors Office met with the residents' legal advisers to outline the issues arising and, in order to resolve the matter, invited proposals as to how the sales could be facilitated. I am advised that this approach did not yield any viable proposals.

Having taken into consideration the advice of the Chief State Solicitor's Office, my officials have been left with no alternative but to formally withdraw from proceeding with the proposed sales. On the 1st November 2018 the Chief State Solicitor's Office wrote to the legal representatives of the occupiers advising them accordingly. As part of this communication my Department have indicated that it is intended to regularise the current occupancies of those people who were the subject of the original sales offer.

Departmental Expenditure

125. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the budget and spend in his Department for marketing, media and social media in each of the years from 2016 to 2018; the projected spend for 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54461/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): My Department does not have a specific budget for marketing, media and social media items, nor did it incur any costs in relation to marketing. The table below outlines expenditure on advertising for the period in question. The projected spend for 2019 is approximately €101,000. Additional ad hoc costs for one off events may occur, in which case the expense is covered by the Branch administering the event from within their own budget.

Expenditure	Amount
Advertising Costs 2016	€92,387.91
Advertising Costs 2017	€97,562.81
Advertising Costs 2018	€110,625.04

The expenditure outlined in the table above for advertising, includes costs associated with a Be Winter Ready information campaign which my Department runs each year which involves advertising on Twitter. The associated costs for this element for the years requested are outlined as follows.

Expenditure	Campaign	Costs
Be Winter Ready 2018-2019	Twitter campaign	€5,535.00
Be Winter Ready 2018-2019	Management of Twitter Campaign	€2,583.00
Be Winter Ready 2017-2018	Twitter campaign	€5,535.00
Be Winter Ready 2017-2018	Management of Twitter campaign	€2,583.00
Be Winter Ready 2016-2017	Twitter campaign	€5,043.00
Be Winter Ready 2016-2017	Management of Twitter campaign	€1,476.00

It is anticipated that expenditure for the 2019-2020 Be Winter Ready Campaign will be in line with recent years.

Departmental Staff Data

126. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of staff in his Department employed to work on marketing, media and social media in 2018. [54478/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): One of my two special advisers is employed as a Press Adviser and is the only person employed in my Department who works full time in the area of media and social media. Two other members of my Department's staff work in its Press Office, while also having a number of other duties and responsibilities. My Department does not employ any of its staff to work in a marketing capacity.

Cyber Security Policy

127. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the role his Department plays in national cybersecurity; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1028/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): As outlined in the Government's White Paper on Defence 2015, the issue of Cyber Security has very significant implications for governmental administration, for industry, for economic wellbeing and for the security and safety of citizens. Indeed Cyber Security is a standing item on the agenda of the Government Task Force on Emergency Planning which I chair.

The response to cyber threats remains a whole-of-Government challenge, with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment taking the lead role and with inputs in the security domain from An Garda Síochána and the Defence Forces. The Department of Defence and the Defence Forces are committed to participating, under the leadership of the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment, in the delivery of measures to improve the cyber security of the State.

Ireland's National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC), which is located in the Department of Communications, Climate Action & Environment provides a range of cyber security services to owners of Government IT infrastructure and Critical National Infrastructure. The NCSC is also home to the national Computer Security Incident Response Team (CSIRT-IE) which acts as a national point of contact involving entities within Ireland, and as the point of contact for international discussions on issues of cyber security. The scope of CSIRT-IE's activities covers prevention, detection, response and mitigation services to Government Departments and State agencies and critical national infrastructure providers. The Defence Forces provide seconded specialists to assist with the work of this team when resources allow. Also, as in any emergency/crisis situation, once Defence systems are supported, the Department of Defence and the Defence Forces will provide support to the CSIRT-IE team in so far as resources allow.

Defence Forces Recruitment

128. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the status of recruitment plans for the Defence Forces for 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1029/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I recently met with senior civil and military officials to review recruitment plans for 2019. Subject to further consideration, it is envisaged that similar recruitment competitions to those held in 2018 will

take place in 2019.

The Government remains committed to on-going recruitment to the Defence Forces to reach the establishment level of 9,500 personnel as set out in the White Paper on Defence 2015.

Defence Forces Remuneration

129. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to deal with the outstanding issues of low pay across the Defence Forces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1030/19]

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.

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. An increase of 1% was paid to personnel earning up to €30,000 per annum from 1 January 2019. Further increases in pay are scheduled for later in 2019 and 2020.

By the end of the current Public Service Pay agreement the payscales 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 the Public Service 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.

130. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if regulations that exclude members of the Defence Forces from participating in marches or parades will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1031/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Given the unique roles assigned to the Defence Forces, there are a range of restrictions that apply to members of the Defence Forces relating to political and industrial relations matters.

Section 103 of the Defence Act prohibits members of the Permanent Defence Force from membership of, or subscription to, any political organisation or society; DFR A9 prohibits participation by uniformed members of the Defence Forces in any demonstration, meeting or function of a political character; DFR A7 prohibits at any time unauthorised communications that pertain to service matters by members of the Defence Forces. Members of the Defence Forces are also prohibited from striking.

The Deputy may wish to know that this matter is the subject of litigation and therefore it is not appropriate to comment further.

Army Barracks

131. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to introduce a new Army barracks in counties Cavan and Monaghan or the greater Border region, in view of Brexit, recent developments and the possible reintroduction of a hard border; if such a move is included in contingency plans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1121/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): As part of a whole of Government approach, my Department continues to engage in forward planning with the other Departments involved in addressing all issues relevant to the UK's decision to leave the European Union. This engagement involves the identification of key strategic, operational and policy issues arising from Brexit.

As I have outlined previously, the UK's decision to leave the EU does not of itself give rise to additional border control requirements. Furthermore, the avoidance of a hard border on the island is fundamental to the Brexit agreement reached in November last between the EU and the UK Government, and there can be no change to the commitments made in that agreement. As such, there are no plans for a new Army barracks in counties Cavan and Monaghan or the greater Border region.

Furthermore, it is important to note that primary responsibility for the internal security of the State rests with the Minister for Justice and Equality and An Garda Síochána. Accordingly, responsibility for the security aspect of border control rests with An Garda Síochána, while the Revenue Commissioners also have responsibilities relating to their particular mandate.

Among the roles assigned to the Defence Forces in the White Paper on Defence is the provision of Aid to the Civil Power which, in practice, means to provide assistance and support to An Garda Síochána when requested to do so. The Defence Forces also provide support to the Revenue Commissioners, again, when requested to do so.

There is ongoing close liaison between An Garda Síochána and the Defence Forces regarding security matters and regular coordination and liaison meetings take place. My Department continues to monitor the ongoing situation to ensure that both it and the Defence Forces are fully prepared to address any potential issues that might arise in the defence area as a consequence of Brexit.

Defence Forces Personnel

132. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of Defence Forces personnel who were required to work or be on-call for periods of more than ten consecutive hours over the Christmas 2018 period; the extra payment made to those personnel; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1136/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The information requested by the Deputy is currently being compiled. I will revert to the Deputy in respect of the information requested when available.

State Claims Agency

133. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the health and safety management system reports and-or audits carried out on the Air Corps by the State Claims Agency in each of the years from 2006 to 2015; the year and author of each report and-or audit in the timeframe; if the reports have been published and-or classified as confidential; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1180/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I am advised by the State Claims Agency that it has a statutory remit under the National Treasury Management Agency (Amendment) Act 2000 to provide risk management advices to Delegated State Authorities. Such risk management advices include the provision of Health & Safety Management System audits, inspections and reviews. From this, State Claims Agency conducted a number of Health & Safety Management System Defence Forces audits within the Air Corps between the years 2006 – 2015. The Reports are authored by the State Claims Agency and are confidential between the Agency and their Client.

Defence Forces Data

134. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the figures for Permanent Defence Force personnel ordinarily based at Custume Barracks, Athlone, County Westmeath. [1325/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The establishment of the Permanent Defence Force is 9,500 personnel. The military authorities have informed me that the establishment for Units based in Custume Barracks is approximately 995 personnel.

Military service entails personnel moving into and out of particular postings and as they serve at home and overseas, receive training and undergo educational and career development courses. Accordingly, there is a constant through-flow of personnel into and out of barracks, including Custume Barracks.

Departmental Correspondence

135. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the customer complaints received by his Department in each of the years since 2016; if the complaints are grouped into categories; the nature of the complaints; the resolution of same; and the number progressed to the relevant Ombudsman in each of the years since 2016. [1869/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): My Department received a small number of complaints in the years referred to by the Deputy. The table sets out the complaints which were received by the Department's Customer Service.

Customer Com-plaints	2016	2017	2018
Number	6	5	0
Category group	Not categorised.	Not categorised.	N/A
Nature	Response times to queries. Event cancellation.	Response times to queries.	N/A
Resolution	Through discussion with complainants to address the issues.	Through discussion with complainants to address the issues.	N/A
Ombudsman referral	None	None	N/A

Humanitarian Aid Provision

136. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to continue to fund and support the conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts at community level by an organisation (details supplied) in partnership with INGOs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54033/18]

137. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to ensure that Ireland increases its diplomatic efforts through the EU to ensure the peace deal in South Sudan holds; his further plans to continue to support the humanitarian efforts in South Sudan that are addressing the root causes of the conflict; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54034/18]

143. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the humanitarian efforts in South Sudan that are addressing the root causes of conflict will receive continued support; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54413/18]

144. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the conflict resolution and peace building efforts at community level by the South Sudan council of churches in partnership with INGOs will receive continued funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54415/18]

146. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if Ireland will increase diplomatic efforts through the EU to ensure the fragile peace deal holds in South Sudan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54427/18]

157. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to increase diplomatic efforts through the EU to assist peace talks in South Sudan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1102/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): I propose to take Questions Nos. 136, 137, 143, 144, 146 and 157 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 over 7 million people are currently in need of humanitarian assistance and protection.

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 2018.

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 was provided in 2018, 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 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 \$178 million to alleviate the crisis in South Sudan since 2011, as well as to the EU, which provided more than €90 million in 2018.

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

Catalan Pro-Independence Prisoners

138. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade further to Parliamentary Question No 65 of 12 December 2018, if his attention has been drawn to the fact that Ireland can refer a case to the ECHR in relation to four Catalan civil and political leaders held in prison on pre-trial detention who are now on hunger strike; if officials from his Department will visit these persons before Christmas in order to report back to him on their situation and conditions of detention; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54043/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The issues referred to by the Deputy are the subject of ongoing judicial proceedings in Spain. As such it would not be appropriate for me to make an intervention or statement on the matter.

There are no plans for Irish officials to make such visits. I am kept informed of developments in Catalonia by our Embassy in Madrid on a regular basis.

Northern Ireland

139. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to have further talks with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the political parties in Northern Ireland on the need to have the assembly and Executive restored; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54114/18]

170. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will provide an update on recent efforts to restart the Executive in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1683/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 139 and 170 together.

The continuing absence of vital institutions of the Good Friday Agreement is a source of deep concern for the Government, as it is for the British Government. The Government will continue to do everything in its power, in accordance with its responsibilities as a co-guarantor of the Good Friday Agreement, to secure the effective operation of all of its institutions. Both Governments are determined to find a way beyond the current impasse to get the institutions operating again and I remain in regular contact with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on how this can be pursued.

I visited Belfast on 9 and 10 January and held discussions with the leaders of all of the Northern Ireland political parties. These were constructive engagements with each of the party leaders and I emphasised that the two-year absence of the devolved institutions must not continue. There are pressing decisions and issues across a range of areas, which require a functioning Executive and Assembly. Each of the party leaders confirmed to me their wish to participate in the institutions again and provided views on key concerns and issues for their parties.

Following these latest consultations, I do not underestimate the way to go in achieving a resolution, but I continue to believe that this can be achieved and that there is an increasingly urgent need for talks to begin.

The devolved institutions of the Agreement are urgently needed so that the mandated Assembly and power-sharing Executive can represent the interests of all of the people of Northern Ireland and address issues of concern, including the challenges for Northern Ireland of the UK decision to exit the European Union. The North South Ministerial Council is also essential to

oversee and develop North South cooperation on matters of mutual interest, as provided for under the Good Friday Agreement.

The legislation that was brought forward by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, which temporarily suspends the requirement to call an Assembly election, underlines the urgent requirement for all with responsibilities to do everything in their power to get them operating again. The Secretary of State and I are agreed that a new political process is needed. I will continue to work with the Secretary of State and remain in regular contact with the leaders of each of the political parties, to get the necessary political process commenced to secure an agreement for a functioning Executive and Assembly.

I also met in Belfast last week with a range of civil society representatives, including trade unions, business organisations and those working in the education, voluntary and community sectors. In all of these discussions, I heard a clear and unambiguous desire for the Assembly and Executive to operate again and acute concern at the impact of the current impasse for Northern Ireland and for progress with the Peace Process founded on the Good Friday Agreement. There was also serious apprehension on how the challenges raised for Northern Ireland by the UK decision to exit the European Union will be addressed and broad support for the Withdrawal Agreement negotiated between the UK and the European Union, in particular in providing an absolute guarantee that a hard border will be avoided and that the Good Friday Agreement will be fully protected. I also received a clear message in these civil society engagements that the UK exit from the EU is a further and pressing reason for political leaders to work together through the power-sharing Executive and Assembly, to represent and protect Northern Ireland's unique interests and concerns.

I believe that these calls from across all sections of the community in Northern Ireland for the devolved institutions to operate have to be heeded.

Maritime Jurisdiction

140. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if a matter regarding a map contained in SI No. 22 of 2016 (details supplied) will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54194/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): In international law the outer limits of a coastal state's maritime zones - such as the 12 mile territorial sea, the 200 mile exclusive economic zone and the continental shelf - are measured from the baseline. The normal baseline is the low water mark along the coast. In 1958, however, following an earlier decision of the International Court of Justice, it was agreed at the UN Conference on the Law of the Sea that in places where a state's coastline is heavily indented, or is screened by a fringe of islands, straight baselines connecting appropriate points on headlands and islands may be drawn.

As the configuration of the Irish coastline on the west and south coasts meets these criteria it was decided that Ireland should become one of the first countries in the world to adopt the new system, drawing straight baselines connecting fifty points from Malin Head in Donegal to Carnsore Point in Wexford. These were set out in the Maritime Jurisdiction (Straight Baselines) Order 1959. As other parts of the State's coastline do not meet the necessary criteria straight baselines were not drawn in those places.

The fifty points were resurveyed several years ago using modern survey techniques that allow far more precision than was possible in 1959. The 2016 Order prescribes an updated and

more accurate system of straight baselines drawn between the resurveyed points and replaces the system established by the 1959 Order.

Departmental Expenditure

141. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the cost incurred by his Department in 2018 for the use of taxi services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54211/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department comprises two separate votes, Vote 28 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Vote 27 International Co-operation. Vote 28 incorporates the majority of Ireland's 83 diplomatic and consular Missions abroad while Vote 27 encompasses a small number of development-focused Missions, mostly in Africa.

Total taxi hire costs for both Votes for 2018, including domestic and Mission costs, amount provisionally to €350,625.00. This amount is based on provisional out-turn figures and are subject to change as we finalise the year end account.

Given the nature of my Department's responsibilities, officers are obliged to undertake a significant amount of official international travel, often taking place during unsociable hours when the safety and security of Officers necessitates travel by taxi. Officers across the growing Mission network also travel to frequent meetings and out-of-hours events as part of their core official duties where it may often be only feasible by taxi.

Travel expenditure is being actively minimised. Provisional 2018 taxi expenditure was marginally higher than 2017 (€337,872; 3.7%) but this is in the context of increased diplomatic activity at European and international level brought about by Brexit preparations and our United Nations Security Council campaign, an expanded Mission network and a larger workforce.

Departmental travel policy aims to minimise official travel costs and to achieve value for money for expenditure necessarily incurred, consistent with the effective discharge of official duties. My Department complies with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform guidelines on official travel.

Consular Services Provision

142. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the assistance being provided to a person (details supplied) in prison in Turkey; if all legal documents required have been furnished in view of the fact that they were in court again on 2 January 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54365/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I can confirm to the Deputy that I am aware of this long-running Consular case.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Embassy of Ireland in Turkey have been providing consular assistance to this citizen and his family since his arrest in 2017. At the latest hearing on 2 January the matter was adjourned and his bail was extended.

I understand that the court in Turkey has made an official request to the Irish authorities for documentation relating to this citizen, which is being processed as rapidly as possible.

Questions Nos. 143 and 144 answered with Question No. 136.

Consular Services Provision

145. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the reason the case of an Irish citizen (details supplied) is not receiving responses from his Department or an embassy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54424/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I can confirm to the Deputy that I am aware of this case, which relates to a civil legal matter in another European country. Embassy officials have provided this citizen with details of local English-speaking lawyers who are best placed to advise on legal proceedings.

My Department has replied directly to this citizen on several occasions, and to the representations made on her behalf.

Question No. 146 answered with Question No. 136.

Departmental Expenditure

147. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the budget and spend in his Department for marketing, media and social media in each of the years from 2016 to 2018; the projected spend for 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54465/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department engages in advertising and public awareness campaigns where there is important information that needs to be brought to the attention of citizens. Some examples of these campaigns have included the Online Passport Renewals Service, a “Citizens Dialogue on the Future of Europe” initiative, the “Getting Ireland Brexit Ready” campaign and the Global Ireland initiative which incorporated the UN Security Council campaign and Public Consultations on Ireland’s International Development Policy.

Projected spending in this area by my Department during 2019 is still being finalised. A full outline of the amount spent in 2016, 2017 and 2018 is laid out in the table.

2018	2017	2016
€243,687.00	€210, 324.15	€45,527.53

Departmental Staff Data

148. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of staff in his Department employed to work on marketing, media and social media in 2018. [54482/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department has a dedicated Communications Unit that employs twenty one civil servants covering, *inter alia*, press relations, website and digital media and public outreach.

The role of the Unit is to promote and facilitate external communication in support of Ireland’s objectives internationally. This includes communicating to the public about the work

underway by Government to prepare for the departure of the UK from the European Union and steps taken to mitigate impacts as well as messaging on our candidacy for the Security Council of the United Nations. Other key priorities for the Unit include strengthening the capacity of the Department and missions abroad to deliver on public diplomacy goals; deepening public awareness of the services and activities of the Department and enhancing public awareness of Irish Aid - Ireland's official overseas development programme.

There are press officers posted in London, Brussels and Washington, as well as a team of three officers in the Passport Office whose work includes social media and key public information messaging on passport services.

In addition there are currently two Special Advisors employed by my Department who, along with other duties, advise on media matters.

Mr. Chris Donoghue is my Special Advisor and Communications Director. Mr. Donoghue is employed at Principal Officer grade. Mr. Paul Fox is Special advisor to the Minister of State for European Affairs. His role includes advice on media matters. Mr. Fox is employed at Assistant Principal Officer grade.

These appointments were made in line with "Instructions to Personnel Officers – Ministerial Appointments for the 32nd Dáil" which included "Guidelines on staffing of Ministerial offices" issued by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

Human Trafficking

149. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the prevention of human trafficking will form a part of Ireland's forthcoming new international development policy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1010/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): The promotion and protection of human rights is at the heart of Irish foreign policy. The 2015 foreign policy review, "Global Island - Ireland's foreign policy for a changing world", recognises that human rights violations undermine development. This commits the Department to promote and protect human rights, with an explicit commitment to combat and prevent human trafficking. Ireland has put in place strong legislative, administrative and operational measures, through a multi-agency approach. Ireland is party to UN and Council of Europe instruments to combat this threat and have fully transposed the EU Directive on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims.

Global Island provides the overall foreign policy framework for the recent public consultation paper on international development, part of the process towards a new policy on international development.

That public consultation paper reiterated Ireland's commitment to upholding human rights and Ireland's international development actions. As part of the contextual analysis underpinning the new development policy, instability and the threats it poses to human rights are identified, factors which facilitate human trafficking.

In line with our foreign policy, the consultation paper on international development cooperation proposes a focus on protection of poor and vulnerable people living in fragile, crisis and conflict-affected areas, and of people on the move. At recent public consultation meetings there was broad validation of proposals to build on the intersections between Ireland's peacekeeping and conflict resolution work, political engagement, human rights, development cooperation

and humanitarian action to combat instability and protect people. The final drafting of the new policy is nearing completion, with a view to maximising the effectiveness of Ireland's international development programmes in all their aspects.

Human Rights

150. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the measures Ireland has taken at EU and international level regarding the ongoing civil unrest and humanitarian crisis in Sudan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1051/19]

151. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the engagements he has had with the Sudanese ambassador regarding the civil unrest and humanitarian crisis ongoing in Sudan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1052/19]

152. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the engagements Ireland's ambassador in Sudan is exchanging with state officials with regard to the civil unrest and humanitarian crisis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1053/19]

153. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the protest movement in Sudan; his plans to raise opposition to repression of the protest movement; the contact he has had with the Sudanese authorities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1055/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): I propose to take Questions Nos. 150 to 153, inclusive, together.

I am deeply concerned about the violence which has accompanied recent protests in Sudan, including credible reports of the use of live fire by the Government of Sudan and of multiple deaths.

Demonstrations, triggered by spiralling costs of living, began in the city of Atbara in the north east of the country on 19 December last year, spreading to over twenty towns and cities. While initially the protests were against the worsening economic situation, they have since developed into calls for President Omar al-Bashir's resignation.

President Omar al-Bashir has reacted by closing schools and declaring a state of emergency in some regions. Sudanese police have used tear gas and live ammunition in an attempt to disperse crowds. It is reported that almost 1,000 people have been arrested across the country since protests began. The Sudanese Government has said that 19 people have been killed during demonstrations, while Sudanese activists and medical workers say that at least double that number were killed. The use of live fire and arbitrary detention in these circumstances can never be justified.

Ireland, together with our EU partners, fully supports the call on the Government of Sudan, issued by the European External Action Service, to exercise restraint, respect the right to peaceful protest and ensure that all law enforcement and security bodies act under its direct control and in accordance with Sudan's constitutional and international commitments. The Embassy of Ireland in Nairobi, which is accredited to Sudan, continues to monitor the situation closely in close cooperation with the Delegation of the European Union in Khartoum.

In addition to the current unrest, Sudan continues to suffer from a range of humanitarian crises, including protracted conflicts and natural disasters, which feed into the popular disaffection which feed the protests. This humanitarian situation has been further exacerbated by the

economic crisis in 2018, leading to severe levels of food insecurity and malnutrition across the country. More than 1.8 million people are internally displaced and Sudan hosts a further 1.2 million refugees that have fled conflict in neighbouring countries, the majority of whom rely on humanitarian aid for their survival. As a result, an estimated 5.5 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance in Sudan this year, including 2.6 million children. Ireland is responding to these crises, with almost €26 million in direct humanitarian assistance to Sudan through our UN, NGO and Red Cross partners since 2012.

European Council Meetings

154. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if EU security issues were discussed at the December 2018 EU General Affairs Council meeting. [53436/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Minister of State for European Affairs, Helen McEntee T.D., represented Ireland at the General Affairs Council on 11 December 2018 which prepared the draft Conclusions for the European Council meeting on 13-14 December.

These welcomed progress made in the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy, including reform of EU Civilian CSDP, a longstanding ambition of Ireland. It also reflected the steps that have been taken in the implementation of Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO); of the European Defence Fund; and of EU-NATO cooperation. In regard to the latter, it is important to note that such cooperation fully respects the decision making autonomy of both organisations and does not prejudice the specific character of the security and defence policy of any Member States. Ministers also discussed the implementation of the Joint Action Plan on disinformation, aspects of which also have a bearing on security issues.

European Council Meetings

155. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the issue of fisheries was discussed in the context of the draft withdrawal treaty at the most recent EU General Affairs Council meeting in November 2018. [50449/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The issue of fisheries, in the context of the UK's withdrawal from the EU, was addressed by Member States during the GAC Article 50 meeting on 19 November 2018.

Fisheries and fish products are not addressed in the Withdrawal Agreement. The Withdrawal Agreement sets the terms of the UK's departure from the EU. However, arrangements on fisheries will be an important aspect of negotiations on the future relationship and, as set out in the Political Declaration agreed in November, both sides are committed to using best endeavours to have agreement on this in place by July 2020.

The EU has been clear in its own negotiating guidelines, adopted by the European Council in March last year, that, in the overall context of the EU-UK Free Trade Agreement, existing reciprocal access to fishing waters and resources should be maintained.

At the GAC in November, I made clear the importance Ireland attaches to this issue, making clear our view that the EU needs to stick closely to the March European Council guidelines on this issue. Fisheries is a priority for this Government, and we want to ensure we maintain cur-

rent access to fishing and Ireland's quota share of fish stocks. We will pursue this as a priority as part of our input on the negotiations on the future relationship.

At home, we continue to provide support to sectors most impacted by Brexit, including fisheries. The funding provided to Departments in Budget 2019 includes a €78m package for farmers, fishermen, food SMEs and to cover additional costs related to Brexit.

Human Rights Cases

156. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the cases of persons (details supplied); if action has been taken at EU or international level to assist these persons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1092/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am familiar with the cases of the persons in question, and remain concerned both about the grounds for their detention and with regard to their treatment by the Bahraini authorities over the past number of years.

Ireland attaches a high priority to safeguarding human rights defenders, and continually advocates for freedom for civil society actors to operate in a safe and enabling environment, without repression.

Our concerns relating to human rights in Bahrain are regularly conveyed through the Bahraini Embassy in London and through Ireland's (non-resident) Ambassador to Bahrain. In February 2018, officials from my Department met with the Ambassador of Bahrain in Dublin and raised Ireland's concerns about the human rights situation in Bahrain.

Ireland has used the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) as a means of keeping human rights issues in Bahrain under examination. Ireland regularly raises the case of human rights in Bahrain at the HRC in Geneva. In fact, Ireland has raised Bahrain in its past eight Item 4 Statements (human rights situations that require the Council's attention). In Ireland's most recent Item 4 Statement at the HRC session in September 2018, we expressed concerns about 'the ongoing restrictions on civil society space and the treatment of human rights defenders in Bahrain'. We also called on Bahrain to 'respect freedom of opinion and expression, and the right to a fair trial'. At the previous HRC session in June 2018, Ireland also raised concerns under Item 4. The EU, in its Item 2 Statement (on the reports of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights), also highlighted the deterioration of the human rights situation, with particular reference to the shrinking of political space in Bahrain. Officials from my Department had previously raised ongoing human rights concerns with Bahrain in the context of its Universal Periodic Review, which took place in Geneva in May 2017.

With regard to the rights of prisoners and detainees, Human Rights Council (HRC) Resolution 36/16, which Ireland co-sponsored, calls upon states to 'investigate promptly, effectively and impartially all alleged human rights violations and abuses suffered by persons deprived of their liberty, in particular cases involving death, torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, to provide effective remedies to the victims, and to ensure that detention administrations cooperate fully with the investigating authority and preserve all evidence'. Ireland has also co-sponsored; Resolutions 36/16 and 30/7, concerning human rights in the administration of justice; Resolution 31/31, concerning torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; and UN General Assembly Resolution 71/188, also concerning human rights in the administration of justice.

My Department will continue to monitor developments in Bahrain, and will continue to call on the Bahraini Government to deliver on its stated commitment to make tangible progress in the human rights sphere. Ireland's concerns about human rights will continue to be raised directly with the Bahraini authorities, and at EU and international levels, whenever opportunities arise.

Question No. 157 answered with Question No. 136.

Brexit Issues

158. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of times the landbridge project group has met since it was established in October 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1133/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Government's planning for Brexit has from the start included issues relating to the continued effective use of the UK landbridge. This is a priority for the Government, given the importance of the landbridge in getting Irish products, in particular agrifood products, to market on continental Europe. This is an important issue with regard to protecting the competitiveness of our producers and ensuring continued unhampered access to the EU Single Market.

The importance of maintaining the landbridge has been recognised and agreed through the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland in the draft Withdrawal Agreement which reaffirms the commitment of the UK to facilitate the efficient and timely transit through the UK of goods moving from Ireland to another EU Member State or another country, or vice versa.

To this end, I welcome the EU's agreement that the UK may join the Common Transit Convention upon its departure from the EU, and the number of formal steps taken to allow this to happen on 4 December 2018. The UK's accession to the Common Travel Convention will play an important role in ensuring Ireland's access to other EU Member States via the UK landbridge.

The second strand is our work with the European Commission and other affected Member States (Germany, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark and Sweden) with a view to preparing EU ports to facilitate the transit of EU products through the UK once it becomes a third country through the use of EU rules on internal transit set out under the Union's Custom Code.

The Landbridge Project Group has been instrumental in ensuring progress has been made in both strands of work. It is chaired by my Department, and involves all relevant Government Departments, including the Department of Finance, the Revenue Commissioners, the Department of Transport Tourism and Sport, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, the Department of Health, and the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation.

The Landbridge Project Group has met four times to date in its full format, (9 October 2017, 15 November 2017, 24 May 2018, and 1 October 2018). The group is also operated by e-mail and therefore there is regular and ongoing contact among Members of the group.

In addition to the full meetings of the Project Group where officials from all relevant Departments are present, groups of Departments also meet in smaller formats to discuss specific landbridge issues, where appropriate. Members of the Project Group have also met with other relevant Member States and the European Commission to discuss the landbridge at a technical level.

Relevant Departments have also been tasked by the Government to roll out detailed Action Plans with a view to advancing, as appropriate, the mitigating measures which have been identified in the areas of their responsibility from the planning to the implementation phase. In line with this approach, the Government has already approved a number of key Brexit preparedness measures focused on East-West trade which will also take account of the continued use of the landbridge.

Passport Applications

159. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the reason a same-sex parent of a donor-conceived child is required to sign a sole guardian affidavit form AFF1 in order to obtain a passport for the child in circumstances in which the General Registration Office has registered the child with the surname of both parents on the basis of an acceptance that the child is part of a family unit that includes both parents and that both parents are providing full parental responsibility in respect of the child; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1156/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): All passports are subject to the provisions of the Passports Act 2008 (“the Act”) as amended.

In regards to guardianship, the Passport Service is bound by Section 14 of the Act 2008 (as amended). Section 14 requires the consent of a child’s guardian(s) before a passport can issue to the child, subject to very limited exceptions. In line with Section 2 of the Passports Act, guardianship is a term with a defined legal meaning and there are many circumstances in which a person, whether in the context of a same-sex or opposite-sex relationship, may play a role in the upbringing of a child without being a guardian as defined by law.

In cases where a child has only one guardian within the meaning of the legislation, this guardian is required to complete a Sole Guardian Affidavit to confirm that there is no other person holding guardianship rights in respect of the child applying for a passport. This is necessary in order to verify that the requirements for guardian consent have been satisfied.

It is important to note that the registration of a child’s surname in double-barrelled format on a birth certificate does not in itself confer guardianship or parental responsibility.

Pension Provisions

160. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the arrangements that can be made to facilitate a contributory pension payment by international bank transfer for a person (details supplied) should the person decide to move back to Iran after living here for over 30 years further to recently becoming homeless; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1161/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Transfer of funds to and from Iranian financial institutions has been an area of difficulty for individuals and companies for some years. This arose originally because of the role of the relevant Iranian banks in evading international sanctions on sales of weapons and controlled technologies.

This problem had begun to ease following the removal of many sanctions in 2016, but has now come to the fore again following the re-imposition by the United States of national sanctions on Iran. These do not prohibit all financial transfers, but there has been a general chilling

effect on the willingness of many European banks to handle funds going to or from Iran. EU sanctions have not been re-imposed.

Work is ongoing at EU level, including in discussion with other states, to devise means to allow such transfers to continue without going through the US financial system. This is a complex and difficult area, but it is being actively and urgently pursued. I have reported to the Dáil from time to time on these efforts.

However, it is not possible for me or my Department to give individual financial advice to persons on how to carry out transfers of funds in relation to funds they may receive in Irish bank accounts. I would suggest that the person concerned might best take this forward by discussing the matter with the body which would be paying such a pension, and with their own bank.

Passport Applications

161. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if a British passport holder married to an Irish person and living here for more than 50 years can apply for an Irish passport; and the procedure in this regard. [1233/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): All passport applications are subject to the provisions of the Passports Act 2008. The Act provides, among other things, that a person must be an Irish citizen before a passport can be issued to him/her. Entitlement to Irish citizenship is in turn determined by the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended, under which and in general, Irish citizenship may be obtained by birth in certain circumstances, by descent, or by naturalisation.

As no details have been supplied about the UK citizen in question, it is not possible to provide specific guidance on their case. Nonetheless, we can advise on the general rules and procedures that apply to cases such as these.

A person born on the island of Ireland before 1 January 2005 is an Irish citizen. Citizenship for persons born on the island of Ireland after that date is subject to certain conditions. A person born abroad is automatically an Irish citizen if one of their parents was an Irish citizen born in Ireland. There is an additional requirement of registration in the Foreign Births Register (FBR) for a person born outside Ireland where his/her Irish citizen parent had also been born outside the island of Ireland. In such cases, Irish citizenship commences after inclusion on the FBR.

Individuals who are unable to establish an entitlement to citizenship by descent may still be able to apply for citizenship through naturalisation. Naturalisation comes under the auspices of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service within the Department of Justice and Equality. Details of how to apply for citizenship through naturalisation can be found at: www.inis.gov.ie

Each person must demonstrate an entitlement to Irish citizenship by providing acceptable documentary evidence of this entitlement with their passport application. Further information on passport applications, including helpful guidelines for document requirements, can be found on the Passport Service's website DFA.ie/passport

Brexit Issues

162. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if a reply will issue to the concerns of a person (details supplied) regarding cross-Border workers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1240/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The focus of my Department, and of this Government, continues to be on securing ratification of the Withdrawal Agreement. This is the best way to ensure that the rights of EU citizens in the UK and UK citizens in the EU are maintained post Brexit. This includes the rights of frontier workers.

The Government is acutely conscious of the concerns of border communities and of cross-border workers as a result of Brexit.

The continuation of the Common Travel Area (CTA) is also important in that context.

The Common Travel Area is a long-standing arrangement between Ireland and the UK which means Irish citizens can move freely to live, work, and study in the UK on the same basis as UK citizens and vice versa. It is an arrangement that is valued on both islands and the continuation of this arrangement is a stated commitment of both the Irish and UK Governments. In the context of the UK's withdrawal from the EU, it is important that any arrangements necessary to maintain the Common Travel Area are made.

The Common Travel Area provides for associated rights and entitlements which enable Irish and UK citizens to move freely between and reside in both jurisdictions. These rights and entitlements include access to employment, healthcare, education, and social benefits, as well as the right to vote in certain elections. The CTA pre-dates Irish and UK membership of the EU and is not dependent on it. It is recognised in Protocol 20 to the EU Treaties and is also acknowledged in the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland to the Agreement on the withdrawal of the UK from the EU which was endorsed by the European Council and the UK Government on 25 November 2018.

The maintenance of the CTA is a bilateral matter. Work is at an advanced stage both with the UK and domestically to ensure that the necessary provisions are made in both jurisdictions so that the CTA continues to function effectively after the UK leaves the EU.

Brexit Issues

163. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the plans contained within the document on preparing for withdrawal of the the United Kingdom from the European Union are contingent on a hard Brexit or if these plans will be proceeded with; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1245/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Government's contingency planning and preparedness for Brexit was initiated well in advance of the UK referendum in June 2016 and since my appointment as Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade in June 2017 I have overseen a sustained intensification of these efforts.

At its meeting of 11 December the Government agreed, that while work on Brexit preparedness for the central case scenario should continue, in light of ongoing political uncertainties and the Brexit deadline of 29 March 2019, greater immediate priority must now be give to preparations for a no deal Brexit.

Following this, the Government published its Brexit Contingency Action Plan on 19 December 2018 which sets out the analysis of a no deal Brexit and detailed sectoral analyses and approaches to mitigating the impacts of a no deal Brexit. The shift to preparing for a no deal Brexit requires the acceleration of certain measures already identified and underway, the putting in place of possible temporary solutions which can be rapidly implemented and potential crisis

response measures.

Accordingly a number of the actions identified in a no deal scenario will still be required even in a central case scenario, including the Withdrawal Agreement with a transition period and the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland and the political declaration on the future relationship, but with a longer timeframe for implementation.

A no deal Brexit would be highly disruptive and would have profound political, economic and legal implications for Ireland, the rest of the EU and, most significantly, for the UK itself. It is not the outcome we want and our focus continues to be on securing ratification of the Withdrawal Agreement.

Registration of Births

164. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the processing times for applications to the foreign births register; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1360/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Foreign Birth Registration, by its nature, can be a detailed and complex process often involving certificates covering three generations and several jurisdictions. Applications requiring clarification or further documents can take longer to process.

The volume of applications for citizenship through Foreign Birth Registration is particularly high at present.

Along with an increase in applications received in 2018 there has also been an increase in the number of incomplete applications. Up to 50% of applications received are not complete.

At present it takes approximately six months to process a complete Foreign Birth Registration application. However, due to the complex nature of the Foreign Birth Registration, it may take up to twelve months to process an application.

Expectant parents who are applying to be entered on the Foreign Birth Register and who wish to ensure that their child is eligible to become an Irish citizen through Foreign Birth Registration should mark this clearly on their application.

In 2018 88% of complete applications for Foreign Birth Registration were processed within six months.

Passport Services

165. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans for opening a passport office in the north west of the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1521/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Passport Service offers a range of convenient channels for submission of passport applications by Irish citizens, at home and abroad. Advice and guidance on these channels and other useful information on passports is available on the Department's website at www.dfa.ie/passport.

The award-winning Online Passport Renewal Service was launched in March 2017 and

offers the convenience of an online application system 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for Irish citizens anywhere in the world, without the need for application forms, printed photos or witnesses.

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.

Those who cannot, or do not wish to, apply online have the option of applying through their local post office with more than 1000 post offices across the State offering this service. The Northern Ireland Passport Express service offers an equivalent service to those living in Northern Ireland from more than 70 of its post offices.

Bearing in mind the availability of both the online and postal application channels, very few citizens living in the island of Ireland are required to travel a significant distance in order to apply for their passport. In the relatively small number of cases where citizens need to travel very urgently and do not have a valid passport, the Passport Offices in Dublin and Cork offer an appointment service.

Therefore taking into account all these circumstances, I am satisfied that the range of options available meets the current needs of passport applicants without the establishment of a further passport office.

Brexit Negotiations

166. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the discussions he has had with his EU counterparts in regard to clarifying the EU backstop in the context of Brexit. [1426/19]

167. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has spoken to his European counterparts individually or collectively since Christmas 2018 in regard to Brexit or other issues of mutual concern. [1429/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 166 and 167 together.

The Taoiseach, my Government colleagues and I take every opportunity to engage with EU partners regarding issues arising from the UK's withdrawal from the European Union.

Recently, I had the opportunity to discuss these, and other matters, with the German Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs, Heiko Maas, during his visit to Dublin on 9 January.

EU partners remain united behind the Withdrawal Agreement agreed with the UK and have been clear that it is not for reopening.

The European Council in December, which the Taoiseach attended, listened to the concerns raised by Prime Minister May and provided important clarifications and reassurances, regarding the backstop, while reiterating that the Agreement cannot be renegotiated.

Further important reassurances and clarifications were provided in a joint letter from the

15 January 2019

President of the European Council, Donald Tusk, and the President of the Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, to Prime Minister May, in an exchange of letters yesterday, 14 January 2019.

The Conclusions and joint letter reiterate the EU's wish to establish as close as possible a partnership with the UK, and to start negotiations on a future relationship agreement as soon as possible after the UK's withdrawal. Ireland strongly supports this commitment.

They make clear the EU's firm determination to work speedily on an agreement, that establishes alternative arrangements by the end of 2020, so that the backstop will not need to be triggered.

They underline that, if the backstop were triggered, it would apply temporarily, unless and until it is superseded by a subsequent agreement that ensures that a hard border is avoided. In such a case, the EU would use its best endeavours to negotiate and conclude expeditiously a subsequent agreement that would replace the backstop so that the backstop would only be in place for as long as strictly necessary.

This is also clearly reflected in the legal text of the Withdrawal Agreement, as well as the text of the political declaration on the future relationship.

As the Conclusions and joint letter demonstrate, the EU has been responsive to concerns raised by Prime Minister May, and has provided clarifications in order to facilitate the next steps of the process, while being clear that they are not in a position to agree to anything that changes or is inconsistent with the Withdrawal Agreement.

Ministerial Meetings

168. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to meet his Canadian counterpart; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1645/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Government engages frequently with the Canadian Government and Canadian elected representatives on all aspects of the Canada-Ireland relationship and on other issues of mutual concern.

There have been strong and sustained Canadian-Irish bilateral contacts in recent years, including the successful state visit by Prime Minister Trudeau in July 2017 and a follow up visit by the Taoiseach to Canada not long after. In 2018, the Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform met with the Canadian Finance Minister in January, while five Ministerial visits to Canada took place during February and March 2018, including Minister Griffin's visit to St Johns and Toronto; an agriculture and food export promotion visit to Ottawa and Toronto led by Minister Creed; Minister Kyne's attendance at a mining conference in Toronto; and St Patrick's Day visits by Ministers Naughten and O'Donovan. Minister Regina Doherty attended the OECD Ministerial in Montreal in May, and Minister Cannon travelled to Canada twice in autumn last year. I fully expect this level of engagement to continue throughout 2019, including through the St. Patrick's Day period.

I was delighted to address the Ireland Canada Business Association conference last November, to speak to the historic, and continuing strong and collaborative relations we enjoy with Canada, and the potential of our bilateral relationship in the coming years. While I haven't as yet met my counterpart, I look forward to travelling to Canada, engaging with the Canadian Government, as well as visiting Ireland's newly opened Consulate General in Vancouver, in the

future.

Human Rights

169. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will provide an update on the situation in Venezuela; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1682/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am gravely concerned by the ongoing political, economic, social and humanitarian crisis in Venezuela, which continues to deteriorate. The worsening crisis is causing mass migration that creates challenges to host communities and to regional stability.

This crisis is having a dire impact on the Venezuelan population both inside and outside the country, and on the neighbouring countries that are receiving ever increasing numbers of Venezuelan migrants and refugees. The UN estimates that the number of Venezuelans who have left their country since 2015 has reached over three million, with the majority of these travelling to nearby countries in the region.

Humanitarian needs are acute, with severe shortages of food and medicine leading to high rates of malnutrition and the spread of illness and disease. I am particularly concerned by the humanitarian dimension of the crisis, and I urge the Government of Venezuela to acknowledge the full extent of that crisis and allow humanitarian actors to operate without interference.

Neighbouring countries hosting Venezuelan migrants are carrying an enormous burden and must be supported. The situation is particularly acute in Colombia, which has received over one million Venezuelans. In addition, large numbers of Colombians, formerly economic migrants in Venezuela, have returned home to Colombia.

Ireland is fully supportive of the €55 million funding that has been committed by the EU for humanitarian assistance. This funding supports the EU response to help the most vulnerable, and support the reception capacities of the host communities in the region. The EU's assistance, delivered through partners on the ground, focuses on emergency healthcare, food aid, shelter and protection for the most vulnerable families affected by the crisis.

I, along with my EU partners, have repeatedly called on the Venezuelan Government to engage in dialogue with the opposition, to respect the electoral calendar and to fully restore the country's democratic institutions. It is regrettable to see the Venezuelan Government not heed these calls for fresh presidential elections in accordance with internationally recognised democratic standards and the Venezuelan constitutional order.

On 10 January, President Maduro started a new mandate on the basis of non-democratic elections. Ireland was not represented at the inauguration, and fully supports the declaration by EU High Representative Federica Mogherini of 10 January. This statement reiterates that the May 2018 presidential election was neither free nor fair, and that its outcome lacked credibility. The statement also urges President Maduro to recognise and respect the role and independence of the democratically elected National Assembly, to release all political prisoners, to uphold the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms, and to urgently address the needs of the population.

Ireland also regrets the negative impact the assumption of this new mandate may have on the possibility of a negotiated solution to this crisis. It is my continued belief that credible and meaningful dialogue is the most effective means of achieving a peaceful negotiated solution to

the crisis currently affecting the country. To that end, it will be vital that the EU remains engaged with all stakeholders in Venezuela.

The EU is currently exploring the potential of setting up an International Contact Group (ICG) for Venezuela. This group would consist of the EU, a number of EU MS, and other important actors with varying political views on the situation in Venezuela. The ICG would not have the role of a mediator, but rather would aim to facilitate a solution to the crisis. The role is envisaged as mainly assisting in putting conditions in place to allow for a political process to take place. I would welcome the establishment of an ICG and I hope that it will be a useful vehicle for information sharing and encouraging dialogue.

The situation in Venezuela continues to be discussed at the highest levels within the EU and was discussed by Foreign Ministers at our meeting on 10 December. I welcome the high priority given to the issue by the EU, and I believe that it is important for us to work in step with our like-minded regional partners.

Our Embassy in Mexico is responsible for our diplomatic relations with Venezuela and is monitoring the situation closely, engaging with partner organisations on the ground and with EU Missions in Caracas. Ireland will continue to engage regularly with our EU partners on this issue, as well as with affected countries in the region.

Question No. 170 answered with Question No. 139.

Human Rights

171. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will provide an update on the situation in Rakhine state and in particular recent clashes in the region; the efforts being made by the EU, UN and international community to protect civilians and uphold human rights; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1684/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am very concerned by the recent escalation of violence in Rakhine State and I call for the immediate cessation of violence before further loss of life. All sides must exercise restraint and respect their obligations under international humanitarian law to protect civilians.

I welcome the unilaterally declared ceasefire by the Military in many of the conflict areas in the North and East of Myanmar something I hope can be extended beyond four months and include Rakhine State. Ultimately, the long-standing and very deeply rooted tensions and divisions in Rakhine State can only be solved through dialogue and an inclusive political process. The report of the Kofi Annan-led Advisory Commission on Rakhine State is an important tool in this regard providing a roadmap for sustainable peace building and development for the benefit of all civilians. In the meantime, civilians must be shielded from the violence that has once again forced people to flee from their homes.

Officials in my Department, including in our embassies in Thailand and Vietnam, will continue to monitor the situation in close contact with the EU Delegation in Myanmar. We will continue to work with our international partners to urge progress within Myanmar on these difficult issues. Together we must pursue a future that brings peace, reconciliation and prosperity for everybody in Myanmar.

Human Rights

172. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will provide an update on efforts at EU and international level to prevent the persecution of Christians around the world; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1685/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Under Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right, which is replicated in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, includes freedom to change one's religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private and to manifest one's religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance. Ireland strongly condemns all forms of persecution on the basis of religion or belief, irrespective of where they occur and who the victims are.

Ireland is committed to promoting and protecting human rights, including freedom of thought, conscience and religion through our work at the EU, the UN Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly. Ireland also uses the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), a mechanism of the Human Rights Council, to remind countries under review of their obligation to advance fundamental freedoms, including the right to freedom of religion or belief, under international human rights law.

At EU level, Ireland played a key role in the adoption by the European Union of guidelines on freedom of religion or belief during our Presidency in 2013. These guidelines provide a framework for the promotion of this right in the EU's external human rights policy.

Addressing the high level segment of the 37th session of the Human Rights Council in February 2018, my colleague, Minister of State for the Diaspora and International Development, Ciaran Cannon highlighted threats to freedom of religion and belief and minority religious communities worldwide, including those of Christian, Muslim and Baha'i faiths.

At the same session of the Council, Ireland participated in the Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Mr. Ahmed Shaheed, welcoming the work he has undertaken to date and assuring him of Ireland's continuing support for his mandate.

Most recently at the 73rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly in November 2018, Ireland supported the EU led resolution on freedom of religion or belief and we also participated in an interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, during which we condemned restrictions placed on fundamental human rights, including the right to freedom of religion or belief, by using national legislation to enforce such measures in the name of national security.

Departmental Correspondence

173. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the customer complaints received by his Department in each of the years since 2016; if the complaints are grouped into categories; the nature of the complaints; the resolution of same; and the number progressed to the relevant Ombudsman in each of the years since 2016. [1873/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): From time to time my Department receives comments from members of the public giving feedback on how we could improve our services both at home and at our Missions abroad. We are committed to constantly improving how we conduct our business and to ensuring that our staff

across all offices, both in Ireland and our global network of Embassies and Consulates, act in a highly professional manner at all times.

My Department is fully committed to investigating and responding to every complaint within a timeframe of 20 days. If a complainant is not satisfied with the explanation or the outcome, he or she can request a review by writing to the Central Coordination Unit of the Department.

Within my Department, the Passport Service received more than 733,000 and 780,000 passport applications in 2016 and 2017 respectively. In 2018, in excess of 862,000 applications were received. With this volume of applications, the Passport Service deals with the highest number of customers of any of the Divisions within my Department.

The Passport Service recorded the following number of complaints for the each of the years requested which were addressed directly to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade:

Year	No. of complaints
2016	25
2017	92
2018	118

There were also a number of complaints received via the Office of the Ombudsman, none of which were upheld by that Office:

Year	No. of complaints
2016	3
2017	3
2018	10

The complaints received fall into the following broad categories:

Communication (e.g: Difficulties in communicating with the office, lack of clear information)

Processing times (e.g: Inadequate processing times)

Customer service (e.g: Poor customer service, errors on Passport data page, loss of documents)

Among the measures taken to ensure improved customer service and, in particular, the management of overall demand and seasonal application increases are the recruitment of additional staff, targeted overtime, re-organisation of production process and administrative arrangements and the continuous implementation of service improvements through the Passport Reform programme.

Each year the Passport Service recruits over 220 Temporary Clerical Officers (TCOs) to assist in processing passport applications and deal with the queries from the general public. For 2019, over 230 TCOs will be assigned to the Passport Service to deal with the increased volume anticipated during the peak season. A dedicated Customer Service Hub has been established to deal with queries from the public. The number of staff that will be answering queries in the Customer Service Hub will have trebled since 2016. In addition to the normal seasonal intake of temporary staff, more than 50 additional permanent staff are being assigned to the Customer Service Hub.

The Passport Reform Programme continues to deliver major upgrades to the Passport Service technology platforms and business processes as well as significant customer service im-

provements. The online passport application service, which was launched in March 2017 for adults renewing their passport, has been expanded to other adult renewal categories and for children since November 2018. This expansion means more than half of all passport applicants are now eligible to renew online. The online passport renewal service bring benefits for customers with faster turnaround times of 10 working days, excluding post. In addition, the costs of renewing a passport online is cheaper than alternative methods, with fees for all online applications reduced by €5 across all application types.

I am satisfied that these additional resources and the improvements in technology will bring about a greater level of customer satisfaction with faster turnaround times and greater access to information.

Mortgage Book Sales

174. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Finance his views on whether families should be allowed to purchase property for the same amount at which they are sold to vulture funds. [54198/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I have been advised by the Central Bank of Ireland that when a consumer takes out a loan from a regulated lender (“the original lender”) it is subject to all the relevant Irish and EU consumer protections. Most loan agreements include a clause that allows the original lender to sell the loan on to another firm and when a loan is sold on to another regulated entity, the relevant Irish and EU consumer protections continue to apply. However, as Minister for Finance, I am unable to interfere with any commercial decision of a financial entity.

The Consumer Protection (Regulation of Credit Servicing Firms) Act 2015 ensures that the protections which applied before a loan was sold will continue to apply. The recently enacted Consumer Protection (Regulation of Credit Servicing Firms) Act 2018 will require that loan owners are regulated by the Central Bank.

There are both practical and commercial reasons why it would not be appropriate to allow borrowers to purchase loans for the same rate that they are sold to funds.

It is incumbent on the seller of loans to obtain the best price it can for them to improve the bank’s capital position and enable it to continue lending to the real economy. Management may take the decision that it is more efficient and cost effective to make a single bulk sale than multiple individual sales with no certainty about completions. Disclosing the price is an extremely commercially sensitive issue and could lead to a breakdown of repayments. The rights and obligations of the borrower remain unchanged but the borrower may be less inclined to meet these obligations if they are aware of the discount which may have applied.

In addition, the discount often applies at a loan book level and specific discounts are not applied to individual loans. There can be wide variances for individual loans from the aggregate amount.

The Government is committed to supporting people in mortgage arrears to remain in their homes and there are a range of supports and services in place to assist people in that regard, including the Mortgage to Rent scheme; the personal insolvency system; and the Abhaile service which provides those in mortgage arrears with access to free financial and/or legal advice from professionals to advise them on their situation.

NAMA Social Housing Provision

175. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Finance if a site (details supplied) in Dublin 8 can be used for the construction by NAMA of a significant amount of social and affordable housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54234/18]

177. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Finance the status of a site (details supplied) in Dublin 8; if the site is controlled by NAMA; if its potential use by public agencies or Dublin City Council for social or affordable housing has been examined; and if his officials or other Departments have had meetings with the receivers of the site to discuss the future of same. [54428/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 175 and 177 together.

I am advised by NAMA that it no longer has any involvement with the Player Wills site. The loans attaching to the site were fully repaid at par value by the borrower in late December 2018 and NAMA accordingly was obliged to release its legal charge over the site.

It is important to note that NAMA does not own or control property, rather NAMA owns loans for which the properties act as security. If a property owner repays the value of their loan, as occurred in this case, then NAMA no longer holds any security over the owner’s property. Thereafter, it is entirely a matter for the owner, in conjunction with the planning authorities, to determine how the property should be utilised.

NAMA was established as an independent commercial body and I do not have a role in its operations or decisions, or in relation to the properties securing its loans. In that respect, no official from my Department met with the former receiver of the Players Wills site in order to discuss the property.

Vehicle Registration Data

176. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Finance if there has been an increase in the number of used diesel vehicles imported from Britain and Northern Ireland in the past three years; the statistics for such imports; if an analysis has been undertaken as to the reason for this increase and its implications of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54355/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Details of the net used diesel cars registered for VRT which were imported from the UK in the years 2016 to 2018 are as follows:

Year	No. of diesel cars registered
2016	52,358
2017	68,644
2018	70,140

The large scale importation of used diesel cars from the UK during 2016 to 2018 may be due to a number of factors such as the relative weaknesses of sterling and the disparity in policies between the UK and Ireland in relation to the taxation of diesel and diesel vehicles.

My Department recognises that the large scale importation of used diesel cars from the UK over the past number of years is undesirable from a public health perspective and also an Exchequer perspective. My Department has previously examined this issue in the context of the Tax Strategy Papers and intends to bring forward options to address the matter to the Tax

Strategy Group later in the year.

Question No. 177 answered with Question No. 175.

NAMA Property Sales

178. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Finance the median selling price for NAMA units sold each year in each of the Dublin local authorities; and the median sales and lease price at which new units from NAMA are sold and leased to local authorities and approved housing bodies. [1626/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The median sale agreed price for NAMA-funded units in the years 2016 to 2018 is set out in the table below. I am advised by NAMA that median sales prices can change significantly from year-to-year in the same Local Authority Area, due to the differing nature of NAMA-funded schemes coming to the market.

Local Authority Area	2016	2017	2018
DLRCC	450,000	550,000	535,000
SDCC	297,500	358,000	373,000
Fingal Co. Council	450,000	298,500	370,000
DCC	330,000	340,000	385,000
All Dublin LAs	415,000	350,000	435,000

As regards your request for the median sale and lease prices for social housing units delivered by NAMA, I wish to advise that as some of these prices are subject to ongoing negotiations these figures are commercially sensitive. However these prices are based on prevailing market rates confirmed by independent valuations. In the case of social housing funded by NAMA provided through Part V obligations, pricing is determined in line with the statutory Part V framework. In the case of NARPS lease arrangements, rents are typically set so as to fall within a range of 78% to 83% of prevailing market rents at the time of the lease.

Customs and Excise Protocols

179. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Finance the training for custom officials that deals specifically with racial profiling; if training is provided as to the way in which to deal with and treat foreign nationals with respect; and the way in which persons who have negative experiences based on racial profiling or inappropriate comments can make a complaint or seek redress. [54369/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised that all Revenue staff receive comprehensive induction training upon joining Revenue. This covers the Civil Service Code of Standards and Behaviour, Revenue's Code of Ethics and Revenue's Customer Service Charter, which includes a commitment to courtesy and consideration.

Revenue's customs training programme includes a module in relation to human rights and equality. I am advised by Revenue that this training was developed in consultation with the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission. The training includes understanding human rights, UN treaties, the UN International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the European Convention on Human Rights, the concept of equality, the Equal Status Acts 2000-2015, discrimination, stereotyping, the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act, 2014, the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty, and unconscious bias.

Trainees use role-related scenarios to evaluate possible risk situations when discrimination could occur, and learn to address these risks. An equality and rights-based approach is taken. Training focusses on respect for the dignity of the person in each interaction with Revenue and the obligations of all staff members to treat every person with dignity and respect.

Revenue does not profile on the basis of race or nationality.

Under Revenue's Customer Service Charter, there are comprehensive complaints and appeal procedures open to all customers of Revenue. Full details of how to complain to Revenue are available on Revenue's website at Complaints, Review and appeal.

Tax Appeals Commission

180. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the number of times the Revenue Commissioners are of the view that section 949AG of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997, prior to its deletion in the Finance Act 2018, had been used to impose an unintended and inappropriate administrative burden on the Tax Appeals Commission and Revenue Commissioners; if the Tax Appeal Commissioners have stated a position regarding the removal of the paragraph; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54046/18]

181. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance his plans on establishing the right of appellants to take a case to the Circuit Court as opposed to the High Court in view of the deletion of section 949AG of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 in order to return to the status quo, as is the stated intention in removing the paragraph; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54047/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 180 and 181 together.

Section 949AG of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (which was inserted by the Finance (Tax Appeals) Act 2015) was introduced with the intention of mirroring a requirement in the part of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 that requires the Appeal Commissioners to have regard to all matters to which Revenue is required to have regard in making the decision that is the subject of the appeal. However, the section was identified by Revenue and the Tax Appeals Commission as being interpreted in a small number of instances as applying in all situations, and as conferring the right on appellants to require the Tax Appeals Commission to require disclosure of all of Revenue's documentation on a particular taxpayer or matter, regardless of whether the Commissioners considered that this was required to determine the particular appeal.

The removal of Section 949AG precludes any assertion that it should apply in all situations, even in those where there is no statutory requirement for the Appeal Commissioners to have regard to the same matters to which Revenue was required to have regard.

It should be noted that legislation provides the Tax Appeals Commission with a wide range of other powers to require appellants and Revenue to supply information to assist the Appeal Commissioners in their adjudication and determination of an appeal. It is considered that these powers are sufficiently extensive to allow for the effective operation of the appeals process. However, I can confirm that officials in my Department will keep this matter under review over the coming year, and further amendments will be considered in future if a need is identified.

Legislative change in respect of section 949AG was discussed with both the Appeal Commissioners and Revenue. Both indicated that they had no objection to the deletion of section

949AG.

There is no plan to revert to allowing appellants the right to take a case to the Circuit Court following a determination from the Appeal Commissioners. This feature of the old tax appeals system (pre 2016) allowed for a complete rehearing of an appeal, as if the Appeal Commissioners had never made their determination. It resulted in additional delays, particularly in regard to appeals outside the Dublin circuit, where it is difficult to get a case listed for hearing. It also had the effect of undermining the Appeal Commissioners' stage of the process where a taxpayer would not fully engage and used the initial hearing as a dry run for the Circuit Court. Moreover, the right to a complete rehearing encouraged taxpayers to re-lodge an appeal, even in circumstances where there were no real grounds for dissatisfaction with the Appeal Commissioners' determination. This runs counter to the principle that cases should be resolved as quickly and effectively as possible and took up valuable court time – a scarce resource.

The reformed appeal system allows more flexible and active case management by the Appeal Commissioners, including written and published determinations and a revised case stated procedure. When appeal proceedings were conducted in the Circuit Court, formal written determinations of the Appeal Commissioners were rarely given and were not generally published. Under the current system, written determinations are made in all cases and published online.

Following the independent review of the operations and governance structures of the Tax Appeals Commission last year, significant additional resources are being provided to the Commission to allow them to recruit more staff (as per a recommendation of the review) and acquire a new case management system. These measures will help the Commission to address the current backlog of appeals.

Tracker Mortgage Examination

182. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Finance if the review by the Central Bank of tracker mortgages has been completed in full; the expected outcome for mortgage account holders that may have been subject of the review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54143/18]

221. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Finance the status of the tracker mortgage examination; the amount paid out to date for redress and compensation; when affected customers receive payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1256/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 182 and 221 together.

The Central Bank has advised me that its Tracker Examination is focused on ensuring that lenders provide fair outcomes for all customers impacted by tracker related failings both from a contractual and transparency perspective. The Examination requires all lenders, which offered tracker interest rate mortgages to their customers, to review all mortgage accounts, including accounts in arrears, to identify any tracker related failings both from a contractual and transparency perspective.

At the Joint Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, and Taoiseach in October, the Governor of the Central Bank confirmed that, as of August 31st, lenders have identified circa 38,400 affected customers (including cases resolved pre-Examination following Central Bank intervention), and paid €580 million in redress and compensation. The redress and compensation phases of the Examination are now significantly advanced: 93 percent of affected customer accounts already identified and verified had received offers of redress and compensa-

tion by August 31st.

As part of the Examination framework, where customer detriment has been identified, the Central Bank has clearly articulated its expectations of lenders to provide appropriate redress and compensation to all impacted customers in line with prescribed Principles for Redress, including:

- 2.1. Redress will result in impacted customers being returned to the position that they would have been in had the relevant issue not arisen.
- 2.2. Compensation is to be reasonable and must reflect the detriment involved arising from and/or associated with being on an incorrect rate (such compensation to reflect the specific circumstances of each impacted customer).

An important part of the Examination Framework is the requirement for lenders to establish independent Appeals Panels, specifically to deal with customers who are not satisfied with any aspect of the redress and compensation offers that they receive from lenders. The appeals process is additional to the options of bringing a complaint to the Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman or initiating court proceedings.

The Central Bank indicates that its supervisory review of conduct of the Tracker Examination is significantly advanced and that a further update on the Examination will be published in early 2019.

Mortgage Book Sales

183. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Finance the measures being taken to ensure that persons who are fully compliant with their mortgage payments to a bank (details supplied) where their mortgages have now been sold to vulture funds are not unfairly evicted from their homes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54145/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Deputy will be aware that a reduction in the level of non performing loans (NPLs) across European banks is a major priority for the banking regulator, the SSM. The Irish banks have made significant progress in this regard since the height of the crisis with NPLs at the banks in which the State has a shareholding reducing by 70% from €54bn to €16bn at end-June 2018. A major contributor to this has been the almost 136,000 mortgage restructures that have been put in place.

Despite this progress, the NPL ratios at the Irish banks remain at an elevated level and are well above the European average of around 4%. PTSB is a particular outlier and had a ratio of 16% even after the bank's loan sale – Project Glas – which was announced last July. Project Glenbeigh – PTSB's second NPL transaction of 2018 announced on 29th November, will achieve a further significant reduction in the bank's NPL ratio to below 10%.

It is important to reiterate that the protections in place for all borrowers before a sale, either by way of securitisation or otherwise, remain unchanged. Start Mortgages, who purchased the Glas portfolio in July and Pepper, who now hold legal title to the Glenbeigh mortgages and who will act as servicer and administrator of the mortgages, are both regulated by the Central Bank of Ireland. When dealing with borrowers, these firms are required to comply with the Consumer Protection Code and the Code of Conduct for Mortgage Arrears. Furthermore, it has been confirmed in the case of this latest transaction that the terms of an agreed restructure will continue to be honoured.

In addition, earlier this year I asked the Central Bank to carry out a review of the CCMA to ensure it remains as effective as possible. The result of this review was published in October and it is encouraging to note that the key findings included confirmation that for borrowers who engaged with the process, the CCMA is working effectively as it is intended in the context of the sale of loans by regulated lenders.

Finally, I wish to highlight that I cannot stop loan sales, even by the banks in which the State has a shareholding. These decisions are the responsibility of the Board and management of the banks which must be run on an independent and commercial basis. The independence of the banks' is protected by Relationship Frameworks, which are legally binding documents that I cannot change unilaterally.

Tax Clearance Certificates

184. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Finance if the case of a person (details supplied) regarding notice of amendment to assessment will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54171/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the person in question submitted their 2017 income tax return on 14 November 2018. When completing the return the person confirmed that they and their spouse wished to be jointly assessed for tax. The person also claimed a tax refund for that year.

Revenue has further advised me that information previously provided to the person's spouse regarding the requirement to complete an 'assessable spouse election form' was incorrect. Revenue apologised to the person for this error and the tax refund has now issued.

Departmental Expenditure

185. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Finance the cost incurred by his Department in 2018 for the use of taxi services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54210/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In response to the Deputy's question, in 2018 the Department of Finance spent some €23,900 in relation to the use of taxi services engaged via the Office of Government Procurement drawdown contract. A proportion of these costs relate to services provided to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform by the Department of Finance. The latter provides facilities management services on behalf of the two Departments.

The general policy in my Department in relation the use of taxis is that they should only be used where it is not possible or feasible to use public transport.

Tracker Mortgage Examination

186. **Deputy Michael Lowry** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the fact that persons (details supplied) affected by the tracker mortgage scandal in the case of a bank have been deemed not to be impacted by the tracker mortgage scandal and the bank has excluded them from receiving redress and compensation; if this is common practice across the banking sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54368/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Central Bank's Tracker Examination is focused on ensuring that lenders provide fair outcomes for all groups of customers impacted by tracker related failings. The Examination requires all lenders, which offered tracker interest rate mortgages to their customers, to review all mortgage accounts, including accounts in arrears, to identify any tracker related failings both from a contractual and transparency perspective.

The Central Bank has indicated that, as at end August 2018, lenders have identified circa 38,400 impacted customers. However, following the reviews conducted by lenders, certain customers have been deemed as not impacted under the Examination. Where customers are deemed as not impacted under the Tracker Examination by lenders, they can make a complaint to the lender concerned and if they are not satisfied with the outcome of their complaint, they can bring a complaint to the Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman.

While the Central Bank does not have a statutory role in investigating individual consumer complaints, the Bank has indicated that it uses information it receives directly from consumers to guide the scope of its broader supervisory work; however, the Central Bank advises that it is not in a position to comment on its supervisory engagement with individual firms. Regarding the progress of the industry wide Tracker Examination, the Central Bank indicates that a further update report will be published in early 2019.

Stamp Duty

187. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of applications made for repayment of stamp duty in circumstances in which land is used for residential development under section 61 of the Finance Act 2017 since 11 October 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54389/18]

188. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of successful applications made for repayment of stamp duty in circumstances in which land is used for residential development under section 61 of the Finance Act 2017 since 11 October 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54390/18]

189. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of unsuccessful applications made for repayment of stamp duty in circumstances in which land is used for residential development under section 61 of the Finance Act 2017 since 11 October 2017; the number that were unsuccessful due to the restrictions outlined in section 83D(3)(c) referring to the 75% rule; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54391/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 187 to 189, inclusive, together.

Section 61 of the Finance Act 2017 provides for a refund scheme of Stamp Duty paid in the case of residential developments. Where Stamp Duty is paid at the 6% rate, the accountable person can seek a refund of up to two-thirds, having commenced building dwelling unit/s.

I am advised by Revenue that 180 applications for repayment of Stamp Duty were received in the period up to 10 January 2019. Of these, 151 have been processed and refunds issued. The remaining 29 applications are still being processed.

The '75% rule' referred to by the Deputy is a condition of the refund scheme that seeks to ensure that a reasonable part of the land is developed for residential purposes and applies in the case of multi-unit developments only. The legislation provides that a refund claim may be made

as soon as building work begins and Section 83D(3)(c) of the Stamp Duties Consolidation Act provides for a clawback of the refund if the '75% rule' is not subsequently met.

Revenue has confirmed that the '75% rule' applied in 6 of the 151 successful applications as they were multi-unit developments. These applications were processed based on declarations by the applicants that the '75% rule' would be satisfied when building works are completed. Revenue has advised that it is too soon to say whether the clawback provisions will be triggered in these cases as the legislation provides for a period of two years within which the building work can be completed.

Tax Code

190. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance his plans for changes to section 114 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 in view of the decision made by the Tax Appeals Commission on 24 September 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54392/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): On 11 December last, I replied to question number 51690-18 from Deputy Pearse Doherty in connection with this matter. In accordance with section 114 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997, where an employee is necessarily obliged to incur and defray out of the emoluments of the employment expenses of travelling in the performance of the duties of the employment, or otherwise to expend money wholly, exclusively and necessarily in the performance of those duties, there may be deducted from the emoluments of the employee to be assessed to income tax the expenses so necessarily incurred and defrayed.

I am advised by Revenue that arising from an employee's entitlement to a tax deduction under that provision in respect of certain expenses, there exists a long-standing Revenue practice under which employers may reimburse tax-free to employees the expenses of travel (and subsistence relating to that travel), subject to certain conditions being fulfilled. The conditions under which the reimbursement to employees of the expenses of travel and subsistence may generally be made without deduction of tax are as follows:

(a) firstly, the employee must be temporarily away from his/her normal place of work in the performance of the duties of his/her employment;

(b) secondly, the travel expenses must be necessarily incurred in the performance of the duties of the office or employment, and

(c) thirdly, arising from a long-accepted position, supported by tax case law, the expenses of subsistence must attach to travelling necessarily incurred in the performance of the duties of the office or employment.

Moreover, provided the employee bears the cost of all expenses of travel necessarily incurred in the performance of the duties of his/her employment (and bears the cost of subsistence relating to such travel), Revenue will disregard for income tax purposes the reimbursement of expenses of travel and subsistence, where such reimbursement is made by way of:

(a) a flat rate up to, but not exceeding, the prevailing Civil Service rates for travel and subsistence, or

(b) a flat rate based on any other schedule of rates and related conditions of travel and subsistence, which do no more than reimburse the employee for actual expenditure necessarily incurred.

Revenue and my Department have noted the comments of the Appeal Commissioner in the case concerned (Tax Appeals Commission Determination 20TACD2018 refers). Revenue has published extensive guidance on the Tax Treatment of the Reimbursement of Expenses of Travel and Subsistence to Office Holders and Employees – Part 05-01-06 of the Tax and Duty Manual refers – and, notwithstanding the Appeal Commissioner’s comments, has no plans to alter its practice or published guidance on this matter.

In all the circumstances, I do not see that there is a need to consider a legislative amendment to section 114 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997.

Mortgage Book Sales

191. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if borrowers from the 6,272 mortgages to be transferred from a bank (details supplied) to a corporation have received correspondence or communication from the corporation; if there are restrictions in place to prevent it from communicating with impacted customers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54425/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Permanent TSB has provided the following detail in relation to the communications process in answer to the Deputy’s question:

- The loans will continue to be serviced by Permanent TSB for a period of up to 6 months (from the date of the transaction). Permanent TSB will continue to be the contact point for customers during this period.

- After the transfer date (up to 6 months from the date of the transaction), impacted customer loans will no longer be serviced or owned by PTSB. Pepper Finance Corporation (Ireland) DAC (Pepper Ireland) will hold legal title to the loans. In addition, it will act as servicer and administrator handling all of the day-to-day management of these loans.

- Immediately following the completion of the transaction at the end of November last year, PTSB wrote to all customers whose loans are included in the transaction to inform them of this development.

- At least 60 days ahead of the transfer, PTSB will write to customers again providing formal notice of transfer, and following completion of the transfer, Pepper Finance will also write to customers to provide them with Pepper Finance contact details and any other relevant information relating to their specific loan agreement.

Customs and Excise Controls

192. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Finance the checks carried out by his officials to ensure that goods bought online from outside the State and posted to the purchaser are complying with VAT and customs duties regulations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54436/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Different rules apply to goods bought online by customers from the EU compared to goods purchased from outside the EU. With regard to goods bought online by customers from other EU countries, such goods are not subject to customs duties. VAT is payable on these goods either in the Member State of the supplier or in Ireland, depending on the level of trade the supplier has with Ireland.

Goods purchased from outside the EU are subject to VAT and customs on importation. I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that importations of goods bought online from non-EU countries are carried out either by express couriers or through the postal system. In the case of the express couriers, these companies make import declarations to Revenue and pay customs duty and VAT, where payable. In respect of imports from non-EU countries via the postal system, the parcels are presented by An Post to Revenue before they are delivered to the purchaser/importer and Revenue assess the duty and VAT payable. An Post pays the amounts assessed to Customs and then recoup this from the purchaser/importer at the time of delivery of the goods.

In addition, Revenue undertake random post-delivery import document checks on parcel consignments entering the country via express couriers to further manage the risk of non-compliance.

NAMA Property Construction

193. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Finance the number of homes constructed which have been funded by NAMA; the number of these that have been sold by local authority and year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54454/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised that, from Q1 2014 to Q4 2018, NAMA funded the construction of 9,669 new residential units in Ireland on residential development land under the control of its debtors and receivers. It is important to note that NAMA can only fund developments which are under the control of its debtors and receivers and which are commercially viable.

The breakdown by local authority area and year of the residential units funded by NAMA to end-December 2018 is set out in the following table.

Unit Delivery by year and Local Authority

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Total
DLRCC	345	90	586	680	814	2515
SDCC	558	243	218	389	187	1595
Fingal Co. Council	115	333	386	399	352	1585
DCC	241	99	182	258	444	1224
Cork Co. Council	65	72	235	257	242	871
Kildare Co. Council	52	56	145	205	250	708
Wicklow Co. Council	10	57	73	143	141	424
Galway City Council	26		68	82	49	225
Meath Co. Council	51	29	31	10	31	152
Cork City Council		12	41	13		66
Laois Co. Council			71	4		75
Wexford Co. Council			52	4		56

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Total
Kilkenny Co. Council	26	16				42
Clare Co. Council	8	6		23		37
Monaghan Co. Council				36		36
Waterford Co. Council	5	16	13			34
Galway Co. Council			16		8	24
Totals	1502	1029	2117	2503	2518	9669

It is NAMA policy that units delivered through its residential delivery programme are openly marketed for sale. I am advised that, in the market conditions which have prevailed since 2014, NAMA debtors and receivers have not experienced any major delays in selling completed units. Accordingly, while the information set out in the tables above relate to completed units, I am advised that it corresponds closely to sales data.

Departmental Expenditure

194. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the budget and spend in his Department for marketing, media and social media in each of the years 2016 to 2018; the projected spend for 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54464/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): My department budgets in line with the subheadings outlined in the *Revised Estimates Volume for Public Expenditure (REV)*. The budget for marketing, media and social media is included in Admin Non-Pay costs, specifically *Subhead III: Training, Development, and Miscellaneous Costs*.

Depending on the nature of the expenditure, it could also potentially be accounted for as part of our overall consultancy budget. However, the vast amount of our consultancy budget is to provide for the Department's requirement for legal or professional services and to cover any legal costs which arise.

As we budget at this level, we do not have details of projected spend in these categories for 2019. However, we expect spend to be broadly in line with the previous years, which are detailed in the table below.

A breakdown of my department's spending in the categories queried is available in the table.

Year	Description	Spend
2016	Switch Your Bank	€24,682
	Mortgage Arrears Communication Campaign	€73,136
	Outside Broadcasting of National Economic Dialogue	€17,657
2017	Switch Your Bank (of which: YouTube)	€717,820 €6,223
	Information notice re: Beneficial Ownership	€2,408
	European Financial Forum	€25

Year	Description	Spend
	Outside Broadcasting of National Economic Dialogue	€17,657
2018	Switch Your Bank (of which: YouTube)	€402,210 €8,896
	Independent Newspapers Marketing Ltd.	€1,240
	Tuairisc Bheo Teoranta	€983
	Outside Broadcasting of National Economic Dialogue	€13,617

The Switch Your Bank campaign is funded, in its entirety, by AIB and Permanent TSB, as part of a range of competition measures agreed with the European Commission to raise awareness and promote customer switching of financial products.

- The Department of Finance facilitates this campaign as part of its remit to ensure that consumers are protected within the financial sector in Ireland and to ensure a healthy level of competition.

- The contract with Language Communications permitted them to appoint subcontractors for provision of services.

- Phase one of the public awareness campaign cost €738,000 in total.

- Phase two of the public awareness campaign will cost €405,900 in total.

- An additional €738 was spent on web hosting for the Switch Your Bank campaign.

Departmental Staff Data

195. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the number of staff in his Department employed to work on marketing, media and social media in 2018. [54481/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I wish to inform the Deputy that there are no staff in the Department of Finance employed specifically to work on marketing, media and social media.

There are currently 5 members of staff (one of whom is currently on maternity leave) in the Press Office. In addition, one of my Special Advisers, provides media advice as part of her role.

Tax Agreements

196. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance his plans in respect of digital taxation. [54496/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Deputy is aware that the European Commission proposal for an interim Digital Services Tax, which imposes a 3% levy on the turnover of certain companies' digital activities, has been debated among Member States at both a technical and political level since first proposed, last March.

The Digital Services Tax proposal was included as an item for policy agreement at ECOFIN on 4 December, where Finance Ministers were asked to agree the scope of the proposal. The

debate was held in public session.

An agreement was not reached, with several Member States, including Ireland, expressing reservations about the proposal. An amended Franco-German proposal was tabled at ECOFIN which seeks to narrow the scope of the digital tax to online targeted advertising only. Subsequent to the discussion the Presidency proposed that Member States consider the Franco-German proposal in the coming months.

Technical discussions will now commence on this proposal. It will be for the Romanian Presidency to determine whether and when this proposal will next be discussed by Ministers. Ireland will continue to engage constructively in this debate, as we have throughout this process.

I have always been clear that I fully recognise that further change is coming to the international tax environment. I remain convinced that global agreement at the OECD offers the most appropriate way for delivering these changes. Intensive work is underway at the OECD and it is expected that an update on this work will be published in mid-2019 with a view to reaching agreement before the end of 2020.

Ireland remains committed to global tax reform. That is why Ireland has been a committed participant in, and strong supporter of, tax reform efforts led by the OECD through the BEPS process.

Ireland will continue to actively engage with work in the area of tax and the digital economy at both OECD and EU level.

Financial Services Regulation

197. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the steps he has taken to combat the uptake of loans with high cost, high risk money lenders; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54497/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): It is important to any society that a responsible and sustainable financial sector provides appropriate credit to consumers. Many regulated financial service providers meet this need in Ireland and provide credit of various duration and price for a variety of purposes. Licensed moneylenders are part of this credit landscape and provide credit to consumers who are often unable to obtain credit from another cheaper source for various reasons.

A number of members within the credit union movement in Ireland offer the Personal Micro Credit (PMC) Scheme. This began as a pilot scheme, supported by Government, in November 2015. Loans under the initiative are branded “It Makes Sense” loans. The PMC Implementation Group was established to oversee and drive the implementation of the scheme through its pilot phase and subsequently through to implementation nationwide. My Department is represented on the PMC Implementation Group, which is chaired by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

It should be noted that credit unions are independent and it is at management discretion if they sign up to offer the “It Makes Sense” loan to consumers. Additionally credit unions can only lend within their common bonds. Currently 48% of credit unions are involved in the PMC scheme and, therefore, only consumers within the common bond of these credit unions can avail of the “It Makes Sense” loan. As a result the “It Makes Sense” loan is not yet available as a nationwide mainstream alternative of affordable credit for current users of licensed

moneylenders.

Anyone wishing to engage in the business of moneylending requires a licence from the Central Bank in accordance with the Consumer Credit Act 1995 (the Act) and the Central Bank assesses applications in line with the criteria set out in the Act. The Act 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 is excessive.

One of the specific challenges that the Bank faces in considering rates charged by licensed moneylenders on specific loans is finding a balance between, on the one hand, the availability of credit for people who do not have access to legitimate credit elsewhere or who do not use other regulated credit providers and, on the other hand, the provision of short term unsecured loans at what can be a high cost.

There is a strong framework of protection in place for consumers who choose to avail of the services of licensed moneylenders including the Bank's Consumer Protection Code for Licensed Moneylenders.

In March 2018, the Central Bank proposed new measures to enhance the framework of protections for customers of moneylenders, including

- Measures aimed at further ensuring that moneylenders adopt and implement a responsible lending culture.

- Moneylenders to prompt consumers to consider alternatives, including cheaper options, to moneylending loans.

- Measures to reduce the possibility of consumers over-extending themselves when borrowing from moneylenders.

The Bank undertook a public consultation on the proposals and it expects to finalise and publish Regulations under Section 48 of the Central Bank (Supervision and Enforcement) Act 2013, to replace the Consumer Protection Code for Licensed Moneylenders, in 2019.

Banking Sector Regulation

198. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance his views on closet indexing which is subject to investigation of 2,000 Irish investment funds in view of the fact that the European Securities Market Authority has indicated between 5% and 15% of UCITs could be closet indexers. [54498/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Central Bank of Ireland is the competent authority for authorising and supervising UCITS funds in Ireland.

I have been informed by the Bank that in Q4 2018 it began key supervisory work to review all Irish domiciled UCITS funds that report to be actively managed to determine if they are potentially index tracking.

ESMA has defined closet indexing as the situation *'whereby asset managers claim, according to their fund rules and investor information documentation, to manage their funds in an active manner while the funds are, in fact, staying very close to a benchmark and therefore implementing an investment strategy which requires less input from the investment manager and charge management fees in line with those of funds that are considered to be actively managed.'*

The Central Bank investigation of 2,000 Irish investment funds is to ensure that investors are not misled or misinformed about the investment objectives, policies and charges set out in fund documentation.

The Central Bank's supervisory work on potential closet indexing takes into account the work and methodology developed by ESMA, which the Bank has contributed to, and the findings in its study.

It is important that any issues identified by the Bank in their investigation of these 2,000 Irish investment funds are dealt with appropriately in order to ensure that investors are treated fairly.

To that end, the Bank has informed me that they will be following-up with any relevant funds identified in the review as potential 'closet indexing' funds, up to and including the use of the Central Bank's full suite of supervisory powers depending on the nature of the findings.

Brexit Issues

199. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the preparations made for a significant increase in businesses registering here ahead of Brexit; the measures he is taking in order to protect Irish SMEs during an influx into the economy; and if he expects a significant increase in the amount of corporation tax paid from foreign investment. [54499/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Government are aware of the complexity of Brexit which, in whatever form it takes, will likely have a negative economic impact on Ireland. My Department has been to the forefront in assessing the impact of Brexit on our economy, commissioning joint research with the ESRI on the issue even prior to the referendum taking place. It is clear from this research and further studies, that a hard Brexit will have a considerable negative impact for Ireland.

The Government has already taken a number of important steps to prepare our economy for the challenges of Brexit. The Government has been building resilience through the creation of fiscal capacity, including by balancing the books and reducing our debt burden, building resilience to economic shocks through the establishment of the 'Rainy Day Fund'. The fund is intended to act as an economic buffer in the event of a particularly severe economic downturn.

Our recent economic history highlights the importance of creating a fiscal safety buffer to help absorb inevitable shocks, at the same time, ensuring the long-term sustainability of the public finances.

The Government is also providing dedicated loan funds for affected businesses. As the Deputy will be aware, I announced a €300 million Brexit Loan Scheme in Budget 2018 to provide support to Irish SMEs to diversify and restructure their businesses in light of Brexit. This Scheme was launched at the end of March of last year. Following on from the successful launch of the Brexit Loan Scheme, as part of Budget 2019 I announced the development of the Future Growth Loan Scheme of up to €300m to provide long-term investment finance of 8-10 years to help Irish businesses invest strategically in a post-Brexit environment. I anticipate that this Scheme will be launched early this year.

The measures introduced in Budget 2019 continue the process of ensuring that Ireland's economy remains competitive and resilient against the backdrop of heightened uncertainty, including from Brexit.

The Government and State agencies will also continue working hard to exploit any opportunities from Brexit, including promoting trade and investment opportunities in Ireland, as an English speaking member of the EU with unfettered access to the EU market.

At the sectoral level new opportunities have been identified – particularly in the international financial services sector which is heavily reliant on access to the Single Market and ongoing compliance with EU regulatory standards. Brexit has already seen opportunities for Ireland to increase its share of financial services-based inward investment. Public announcements to establish or expand operations have been made by a number of companies.

With regard to business registrations, I am advised by Revenue that the numbers of companies and businesses registering for Corporation Tax and Income Tax has been increasing in recent years. However, it is not possible to identify those registering as a result of Brexit separately from normal growth and expansion of the Irish economy.

I am further advised that Revenue provides an easy to use on-line facility that allows new customers to register for their taxes online. This facility can cater for significant numbers of new registrations if the need arises.

As the Deputy is aware, forecasts of tax receipts are produced by the Department of Finance with assistance from Revenue. The role of Revenue is to advise of any potential increases and decreases in taxation that they have been made aware of from administering the taxes and other data sources available to them. Revenue are not currently aware of any significant increases in tax receipts expected as a result of increased investment due to Brexit.

Departmental Meetings

200. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance if emails, memos or minutes of meetings between his Department and public or private banks in regard to cases of mortgage arrears or potential repossessions on the book of those banks will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54527/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, I and my officials have regular meetings with the CEOs/senior officials of the banks operating in Ireland. Some of these meetings focus on specific issues such as the tracker investigations but also can cover more wide ranging general issues.

Obviously due to client confidentiality, commercial sensitivities and General Data Protection Regulation, the specifics of individual mortgage arrears cases or potential repossessions cases would not be discussed.

VAT Rate Application

201. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Finance the position in relation to VAT on food supplements, vitamins and minerals; his plans to impose a 23% VAT rate on such products; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54539/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Under the VAT Consolidation Act 2010, the standard rate of VAT applies to all food supplements, which are not foods in the ordinary and everyday meaning of the word. However, a longstanding concession provided through Revenue guidance permitted the zero rating of certain types of food supplements including vitamins, minerals and fish oils. The operation of the current concession became extremely problematic

because of efforts by certain businesses in the industry to exploit the concession to extend zero rating way beyond the scope permitted by Revenue. These businesses consistently challenged Revenue guidance and Revenue decisions on the VAT rating of products giving rise to serious concerns about compliance within the industry and unfair competition between compliant and non-compliant businesses.

Revenue published new guidance on 27 December concerning the rate of VAT that applies to food supplements. The new guidance withdraws the concessionary application of the zero rate to certain food supplements provided for in previous guidance and these products will be liable at the standard rate from the 1 March 2019.

However, independent of Revenue's decisions on interpretation, I agreed during the recent Finance Bill to put in place a process that will conclude in the 2019 Tax Strategy Group Paper to examine some of the policy choices around the VAT treatment of food supplements.

It should be noted, however, that human oral medicines, including certain folic acid and other vitamin and mineral products, licenced by the Health Products Regulatory Association will continue to apply at the zero rate of VAT. Infant foods will also continue to be zero rated.

Central Bank of Ireland Reports

202. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the steps he plans to take, including timelines, for the implementation of the recommendations and action points set out in the recent Central Bank report on behaviour and culture in the banking sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1014/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Officials from my Department have been in discussion with the Central Bank with regard to the proposals as set out in the report on behaviour and culture in the Irish retail banks since its publication in July 2018.

My officials are preparing a detailed analysis of the proposals, which has been informed by the discussions with the Central Bank and learnings from HM Treasury's experience of the UK Senior Managers' Regime. When I have completed my review, I will give my initial views on the proposals with the intention to proceed and will, if required, engage with the Attorney General's Office for formal legal advice.

As I have previously stated in this House, I intend to seek Cabinet approval to draft the Heads of Bill by the end of Quarter 1 2019. As with any complex piece of legislative drafting, I expect that it will be some months after that before the draft Bill/Scheme goes to Government with its associated Regulatory Impact Analysis.

I would highlight now that it may be necessary to adjust this timeline to accommodate urgent Brexit-related legislation, which, as the Deputy is aware, must take priority.

VAT Rate Application

203. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance if a system will be introduced in which clubs and associations that raise money voluntarily will be reimbursed VAT being charged (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1038/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The VAT Compensation Scheme for Charities was introduced in Budget 2018 to reduce the VAT burden on charities through the

partial compensation of VAT they incur. This Scheme was introduced in 2019 in respect of VAT expenses incurred in 2018. Charities will be entitled to a refund of a proportion of their VAT costs based on the level of non-public funding they receive, up to a total capped fund of €5m.

One of the conditions for qualification under the scheme is registration as a charity under Section 207 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997. Bodies established for the promotion of athletic or amateur games or sports are normally granted tax exemption under Section 235 Taxes Consolidation Act 1997, and this being the case may not be eligible to claim under the Charities Compensation Scheme.

Customs and Excise Controls

204. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance if he will put forward a proposal (details supplied) at EU Council level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1087/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): EU Directive 92/83/EEC deals with the harmonization of the structures of excise duties on alcohol and other alcoholic beverages. This Directive provides that Member States may apply reduced rates of excise for small beer producers and also for small distilleries (spirit drinks producers). Ireland has exercised the option to apply reduced rates of excise for small beer producers.

Having regard to public health concerns, Directive 92/83/EEC set the production threshold for the application of excise relief for small distilleries at 10 hectoliters of pure alcohol per annum. In fact only seven Member States apply an excise relief for small distilleries and the commercial viability of such a scale of production was found by the European Commission to be very limited, most beneficial to ancillary producers.

A proposal to amend the current Directive 92/83/EEC was published by the European Commission in 2018. The legislative proposal includes an option for Member States to apply reduced rates of excise for cider and other fermented drinks, but it does not amend the existing small distilleries threshold nor is there any discernible interest among Member States in making any such amendment.

Living City Initiative

205. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Finance if consideration will be given to implementing the living city initiative in Drogheda, County Louth to help drive residential numbers up and vacant properties down (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1088/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Living City Initiative was introduced in the Finance Act 2013 and commenced on 5th May 2015 when the initiative was extended beyond the original planned pilot cities of Limerick and Waterford, to include the cities of Dublin, Cork, Galway and Kilkenny. In line with my Department's commitment to evidence based policy-making, the inclusion of these additional four cities followed the completion of a comprehensive, independent ex-ante cost benefit analyses.

The specific Special Regeneration Areas for the Living City Initiative in each city were designated following consultation with the relevant city councils and an independent review by a third party advisor. Specific criteria were set down in respect of the areas that should be

included within the remit of the Living City Initiative which were required to be taken into account by the relevant city councils when putting forward the proposed Special Regeneration Areas for each city. In particular, Special Regeneration Areas should be inner city areas which are largely comprised of dwellings built before 1915, where there is above average unemployment and which demonstrate clear evidence of neglect, dereliction and under-use.

Officials in my Department reviewed the Living City Initiative in 2016 in consultation with the relevant councils and the then Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. On foot of that review, a number of changes were brought forward to the scheme in Budget 2017 in order to make the initiative more attractive and effective. The principal change extended the residential element of the scheme to landlords, who are now able to claim the relief by way of accelerated capital allowances for the conversion and refurbishment of property, which was built prior to 1915, where such property is to be used for residential purposes. In addition, the requirement for a pre-1915 building to have been originally constructed for use as a dwelling in order to qualify for the residential element of the Initiative was removed. The floor area restriction for owner-occupiers has also been removed, while the minimum amount of capital expenditure required for eligibility for relief, under all elements of the scheme, was also amended and must now only exceed €5,000.

The aim is to get the design of the Initiative right so that it can work in an effective manner. Once it is proven that this have been achieved, it will then be possible to consider if and how the Initiative should be extended to other locations. Unless the underpinning scheme is made more effective, extension of eligibility for it to other towns would be largely ineffective.

Tax Yield

206. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the amount collected from the sugar tax in 2018; the way in which this compares to the amount expected to be collected in 2018; the estimated yield from the tax for 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1108/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the provisional receipts from Sugar Sweetened Drinks Tax (SSDT) in 2018 are €16.5m. As this was a new tax, forecasting the level of receipts in advance was challenging, but based on the best available information was estimated at €30m. This assumed a commencement date of 1 April 2018. The subsequent 1 May commencement date impacted on the returns filed and payments made. The estimated yield from SSDT in 2019 is provisionally set at €35m.

Finally, the Deputy will be aware that the primary purpose of this tax is to change behaviour rather than to raise revenue. As such, the early indications are that the tax is working effectively in reducing the volume of sugar sweetened drinks being consumed in Ireland.

Stamp Duty

207. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of stamp duty collected in 2018 from non-residential property; the amount expected to be collected for 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1109/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the provisional receipts of Stamp Duty associated with property in 2018 amounted to €661 million. It is estimated that €490 million of these receipts relate to non-residential property. While a formal

forecast for Stamp Duty on non-residential property for 2019 is not prepared, Revenue's tentative estimate on a full-year basis is €530 million.

Sovereign Debt

208. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of Ireland's sovereign debt that falls due for refinancing for each year from 2019 to 2025; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1110/19]

209. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated cost for each year from 2019 to 2025 to Ireland of every 1% increase in sovereign borrowing costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1111/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 208 and 209 together.

The National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA) has advised me that at end-2018, the volume of medium/long-term Irish sovereign debt due to mature over the seven year period to end-2025 was just over €73 billion. The annual breakdown is set out in the table below. The maturity profile of Irish Government bonds and EU Programme loans is available on the website of the NTMA at the link pasted below and is updated monthly.

<https://www.ntma.ie/business-areas/funding-and-debt-management/statistics/maturity-profile>.

Year	Principal Repayments* (€ billions)
2019	15.2
2020	19.0
2021	0.5**
2022	11.9
2023	7.0**
2024	8.1**
2025	11.5**

Source: NTMA

* Reflects Government Bond and EU Programme loan maturities as at end-2018. Figures include the effect of currency hedging transactions.

** Excludes EFSM maturities as these loans are due to be extended following the maturity extensions granted in mid-2013.

The Deputy should be aware that the figures in the table for the years 2021, 2023, 2024 and 2025 exclude maturities of European Financial Stabilisation Mechanism (EFSM) loans of €3 billion, €2 billion, €0.8 billion and €2.4 billion respectively. This is because, owing to the maturity extensions granted in 2013, it is not expected that Ireland will have to refinance any EFSM loans before 2027. In total, over the period from 2019 to 2025, this reduces the refinancing requirement by €8.2bn to €73 billion .

While the vast bulk of Ireland's National Debt is at fixed rates of interest the cost of refinancing that debt could become more expensive if interest rates were to rise.

However, it should be noted that the debt interest estimates set out in Budget 2019 are based

on prudent assumptions and already allow for an increase in rates on Exchequer borrowing over the forecast period.

Tax Data

210. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if his Department or the Revenue Commissioners have an estimate of the refund of tax that may be due to persons arising from a recent High Court decision relating to the dwelling house exemption; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1112/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that it is a qualifying condition of the dwelling house exemption that a person inheriting a dwelling house cannot have an interest in another dwelling house at the date of the inheritance. A recent High Court judgement held that a person inheriting a dwelling house cannot have a beneficial interest in a dwelling house forming part of the residue of an estate until the assets for distribution have been ascertained; that is, on a later date than the date of the inheritance.

The facts of the relevant case were that an individual had inherited more than one dwelling house from the same disponent and both dwelling houses formed part of the residue of the estate. The judge held that the individual did not have a beneficial interest in either of the dwelling houses at the date of the inheritance and qualifies for the exemption. Revenue have issued revised guidance on foot of the judgement to clarify that a dwelling house forming part of the residue of an estate is not to be taken into account in determining whether a successor has an interest in another dwelling house at the date of an inheritance.

Due to the nature of the information supplied on the capital acquisitions tax return it is not possible to provide an estimate as requested by the Deputy. Having regard to the specific circumstances of the case concerned, however, Revenue does not anticipate that many beneficiaries will be affected by this judgement.

Tax Data

211. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated number of income tax units on emergency tax; the corresponding data for the same period in 2018; the impact of PAYE modernisation on the numbers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1113/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that emergency tax should only apply in limited circumstances under PAYE Modernisation. These circumstances typically occur where an employee has not provided a valid Personal Public Service Number (PPSN) to an employer or where it is an employee's first employment in the State. Also, in very rare circumstances emergency tax could apply because an employee's tax record needs to be updated, which could prevent Revenue from issuing a 'Revenue Payroll Notification' (RPN). The RPN is the mechanism through which Revenue provides employers with real-time information in respect of employees' tax credit and rate band entitlements.

Revenue has confirmed that by 11 January 2019, employers had successfully submitted pay and statutory deduction details in respect of over 1.54m employees under the new PAYE Modernisation arrangements. Of these, approximately 23,000 (1.5%) individuals were reported as being on emergency tax. It is not possible to directly compare this figure with the 2018 tax year because employers were not previously required to provide information on instances where

emergency tax was applied.

Revenue has further advised me that from analysis of the submissions received to date, it is clear that some employers are unnecessarily operating emergency tax in respect of employees where an RPN is available. However, the analysis also confirms that many employers who incorrectly operated emergency tax in their first payroll run of the year have since corrected the error and applied the correct details to their employees' second week's earnings and refunded any overpayments.

Revenue has assured me that it will continue to very actively monitor PAYE Modernisation payroll submissions and will make direct contact with employers who appear not to be operating the system properly to assist them rectifying any errors made. Revenue also expects that the numbers of employees being placed on emergency tax will decrease further once the system beds down and employers become used to operating on a real-time basis.

Finally, I wish to commend Revenue for the successful launch of PAYE Modernisation and the seamless integration of the new real-time reporting arrangements into employers' payroll systems.

Brexit Data

212. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Finance the number of new customs officers which will be assigned to each port and airport as a consequence of Brexit; the number expected to be in place in each port and airport by 29 March 2019, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1158/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that they will require an additional 600 staff as a result of Brexit. This is based on the central case scenario of an orderly withdrawal, to include a transition period to the end of 2020, followed by an agreed future trading relationship between the EU and the UK.

The Government approved the phased recruitment of 600 Revenue staff in September of last year. Budget 2019 provided Revenue with a provision for 270 staff, of the total of 600, for Brexit during 2019. These staff are primarily required for trade facilitation.

Revenue has advised that plans are well advanced to have 200 of the 270 additional staff, across a number of functions, trained and in place by 29 March 2019. Of these 200 additional staff, 142 will be assigned to the ports and airports and will be working on a 24 hour/7-day basis.

The following table provides the breakdown of the number of additional staff who will be in place in Dublin Port, Dublin Airport and Rosslare Port by 29 March 2019:

Additional Staff	Total
Dublin Port	81
Dublin Airport	41
Rosslare Port	20

The above additional staff will bring the total Revenue staff in Dublin Port to approximately 160, Dublin Airport to approximately 160 and Rosslare Port to approximately 40 by 29 March 2019.

In the event of the UK leaving without an agreement accelerated recruitment of the remain-

ing 330 staff will be required during 2019. It is intended to manage this by way of internal, interdepartmental and open recruitment. In addition Revenue will also redeploy existing Revenue staff, if necessary.

Investor Compensation Company Limited

213. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if the Central Bank makes it compulsory as part of its licensing requirements for investment firms and pension providers to be part of the investor compensation scheme; the number of investment firms or pension providers that are operating here which are not part of the scheme; if they are part of a compensation scheme in other jurisdictions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1171/19]

215. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if auto enrolment were to be implemented under the Strawman proposal, if these pensions would be covered by the investor compensation scheme if one of the operators of the scheme fails; if not, the compensation scheme which will be available for customers in such an instance in which a pension provider fails; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1173/19]

216. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the types of pensions covered by the investor compensation scheme; if it is just personal retirement savings accounts and approved retirement funds; the compensation scheme available if a pension provider fails and the pension fund is an occupational pension fund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1174/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 213, 215 and 216 together.

The Investor Compensation Company DAC (ICCL) is an independent body set up in accordance with the Investor Compensation Act, 1998 (the Act). The ICCL is Ireland's statutory 'fund of last resort' for customers of authorised investment firms.

I am informed by the Central Bank that membership of the investor compensation scheme is mandatory for the following categories of authorised investment firms as defined in the Act:

- MiFID investment firms;
- Investment business firms authorised in accordance with the Investment Intermediaries Act, 1995;
- Credit Institutions licenced in accordance with section 9 of the Central Bank Act of 1971;
- Insurance intermediaries;
- UCITS Management Company authorised to provide Individual Portfolio Management services;
- AIF Management Company authorised to provide Individual Portfolio Management services.

There are currently 3,410 authorised investment firms that are in scope for the purposes of the Act.

The coverage of the ICCL is set out in the Act. The Act prescribes that the ICCL shall pay compensation to clients of the aforementioned categories of investment firms ("compensation

obligation”). The compensation obligation of the ICCL is restricted to “eligible clients”, in essence clients, that are not defined in the Act as excluded investors, such as professional and institutional investors, including among others a pension or retirement fund.

In respect of eligible clients’ investments, the compensation obligation relates to eligible client money held, and, eligible client investment instruments held, administered and managed in connection with the provision of certain investment services, that the failed investment firm is unable to return to the eligible investor in accordance with legal and contractual conditions applicable. The compensation obligation is limited to 90% of the eligible investors’ net loss, subject to a maximum compensatable payment of €20,000 per eligible investor.

The investment instruments that are eligible for compensation under the Act are set out in section 2 of the Investment Intermediaries Act, 1995 (IIA) and Schedule 1 Part 3 of the European Union (Markets in Financial Instruments) Regulations 2017 (MiFID).

It is apparent from the investment instruments referred to in section 2 of the IIA that Personal Retirement Savings Accounts are listed and therefore in-scope, subject to all other elements of the compensation obligation being satisfied in accordance with the Act.

An Approved Retirement Fund is not a defined investment instrument within the scope of the Act and the compensation obligation, if any, would need to be considered, on a case-by-case basis, by an Administrator appointed in accordance with the provisions of the Act to validate claims received from clients of the relevant failed firm.

Occupational pension policy is a matter for the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP) and is underpinned by the Pensions Act 1990 (PA). I am advised by DEASP that the PA provides certain protections to members of an occupational pension scheme in the event of the insolvency of their employer.

Specifically S48A of the PA provides a liability in law for the Minister for Finance to make payments of certain certified amounts to the trustees of an occupational pension scheme where the resources of the scheme are not sufficient to discharge liabilities in relation to certain benefits. In order to be eligible for such a payment, there must be a double insolvency of both the employer and the pension scheme.

Section 48A operates in the event of the wind up of a pension scheme, where both the employer and the scheme are insolvent at the date of wind up, and the scheme has insufficient funds to meet the liabilities of a scheme in respect of benefits referred to in S48(1AB) paragraphs (b), (c), and (d) of the PA, the Minister for Finance will provide monies from the Exchequer to fund the shortfall. The shortfall being 50% of the benefits, and where the annual amount is €12,000 or less, 100% of the benefits.

Regarding the proposed implementation of an Auto-Enrolment scheme, my colleague the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection has primary responsibility in this area. However, I have been informed that the detailed evidence building and consultation required to deliver an automatic enrolment system is now being undertaken over an initial project planning phase. This will include an investigation of the potential organisational models for delivery and the likely costs involved.

Until this work is complete and a preferred model chosen, it would not be possible to confirm the specific operational structure and design characteristics of automatic enrolment.

214. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of individual investors here that would be deemed to be eligible investors under the Investor Compensation Act 1998; if the Central Bank publishes such data; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1172/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Investor Compensation Company DAC (ICCL) is an independent body established in accordance with the Investor Compensation Act 1998.

The ICCL is Ireland's statutory 'fund of last resort' for the clients of authorised investment firms.

The Act prescribes that the ICCL shall pay compensation to clients of specified categories of investment firms where a firm is unable to meet its financial obligations to those clients. The compensation obligation of the ICCL is restricted to "eligible clients", who are clients which don't fall under the definition of professional or institutional investors.

There are currently 3,410 authorised investment firms that are in scope for the purposes of the Act.

In respect of eligible clients' investments, the compensation obligation relates to eligible client money held and eligible client investment instruments held, administered and managed in connection with the provision of certain investment services, that the failed investment firm is unable to return to the eligible investor in accordance with legal and contractual conditions applicable.

The compensation obligation is limited to 90% of the eligible investors' net loss, subject to a maximum compensation payment of €20,000 per eligible investor.

Neither the ICCL nor the Central Bank of Ireland collect information on the number of eligible investors under the Act.

Questions Nos. 215 and 216 answered with Question No. 213.

NAMA Staff Remuneration

217. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 146 of 18 December 2018, if the National Treasury Management Agency will provide a breakdown of all discretionary performance related payments in tabular form (details supplied); the highest discretionary performance related payments made to a single employee in each of the years 2006 to 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1179/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The response to the deputy is set out in the table.

Year	Total discretionary performance-related payments	Number of Benefiting Employees	Highest discretionary performance-related payments to an individual
2006	€2,807,229	116	€377,000
2007	€3,165,551	138	€403,000
2008	€3,459,751	161	€395,500

Year	Total discretionary performance-related payments	Number of Benefiting Employees	Highest discretionary performance-related payments to an individual
2009	€2,751,361	167	€200,000
2010	€1,981,760	258	€40,000
2011	€62,610	5	€30,000
2012	€43,100	6	€25,000

Note -

- In respect of the years 2006-2010, the details provided have been compiled by the NTMA following the retrieval and review of available historical hardcopy documentation.

- Details of the total amount paid in discretionary performance related pay along with the number of staff in receipt of these payments have been published in the NTMA Annual Report for the years 2010 to 2017 (the NTMA's most recent Annual Report).

EU Issues

218. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he has submitted feedback on the EU roadmap for more efficient law making in the field of taxation and identification of areas for a move to qualified majority voting; if so, the status of this feedback; his views on the proposals outlined in the roadmap specifically those proposals to end unanimity when it comes to taxation matters; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1193/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The European Commission recently published a Roadmap document titled 'Taxation - more efficient EU law-making procedure' which is seeking the views of members of the public and is open until 17th January 2019. It is aimed at seeking the views of the general public rather than the Member States.

I am aware that a European Commission Communication paper is due to be published shortly on a potential move to qualified majority voting in the area of taxation.

I firmly believe that the current unanimity based voting procedure is the most appropriate voting system in the area of taxation. Indeed, over the last 4 years, 21 Taxation initiatives have been agreed by Member States unanimously. This includes important Directives on VAT, administrative co-operation, Anti-Tax-Avoidance and also the EU list of non-cooperative tax jurisdictions. This illustrates that the requirement for unanimity is not preventing significant agreements from being reached.

The European Treaties are clear on how tax decisions are to be taken and Ireland's tax sovereignty is an important issue for Irish citizens. I do not support any change to existing EU voting rights on taxation.

NAMA Operations

219. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Finance the status of the work of NAMA; the expected surplus to be returned to the State; the way in which the surplus to date will be used; the date the agency will be wound up; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1254/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I wish to advise the Deputy that it is expected that NAMA will substantially complete its work by 2020/2021 and that, over those two years, the Agency expects that a surplus, currently projected to be €3.5bn, will be available for return to the State.

NAMA announced in October 2017 that it had redeemed all of its €30.2bn in Senior Debt which was guaranteed by the State and since April 2018 it has commenced the redemption of its €1.6bn in subordinated debt. However, notwithstanding the successful achievement of repaying the State's contingent liability, three years ahead of schedule, there is still a significant body of work yet to be completed by NAMA.

While it is currently estimated that NAMA will return a surplus in the region of €3.5bn to the Exchequer, this surplus has yet to fully crystallise. It is important to note that realisation of this surplus depends on the success of NAMA's ongoing deleveraging, its Dublin Docklands SDZ programme and residential funding programme. These activities must be completed for the expected surplus to be earned.

NAMA was mandated in late 2009 to deal expeditiously with its acquired loan portfolio and to extract best value from that portfolio. NAMA has been extremely successful in achieving this mandate and has now entered into the final phase of this work. NAMA continues to de-risk its positions so that by 2020, the real estate and financial assets supported by NAMA funding will comprise a relatively small portfolio of liquid commercial and residential exposures. Active consideration is underway regarding NAMA's end of life strategy and the maximisation of the return of any surplus to the State in respect of these remaining assets.

As the Deputy will be aware, NAMA was established with a very specific legal mandate, which was approved by the European Commission in 2010. It is important that NAMA's role is preserved and that it completes its work in line with its original mandate.

As per section 60(2) of the NAMA Act 2009, NAMA may use surplus funds to redeem and cancel its senior and subordinated debt. Surplus funds may only be returned to the Central Fund once NAMA's debt has been redeemed in full in 2020.

Any NAMA surplus paid, while Exchequer positive, will not impact the general government balance, in line with EUROSTAT rules. It will be a decision for the Government as to how any surplus returned by NAMA will be utilised within the framework of the fiscal rules. However, the intention has always been to use such receipts from the resolution of the financial sector crisis to pay down our national debt and reduce our debt servicing costs.

VAT Rate Increases

220. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Finance if he has commissioned an impact assessment of the increase in VAT from 9% to 13.5% in respect of hotels, restaurants, hairdressing and other activities; the expected increase in revenues in each of the categories in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1255/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): A "Review of the 9% VAT rate: Analysis of Economic and Sectoral Developments" was published by my Department in July 2018, in order to better inform any decision in relation to the 9% reduced rate going forward. In addition to assessing the relevance, cost, value-for-money, and impact to date of the 9% VAT rate, the Review also looks at the estimated impact on the relevant sectors were the rate to be increased.

The Review found that tourism expenditure is more sensitive to income growth and the eco-

conomic cycle than 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 9% rate sector remains strong. The Review concludes that the VAT rating applied to the tourism sector should not greatly impact demand or employment in the sector. The Budget decision to increase the VAT rate was made following this analysis.

With regard to the expected increase in Exchequer revenues in 2019 as a result of the Budget change, this is estimated to be €466 million. The VAT rate increase in tourist accommodation is expected to yield €235m in 2019, restaurants are expected to yield €191m, hairdressing is estimated to yield €27m in 2019, bloodstock sales is expected to yield €7m and cinemas and shows are estimated to yield €6m in 2019.

Question No. 221 answered with Question No. 182.

Help-To-Buy Scheme

222. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Finance the status of a review of the help-to-buy scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1257/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Last year, I commissioned an independent Cost Benefit Analysis (CBA) of the Help to Buy (HTB) incentive. Following a competitive tender process, Indecon International Economic Consultants were appointed to carry out this analysis. The report of the CBA was published at Budget time in the Department of Finance Report on Tax Expenditures and is available on my Department's website.

In brief, the report found as follows:

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

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

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

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

The incentive is due to expire at the end of the current year and will be subject to decision in the context of Budget 2020.

Stamp Duty

223. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Finance if he is satisfied that information (details supplied) regarding the sale price of certain apartments in Dublin in 2018 supplied by the Revenue Commissioners to the Property Services Regulatory Authority is correct; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1288/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the information regarding the sale price of the apartments in question was sourced directly from self-assessed Stamp Duty returns which were filed electronically by taxpayers or their representatives through Revenue's Online Service (ROS).

Revenue has also advised me that the transfer of information to the Property Services Regulatory Authority (PSRA) is an automated process that directly feeds from one IT system to the other. It is sometimes the case that the information provided on the electronic Stamp Duty return is not completed correctly by the filer, for example apartment addresses within a block, and because of this the sales price information displayed on the Residential Property Price Register may appear to be incorrect.

Regarding the properties in question, Revenue has confirmed to me that it will examine the individual Stamp Duty returns, and will make direct contact with the filers where the information appears incorrect to advise on any necessary amendments. Where a return is amended, the Residential Property Price Register will automatically update within a few days.

Finally, I am aware that Revenue has published a very useful Help Guide on its website at www.revenue.ie/en/online-services/support/documents/help-guides/stamp-duty/completing-a-return-online.pdf to assist people in completing Stamp Duty returns, which the Deputy may find helpful. I am also advised that the PSRA provides guidance on its website on how to interpret information held on the Residential Property Price Register.

Film Industry Tax Reliefs

224. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance when he expects EU approval will be secured to implement the regional uplift aspect of the film tax relief provided for in the Finance Act 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1328/19]

225. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if efforts will be made to support the inclusion of Cork city and county in the regional uplift aspect of the film tax relief provided for in the Finance Act 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1329/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 224 and 225 together.

Section 481 TCA 1997 provides a 32% payable credit for eligible expenditure on film production in Ireland. It is available to Irish and international film production companies that are resident in the State or in an EEA State and carry on business in the State through a branch or subsidiary.

In addition to extending the credit's end date from 2020 to 2024, Finance Bill 2018 provided for a short-term, tapered regional uplift, commencing at 5%, for productions being made in areas designated under the State aid regional guidelines. The regional uplift will be introduced subject to State aid approval.

The regional uplift will be phased out on a tiered basis with 5% available in years 1 and 2, 3% in year 3, 2% in year 4, and reducing to 0% from year 5 on. The purpose of the regional uplift is to support the development of new, local pools of talent in areas outside the current main production hubs and to support the geographic spread of the audio-visual sector.

In considering whether the regional film development uplift applies, the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht shall have regard to the following factors -

- i. whether the production of the film is substantially undertaken in an assisted region;
- ii. whether there is limited availability of individuals with suitable experience or training who habitually reside within a 45 kilometre radius of the place of production to provide services, and
- iii. in respect of the areas of expertise where there is limited availability, the company provides training for individuals that habitually reside within that 45 kilometre radius.

The regions availing of the uplift will currently be limited to areas in Ireland sanctioned to receive regional aid under the EU regional aid guidelines.

The EU Regional Aid Guidelines (RAGS) allow each Member State to provide enhanced rates of State aid in the least economically developed areas of each country. This enables the State's enterprise development agencies to grant State aid, at enhanced rates, to businesses in order to support new investment and new employment in productive projects in Ireland's most disadvantaged regions.

Ireland's regional aid map was sanctioned by the EU in 2014. In accordance with the map, the regions unable to avail of the uplift are Dublin, Cork and the Mid-East generally, i.e. Kildare, Meath and Wicklow. (Exceptions in the mid-east which can receive regional aid assistance are Kells, Athy and Arklow.) The uplift is subject to State aid approval. My officials are currently in the process of notifying the aid with the European Commission. As I advised during Report stage of the Finance Bill process, should it transpire through conversations with the Commission that the geographic regions able to avail of the uplift can be amended, the inclusion of Cork city and county in may be something we can consider.

I would also like to advise the Deputy the process of notifying the EU of the regional uplift has begun but it is currently not possible to give a definitive timeline as to when this process will be completed.

Housing Policy

226. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which he can intercede with the EU institutions in view of the need to clear the way for an emergency local authority and affordable housing programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1365/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The fiscal rules to which Ireland is subject have direct application through a number of EU regulations and through the Fiscal Responsibility Act 2012. Any change to these regulations would have to follow the normal EU approach, beginning with a proposal from the Commission before consideration by Member States and the European Parliament.

The fiscal rules provide some scope for flexibility, where temporary deviations from the required budgetary adjustment are permitted, subject to strict conditions. There are also certain more explicit flexibility provisions within the rules. For instance, to facilitate public investment, increases in capital expenditure are smoothed over a four-year period, where only one-quarter of the increase is taken into account in the first year.

The rules also allow for deviations in the event of specific unforeseen circumstances – to date this has primarily been employed by several Member States in respect of costs relating to the refugee crisis – and to finance structural reforms that improve the long-term sustainability

of the economy.

The Government has been clear that the provision of affordable housing is a top priority. The Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan outlines the Government's strategy for tackling housing issues. According to the latest estimates, 63,727 housing solutions were delivered under Rebuilding Ireland, by the third quarter of 2018. In addition, last September, along with my colleague the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, I signed the Establishment order for the Land Development Agency. The Agency will work to better coordinate State lands for regeneration and development in partnership with land-owning State bodies.

Finally, a wide range of housing measures were announced in Budget 2019, which provides a €2.3 billion investment in housing this year. This represents a 25 per cent increase on 2018, and is the most the State has ever spent on housing. Budget 2019 provides a further increase of €30 million for homelessness services, bringing the total allocation for 2019 to €146 million.

Insurance Costs

227. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Finance the measures he has taken to meet and engage with insurance companies here regarding excessive premiums being charged to consumers particularly in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1366/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As Minister for Finance I am responsible for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation. Neither I nor the Central Bank can interfere in the pricing of insurance products, as these matters are of a commercial nature, and are determined by insurance companies based on the risks they are willing to accept.

However, it is acknowledged that pricing in the insurance sector has been subject to a lot of volatility in recent years, from a point where some premiums appeared to be priced at an unsustainably low level to the more recent experience of large increases, particularly in relation to motor insurance.

Indeed, the problem of rising motor insurance premiums was the main impetus for the establishment of the Cost of Insurance Working Group, which the Minister of State with responsibility for insurance, Michael D'Arcy T.D., chairs. Its Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance was published in January 2017 and makes 33 recommendations with 71 associated actions to be carried out in agreed timeframes, set out within an Action Plan. The Working Group continued its work throughout 2017 and subsequently published the Report on the Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance in January 2018.

Stakeholder consultation formed the foundation upon which the Working Group's two Reports and their recommendations were developed. This consultation process undertaken by the Working Group involved a wide range of stakeholders representing the different voices within this sector, including representative bodies, the major individual motor insurance providers and interest groups. The impact of excessive premiums being charged to consumers from all counties across the country was a feature of this engagement process with industry.

In addition, my officials regularly raise specific issues affecting consumers across the country during their ongoing engagement with Insurance Ireland, including within a sub-group formed to implement relevant consumer-focused recommendations from the Motor Report.

Furthermore, Minister of State D'Arcy, has separately met with representatives from insur-

ance companies and other relevant stakeholders in relation to a number of issues and the problems resulting from high insurance premiums have been discussed during these engagements.

Quarterly progress updates on the implementation of the Reports have provided more detailed information on the implementation of each of the recommendations and actions. The seventh quarterly update was published in November 2018 and is available on the Department's website, within "The Cost of Insurance Working Group" sub-section of the main "Insurance" section. Officials in my Department are currently working with the relevant stakeholders to prepare the update for the Fourth Quarter of 2018.

Finally, it should be noted that the most recent CSO data (for November 2018) indicates that private motor insurance premiums have decreased by 22.7% since peaking in July 2016. There was a drop of 7.6% year-on-year in November.

While the CSO statistics indicate a greater degree of stability on an overall basis, these figures represent a broad average and therefore there are many people who may still be seeing increases. However, I am hopeful that this greater stability in pricing will be maintained with the result that premiums should continue to fall from the very high levels of mid-2016.

Economic Competitiveness

228. Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which he remains satisfied that the economy remains competitive in all aspects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1367/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The improvement in Ireland's competitiveness has been at the cornerstone of the recovery in the Irish economy. Since 2008, the Central Bank's real harmonised competitiveness indicator has improved by approximately 21 per cent.

The restoration of Irish competitiveness has been hard-won through improvements in productivity, wages and price moderation. It is important that this competitiveness is preserved and continues to facilitate sustainable economic growth.

Importantly for Ireland's competitiveness, the robust growth in the economy has not yet given rise to inflationary pressure. For the first eleven months of the year, inflation as measured by the Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices (HICP) averaged just 0.7 per cent on an annual basis, this follows five consecutive years in which inflation has been below 1 per cent.

In the coming years, the domestic economy is expected to act as a primary driver of growth. In this context, we must remain cognisant of the potential upward pressure this will place on both prices and wages, which could give rise to a loss of competitiveness.

As highlighted in Budget 2019, our economy will also face a number of external risks in the years ahead. These risks primarily relate to a more adverse-than-expected outcome from Brexit, a rise in protectionism and a faster than expected normalisation of monetary policy.

As a number of these factors are beyond our control the best way we can mitigate against these risks is through prudent budgetary policy, careful management of the public finances and by focusing on competitiveness-oriented policies. That is what the Government has done and will continue to do going forward.

Motor Insurance Costs

229. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which the benefits of the review of the motor insurance sector will accrue in terms of reduced premiums; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1368/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As you are aware, the Cost of Insurance Working Group published its *Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance* on 10 January 2017. The Report makes 33 recommendations with 71 associated actions to be carried out in agreed timeframes, set out in an Action Plan within the Report.

Work is ongoing on the implementation of the outstanding recommendations by the relevant Government Departments and Agencies and the seventh quarterly update on progress was published in November 2018 which shows that of the 59 separate applicable deadlines within the Action Plan set to the end of Q3 2018, 45 relate to actions which have now been completed. Substantial work has also been undertaken in respect of the nine action points categorised as “ongoing”. Officials in my Department are currently working with the relevant stakeholders to prepare the update for the Fourth Quarter of 2018.

I believe that the continued implementation of the recommendations from the *Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance*, in parallel with the implementation of the recommendations from the *Report on the Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance*, will make a difference to the pricing of insurance premiums. It is envisaged that the implementation of all the recommendations from the two primary Reports cumulatively, with the appropriate levels of commitment and cooperation from all relevant stakeholders, will achieve the objective of delivering fairer premiums for consumers and businesses alike.

In this regard, it should be noted that the most recent CSO data (for November 2018) indicates that private motor insurance premiums have decreased by 22.7% since peaking in July 2016. There was a drop of 7.6% year-on-year.

While the CSO statistics indicate a greater degree of stability on an overall basis, these figures represent a broad average and therefore there are many people who may still be seeing increases. However, I am hopeful that this greater stability in pricing will be maintained with the result that premiums should continue to fall from the very high levels of mid-2016.

Tax Code

230. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Finance if he will address matters relating to section 114 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1373/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that in accordance with section 114 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997, where an employee is necessarily obliged to incur and defray out of the emoluments of the employment expenses of travelling in the performance of the duties of the employment, or otherwise to expend money wholly, exclusively and necessarily in the performance of those duties, there may be deducted from the emoluments of the employee to be assessed to income tax the expenses so necessarily incurred and defrayed.

Arising from an employee's entitlement to a tax deduction under section 114, in respect of certain expenses, there exists a long-standing Revenue practice under which employers may

reimburse tax-free to employees the expenses of travel (and subsistence relating to that travel), subject to certain conditions being fulfilled. I am advised by Revenue that the conditions under which the reimbursement to employees of the expenses of travel and subsistence may generally be made without deduction of tax are as follows:

(a) firstly, the employee must be temporarily away from his/her normal place of work in the performance of the duties of his/her employment;

(b) secondly, the travel expenses must be necessarily incurred in the performance of the duties of the office or employment, and

(c) thirdly, arising from a long-accepted position, supported by tax case law, the expenses of subsistence must attach to travelling necessarily incurred in the performance of the duties of the office or employment.

Moreover, provided the employee bears the cost of all expenses of travel necessarily incurred in the performance of the duties of his/her employment (and bears the cost of subsistence relating to such travel), Revenue will disregard for income tax purposes the reimbursement of expenses of travel and subsistence, where such reimbursement is made by way of:

(a) a flat rate up to, but not exceeding, the prevailing Civil Service rates for travel and subsistence, or

(b) a flat rate based on any other schedule of rates and related conditions of travel and subsistence, which do no more than reimburse the employee for actual expenditure necessarily incurred.

I do not consider that the conditions outlined above create unreasonable restrictions in the deductibility of travel expenses. Consequently, I do not see the need to consider an alternative approach.

As the Deputy has mentioned in his question, a public consultation was held in 2015 on the tax treatment of expenses of travel and subsistence for employees and office holders. Arising from that consultation a number of issues were identified, which resulted in the introduction of legislation in the Finance Acts of 2015 and 2016 to exempt certain expense payments of non-resident non-executive directors and members of the State Examinations Commission (2015), and of resident non-executive directors (2016). I have no plans to introduce further legislation on this issue at present.

Finally, it should be noted that Revenue has published extensive guidance on the Tax Treatment of the Re-imbursment of Expenses of Travel and Subsistence to Office Holders and Employees, which is available on the Revenue website: Part 05-01-06; <https://www.revenue.ie/en/tax-professionals/tm/income-tax-capital-gains-tax-corporation-tax/part-05/05-01-06.pdf>.

Revenue are always willing to provide clarification to employees, businesses and tax practitioners in relation to all areas of taxation, including travel and subsistence expenses, if requested to do so.

European Investment Bank

231. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he or his officials have been involved in discussions regarding the possibility of providing additional capital to the European Investment Bank as a result of the UK's planned departure from the European Union;

his views on the possibility of the UK remaining a member of the EIB after it leaves the EU; the consequences for Ireland if the UK is no longer a member of the EIB; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1378/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): When the United Kingdom exits the EU on 29 March 2019, its departure from the EU will also mean that it will stop being a shareholder of the European Investment Bank (EIB). Article 308 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union states that: “The members of the European Investment Bank shall be the Member States”. As a result, the UK will not remain a member of the EIB after it leaves the EU.

Once the UK stops being a shareholder of the EIB, the capital it has provided to the EIB will no longer be part of the Bank’s subscribed capital base. In recent months, the shareholders of the EIB, including Ireland, have been actively discussing means by which the capital base of the EIB can be strengthened to compensate for the loss of the UK shareholding. This may include, redenomination of some reserves and potentially an adjustment in the shareholdings of the EU Member States.

Assuming a positive outcome and applying the provisions in the Withdrawal Agreement on the repayment of the UK’s capital, the effect of UK withdrawal on EIB’s operations and financial capacity should be mitigated. This would include any direct impact on EIB lending to Ireland. The future relationship between the UK and the EIB will be subject to the broader negotiations on the future relationship between the UK and the EU.

Revenue Commissioners Powers

232. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Finance if the issues raised by a person (details supplied) have been resolved; the incidents involved and the way in which each one was dealt with by the Revenue Commissioners; and if the circumstances relate to the lack of outcomes to complaints made by them in the past or to a breach of agreements by the Revenue Commissioners. [1381/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the issue to which the Deputy is referring relates back to 2007 when a warrant notification from the Wexford Sheriff, in respect of taxes owed by the person in question, was inadvertently delivered to an unconnected third party of the same name.

Revenue further advised that it has apologised to the person for the error on numerous occasions over the intervening years as has the Wexford Sheriff. (It is important to note that the Wexford Sheriff is an Officer of the Court that acts independently of Revenue under the Court Offices Act 1945.) Revenue also appointed senior officials in both the local Wexford office and in the Collector-General’s office to liaise directly with the person as necessary and to assist them in managing their tax obligations, particularly in respect of a number of tax filing issues that subsequently arose.

While Revenue is not aware of any unresolved issues at this stage, it is happy to further engage with the person or their representatives if required. To advance matters, the Deputy should advise the person to liaise directly with the designated senior officials to discuss any further concerns that they may have. Revenue is also happy to provide the names and contact details of the officials to the Deputy should it be useful to do so.

Tax Data

233. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the number of primary schools registered for relevant contracts tax in each of the years 2015 to 2018; the number and type of audits carried out by the Revenue Commissioners on those schools in each of the years; the type of audits carried out; and the results arising. [1484/19]

234. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the number of post-primary schools registered for relevant contracts tax in each of the years 2015 to 2018; the number and type of audits carried out by the Revenue Commissioners on those schools in each of the years; the type of audits carried out; and the results arising. [1485/19]

235. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the number of third-level colleges registered for relevant contracts tax in each of the years 2015 to 2018; the number and type of audits carried out by the Revenue Commissioners on those colleges in each of the years; the type of audits carried out; and the results arising. [1486/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 233 to 235, inclusive, together.

I am advised by Revenue that there are 3,101 entities currently registered for Relevant Contracts Tax (RCT) across the education sector. The breakdown between Primary, Post Primary and Third Level is set out in the table below.

Level	No.
Primary	2,549
Post Primary	516
Third Level	36

The details of Revenue's compliance intervention Programme (Aspect Queries, Profile Interviews, Audits, Investigations) across the education sector for the years 2015 to 2017 are set out in the table below. For each year, the table includes the total number of interventions carried out (including yield) and separately sets out the number of cases where RCT formed part of the overall settlement.

Level	Year	Overall		Interventions with RCT liability	
		No. of Interventions	Yield	No. of Interventions	Yield
Primary	2015	281	€1,024,495	19	€130,699
	2016	247	€1,291,503	17	€218,903
	2017	340	€1,623,351	17	€147,699
	2018	247	€721,224	5	€20,556
Post Primary	2015	178	€775,365	9	€124,159
	2016	124	€1,076,832	4	€4,028
	2017	159	€975,510	2	€10,693
	2018	220	€893,152	5	€22,965
Third-Level	2015	62	€3,548,268	1	€131,988
	2016	39	€64,871	0	-
	2017	43	€152,515	0	-
	2018	73	€246,521	2	€128,862

Corporation Tax

236. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the number of new applications to be assessed under section 110 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 received by the Revenue Commissioners in 2017 and 2018. [1487/19]

237. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the number of companies assessed under section 110 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 in 2016 and 2017; the number that submitted returns; the number which failed to do so; and the number of prosecutions taken by the Revenue Commissioners against those that failed to do so. [1488/19]

238. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the number of active companies assessed under section 110 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 that have Russian connections. [1489/19]

239. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the number of active companies assessed under section 110 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 involved in aircraft leasing. [1490/19]

240. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the number of active companies assessed under section 110 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 which have Chinese connections. [1491/19]

241. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the number of active companies assessed under section 110 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 which were audited in 2017 and 2018 for reasons other than for VAT. [1492/19]

242. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the number of active companies assessed under section 110 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 which in 2016 and 2017 held Irish resident assets, whether loans or other securities or physical property. [1493/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 236 to 242, inclusive, together.

I am advised by Revenue that the number of notifications received from companies that they are qualifying companies for the purposes of section 110 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (“TCA”) in each of the years 2017 and 2018 is as follows:

Year	Number of Notifications Received
2017	382
2018	471
Total	853

Information relating to Corporation Tax returns filed by companies who had submitted a notification to Revenue that they were a qualifying company for the purposes of section 110 TCA during 2016 and 2017 (based on records on 10 January 2019) is, as follows:

Corporation Tax returns	2016	2017
No. of companies expected to file returns	2,642	2,966
No. of returns due but not filed as at 10 January 2019	181	480

I am advised that as part of Revenue's on-going compliance programmes, its Large Corporates Division engages with companies who appear to have an obligation to file a corporation tax return, but who have not done, so to establish the reason for the non-filing of the return.

There have been no prosecutions of section 110 companies for failure to file returns. Revenue's normal approach is to impose of a surcharge for the late or non-filing of a tax return, including financial statements, under section 1084 TCA 1997 rather than pursuing a criminal prosecution under the provisions of section 1087 of the TCA 1997.

I am advised by Revenue that there is no legal requirement for information regarding "connected parties" or whether the company is engaged in aircraft leasing or any other activity to be included on the corporation tax returns submitted by taxpayers. Therefore, Revenue is not in a position to provide the information requested by the Deputy regarding the number of section 110 companies with Russian or Chinese connections or the number engaged in aircraft leasing.

Revenue undertake compliance interventions in a number of forms, including audits, profile interviews and aspect queries. I am advised by Revenue that one audit was completed in respect of a section 110 company in 2018 for reasons other than VAT. No additional liabilities arose from that audit. The number of compliance interventions of all types (non-VAT related) completed during 2017 and 2018 is as follows:

Compliance Interventions	Nos.
Audit	1
Profile Interview	1
Aspect Query	67

I am advised by Revenue that a section 110 company, for accounting periods ending in 2017, is required to provide information on its corporation tax return on whether the company's qualifying assets include "specified mortgages" (broadly, mortgages on land in the State) and, where the company holds "specified mortgages", whether the company carries on a "specified property business" (broadly, a business of managing mortgages on land in the State) within the meaning of section 110(5A) of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997. The number of companies who confirmed they hold "specified mortgages" and carry out a "specified property business" is, as follows:

Companies	Nos.
Number holding "specified mortgages"	145
Number carrying out a "specified property business"	90

Tax Data

243. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the number of claims made by companies for correlative adjustments in each of the years 2010 to 2018; the number of claims for correlative adjustment conceded by the Revenue Commissioners; the value of the tax involved in those claims; and the amount of tax involved in each of the three largest cases in respect of the number of claims made in these years by industry and the other country involved. [1494/19]

244. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated cost of refunds arising from correlative adjustments made in 2017 and 2018. [1496/19]

245. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the tax at risk in respect of all

open claims for correlative adjustments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1497/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 243 to 245, inclusive, together.

I would clarify that correlative relief claims may be more appropriately described as potential tax refunds which Revenue may be required to make in accordance with our tax treaty obligations, as opposed to tax at risk.

Regarding open claims for correlative adjustments, I am advised by Revenue that as at 30 September 2018, the latest period for which relevant data has been compiled, approximately €271 million in tax was the subject of open correlative relief claims.

Regarding 2017 and 2018 claims, correlative relief with a tax value of approximately €26 million has been granted as at 30 September 2018.

The table below includes the number of correlative relief claims made by companies for each of the years 2010 to 30 September 2018, together with the number of claims where correlative relief was granted and the tax value of relief granted.

Year of claim	Number of claims received	Tax value of relief granted *
2010	16	€89.7m
2011	8	€40.9m
2012	13	€34.2m
2013	10	€9.2m
2014	12	€3.8m
2015	14	€9.0m
2016	9	€0.0m
2017	8	€15.0m
2018	10	€0.0m

* Correlative relief may be granted over a number of years and may take the form of increasing losses to be carried forward as well as refunds and off-sets.

I am advised by Revenue that, having regard to their obligation to observe confidentiality in relation to the tax affairs of taxpayers or small groups of taxpayers, they are not in a position to provide the information requested by the Deputy in relation to the numbers of claims where correlative relief was granted, the amount of tax involved in the three largest cases or the industry or the adjusting country with respect to those cases.

Finally, it is to be noted that claim numbers and amount of tax relief granted as a result of corresponding adjustments agreed between Revenue and the tax authorities of other countries under the Mutual Agreement Procedures provided for in Double Tax Treaties are not included in the above figures.

VAT Yield

246. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated total value of electronic sales from Ireland to Italy for VAT-unregistered customers and VAT-registered customers in each of the years 2015 to 2018. [1498/19]

247. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the likely tax loss to Ireland in a full year of the proposed Italian digital tax if credit was claimed and-or granted here for the tax

and the companies affected changed their business structures to reallocate profits to the locations in which the sales were generated, that is, Italy. [1499/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 246 and 247 together.

I have set out below, for the years 2015 to 2017 and period to the end of Q3 2018 (beyond which figures are not yet available), an estimate provided by the Revenue Commissioners of the total value of taxable e-services supplied directly to VAT unregistered customers in Italy by businesses established in Ireland. Supplies from Ireland are excluded where a business has a fixed establishment in Italy or has chosen not to register though the simplified VAT Mini One Stop Shop (MOSS) scheme. In addition, Irish businesses that supply services through digital portals, platforms, gateways or marketplaces where the host is not VAT MOSS-registered in Ireland may be excluded. Equally, businesses located outside of Ireland that supply e-services through such technologies with a host established in Ireland may be included.

Year	Value of Taxable Supplies (B2C) to Italy €m
2015	€111m
2016	€205m
2017	€415m
2018 (Q3)	€368m

Information on the total VAT collected on these supplies is provided on the Revenue website <https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/registrations-assessments-transactions/vat-moss.aspx>.

The supply of e-services to VAT registered customers is not within the scope of the VAT MOSS scheme, as VAT registered customers account for their EU acquisitions through domestic VAT and as such the identification of such supplies is not readily available. Irish businesses providing intra-Community supplies are required to submit periodic returns on these supplies, although specific detail on these goods or services is not required. Therefore, it is not possible to quantify the value of e-services from these records. However, the value of all taxable VAT zero-rated services is available. The table below provides an estimate of the value of all taxable services (including e-services) supplied to Italy for the period January 2015 to the end of August 2018.

Year	Value of Taxable Zero-rate Services (B2B) to Italy €b
2015	€2.9bn
2016	€4.0bn
2017	€4.2bn
2018 (August)	€2.6bn

Additional information concerning International trade in services is provided by the Central Statistics Office at the following link:

<http://www.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=BPA04&PLanguage=0>.

As regards Question [1499], I am informed by Revenue that the available data is not sufficiently detailed to enable a calculation of the likely tax loss as a result of a digital tax in any specific EU Member State.

Property Tax Administration

248. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance his views on providing relief for local property tax for older persons who are paying very expensive nursing home fees for their spouses under the fair deal scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1538/19]

249. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance his views on providing relief for local property tax for older persons who are paying expensive nursing home fees for their spouses under the fair deal scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1554/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 248 and 249 together.

The 2012 inter-Departmental Group which considered the structures and modalities of a property tax recommended that a universal liability to the Local Property Tax (LPT) should apply to all owners of residential property with a limited number of exemptions. Limiting the exemptions available allows the rate to be kept low for those liable persons who do not qualify for an exemption. While there is no specific exemption from the requirement to pay LPT for persons as described in the deputy's questions, such persons may be entitled to an exemption on other grounds or may qualify for a deferral subject to meeting the qualifying conditions.

Part 12 of the Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 (as amended) provides for a system of deferral arrangements for owner-occupiers where there is an inability to pay the tax and the person meets certain criteria based on income thresholds. These deferral arrangements also take account of mortgage interest payments made by the property owner.

The property must be the sole or main residence of the liable person and his or her gross income must be below certain thresholds. The thresholds are €15,000 for a single person and €25,000 for a married couple, civil partners or cohabiting couple. Deferral in respect of half of the local property tax payable is possible, where the gross income is above the threshold but less than €25,000 in the case of a single person and €35,000 in the case of a couple.

Homeowners may also be able to claim a deferral on hardship grounds if they have suffered a significant unexpected and unavoidable financial loss or expense in the current year and as a result are unable to pay their LPT liabilities without causing excessive financial hardship.

My department is currently finalising a review of the LPT in conjunction with the Departments of the Taoiseach, Public Expenditure and Reform, Housing Planning and Local Government, and the Office of the Revenue Commissioners. The review is looking in particular at the impact on LPT liabilities of property price developments. In that regard the review will be informed by the desirability of achieving relative stability, both over the short and longer terms, in LPT payments of those liable for the tax and provide clear direction on the likely payments faced by households in 2020. I will of course carefully consider the conclusions and recommendations of the report when it is presented to me.

National Debt Servicing

250. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated amount which has been saved in debt servicing costs as a result of the historically low borrowing costs since the economic crisis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1606/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): It is difficult to isolate the impact of

particular factors on the debt service bill. However, what I can say is that in the Stability Programme Update in April 2014, debt service costs for 2018 were projected to be close to €10 billion. The National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA) have advised me that the actual outturn for 2018 was under €6 billion. Furthermore, debt service is now more than 20% below its 2014 peak.

There are a number of reasons why the debt service bill is so much lower than previously projected. These include the European Central Bank's Quantitative Easing (QE) programme which has compressed sovereign bond yields, and the full early repayment of IMF Programme loans.

Looking back further towards the earlier part of the decade, the removal of margins on EU Programme loans and the replacement of the IBRC Promissory Notes have also helped reduce the debt service bill.

I am advised that the debt service bill is expected to fall further this year.

Revenue Commissioners Powers

251. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Finance if assistance will be provided to a person (details supplied) in securing a specific document. [1611/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Revenue has advised me that it does not issue P45 documents to taxpayers. The P45 document is provided directly to employees by employers when an employment ceases. Revenue has however written to the person in question and provided them with the required details (per Revenue's records) in respect of the particular employment.

By way of general information, the Deputy may be interested to note that from the 2019 tax year onwards, employers are no longer required to provide employees with a P45 document at the end of an employment. The information previously provided in this document is now automatically supplied to Revenue through payroll submissions made by employers since the introduction of PAYE Modernisation on 1 January 2019. It is also planned to make this information directly available to employees via Revenue's online systems later in the year.

Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General

252. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Finance if the Comptroller and Auditor General carried out an audit of procurement of ships by the Department of Defence in either 2011 or 2012. [1653/19]

253. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Finance if a recommendation was made within the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General in 2011 or 2012 that a report into procurement by the reporting division into multi-million euro procurement by the Department of Defence should be conducted; if such a report was carried out; and if not, the reason therefor. [1656/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 252 and 253 together.

The Comptroller and Auditor General is independent in the exercise of his functions and therefore my Department does not have the details requested.

The Deputy may wish to raise the matters directly with the Comptroller and Auditor General.

Motor Insurance Costs

254. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the future motor insurance premiums charged for learner drivers, be they owners or users, in view of the recent additions of amendments to the Road Traffic Acts; and if he will impress upon the insurance companies for a reduction on these premiums. [1667/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As Minister for Finance, I am responsible for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation. Neither I nor the Central Bank of Ireland can interfere in the pricing of insurance products, as this is a matter of a commercial nature, and determined by insurance companies based on an assessment of the risks they are willing to accept. These are considered by insurance companies on a case-by-case basis. This position is reinforced by the EU framework for insurance which expressly prohibits Member States from adopting rules which require insurance companies to obtain prior approval of the pricing or terms and conditions of insurance products.

I understand that motor insurers use a combination of rating factors in making their individual decisions on whether to offer cover and what terms to apply. Factors include those such as the age of the driver and the relevant driving experience, as well as the age and type of vehicle, how the vehicle is used, the claims record, and the number of drivers. Insurers do not all use the same combination of rating factors, and as a result prices vary across the market. In addition, insurance companies also price in accordance with their own past claims experience.

Regarding recent changes to legislation relating to learner drivers, my officials contacted their counterparts in the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and were informed that it would be presumed that this would refer to two specific measures included in the Road Traffic (Amendment) Act 2018 which was commenced before Christmas. The first is a provision to hold accountable owners of vehicles who allow unaccompanied learners to drive their vehicles. The second extends the existing Garda power to detain vehicles in certain circumstances by adding the circumstance whereby the driver is an unaccompanied learner.

The Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport emphasises that the new measures are intended to increase Garda enforcement powers in this area and act as a deterrent to the highly dangerous practice of learners driving unaccompanied and, as such, should make Irish roads safer. However, it is unclear how these changes will impact upon the cost of motor insurance for learner drivers on a broad level, if at all, as since 2007 it has already been illegal for a learner to drive unaccompanied.

More generally, the Deputy should note that the Cost of Insurance Working Group will continue to focus on putting into place the measures proposed in its *Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance*. It is envisaged that the implementation of all the recommendations cumulatively, with the appropriate levels of commitment and cooperation from all relevant stakeholders, should achieve the objective of delivering fairer premiums for all consumers, including learner drivers.

In this regard, it should be acknowledged that the most recent Central Statistics Office data (for November 2018) indicates that private motor insurance premiums have decreased by 22.7% since peaking in July 2016. While the CSO statistics indicate a greater degree of stability on an overall basis, these figures represent a broad average and therefore it is appreciated

that many people may still be seeing increases. However, it is hoped that the improved stability in pricing will be maintained and that motor insurance premiums should continue to fall from the very high levels of mid-2016.

Departmental Correspondence

255. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance the customer complaints received by his Department in each of the years since 2016; if the complaints are grouped into categories; the nature of the complaints; the resolution of same; and the number progressed to the relevant Ombudsman in each of the years since 2016. [1872/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In line with the Department's Customer Charter, available on the Department's website, a complaint is defined as "an expression of dissatisfaction concerning the provision of a service or services by the Department". The Department received two complaints for the period 2016 - 2018 outlined in the following table:

Division	Year of Complaint (2016/2017/2018)	Nature of Complaint (e.g. time-lines for response, manner by which customer was dealt with etc)	Resolution	Was Complaint referred to Ombudsman
Corporate – Customer Service Manager	2016	Timeline of response	Written responses to requestor; engagement by Customer Service Manager and other relevant officials	No
Corporate – Customer Service Manager	2018	Timeline for response to Written Representation	Written responses to requestor; engagement by Customer Service Manager and other relevant officials	No

Pension Provisions

256. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to increase the public service pension payment a retired public sector worker receives in line with the additional years they can now work up to 70 years of age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54379/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Public Service Superannuation (Age of Retirement) Act 2018 came into effect on 26 December 2018. The Act provides for an increase in the compulsory retirement age of public servants recruited prior to 1 April 2004, from age 65 to age 70, other than a member of the uniformed pension fast accrual group, such as Gardai, Prison Officers, Fire Fighters and members of the Permanent Defence Force who, for operational reasons are required to retire early.

Now that the legislation has come into effect, no public servant, other than a member of the uniformed pension fast accrual group mentioned above has a compulsory retirement age of less than 70.

Under the terms of the Public Service Superannuation (Age of Retirement) Act 2018, af-

affected public servants may remain in work beyond the age of 65 and up to the age of 70 on current terms and conditions, including pay and pension. Public servants who choose to remain at work after the age of 65 will continue to be a member of the relevant pension scheme and they will accrue pension benefits and pay pension contributions in the normal way, in line with scheme rules. Pension will continue to accrue as normal past the age of 65, subject to the statutory maximum of 40 years' reckonable service, and pension will become payable on the date of retirement. Accordingly, the further adjustment of existing pension payment terms for public servants in consequence of the enactment Public Service Superannuation (Age of Retirement) Act 2018 does not arise.

Brexit Issues

257. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the changes required at ports and airports as a consequence of Brexit require planning permission or legislative changes; if so, if planning permission in circumstances in which it is necessary is being sought; the status of same; the progress to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1127/19]

258. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the date he expects the 33 inspection bays for trucks arriving at Dublin Port will be completed and ready for operation as set out in the Brexit contingency action plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1128/19]

259. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the date he expects the 270 parking spaces for trucks awaiting inspection at Dublin Port to be completed and ready for operation as set out in the Brexit contingency action plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1129/19]

260. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the date the new traffic management system is expected to be ready for operation at Dublin Port to manage traffic to and from ferries as set out in the Brexit contingency action plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1130/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 257 to 260, inclusive, together.

The Office of Public Works, on behalf of the Revenue Commissioners, the Department Agriculture, Food & the Marine, the Department of Health and the Department of Transport, Tourism & Sport, is working to put in place the infrastructure required for customs, sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) and health checks and controls at Dublin Port, Rosslare Europort and Dublin Airport when the transition period provided for under the draft Withdrawal Agreement expires at the end of 2020. In parallel with this, work is also underway to put in place temporary arrangements in the event that the UK leaves the EU at the end of March without an agreement. This includes the acquisition of sites and the installation of infrastructure at all three locations to cater for both scenarios. This work is ongoing.

An existing facility in Dublin Port is being refurbished in order to provide the necessary inspection facilities for the State agencies to carry out their statutory functions. An additional area has been identified for overflow parking and both facilities will be in place on or before the 30th March 2019. Planning requirements will be adhered to.

The Office of Public Works has also been engaged with the Dublin Port Company to ensure that the new traffic management system will be operational on the required date.

Brexit Issues

261. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to make additional funding available in the event of a no-deal Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1134/19]

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

Increased resources of €25 million has been provided across a range of Departments and Offices. This will enable the Office of the Revenue Commissioners, the Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine, the Department of Transport, Tourism & Sport, the Department of Health and the HSE implement necessary measures including in the areas of customs, SPS and food safety controls.

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

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

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

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

Superannuation Schemes

262. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if a person has been awarded an injury warrant and subsequently takes a successful court case against the State for compensation for their injuries, if the injury warrant will be withdrawn. [1370/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Civil Service Injury Warrants are a series of statutory instruments made under the Superannuation Acts. They provide additional benefits over and above normal pension entitlements, to or in respect of officers who, through no fault of their own, are killed or injured in the performance of their duties. The injury must be attributable to the nature of their duties.

The additional benefits paid under the Injury Warrants consist, in the main, of an annual allowance or, in a limited set of circumstances, payment of a special gratuity.

In non-fatal cases, once eligibility for an Injury Warrant annual allowance is established, the legislation prescribes that the amount of the award is determined by a classification as to the degree of impairment to the officer's earning capacity caused by the injury. The classifications in the legislation each have a corresponding proportion which is to be applied to the difference between (i) salary and emoluments at time of injury and (ii) other superannuation benefits. The result is the quantum of Injury Warrant annual allowance awarded. The total of the Injury Warrant award, when taken together with any other superannuation pension benefits, as well as any Social Welfare benefits in payment, is limited to 5/6ths of the officer's salary and emoluments at the date of injury. The Injury Warrant award is reduced, if necessary, to ensure this limit is not breached.

There is no provision in the legislation for withdrawal of an award on the basis of a subsequent successful court action against the State for compensation in respect of the injury that formed the basis of the Injury Warrant award.

However, I would point out that the Injury Warrant award, in addition to being a superannuation benefit, is also a form of compensation paid by the State. Thus, when considering a potential award for damages in a claim against the State, the amount of any Injury Warrant award already being paid by the State would be taken into account by the Court in assessing the level of compensation in the litigation.

Estimates Process

263. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of Departments that will require Supplementary Estimates in 2019; and the reasons for the overrun. [1591/19]

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

At this stage of the year, it is too early to predict whether supplementary estimates will be required or where the need may arise. However, a number of measures are in place to monitor expenditure throughout the year to ensure that any issues that do arise are managed appropriately. The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform is in regular contact with all other Departments and Offices to ensure that expenditure is being managed within the overall fiscal parameters. The drawdown of funds from the Exchequer is reported on each month against expenditure profiles in the Fiscal Monitor published by the Department of Finance. Expenditure figures for January will be published in the first week of February.

Flood Relief Schemes Funding

264. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when funding will be provided for flood relief works at a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54054/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Local flooding issues are a matter, in the first instance, for each Local Authority to investigate and ad-

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

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

Tender Process

265. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when the Office of Government Procurement will advance the Programme for A Partnership Government commitment to introduce a provision by which taxi companies that wish to bid for State procurement contracts must ensure a minimum of 10% of their fleet is wheelchair accessible. [54072/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): My colleague, the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport and National Transport Authority (NTA) have primary responsibility for meeting this commitment. Recognising the prevailing market structure for taxi services is central to this issue as there are no large unitary fleet operators who can easily be compelled to meet such a requirement. I understand that the NTA (a) continue to fund a programme of grants to increase the level of wheelchair accessible, and (b) the vehicle specification to qualify as a wheelchair-accessible taxi has been amended to reduce the level of investment required by individual taxi operators in order to comply.

The Office of Government Procurement (OGP) has undertaken the responsibility for the procurement of many state funded taxi services in recent years and engages with the NTA on an ongoing basis in this regard. The OGP ensures that appropriate accessibility criteria are included in tenders for taxi services.

Having regard to the above, the OGP established a Framework Agreement for the provision of taxi services in the Greater Dublin Area in September 2018. The tender competition to establish this Framework was designed to encourage participation on a fair and equal basis by Small and Medium Enterprises (SME's) together with addressing the Programme for Government commitment.

Legislative Process

266. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when the Public Service Superannuation (Age of Retirement) Bill 2018 will become law; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54077/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Public Service Superannuation (Age of Retirement) Act 2018 was signed by the President on 26 December 2018 and came into effect immediately from that date.

The Act provides for an increase in the compulsory retirement age of most pre-2004 public servants from age 65 to age 70. Under the Act, any relevant public servant who had not already reached his/her compulsory retirement age before 26 December 2018 has a new compulsory retirement age of 70 and can choose to stay at work up to that age on current terms and conditions, subject to the normal standards of health and performance etc.

Departmental Expenditure

267. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the cost incurred by his Department in 2018 for the use of taxi services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54215/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The following table sets out the amount spent by my Department on Taxi Services in 2018.

My Department employs the services of a taxi company engaged through an Office of Government Procurement drawdown contract. The hire of taxis to travel to and from meetings is only permitted where no suitable public transport is available or feasible.

Month	Amount Spent
January	€1,315.04
February	€1,556.97
March	€1,298.50
April	€1,682.36
May	€1,673.70
June	€1,357.82
July	€1,620.66
August	€943.42
September	€771.84
October	€1,796.62
November	€1,980.52
December	€2,462.46
Total	€18,459.91

Flood Prevention Measures

268. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if matters (details supplied) regarding flooding in Caherciveen, County Kerry will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54366/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In 2015, Kerry County Council was approved funding of €5,258 under the Office of Public Works' Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme to carry out a feasibility Study of measures to alleviate ongoing flooding on the N70 South of Caherciveen which includes the area mentioned in the Deputy's question.

It is open to Kerry County Council to apply for funding under the Minor Works Scheme to undertake works if viable measures are identified subject to the criteria being satisfied.

No application has been received from Kerry County Council under the Minor Flood Miti-

gation Works and Coastal Protection scheme for the area mentioned in the Deputy's question.

Departmental Expenditure

269. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the budget and spend in his Department for marketing, media and social media in each of the years 2016 to 2018; the projected spend for 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54469/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The following table outlines the spend by my Department on marketing and media in the years 2016, 2017 and 2018. The figures include, for example, awareness campaigns in relation to MyGovID and the work of the Office of Government Procurement which is part of the Department. At present, there are no figures available for the projected spend on marketing and media in 2019.

Year	Total Spend
2016	€14,987.14
2017	€282,144.00
2018	€182,882.71

The following table outlines the spend by my Department on social media in the years 2016, 2017 and 2018. Similarly, these figures include expenditure by the Office of Government Procurement. At present, there are no figures available for the projected spend on social media in 2019.

Year	Total Spend
2016	€2,444.07
2017	€46,634.04
2018	€47,337.07

There is no specific budget set out for marketing, media or social media within my Department. I also refer the Deputy to my reply to PQ Number 54486/18.

Departmental Staff Data

270. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of staff in his Department employed to work on marketing, media and social media in 2018. [54486/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I wish to inform the Deputy that there are no staff in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform employed to work on marketing, media and social media.

There are currently 3 members of staff in the Press Office and managing the Department's social media presence is a part of their work. In addition, one of my Special Advisers, Deborah Sweeney, provides press and media advice as part of her role.

Public Sector Pay

271. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if all sick

leave is taken into consideration before sanctioning a due incremental pay rise for public sector employees; his plans to examine proposals that would treat work related illness or injury in a different way when calculating entitlements to future increments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54510/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Public Service Sick Leave Scheme (S.I 124 of 2014) does not prejudice the Occupational Injuries arrangements in place in each sector, as per the Sick Leave Regulations - (Regulation 4). Therefore any sick leave in relation to an occupational injury is ring-fenced from ordinary sick leave limits and is not included on an officer's sick leave record.

In relation to the payment of increments and also in relation to work related injury or occupational injury, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform does not have responsibility for the arrangements in place across the Public Service and these are the responsibility of individual public service employers as appropriate.

The Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform does have responsibility for the arrangements relating to these issues in the civil service.

The Deputy has asked about the treatment of an occupational injury or illness in the calculation of increments. As sick leave in relation to an occupational injury is not included on an officer's sick leave record, sick leave in relation to an occupational injury is not related to or taken into account in any decisions about increments.

National Monuments

272. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the long-term future plans for the historical St. Laurence's Gate, Drogheda; if the plan will include public access to the gate; if risk assessments have been carried out on the effects of such access; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1064/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The long term ambition for the St. Laurence's Gate site is to continue to maintain it as a National Monument in State care, consolidate it, rectify certain structural issues that are apparent currently and, ultimately, once a balanced risk assessment has been undertaken, provide a level of safe public access. It is not clear at this stage when the necessary work will be done as a number of other urgent priorities are being addressed currently.

OPW has also consulted with other stakeholders, including the Local Authority about how the site is to be managed in the longer term but no specific conclusions have been reached as yet.

Coastal Erosion

273. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if his Department has received an east County Meath coastal erosion report from Meath County Council; if he will be enacting the recommendations and requests in the report to address the urgent coastal erosion in the area of east County Meath to complement the works carried out to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1071/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by my Department that it is a matter for Local Authorities, in the first instance, to assess and

address problems of coastal erosion in their areas. Where necessary, Local Authorities may put forward proposals to relevant central Government Departments, including the OPW, for funding of appropriate measures depending on the infrastructure or assets under threat.

In this regard, the OPW Minor Flood Mitigation Works & Coastal Protection Scheme provides funding to Local Authorities to undertake minor flood mitigation or coastal protection works or studies, costing less than €0.75 million each, to address localised flooding and coastal protection problems within their administrative areas. Funding for coastal erosion risk management studies may also be applied for under this scheme. Funding of up to 90% of the cost is available for projects which meet the eligibility criteria including a requirement that the proposed measures are cost beneficial. The OPW has published guidelines for coastal erosion risk management measures and funding applications under the Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme, available on the OPW website.

I am advised that OPW has not received the report referred to in the Deputy's question.

Public Sector Staff Retirements

274. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the situation regarding public service employees who are on or about to participate in the interim arrangements of a fixed one year contract and may want to avail of the extension to 70 years of age under the Public Service Superannuation (Age of Retirement) Act 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1083/19]

275. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if a person (details supplied) can be considered for the extended retirement age in the Civil Service. [1084/19]

276. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of persons in the Civil Service availing of the one year extension before retirement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1085/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 274 to 276, inclusive, together.

On 5 December 2017, the Government made a decision to increase the compulsory retirement age to 70, for public servants recruited prior to 1 April 2004. Primary legislation was necessary to bring this decision into effect and the compulsory retirement age of 65 continued to apply until the enactment of the Public Service Superannuation (Age of Retirement) Act 2018 on 26 December 2018. Under the Act, any relevant public servant who had not already reached his/her compulsory retirement age before 26 December 2018 now has a new compulsory retirement age of 70.

Prior to the enactment of the Public Service Superannuation (Age of Retirement) Act 2018 on 26 December 2018, the compulsory retirement age of 65 continued to apply and pre-2004 public servants reaching that age were required to retire. In recognition of the fact that there would be an unavoidable delay between the Government Decision to amend the compulsory retirement age and the enactment of the legislation necessary to bring that change into effect, I introduced temporary arrangements for those facing compulsory retirement in the interim. These arrangements enabled public servants who reached the age of 65 to retire as required but to be rehired for 1 year until they reach the age of eligibility for the State pension (66). Enactment of the legislation has no effect on those public servants who are availing of the interim arrangements. The terms of their fixed term contracts will continue to apply and they will cease

working at age 66 as previously provided. In the Civil Service, my understanding is that there are approximately 150 people who have availed of this arrangement.

The purpose of the interim arrangements was to offer a limited, temporary solution to individuals who reached the age of 65 before the commencement of the necessary legislation. It was clearly indicated that availing of the arrangements did not confer any rights to any new arrangement that might be provided for in future legislation and I understand that the arrangements were welcomed in that context. If the interim arrangements had not existed, individuals in this position would have had to cease working at age 65. Public servants who are currently availing of the interim arrangements have retired (at 65), received lump sums and are receiving pension (subject to abatement). They are thus in a very different position to public servants who had not yet reached the age of 65 before the enactment of the legislation.

The necessity for people reaching the age of 65 to enter the interim arrangements ceased with effect from 26 December 2018. Any relevant public servant reaching the age of 65 on or after that date has a new compulsory retirement age of 70 and can choose to remain at work up to that age, on current terms and conditions.

Flood Relief Schemes Status

277. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of a planned flood relief scheme (details supplied) in County Cork; the stage of the project; when it is due to move to construction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1114/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised that the Douglas flood relief scheme (incl Togher culvert) is being progressed by Cork County Council. The scheme has received planning approval and is currently at detailed design stage with procurement of the civil works contractor to take place in the first quarter of this year, with the appointment of the civil works contractor to follow shortly thereafter. Construction of the scheme is proposed to commence in the third quarter of 2019.

Garda Stations

278. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if consideration will be given to a request from a committee (details supplied) to allow it permission to acquire, use or lease the local Garda barracks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1184/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The former Garda station at Ballylongford, County Kerry is currently occupied by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS). It is not available for another use at this time.

Public Procurement Contracts Data

279. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of publicly funded tenders since 2007 that have required additional public moneys allocated to them without the tender process having to be restarted; and the amounts that were allocated in tabular form. [1260/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In the first instance, I wish to advise the Deputy that when a procurement process commences, the final cost of procuring the goods or services involved will not always be fully known.

The Department's internal procurement policy provides that a procurement process for goods or services over €5,000 may not be commenced without: establishing a clear business need; obtaining a realistic estimate of the value of all phases of the service or the goods to be procured; and confirming that the required budget has been approved and is in place.

Once the process has commenced, the final expenditure involved may subsequently vary depending on a number of factors, including:

- the level and volume of services actually delivered;
- the invoking of options in the contract to extend it beyond the initially specified date; and
- the invoking of other contract provisions that broaden or intensify the nature of the work involved, such as service enhancement and service review.

Since its establishment in 2011, my Department has had two publicly funded tenders that have required additional public moneys to be allocated to them internally without the tender process having to be restarted. Details are set out as follows.

Year	Tender	Additional Allocation (€)	Further Information
2015	Provision and Implementation of a Business Intelligence Solution	99,026	Additional costs of 11% of the project cost arose in respect of additional implementation costs and supports required
2018	Infrastructure Monitoring Services (eCohesion System)	170,000	Additional costs of less than 6% of project cost arose due to infrastructure monitoring change, some additional functionality and additional days of testing

Public Procurement Contracts

280. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if tenders have been re-invited from the shortlist of building contractors for the new State Forensics Laboratory at Backweston, Celbridge, County Kildare; if so, the closing date for receipt of tenders; when it is envisaged construction will commence and finish on the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1338/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Office of Public Works (OPW) is managing the delivery of the new Forensic Science Laboratory at the Backweston campus.

The Deputy should be aware that enabling works for Forensic Science Ireland that com-

menced in October 2017 have now been completed.

However, due to recent changes in international forensic laboratory standards, the merging of the Garda Technical Bureau with Forensic Science Ireland and changes to staff numbers, it was necessary to add further material to the tender documentation. The issues involved, relate primarily to laboratory interior finishes and mechanical and electrical adjustments.

On completion of this examination it was possible to re-invite tenders from the shortlist of building contractors for the new State Forensics Laboratory in Q4 2018 with a closing date for submissions of 29 March 2019. Tender assessment will then take place during Q2 2019. On completion of the assessment and following the statutory standstill period it is envisaged that construction could commence in Q3 2019. When the construction contract for the main building is placed, the estimated construction period is 24 months followed by a validation and test period prior to occupation.

Public Procurement Contracts Data

281. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform further to Parliamentary Question No. 148 of 18 September 2018, if the engineering consultants have been appointed; when planning permission will be sought for the State data centre; when tenders will be sought for construction; when construction will commence; the estimated construction time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1339/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The civil and structural engineers for the project have been appointed following a public procurement process. The mechanical and electrical engineering service is being provided by in-house staff in the OPW. The Planning Application will be lodged in the coming week. The current programme is that tenders will be issued in Quarter 2 and construction to begin in Quarter 4, 2019. This will be reviewed and is likely to be revised. Currently the time for construction is estimated at proximately 12 months.

Flood Prevention Measures

282. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform further to Parliamentary Question No. 72 of 9 October 2018, if consultants have been hired to complete the reassessment of the local hydrology of the area in question and the operation of the local drainage network; the expected date for completion of the studies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1342/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Further to Parliamentary Question No. 72 of 9 October 2018 the Office of Public Works (OPW) and Kildare County Council have developed the project brief for the study referred to by the Deputy.

I have requested information from Kildare County Council and a direct reply will issue to the Deputy in due course.

Flood Relief Schemes

283. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the arrangements the Office of Public Works plans to make to alleviate the hardship faced by a

community (details supplied) due to the closure of a road; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1451/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The extended road closure is necessitated due to a partial collapse of the bridge at Dunkellin during the course of works on the Dunkellin River and Aggard Stream flood relief scheme. Galway County Council (GCC) is the Contracting Authority for this project with funding being provided by the Office of Public Works.

A road closure was in place for the duration of the proposed works to the bridge. Arising from the partial collapse of the arch bridge, this road closure had to be extended to allow time for a design to be agreed for a replacement structure that would include the additional flow capacity required for the scheme and take account of the historical importance of Dunkellin Bridge. GCC has sought additional funding for the scheme to upgrade the remaining part of the structure in order to secure the bridge into the future.

I am advised that GCC is proceeding expeditiously to have all the necessary agreements and permissions in place to allow the bridge replacement and refurbishment works to be undertaken thereby minimising the duration of the road closure. Liaison with the local community affected by the road closure is a matter for GCC.

National Monuments

284. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of persons employed at Kilkenny Castle, permanent and temporary, respectively; the title of the position of each; the number of visitors to the castle in each of the past five years; the budget set aside for 2019 to 2020; the cost of private security at the castle for each of the past five years; if further park wardens will be employed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1465/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The data are as follows:

Kilkenny Castle Staff Friday as of 11 January 2019
Total 25
Parkland
8 Permanent 0 Temporary
1 x Foreperson
1 x Head Gardener
1 x Gardener
5 x General Operatives
Kilkenny Castle
17 Permanent 0 temporary
1 x Foreperson
1 x Head of Collections
1 x Events Officer
2 x Supervisor Guide
1 x Head Guide
8 x Guides

Kilkenny Castle Staff Friday as of 11 January 2019
1 x Supervisor Cleaner
1 x Cleaner
1 x Payclerk
2019 Seasonal Guides (from 1st February)
12 x seasonal guides

Visitor Numbers 2014 - 2018
Castle Park
Counters were installed in 2017. 815,428 visited the Castle park in 2017.
2018 - final figures not yet available.
Castle Building ticketed visitor numbers:
2014 - 259,250
2015 - 282,588
2016 - 307,132
2017 - 327,564
2018 - 335,500

The budget allocation for Kilkenny Castle & Park for 2019 has not been finalised. However, it will be in line with the 2018 allocation of €1. 9m (comprising of €1.36m for pay and €550k for non-pay expenditure).

The following expenditure was incurred in relation to private security :

2014 - €6,000

2015 - €15,530.95

2016 - €28,807.09

2017 - €45,777.59

2018 - €74,295.48

In respect of Park Wardens, OPW intends to fill one Constable position in the near future.

Garda Stations

285. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of a building (details supplied) in County Cork formerly occupied as a Garda station; if the station is in the ownership or control of the OPW; if so, if it is planned to dispose of the building; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1541/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Commissioners of Public Works own the former Garda station at 58 MacCurtin Street, Cork. When any state property becomes vacant, the policy of the OPW is to firstly determine whether alternative State use by Government Departments or the wider public sector can be identified. If no other State use is identified for the property, the OPW will consider disposing of it on the open market.

In the case of MacCurtin Street former Garda station, an evaluation has taken place in line

with the above policy. Given that an alternative State use has not been identified, it is anticipated that the property will be disposed of by means of public auction during 2019.

Legislative Process

286. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the expected timeframe for the full passage of the Public Sector Standards Bill 2015; the reason for the delays in the progress of the Bill; and the reason it has not proceeded beyond Committee Stage. [1638/19]

287. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide a consolidated table that compares the law now with what it will be after the Public Sector Standards Bill 2015 is implemented in terms of the new obligations on officials as promised in committee proceedings on the Bill. [1639/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 286 and 287 together.

The Public Sector Standards Bill 2015 was published on 23 December 2015 and completed Second Stage in the Dáil on 20 January 2016. Committee Stage commenced on the 6th of April 2017, where sections 1 to 42 of the 66 sections in the Bill were agreed. Much work has been completed since the Bill was considered in Committee, including work specifically requested by the Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, and Taoiseach Committee (the Committee) and this work is outlined as follows.

- Letters to T.D.s, Senators and Local Authority Representative Organisations:

At the request of the Committee, I issued comprehensive letters and briefing regarding the Bill on 10th May 2017 to all TD's, Senators, and Local Government Representative Organisations. These letters detailed background information and key reforms of the Bill and included three attachments about the main provisions and checks and balances within the Bill, along with the table that you refer to in your question. For ease of reference I have attached a copy of this table. Finally, the letters stated that my officials were available to discuss any issues that may arise.

- Briefing for T.D.s and Senators:

At the Committee's request, a comprehensive briefing session on the Bill for all T.D.'s and Senators took place on 30th May 2017 in the Oireachtas.

- The Committee

On 16 August 2017 I wrote to the clerk of the Committee outlining that the requests made by the Committee had been met in full and seeking a resumption date for consideration of the Bill.

- Discussions with T.D.s:

Minister of State O'Donovan is currently bringing the Bill forward on my behalf. In order to gain some cross-party consensus for the Bill, two meetings were held between the Minister of State, his officials and Deputy Dara Calleary T.D., Fianna Fáil in November and December 2017, and a meeting was held between the Minister of State, his officials and Deputy Jonathan O'Brien, Sinn Féin in November 2017. These meetings discussed issues regarding various aspects of the Bill. A substantive reply issued to Deputy Calleary in relation to his concerns in December 2017. Deputy O'Brien's issues were addressed at the meeting and he advised that

Sinn Féin was broadly in agreement with the Bill.

- Local Authority Representative Groups:

The AILG and LAMA (Local Authority Representative Groups) were invited to the Committee in November 2017 to outline their issues in relation to the Bill. The clerk to the Committee then wrote to my Private Secretary enclosing the Official Transcript of the meeting and a letter from the AILG to me dated June 2017 (which was never received in my Department). The Committee asked my Department to review and address the issues that arose in the course of the hearing and to engage with the stakeholders in that regard. The Official Transcript was thoroughly reviewed by my officials to identify issues raised at the hearing. In January 2018, a meeting took place with the Local Authority Representative Groups to listen to their issues in relation to the Bill. In May 2018, officials also met with representatives from the CCMA (County and City Management Association).

- The Committee:

A letter issued to the clerk of the Committee on 13 March 2018 outlining the response to each of the issues raised by the AILG and LAMA at the FPER Committee meeting in November 2017, and stated that given that all the requests of the Committee had been met, the Minister of State was seeking that the Committee re-commence and complete Committee Stage of the Bill as soon as possible. A reminder letter issued from the Minister of State in June 2018. A date of the 27th of September 2018 was provided for the re-commencement of Committee Stage, however, it had to be postponed due to a bereavement in the Minister of State's family. Committee Stage was subsequently re-scheduled for the 22nd of November 2018, however, this date was deferred by the Committee. My Department has since then, on a number of occasions, requested urgent re-scheduling of Committee Stage and is currently awaiting a date from the Committee.

- Proposed Report Stage amendments

In order to address and resolve the various issues raised during the Committee session on 6 April 2017 and during the subsequent meetings with Oireachtas members and Local Authority Representative Groups, the Minister of State will be proposing a number of Report Stage amendments to the bill which have already been approved by Government. These will be outlined at Committee Stage.

Finally, I would like to highlight that my Department has been working tirelessly on various items regarding the Bill, with a view to facilitating the speedy passage of the Bill through the Oireachtas, once Committee Stage is re-commenced.

Table setting out the current declarations regime and the new proposed regime under the Public Sector Standards Bill 2015 for Oireachtas Members and Members of Local Authorities

Current Declarations Regime	Proposed Declarations Regime for category A and B under the Public Sector Standards Bill
Must declare - profession, trade, occupation etc (other than as a public official) where income exceeds €2,600 at national level (no threshold at local level)- position as lobbyist, consultant or advisor (applies at national and local level)	Will continue to apply, but - source of income over €2,600 will be declarable by category A and B; and amount of this income will be declarable for category A on private basis. Reference to a source of income does not include a reference to particular clients of a business or profession of official - will continue to apply

Current Declarations Regime	Proposed Declarations Regime for category A and B under the Public Sector Standards Bill
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - any interest in land where value over €13,000 including where official entered into contract to buy land or any option to do so but not private home (national level); - any estate or interest in land including the interest of official in any contract entered into to buy or sell land or options held by him or any business of dealing in or developing land by a company of which the official or his nominee is a member (local level)- any profession, business or occupation the official is engaged in on own behalf or otherwise relating to dealing in or developing land and any business of dealing in or developing land carried on during the appropriate period by a company or other body of which the person concerned, or any nominee of the person, is a member (local level) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - any estate or interest in land held by the official where the value is over €10,000 (other than a family home) and including where official entered into contract to buy land or any option to do so- source of income from developing land by or on behalf of the official and for this purpose income of a company or body corporate related to or dealing with land shall be included if the company or body is connected to the official (by virtue of the definition) - any estate or interest in land over €10,000 held by a company or body corporate where connected to the official by virtue of the definition of a connected person
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Shares, debentures, bonds etc. or other like investments in a company if aggregate value over €13,000 (national and local level) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Any beneficial or legal interest in shares, debentures, bonds or other like investments in a company where interest is over €13,000. Doesn't include money in current account, deposit or other accounts or interests in not-for profits or residential management companies etc
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Directorships or shadow Directorships of any company (national and local levels) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continues, but management positions of any companies held will also be declarable
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Travel and related facilities is declarable subject to a number of exclusions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - See following table on gifts, travel etc
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gifts, property and services declarable excluding where given on personal basis unconnected with work or where under €650 (national and local level) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - See following table on gifts, travel etc- The supply or lending of property or supply of a service to the official at less than commercial consideration by prices more than €200 but less than €600 or where supplied or lent free of charge
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Contracts where directly or indirectly supplied goods or services to public body or Minister (national level) or to a local authority (local level) exceeding €6,500 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continues but threshold reduced to €5,000

Current Declarations Regime	Proposed Declarations Regime for category A and B under the Public Sector Standards Bill
<p>- Interests of which official has actual knowledge of spouse or child which could materially influence the official in the performance of his/her functions (applies to Office Holders and all designated public officials but not to other Oireachtas Members at national level; does not apply at local level but beneficial and pecuniary interests must be declared and these apply to connected persons).</p>	<p>- Interests of spouse or child where official has actual knowledge the interest could reasonably be perceived as connected with the performance of his/her functions</p>

Private declarable interests (new requirements under the PSS Bill – applies to Category A)

- remunerated trade, profession, employment etc excluding remuneration as public official
- dealing in or developing land
- position as consultant or adviser or as lobbyist
- any individual assets and liabilities in excess of €50,000
- any gifts which exceed €200 by a non-relative and is not connected with the performance of functions
- any travel which exceeds €600 given by a non-relative and not connected with the performance of functions
- the supply or lending of property or a service for less than commercial price by more than €200 or free of charge if the commercial consideration is more than €200
- the interests of relatives (who are not public officials), which they have knowledge of, that could be perceived as connected with the performance of the function of the official
(spouses and children interests are part of the public declaration as is currently the case)

Ad Hoc declarations

The ad hoc declarations comprise the declarations currently set out in the individual sections of the 1995 Act relating to the performance of functions for public officials at national level (sections 16, 17, 18 and 19) with the exception of members and office holders which are set out at sections 7 and 14 respectively. In relation to members, where the member proposes to speak or vote at proceedings and he/she or a connected person has a material interest in the subject matter shall make a declaration before the proceedings or during his/her speech or before voting. There are similar provisions at Local Government level at section 176 and 177 of the Local Government Act 2001 where the official must disclose the interest or the connected person's interest at the meeting and before discussion of the matter but in the case of the Local Government official, he/she must withdraw from the meeting while the matter is being discussed.

In the Bill, section 12 provides for ad hoc declarations relating to meetings of the Houses,

local authorities, certain committees and boards. It provides that elected representatives at national and local level must declare their interests or a connected person's interests before proceedings or voting and before discussions on matters begin and must withdraw from the meeting and take no part in the discussion or voting at local authority level and such obligations will now also apply to Board members. In relation to members of the Oireachtas, provided he/she makes the declaration then he/she may continue to participate and vote.

Section 13 sets out ad hoc provisions concerning other public officials which reflect current obligations.

Table regarding proposed regime for gifts, travel, accommodation, refreshment and ancillary facilities as proposed in the Public Sector Standards Bill 2015

-	-	Received from a relative		Received from a person not related	
		Not connected with function	Connected with function	Not connected with function	Connected with function
	Travel etc	Accept, no declaration	Accept, no declaration	Accept, no declaration	Accept, no declaration
<€200 in 12 months	Gifts	Accept, no declaration	Accept, no declaration	Accept, no declaration	Accept, no declaration
	Travel etc	Accept, no declaration	Accept, no declaration	Accept, no declaration	Accept, no declaration
€200-600 in 12 months	Gifts	Accept, no declaration	Accept, declared by all officials	Accept. Only Category A declares, confidentially	Accept, declared by all officials
	Travel etc	Accept, no declaration	Accept, declared by all officials	Accept. Only Category A declares, confidentially	Accept, declared by all officials. Excludes travel etc. provided in the course and for the purpose of performing official functions
>€600 in 12 months	Gifts	Accept, no declaration	Refuse/remit and notify Commissioner	Accept. Only Category A declares, confidentially	Refuse/remit and notify Commissioner

Office of Public Works Projects

288. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if cell windows fitted in courthouses and Garda stations are fully compliant with standards relative to that product; if an engineer was contracted to report on the standard and compliance of cell windows already fitted; if so, if that report is available; if the supplier or suppliers of cell windows have been issued with specifications for this product by the OPW; if so, if they met the required specifications; if the product was tested by the OPW or the supplier; if cell windows that were in place have now been removed and replaced by this new product; if cell windows in newly constructed or refurbished stations have been checked recently for damage or defects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1786/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): From the

1970s until 2016 there was only one supplier of the cell windows. This original supplier conformed with a standard set by OPW, Eolas/NSAI in 1987, now updated to comply with EN14019. A second supplier entered the market in 2016 and has a cell window that also complies with EN14019, and in addition, has been tested by a third party.

A due diligence review by a structural engineer firm confirmed that the cell windows “which are currently being produced by both approved suppliers are fit for purpose”. The report is commercially sensitive.

Both window suppliers provided the data on the three elements that make up the cell window, namely, the glass block, concrete, and a protective laminate. The performance of the window relies upon the combined interaction of all three elements working together. It is this combined performance that makes a cell window comply with EN14019. Both approved cell window suppliers have individual elements (glass block, concrete, laminate) that vary when compared with each other. However, when the three elements are combined together they comply with EN14019. The selection of which approved cell window supplier, for a particular project, is the prerogative of the main building contractor. The main contractor may choose a supplier based on the number of issues including cost of schedule of delivery, site installation program, etc.

If any defects are noted by the contractor or the design team during the building inspections or later during the defects liability period post completion, they are brought to the attention of the relevant suppliers installation team for correction.

The OPW have been undertaking a general detention area upgrade in Garda stations over the last number of years. The aim of this programme is to meet new standards of prisoner care including heating, ventilation, cell doors and ablution facilities. In some cases this upgrade leads to the renewal of old cell windows. It should be noted that many of the Garda stations involved in the detention area upgrade are of a considerable age dating back to the nineteenth century.

Departmental Correspondence

289. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the customer complaints received by his Department in each of the years since 2016; if the complaints are grouped into categories; the nature of the complaints; the resolution of same; and the number progressed to the relevant Ombudsman in each of the years since 2016. [1877/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): My Department is very conscious of the need to provide the highest level of service to our customers. All staff in my Department are committed to ensuring that the twelve principles of Quality Customer Service are embedded in everything we do.

The number of complaints received in the years in question is shown in the following table.

Year	Number of Complaints Received
2016	0
2017	3
2018	2

The complaints received in 2017 and 2018 related to Quality Customer Service Principle 5 (Timeliness and Courtesy) and those complaints have been addressed by the Department’s Quality Service Officer. Unfortunately, competing deadlines can mean that, on occasion, some queries sent to the Department are not answered in strict accordance with the timelines set out

in our Quality Customer Service Charter and Action Plan and this can give rise to complaints. Due to the sensitive and complex nature of some of the original queries which gave rise to the complaints, it is not possible to confirm that these have been fully resolved.

To the knowledge of my Department, none of the complaints listed in the table have been referred to the Office of the Ombudsman to date.

Research Funding

290. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if applicants placed on the reserve list were successful in securing funding under a programme (details supplied); the name of the applicants; the number of successful applicants that did not take up the programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54404/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Following a two-stage international assessment process, 36 awards (18 Starting grants and 18 Consolidator grants) were made in March 2018 by the Irish Research Council under its Laureate Awards programme. These awards were made in three panel domains - life sciences, physical sciences and engineering, and the arts, humanities and social sciences.

In addition, there were 31 proposals designated by the international expert panels as fundable reserve proposals. These proposals meet the required standard of excellence and are ranked in order of merit. The reserve list applicants are distributed across the three panel domains and the two award types; effectively creating 6 rank lists.

The reserve panels are activated if a) additional funding became available in respect of the Call or b) if one or more of the awardees was not in a position to take up or proceed with the award. If an awardee returns his/her award, a reserve list candidate of the same panel domain and award type is subsequently offered the award based on their ranking.

Two Starting Grant Laureate awardees (Dr Larisa Florea and Dr Ted Vaughan) from the Physical Sciences and Engineering Panel were successful in winning Starting Grants from the European Research Council in July 2018. As it was not possible for these awardees to conduct research under both grants simultaneously, and as the European Research Council awards have substantially higher monetary value than the Laureates, the two researchers returned their Laureate awards. Accordingly, two Starter Grant applicants from the Physical Sciences and Engineering Panel domain reserve list were selected for awards in order of ranking, namely Professor Laurence Gill and Dr Jonathan Mackey.

In November-December 2018, two further Laureate awardees from the Physical Sciences and Engineering panel were successful in securing major research grants. Again, it is not possible for these awardees to hold both their new grants and the Laureate awards simultaneously, and are terminating their Laureate awards. The Council is currently examining funding two further awards from the reserve panel, in order of ranking.

Research Funding Data

291. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the funding allocated for research in each of the third level institutions in each of the years 2006 to 2016, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54455/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The information requested by

the Deputy is outlined in the attached documents. The documents outline research income for the academic years 2005/06 to 2015/16 for the university and institute of technology sectors.

Total Income 07 to 16

Total Income 05 to 16

University research income, state and non-state 05 to 16

IOT 2 total income 05 to 16

State income 07 to 16

IOT 1 Total Income 07 to 16

Non-state income 07 to 16

State Income 2007 to 2016

Non State income 2007 to 2016

Schools Building Projects Status

292. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if permission will be granted for work at a school (details supplied) in order that it can begin the planning and tendering process to be ready when the 12 month period has passed to proceed with the new build in a timely fashion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54039/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department approved a devolved building project to the school referred to in April 2017 for the provision of accommodation for a Special Educational Needs base. I understand this project received approval to proceed to construction in December last.

A subsequent application for the provision of additional accommodation at the school was received following the approval of a further mainstream teaching post for the current school year. To meet the immediate deficit in accommodation my Department approved the provision of temporary accommodation.

Once the approved project is delivered, and should a deficit in permanent accommodation pertain to meet the schools long term needs, it will be open to the school to contact my Department further in that regard.

Oideachas Gaeltachta

293. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy John Brassil** den Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna an ndéanfaidh sé an cóimheas idir daltaí agus múinteoirí do 2008 a chur i bhfeidhm go práinneach agus i gceart do scoileanna Gaeltachta atá páirteach sa Scéim Aitheantais, ós rud é go mbeidh an cóimheas seo idir daltaí agus múinteoirí ag teastáil ó na scoileanna Gaeltachta; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [54068/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Leithdháiltear uaireanta breise tacaíochta teanga sa Ghaeilge (sa bhreis ar an ngnáth-leithdháileadh foirne) ar scoileanna atá rannpháirteach sa Scéim Aitheantais Scoileanna Gaeltachta.

Ó bunaíodh An tAonad um Oideachas Gaeltachta laistigh den Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna rinneadh dul chun cinn suntasach i ndáil le forbairt na Scéime Aitheantais Scoileanna Gaeltachta tar éis comhairliúcháin le páirtithe leasmhara ábhartha, agus ó cuireadh tús lena cur chun feidhme sna scoileanna. Is é cuspóir na Scéime ligean do scoileanna rannphárteacha, tar éis comhairliúcháin lena bpobail áitiúla, féachaint chun Aitheantas mar Scoil Ghaeltachta a ghnóthú thar thréimhse cúig bliana an Pholasaí don Oideachas Gaeltachta 2017-2022 ar bhunús chur chun feidhme na gcritéar sonrath teanga-bhunaithe, lena n-áirítear cur chun feidhme an chur chuige lán-tumoideachais sa Ghaeilge, seachas i dteagasc an Bhéarla agus na dteangacha eachtracha agus pleananna gníomhaíochta a bheith forbartha ag scoileanna chun tacú leis an gcur chun feidhme.

D'athbhreithnigh An tAonad um Oideachas Gaeltachta na pleananna gníomhaíochta um fheabhsúchán a bhí ag gach scoil a bhí rannphárteach sa Scéim i mí Feabhra na bliana 2018, agus tugadh aiseolas do gach scoil faoi leith. Chuir sé sin ar chumas gach scoil rannphárteach rochtain a fháil ar acmhainní breise ó mhí Mheán Fómhair 2018 ar aghaidh. I measc na n-acmhainní sin tá rochtain ar dheontas chun acmhainní teagaisc trí mheán na Gaeilge a cheannach, uaireanta breise do theagasc teanga chun tacú leis an nGaeilge, forbairt ghairmiúil leanúnach sa bhreis arna soláthar ag COGG, agus cuairteanna comhairleacha breise arna soláthar ag an gCigireacht.

Ba ar bhunús na bhfigiúirí rollaithe a taifeadadh sa bhliain roimhe sin a leithdháileadh na huairteanta tacaíochta teanga breise don Ghaeilge ar scoileanna a bhí rannphárteach sa Scéim ó mhí Mheán Fómhair 2018 ar aghaidh, rud a thagann le gnásanna na Roinne. Tugadh an rogha do scoileanna ag an mbunleibhéal na huairteanta breise tacaíochta teanga sin a chomhcheangal le bunscoileanna eile sa cheantar chun braislí a chruthú, rud a cheadódh post teagaisc sealadach ar bhonn páirtaimseartha a chruthú, ar post é a bheadh comhroinnte idir na bunscoileanna sa bhraisle faoi leith.

Oibríonn an sceideal reatha um sholáthar foirne sna bunscoileanna ag meán ginearálta 1 mhúinteoir amháin in aghaidh gach 26 dalta, an staid is fabhraí riamh a chonacthas ag an mbunleibhéal. Breithneofar aon fheabhsú breise mar chuid den chéad phróiseas buiséadach bliantúil eile, in éineacht leis na héilimh iomadúla eile ón earnáil oideachais.

Táthar ag cur bailchríche leis na socrúithe ginearálta um leithdháileadh foirne don bhliain 2019/20 faoi láthair, agus beidh siad sin ar fáil ar láithreán gréasáin mo Roinnese an chéad mhí eile. Ag teacht leis na ngnás atá i bhfeidhm le roinnt blianta anuas, beidh rátaí coinneála níos fearr i scoileanna Gaeltachta ná i scoileanna eile mar thoradh ar na socrúithe foirne sin.

Additional language support hours for Irish (over and above the normal staffing allocation), are allocated to schools participating in the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme.

Since the establishment of An tAonad um Oideachas Gaeltachta within the Department of Education and Skills, significant progress has been made in relation to the development of the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme following consultation with relevant stakeholders, and commencement of its implementation in schools. The objective of the Scheme is to allow participating schools, following consultation with their local communities, to seek to achieve Gaeltacht School Recognition over the 5 year period of the Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017-2022 on the basis of the implementation of specific language-based criteria, including the implementation of a total-immersion approach in Irish except for the teaching of the subject English and foreign languages and the development of action plans by schools to support implementation.

Each participating school's action plans for improvement was reviewed by An tAonad um Oideachas Gaeltachta in February 2018 and feedback was provided to each individual school.

This enabled each participating school, to access additional resources from September 2018. These resources include access to a grant to purchase Irish-medium teaching resources, additional language-teaching hours to support Irish, additional continuing professional development delivered by COGG, and additional advisory visits provided by the Inspectorate.

The additional language support hours for Irish allocated to schools participating in the Scheme from September 2018, was based on the enrolment figures recorded in the previous year, which is in line with Department norms. Schools at primary level, were given the option to combine these additional language support hours with other primary schools in the locality to form clusters, which would allow for the creation of a temporary part-time teaching post that would be shared by the primary schools in the particular cluster.

The current staffing schedule in primary schools operates at a general average of 1 teacher for every 26 pupils which is the most favourable position ever seen at primary level. Any additional improvement will be considered as part of the next annual budgetary process alongside the many other demands from the education sector.

The general staffing allocation arrangements for 2019/20 are currently being finalised and will be available on my Department's website next month. As has been the norm for the past number of years, these staffing arrangements will allow for more favourable retention rates in Gaeltacht schools than in other schools.

Summer Works Scheme Data

294. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the specific works to be carried out at each of the 20 schools in County Donegal under the summer works scheme 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54084/18]

295. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the applications received under the summer works scheme 2019 for County Donegal; the applications that will be funded; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54085/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I propose to take Questions Nos. 294 and 295 together.

I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department announced the list of approved Summer Works projects for 2019, including schools in County Donegal, on the 17th December last, with details of the approved schools published on my Department's website www.education.ie. Schools were notified of their decision via the Department's Esinet portal on that date.

In addition, I wish to advise the Deputy that a new Summer Works Scheme which will open for applications in early 2019 for projects to be delivered from summer 2020 onwards.

DEIS Eligibility

296. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the procedure for awarding DEIS status in both primary and secondary schools; the way in which certain schools fail to qualify for DEIS status in cases in which all surrounding schools in the same catchment area qualify in view of the fact that the same socio-economic criteria apply to the same catchment area; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that there are anomalies in the past two rounds of DEIS status applications; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that action on same was not taken; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54086/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): As the Deputy is aware, following an extensive review of DEIS and the publication of the DEIS Review Report and DEIS Plan 2017, my Department has introduced an objective, statistics based model for assessing which schools merit inclusion in the DEIS Programme, so that all stakeholders can have confidence that we are targeting extra resources at those schools with the highest levels of concentrated disadvantage. The process is the same for both primary and post primary and there is no application process.

The key data sources used in the renewed DEIS identification process are the DES Primary Online Database (POD) and Post-Primary Online (PPOD) Databases, and CSO data from the National Census of Population as represented in the Pobal HP Index for Small Areas which is a method of measuring the relative affluence or disadvantage of a particular geographical area. Variables used in the compilation of the HP Index include those related to demographic growth, dependency ratios, education levels, overcrowding, social class, single parent rate, occupation and unemployment rates. This data is combined with pupil data, anonymised and aggregated to small area, to provide information on the relative level of concentrated disadvantage present in the pupil cohort of individual schools. This data was applied uniformly to all schools in the country in a fair and objective way, to identify the relative level of concentrated disadvantage present in each school. A detailed document explaining the methodology used in the Identification process under DEIS plan 2017 is available on the Department's website at <https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools-/DEIS-Identification-Process.pdf>

Following an initial application of this new methodology, 79 new schools were brought into the DEIS programme in 2017 with a further 30 being upgraded from Band 2 to Band 1 status. These schools were assessed as having the highest levels of concentrated disadvantage.

The schools in DEIS since 2006 were identified using different means. At primary level there was a survey of school Principals using the following socio-economic variables: %unemployment; %local authority accommodation; %lone parenthood; %travellers; %large families (more than 5 children); %pupils eligible for free books. At post primary level a combination of data from the Departments pupil database including school level retention rates together with exam achievement data and exam fee waiver data, which indicated that students had medical cards was used.

DEIS Plan 2017 states that the improved data on the socio-demographic of schools resulting from the new identification model will have an impact not only on the assessment of schools for inclusion in the programme but also on the scaling of resources to allow for more graduated levels of support. This in turn allows for the ultimate objective of allocating resources to best meet the identified need of individual schools.

In order to achieve this, the current identification model needs to be as accurate as possible and this will be facilitated by the use of Eircode to ensure correct inputting of addresses. Further analysis is also required to examine other variables known to be strong predictors of educational disadvantage in the context of resource allocation. Therefore, in order to ensure the quality of the address data and conduct further analysis, it is not intended to extend the DEIS programme to any further schools until this work is complete.

DEIS Status

297. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to establish an appeals mechanism for schools that have to date failed to obtain DEIS status;

if his attention has been drawn to the fact that schools have very little or no input in supplying school data and relevant information; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54087/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): As the Deputy is aware, following the review of DEIS, my Department introduced an objective, statistics based model for assessing which schools merit inclusion in the DEIS Programme, so that all stakeholders can have confidence that we are targeting extra resources at those schools with the highest levels of concentrated disadvantage.

This was the culmination of more than 18 months of consultation and discourse with education partners and other stakeholders to ensure that identification of schools and future delivery of interventions is fully informed by the practical experience of teachers, parents, students and non-governmental organisations working on behalf of children at risk of educational disadvantage and their families.

There was a clear consensus throughout the review process that there was a need for a new approach to the arrangements for identifying schools and the survey approach used in 2005 would place an additional unwanted administrative burden on schools and school Principals. It was also considered unfair to expect schools/school Principals to gather sensitive socio-economic data on its school community.

Details on how the new objective assessment framework was developed and what was taken into consideration are set out in Chapter 3 of the Report on the Review of DEIS. <https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools-/DEIS-Review-Report.pdf>

School Placement

298. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the options available to a person (details supplied) who cannot source a primary school place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54131/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The position is that the selection and enrolment of pupils in schools is the responsibility of the authorities of the individual school. My Department's main responsibility is to ensure that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all pupils seeking school places in an area. However, this may result in some pupils' not obtaining a place in the school of their first choice. As schools may not have a place for every applicant, a selection process may be necessary. This selection process and the enrolment policy on which it is based must be non-discriminatory, and must be applied fairly in respect of all applicants.

Under section 15 (2) (d) of the Education Act, 1998, each school is legally obliged to disclose its enrolment policy and to ensure that, as regards that policy, principles of equality and the right of parents to send their children to a school of the parents' choice are respected.

Section 29 of the Education Act, 1998 provides for an appeal by a parent or guardian to the Secretary General of this Department or, in the case of an Education and Training Board (ETB) school, to the ETB in the first instance, where a Board of Management of a school, or a person acting on behalf of the Board, refuses to enrol a student in a school, expels a student, or suspends a student for 20 or more days in any school year.

My Department has no authority to compel a school to admit a pupil, except in the case of an appeal under section 29 of the Education Act, 1998 being upheld.

Application forms for taking a section 29 appeal are available on this Departments website at the following link :<http://www.education.ie/en/Parents/Services/Appeal-against-Permanent-Exclusion-Suspension-or-Refusal-to-Enrol/Section-29-Appeals-Application-Form.doc>, or by contacting Section 29 Administration Unit, Friars Mill Road, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath, phone 0761 108588. Completed applications forms should be sent to the address above, together with a copy of the letter received from the Board of Management or a person acting on behalf of the Board of Management, within 42 days of receipt of the schools decision.

In addition, the Educational Welfare Service (EWS) of the Child and Family Agency (TUSLA) is the statutory agency which can assist parents who are experiencing difficulty in securing a school place for their child. The EWS may be able to offer assistance and advice on securing a school placement within your area. The contact details for this agency is Educational Welfare Service of the Child and Family Agency, Floors 2-5, Brunel Building, Heuston South Quarter, Dublin 8 phone number 01-7718500.

Schools Building Projects Status

299. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the provision of new buildings and associated works for a school (details supplied); his views on the current arrangement in which a school is residing in the school; his further views on the appropriateness of the arrangement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54134/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): As the Deputy may be aware, a building project to provide improved accommodation for the school to which he refers has been devolved to the local Education and Training Board (ETB) for delivery. The ETB has advised my Department that the pre-qualification process for the appointment of contractors for the project is ongoing.

The Deputy will also be aware that a new 1,000 pupil post primary school for Swords opened in September 2018 within available accommodation at the above referenced school, on a temporary basis.

With regard to the provision of permanent accommodation for the school, a building project is included in my Department's Capital Programme. The Tender Assessment Report for the project has been submitted to my Department for consideration and is currently under review. When the tender process is complete, the project will proceed to construction.

Summer Works Scheme Administration

300. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a decision on the summer works programme applications will be made; when the schools that have applied will first be notified; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54140/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department announced the list of approved Summer Works projects for 2019 on the 17th December last, with details of the approved schools published on my Department's website www.education.ie. Schools were notified of their decision via the Department's Esinet portal on that date.

Third Level Courses Availability

301. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on reports from early career psychologists that there is a lack of transparency and fairness in the PhD application process and doctoral panels which are made up of both HSE and university personnel; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54161/18]

302. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if funding to provide more places available on accredited postgraduate psychology courses here will be increased; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that there is only one doctorate course available nationally which is extremely costly in view of the fact there is no funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54162/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I propose to take Questions Nos. 301 and 302 together.

Universities are autonomous institutions within the meaning of the Universities Act 1997. The management of their academic affairs, including the establishment of entry requirements, is a matter for individual universities. Neither I nor the Department has any role in relation to such matters.

There are a number of doctoral courses available in Ireland that are accredited by the Psychological Society of Ireland:

- Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology: Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick
- Doctorate in Educational Psychology: University College Dublin
- Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology: Trinity College Dublin
- Doctorate in Clinical Psychology: Trinity College Dublin, University of Limerick, University College Dublin, NUI Galway, University College Cork

Additionally, Maynooth University and the NUI Galway are providers of structured PhD programmes in Psychology.

Higher education institutions are academically independent and the level of tuition fees charged for their postgraduate programmes is a matter for the institutions themselves to determine. Accordingly, I have no role in determining tuition fees for these programmes.

I would like the Deputy to note that, in relation to the Doctorate in Clinical Psychology, the HSE provides sponsorship to trainees of 60% of fees, with the trainee responsible for 40% of the shortfall. Depending on the higher education institution, this equates to €5,200 - €5,800 per annum.

Students may be eligible for a postgraduate grant at and can determine their eligibility at <https://susi.ie/eligibility/income/>.

Students can also claim tax relief on fees (including the student contribution) that have been paid for third level education courses. Further information can be found at <https://www.revenue.ie/en/personal-tax-credits-reliefs-and-exemptions/education/tuition-fees-paid-for-third-level-education/index.aspx>.

School Accommodation Provision

303. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the shortage of secondary school places in the Kinsealy, Malahide and Portmarnock areas of north County Dublin (details supplied); the steps he is taking to address the situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54172/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): In order to plan for school provision and analyse the relevant demographic data, my Department divides the country into 314 school planning areas and uses a Geographical Information System, using data from a range of sources, to identify where the pressure for school places across the country will arise. With this information, my Department carries out nationwide demographic exercises to determine where additional school accommodation is needed at primary and post-primary level.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Government last April announced plans for the establishment of 42 new schools over the next four years (2019 to 2022). This announcement followed nationwide demographic exercises carried out by my Department into the future need for primary and post-primary schools across the country and the 4-year horizon will enable increased lead-in times for planning and delivery of the necessary infrastructure.

Where demographic data indicates that additional provision is required, the delivery of such additional provision is dependent on the particular circumstances of each case and may, depending on the circumstances, be provided through either one, or a combination of, the following:

- Utilising existing unused capacity within a school or schools,
- Extending the capacity of a school or schools,
- Provision of a new school or schools.

While a new post-primary school has not been announced in the Malahide_Nevinstown or Portmarnock school planning areas as part of this announcement, the announcement includes two new 1,000 pupil post-primary schools to serve the Donaghmede_Howth_D13 school planning area, which is adjacent to the Portmarnock school planning area, to be established in 2019 and 2021.

In addition, the following post-primary schools were also established to serve these areas in recent years as follows:

- 1,000 pupil post-primary school established in 2018 to serve the Malahide_Nevinstown and Portmarnock school planning areas as a regional solution; and
- 1,000 pupil post-primary school established in 2018 to serve the Swords school planning area, which is adjacent to the Malahide_Nevinstown and Portmarnock school planning areas.

The requirement for new schools will be kept under on-going review and in particular will have regard for the increased rollout of housing provision as outlined in Project Ireland 2040. In addition to the new schools announced, my Department's capital investment programme also provides for devolved funding for additional classrooms for existing schools where an immediate enrolment need has been identified.

Schools Building Projects Status

304. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when permanent buildings will be provided for schools (details supplied). [54173/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The major building project for the schools referred to by the Deputy is currently at an advanced stage of architectural planning Stage 2b (Detailed Design), which includes the application for statutory approvals and the preparation of tender documents.

The pre-qualification process to select a shortlist of suitable contractors for tender stage is currently ongoing.

The Design Team is currently assessing the expressions of interest. A pre-qualification report will be compiled and forwarded to the Department once this exercise is complete.

Once the pre-qualification process is complete the Department will be in contact with the Board of Management with a view to progressing this project to tender stage.

A tender stage normally takes between 7 and 8 months to complete.

Schools Building Projects Status

305. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of new accommodation for a school (details supplied). [54174/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The delivery of a new 5 classroom school with a 2 classroom ASD unit is being devolved to Louth Meath Education and Training Board.

To enable this, my Department is currently preparing a Service Level Agreement for issue to the ETB. The execution of this Service Level Agreement will allow the ETB to procure a Design Team to take the project through the various stages of architectural planning and onwards through the process of meeting statutory planning requirements and to construction.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

306. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an application for funding by a school (details supplied) will be processed in order to allow the service to commence in September 2019 in view of the fact there are no ASD units in the area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54175/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I wish to confirm to by Deputy that the school referred submitted an application in December for additional accommodation for the provision of a two class Special Educational Needs bases.

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

Schools Amalgamation

307. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the merging of two schools (details supplied) in County Cavan; if the consultation process will be examined with local communities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54179/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I wish to advise the Deputy

that the decision making authority for changes to schools belongs to the Patron/Trustees of the school, and then this is subject to the approval of the Department.

Any proposed change involves extensive negotiations at local level and must be well planned and managed in a manner that accommodates the interests of students, parents, teachers, local communities and contributes to an inclusive education system.

My Department has sought further information from the Patron of the schools concerned relating to the proposed amalgamation and this is awaited. The matter can be considered further following receipt of this information.

Departmental Expenditure

308. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the cost incurred by his Department in 2018 for the use of taxi services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54208/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): In 2018 my Department incurred a cost of €22,216.11 on taxi usage for official purposes in Ireland and abroad. This expenditure is in respect of staff in the Department of Education and Skills including field officers in the Inspectorate and the National Educational Psychologist Service (NEPS). It should be noted that the expenditure figure may also include payments relating to a previous year.

My Department's policy for official taxi usage is to ensure the efficient and effective use of this resource and to ensure costs are kept to a minimum. Taxi usage by Department officials is acceptable only when there is an unavoidable business need and are used in circumstances where public transport is not available or feasible.

State Examinations

309. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of procedures in the case of a person (details supplied). [54245/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The State Examinations Commission has statutory responsibility for operational matters relating to the certificate examinations. In view of this I have forwarded your query to the State Examinations Commission for direct reply to you.

School Transport Provision

310. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if school transport will be provided on medical grounds to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54248/18]

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.

There are currently over 117,500 children, including over 13,000 children with special educational needs, transported in over 5,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary

schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually.

School Transport Section of my Department has not received an application for school transport on medical grounds for the child referred to by the Deputy.

An application form is available on my Department's website at *www.education.ie*.

Schools Building Projects Status

311. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of school building projects in County Kildare; the timeline for completion of same in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54252/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Information in relation to the current status of all major school building projects and additional accommodation projects including County Kildare is available on my Departments web-site and this information is updated on a regular basis. Information in relation to all completed projects is also available on my Department website.

School Curriculum

312. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to make history a compulsory subject for the junior cycle curriculum; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54253/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Since my arrival in the Department I have been considering the issue of History in the curriculum. I have spoken publicly of how vital it is that our young people can learn from the past so that they can plan for the future. I think it is very important that our education system should provide the opportunity to learn about, and learn from, key times and events in our history, events that we particularly recall in this decade of centenaries. These include the end of the First World War, the delicate path we walk to mark the foundation of the State, and the role of women in society. The study of our history can also afford the opportunity to consider and learn from the story of Irish migration, of the journey from conflict to peace on this island, and to learn about the rich history of our Irish language and its place in our culture and our heritage.

Prior to the implementation of the new Framework for Junior Cycle, only 52% of schools - the voluntary secondary schools - provided History as a core subject. Yet 90% of students present for History in the Junior Certificate examination each year.

It is against this backdrop, of the importance of learning from our past, that I have asked the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) to review the optional nature of history under the new Framework for Junior Cycle. History was one of the new subject specifications introduced to schools just last September.

As part of their review I have also asked the NCCA to identify how we can best promote the study of history in our schools.

I have met with officials of the NCCA and had an initial discussion on this matter. I expect to receive a report from the Council by the end of the first quarter of this year.

Special Educational Needs Staff

313. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to allow special needs assistants to take unpaid leave for the purpose of undertaking teaching practice when retraining as a primary or secondary school teacher. [54254/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Special Needs Assistants are recruited specifically to assist in the care of pupils with disabilities, who have additional and significant care needs, in an educational context. They may be appointed to a special school or a mainstream school to assist school authorities in making suitable provision for a pupil or pupils with special care needs. The first priority is that the care needs of the pupils are met on an ongoing basis during the school year.

In June 2012, my Department, in conjunction with the School Management Bodies and the relevant Trade Unions, agreed a Career Break Scheme for Special Needs Assistants in Recognised Primary and Post-Primary Schools, the provisions for which are contained in Circular Letter 22/2012 which is available on my Department's website.

Paragraph 1.2 of the Circular states:

“ The main objectives of this scheme which are not exhaustive, is for employers, wherever possible to facilitate applicants in the areas of:

- *Personal Development*
- *Education (including teacher training)*
- *Public Representation*
- *Childcare/Dependent care*
- *Self-employment”*

The Career Break Scheme therefore is applicable to Special Needs Assistants who wish to pursue courses such as teacher training where participants are required to spend significant periods of time on school observation/teaching practice during the school year.

Special Educational Needs Staff

314. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to allow special needs assistants who are qualified as primary school teachers to work as full-time learning support teachers in post-primary schools with benefits and leave. [54255/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The recruitment and appointment of teachers to fill teaching posts is a matter for the individual school authority, subject to procedures agreed under Section 24(3) of the Education Act 1998 (as amended by the Education (Amendment) Act 2012).

The policy of my Department is that, as far as possible, schools should appoint people to teach who are registered with the Teaching Council and have qualifications appropriate to the sector and suitable to the post for which they are employed.

The Teaching Council is the statutory body for the registration of teachers including the recognition of teaching qualifications.

Schools Refurbishment

315. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if phase 2 development works in a school (details supplied) will be sanctioned; if additional funding will be provided to allow for emergency works to be carried out in respect of a leaking roof, dangerous chimney stacks, a leaking glass corridor and obsolete central heating pipework and radiators; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54319/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): As the Deputy may be aware my Department approved a devolved grant for works at the school referred to. Subsequently an increased scope of works was submitted by the school. Additional information was requested, and received, in that regard. The additional information is currently under consideration and my Department will be in contact with the school once that process is complete.

In addition, my Department has approved funding under the Emergency works Scheme for roof repairs at the school. Officials from my Department have recently been in contact with the school and have been advised that new leaks have occurred in a separate glass roofed area of the school. The details of the works required along with the relevant costings have been requested and once this information has been received and assessed the School Authorities will be notified directly. If there are further issues with dangerous chimney stacks at the school the works proposed along with the associated costs can be submitted to my Department for assessment under the terms and conditions of the Emergency works Scheme.

With regard to the upgrade of the school's heating system my Department has recently advised the school that the works proposed were outside the terms of the Emergency works Scheme and that the correct mechanism for applying for works of this nature was my Department's Summer works Scheme. It is open to the school authority to apply for these works under the new Summer Works Scheme opening for applications in early 2019 for projects for summer 2020 onwards.

School Curriculum

316. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a reply will issue to correspondence in regard to the concerns of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54388/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The Irish language is accorded special status in Ireland and is protected by various pieces of legislation and in particular Article 8 of our Constitution which states that "The Irish Language as the national language is the first official language". The Education Act 1998 recognises the particular responsibility of the education system with regard to supporting the Irish language.

In recognising the linguistic, social and cultural importance of Irish and English in Ireland, both languages are included as core subjects in the national curricula for recognised primary and post-primary schools and centres for education in Ireland. The importance of the teaching of both languages in this way has been re-affirmed most recently in the 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030.

Indeed, the most recent curricular changes at primary and junior cycle level have emphasised not only the importance of learning both languages but also the wider benefits of bilingualism. The development of these new language curricula reflects my Department's reassertion of its commitment to the Irish language and to progressing the language education related

actions of the 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030.

The new Primary Language Curriculum integrates English and Irish learning at primary level and supports teachers to work with children whose learning and development may progress at a different rate to their peers along a Progression Continuum. Recent curricular developments create a very different learning environment for students, one which places them at the heart of the language learning and assessment processes from Junior Infants through to the end of Junior Cycle. The Primary Language Curriculum and the specifications for Irish in Junior Cycle place a strong emphasis on language skills development and the integration and transferability of those skills. It also gives students potential to realise the benefits that could accrue from engaging in the study of two languages from an early age.

It is acknowledged that in some very limited and well-defined circumstances as set out in Circular 12/96, an exemption from the study of Irish may be warranted. To be eligible for an exemption a child's circumstances must satisfy the criteria of the circular and it is school management who are the delegated authority to grant exemptions in line with the criteria of the circular.

The Department is reviewing circulars on Irish exemptions from primary and post-primary schools and a public consultation is underway on proposed changes with a view to bringing the existing circulars up to date with current policy and in line with new language curricula.

The public consultation, launched on 7 December, invites the public to complete a) a short on-line survey responding to the key proposed changes and b) to submit their views more generally on aspects of the proposed revised circulars. A research report has also been published as part of the public consultation process. The closing date for receipt of responses to the public consultation has been extended to the 18th January 2019. The results of the public consultation will inform the new circulars under which exemptions from the study of Irish at primary and post-primary level will be permitted.

Teachers' Remuneration

317. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to regularise the situation in regard to equal pay for equal work for teachers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54395/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The public service agreements have allowed a programme of pay restoration for public servants to start. The starting salary for a new entrant teacher in 2012 was €30,702. As a result of the programme of pay restoration, the starting salary of a teacher is now €36,318 and from 1 October 2020 onwards will be €37,692.

Section 11 of the Public Service Pay and Pensions Act 2017 provides that "the Minister [for Public Expenditure and Reform] shall, within three months of the passing of this Act, prepare and lay before the Oireachtas a report on the cost of and a plan in dealing with pay equalisation for new entrants to the public service."

The report laid before the Oireachtas on foot of this provision by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform assesses the cost of a further change which would provide a two scale point adjustment to new entrants recruited since 2011. The total cost of such an adjustment across the public sector is of the order of €200 million, of which Education accounts for €83 million. The report also acknowledges that, during the financial crisis, there were policy changes which affected remuneration in different occupations across the public sector (including education).

The matter of new entrant pay is a cross sectoral issue, not just an issue for the education sector alone. The Government supports the gradual, negotiated repeal of the FEMPI legislation, having due regard to the priority to improve public services and in recognition of the essential role played by public servants.

On 24 September 2018, an agreement was reached between the Government and the public services committee of ICTU in respect of new entrant pay.

This agreement will benefit 16,000 teachers and nearly 5,000 SNAs within the education sector. The deal provides for a series of incremental jumps for new entrants.

These restorations for new entrants have been achieved through continued engagement and collective bargaining between the Government and the public service unions and shows the benefits that such engagement can bring.

School Accommodation Provision

318. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the way in which he is addressing the requirement for additional second level school places in Newbridge, County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54396/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): In April 2018, the Government announced plans for the establishment of 42 new schools over the next four years (2019 to 2022). This announcement highlighted that the requirement for new schools will be kept under on-going review, and in particular would have regard for the increased rollout of housing provision as outlined in Project Ireland 2040, and also noted that there will be a need for further school accommodation in other areas in the future, which can be addressed through either planned capacity increases, additional accommodation or extensions to existing schools.

As the Deputy will be aware, my Department's review of provision at post-primary level across the school planning areas in the South Kildare area is now complete.

My Department is satisfied that the needs in the area can be met through the replacement and expansion of the existing Curragh Post-Primary School with a new 1,000 pupil school building. It is intended that the expansion of the existing Curragh post-Primary school, a multi-denominational Community College under the patronage of Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board (KWETB), will also cater for demand arising in the adjoining Newbridge and Kildare school planning areas.

Engagement is ongoing in relation to the potential for Educate Together to become a Trustee Partner for the school. A new site will be required for the school and my Department will be liaising with KWETB regarding the process for identifying a suitable site for the new school building.

DEIS Status

319. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the DEIS status of a school (details supplied). [54405/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The school in question is in the DEIS programme. The list of schools included in the DEIS programme is available at the following link:

https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools-/deis_school_list.xls.

Schools Building Projects

320. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 214 of 18 December 2018, if a meeting will be requested with the chairman of the board of management of the school in view of the fact that the complicated issues surrounding the matter can only be resolved by a verbal explanation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54419/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The Deputy will be aware that the school has recently submitted clarifications in relation to the issues in question. Officials in my Department are still in the process of thoroughly reviewing this information. This review will consider the meeting request referred to by the Deputy and will also take account of all information provided by the school and the consultants appointed by it. My officials will inform the school of its decision in the matter once this review is completed.

Language Schools

321. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to protect students of English as a foreign language who are paying fees to QQI language schools from further closures which would result in a loss of fees and investment. [54437/18]

322. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of reports that have been commissioned by his Department in regard to students of English as a foreign language whose courses have ceased suddenly, leaving students left out of education and out of pocket without warning; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54438/18]

323. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of providers of education and training, including English language training, that have been awarded the QQI international education mark; the number of providers that have applied; and the number that were refused. [54439/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I propose to take Questions Nos. 321 to 323, inclusive, together.

The majority of English language schools in Ireland are privately run and do not come under the remit of my Department or Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI). My Department has not commissioned any reports in relation to the closure of English language schools.

The Deputy may be aware that my Department is taking steps to strengthen regulation of the English language sector. The Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) (Amendment) Bill 2018 is currently before the Seanad. The new Bill provides for the establishment of 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 QQI will be allowed to carry the Mark.

Once fully implemented, providers will be able to apply to QQI to gain authorisation to use

the IEM in order to be eligible to recruit international students. The IEM is a tool to further enhance and sustain the quality of our education system. It also provides learners, or potential learners, with the necessary confidence that providers with the IEM have been quality assured by QQI.

The Bill also contains provisions to provide QQI with additional statutory powers to examine a provider's financial sustainability. These provisions will enable QQI to examine the bonafides 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. 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.

Upon enactment, the Bill will also empower QQI to establish a Protection for Enrolled Learners (PEL) Fund. This fund will be resourced by an annual charge from those providers covered by it. The fund will be used to 'teach out' a programme in the event that a provider fails to provide a programme. Should this not be possible, the fund will be used to reimburse students for the most recent fees that have been paid.

The Deputy may also be aware of the appointment of a mediator to the English language education sector recently announced by my Department.

Mr Patrick King, the former General Secretary of the Association of Secondary Teachers of Ireland (ASTI), has been appointed to work with relevant stakeholders to explore the potential to address some of the employment related issues that have arisen in the English language education sector. Mr King will meet with employer and employee representative bodies early in 2019 to identify and discuss relevant issues. Mr King's role will be to explore whether there is scope for a set of minimum employment standards that could be agreed for the sector, and which could form the basis of a Registered Employment Agreement.

This process will provide an opportunity for both employers and employees to address the employment related issues that continue to damage the reputation of the sector.

Interested parties are being encouraged to make a submission with their views on relevant issues that will assist the mediator in his work. A dedicated email address is now open to receive submissions: elemediation@education.gov.ie.

Teacher Recruitment

324. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the measures he has taken in regard to the difficulties schools are having in recruiting teachers for subjects such as home economics and Irish; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54440/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Management bodies and schools have, in recent years, reported difficulties in recruiting teachers. At primary level this relates mainly to the recruitment of substitute teachers and at post-primary level to the recruitment of teachers of particular subjects, including Irish and Home Economics.

In response to these difficulties, the Teacher Supply Steering Group, chaired by the Secretary General of my Department, was established in March of last year.

The Steering Group is considering the issues that impact on teacher supply, including: initial

teacher education policy, provision, funding and support; data/research requirements; policies and arrangements for schools and teachers that impact on teacher mobility/supply; and promotion of the teaching profession. The Steering Group is supported by a number of working groups which are looking in detail at the issues under these broad headings. In undertaking its task, the Group is cognisant of the requirement that all persons wishing to teach in recognised schools must meet the professional registration standards and criteria set by the Teaching Council, which is the professional regulatory body for the teaching profession.

The Deputy will be aware that In November 2018, I published the Action Plan for Teacher Supply setting out actions in the four policy areas. One of the higher education actions was for the HEA to engage with HEIs to ensure that additional 4-year undergraduate post primary initial teacher education (ITE) programmes are in place, including in priority subjects such as Irish and Home Economics.

As a result of this engagement a number of new initial teacher education undergraduate programmes will now commence in 2019 and graduates will be eligible for registration with the Teaching Council in a number of the priority subject areas, including Home Economics and Irish. More new undergraduate ITE programmes are also planned by the HEIs to commence in 2020.

The Deputy may wish to note also that one of the key actions in the Action Plan is the implementation of a campaign to promote the teaching profession. The first phase of the campaign, supported by a new dedicated website, was launched in December of last year and is designed, amongst other things, to encourage leaving certificate students, many of whom are in the process of making their CAO applications, to apply for an undergraduate ITE programmes, including the additional programmes put in place by the HEIs for 2019.

Apprenticeship Data

325. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of apprenticeship courses that are offered in west County Dublin; the uptake in apprenticeships; and if there was sufficient supply of courses for the demand in each of the years 2016, 2017 and 2018. [54441/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): Apprenticeship is a demand driven educational and training programme, which aims to develop the skills of an apprentice in order to meet the needs of industry and the labour market. Consequently, the number of apprentices registered is determined by employers within each sector. 80% of the total time on a craft apprenticeship is spent on-the-job with the employer so demand for apprenticeship is primarily met by the employer base in any area.

Apprenticeships are national training programmes that are delivered via a range of education and training providers. Apprentices receive their off-the-job training in an Institute of Technology or an Education Training Board. Technological University Dublin, Blanchardstown Campus, is one of the providers of off-the-job training and offers training for plumbing apprentices. The numbers of apprentices at that location in recent years are set out in the following table.

It is not practical to offer the full range of apprenticeship trades in each training location. SOLAS, in their role as co-ordinating provider, operates a transparent and equitable management system for the scheduling of all apprentices for their off-the-job training and whilst every effort is made to eliminate unnecessary travel apprentices sometimes have to attend training facilities outside their locality. Apprentices in west Dublin also have access to the broad range

of off-the-job training offered by City of Dublin ETB and Dublin Dun Laoghaire ETB Training Centres and at the campuses of Technological University Dublin.

SOLAS and the Higher Education Authority will continue to monitor off-the-job training capacity as craft apprenticeship registrations continue to grow strongly.

Apprentices Attending Plumbing Phase 6 training in Blanchardstown Campus

Year	Number
2016	48
2017	64
2018	63

Apprenticeship Programmes

326. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to increase the awareness and availability of apprenticeships to secondary school students, post-leaving certificate students and untrained workers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54442/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): It is important that learners and workers consider their interests and career options in an informed way throughout their education and working lives. The wide range of opportunities offered through the apprenticeship programme should be an important part of this process.

Government is working to address the visibility of apprenticeship and has put significant additional resources into this area. A national promotional campaign, Generation Apprenticeship, has been underway since May 2017, led by the Apprenticeship Council and SOLAS. The campaign promotes apprenticeship on TV and radio along with social media platforms that include Twitter; LinkedIn; Facebook and Instagram. It has been designed to influence parents, teachers and potential apprentices on the career paths and further educational opportunities arising from apprenticeship programmes. In addition, the Education & Training Board SOLAS Authorised Officers play a critical role in promoting apprenticeship by visiting employers, schools and attending career fairs.

In addition, an independent review of career guidance, which is being carried out by Indecon International Consultants, is examining the quality and range of information and resources available to students in schools and other settings. This will include an examination of how apprenticeship opportunities are presented to students in these settings.

As set out in the Action Plan to Expand Apprenticeship and Traineeship in Ireland, SOLAS has completed a review on pathways to participation in apprenticeship. The purpose of the review is to ensure that our national apprenticeship system is more reflective of the range and diversity of our population, more inclusive of diverse backgrounds and abilities and that apprenticeship opportunities are more readily accessible to all. Work is already underway in many of the areas identified for action and SOLAS will lead implementation of the actions, working closely with apprenticeship partners and stakeholders, in particular employers, education and training providers and apprentices themselves. The review is available on SOLAS's website www.solas.ie.

In addition, work is also underway in SOLAS on a new employer portal initiative which will provide capability to approved employers to advertise apprenticeships, as well as other value-added services. The new portal is expected to be rolled out in 2019 on successful completion

of a pilot phase.

Schools Mental Health Strategies

327. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to combat student anxiety and stress within secondary schools to enable a good mental health environment for students sitting the leaving certificate and other examinations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54443/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): As the Deputy may be aware, mental health and wellbeing promotion is afforded a high priority and is one of the key goals within my Department's Action Plan for Education in 2016/19. My Department is strongly supportive of the promotion of wellbeing in our schools and has a key role to play in the promotion of the wellbeing of children and young people in Ireland, in collaboration with the Departments of Health and Children and Youth Affairs, and with other Government Departments and Agencies.

My Department adopts a holistic and integrated approach to supporting schools in promoting wellbeing and positive mental health. The process spans the curriculum in schools, whole-school ethos, quality of teaching, learning and assessment, student support and pastoral care and the provision of professional development for teachers. It also involves other supports such as educational psychological services and guidance services, and the interface with other agencies, both nationally and locally.

To support this holistic approach my Department has published a *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice* (2018-2023) for all schools which will inform how schools can best promote student wellbeing. The policy statement and framework for practice provides an overarching structure encompassing existing, ongoing and developing work in the area of Wellbeing Promotion in schools.

Best practice indicates that schools adopt a whole-school, multi-component preventative approach to Wellbeing Promotion that includes both universal and targeted interventions. A whole-school approach involves all in the school community engaging in a collaborative process to improve areas of school life that impact on wellbeing. This will be achieved through the use of a School Self-Evaluation process taking Wellbeing Promotion as its focus. It will allow schools to benchmark their practice against the statement of effective practice, and identify areas for development, implementation and review. It is envisaged that schools will engage with the statements and adapt and develop the best practice items as they meet the needs in their own school community.

A multi-component approach encourages schools to address areas, not only relating to Teaching and Learning but also relating to culture and environment, policy and planning and relationships and partnerships. These areas are embedded in the Wellbeing Framework for Practice. Working preventatively and providing for both universal and targeted approaches is described as providing a 'Continuum of Support'. Schools are encouraged to provide supports to promote the wellbeing of all within the school community as well as providing some targeted interventions for children and young people presenting with vulnerabilities in the area of wellbeing.

It is my Department's aim that by 2023 all schools and centres for education will have embedded this dynamic School Self-evaluation process focusing on Wellbeing Promotion. The implementation of this Wellbeing Promotion Process is an ongoing process that will ensure

the necessary focus on supporting children and young people in having a sense of purpose and fulfilment, and the skills necessary to deal with life's challenges.

A Wellbeing Policy Implementation Plan, which has specified seven high level goals, has been agreed for achievement over the next five years.

The seven high level goals are as follows:

1. Strengthen and align current structures within the Department and between the Department and other relevant Departments to ensure the coordinated implementation of this Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice.

2. Plan and provide for the national roll-out of a professional development process to facilitate all schools and centres for education to engage with and embed a Wellbeing Promotion Process which builds professional capacity and collaborative cultures from 2018-2023.

3. Provide for an aligned, comprehensive and easily-accessible programme of support for all schools and centres for education to address school-identified wellbeing promotion needs.

4. Consider how the system is meeting current and future teachers' learning needs relating to wellbeing promotion

5. Develop a research based framework for the evaluation of wellbeing promotion in schools.

6. Improve use of supports for children and young people at key points of transition within and between education settings.

7. Promote the wellbeing of school and centre of education personnel.

Schools will be supported in this work by a national professional development programme currently being developed and trialled, and full roll out will commence in 2019. In addition, our national support services will step up the investment made in building capacity within schools to deliver:

- More training for teachers and school staff (including the Incredible Years programme, the Friends programme and the SafeTALK programme)

- Improved curriculum content (through the Junior Cycle Wellbeing programme, improved resources for teachers to deliver Relationships and Sexuality Education)

- Best practice models of school based student support teams

- Protocols for connecting to wider support services

- A national training programme to support schools to implement the Self-Evaluation Wellbeing Promotion process and the development of Wellbeing Resources, including self-evaluation planning and feedback templates.

By providing this Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice I believe that we can fulfil our mission to enable individuals to achieve their full potential and contribute to Ireland's social cultural and economic development into the future.

I can also inform the Deputy that the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment are engaged in a comprehensive review of senior cycle, a process informed by Junior Cycle reform. One component of this review will be examining ways to alleviate stress for our learners as part of the examinations system. As part of the first phase of the review the NCCA conducted international research on senior cycle in a number of other jurisdictions (France, Sweden, New

Zealand, Queensland, Finland, England, Netherlands, and Ontario). The report of this research was published in February 2018 and is available on the NCCA's website.

A significant and exciting new step in the review started in autumn. The NCCA began collaborating with a group of 41 schools, which includes discussions with students, teachers and parents, to conduct a school-based review of senior cycle. Schools were provided with stimulus material to facilitate discussions with staff, students and parents. These school-based discussions will now widen out into national discussions, towards a final report to be agreed by the NCCA in mid-2019.

The revised Leaving Certificate grading system introduced in June 2017 was designed to reduce the pressure on students in chasing small percentage gains which would lead to changes in grade bands. This was done by reducing the number of overall grade bands.

In addition, the NCCA has been moving towards introducing second components to more leaving cert subjects. Some two-thirds of LC subjects now include a second assessment component which is undertaken by students before the June exams commence. The second assessment component also allows the assessment of a wider range of student skills than is possible with just a single written exam.

My Department and the State Examinations Commission also recently announced the addition of two days to the Leaving Certificate examination timetable. The additional days allow for new scheduling options for examinations, which are intended to minimise clashes for students and promote the wellbeing of students sitting exams.

Departmental Expenditure

328. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the budget and spend in his Department for marketing, media and social media in each of the years 2016 to 2018, inclusive; the projected spend for 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54462/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): For the Deputy's information, the following are the details in relation to the expenditure from 2016 - 2018 inclusive in relation to marketing, media and social media.

My Department had no social media spend in 2016 and 2017. However, in December 2018, a campaign promoting teaching as a career was developed in conjunction with the Government Information Service (€132,991) in which social media was utilised as a platform. The invoices in relation to the social media element of this campaign have not yet been submitted to the Department and will be paid in 2019.

In addition, during 2018, my Department engaged in a number of other high profile campaigns aimed at raising awareness among the teaching profession and learners on specific initiatives including a national STEM awareness campaign (€78,965); online safety campaign in conjunction with the Department of the Taoiseach (€21,051); awareness raising Campaign (Promotion of Foreign Languages as part of Ireland's Foreign Languages strategy) which was implemented by Post-Primary Languages Initiative (PPLI) (€350,000).

My Department does not have a dedicated marketing and media budget and consequently cannot predict costs for 2019. Any costs arising in relation to such activities are met from the relevant business unit's subhead and accounted for in the Department's annual Appropriation Accounts.

Year	Costs
2016	€11,719.55
2017	€38,628.30
2018	€591,726.32

Departmental Staff Data

329. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of staff in his Department employed to work on marketing, media and social media in 2018. [54479/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): My Department recently appointed a Principal Officer to manage the Department's Communications. The Department's press office currently handle our media queries and social media. There are three staff in the Press Office (Higher Executive Officer (acting) Executive Officer and Clerical Officer) one of whom is out on Maternity leave.

State Examinations Exemptions

330. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to introduce a circular allowing for students who have been granted an exemption from Irish language studies on grounds of dyslexia to be granted an exemption from studying a third language; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54506/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The position is that exemptions from the study of Irish are currently granted in accordance with the provisions of Departmental Circular 12/96 for primary schools and Circular M10/94 for post-primary schools. The Department is reviewing these circulars and a public consultation is underway on proposed changes with a view to bringing the existing circulars up to date with current policy and in line with new language curricula.

The choice of subjects for post-primary students, including a third language, is a matter for the student and his or her parents in consultation with the school principal in the context of the students overall education needs and in accordance with the policies and procedures obtaining in the school. The Department has no plans therefore to introduce exemptions from the study of third languages.

Note that individual higher education institutions set particular entry requirements for their courses, this may include a foreign and/or Irish language requirement.

A student can apply for a waiver from the assessment of aspects of spelling, grammar and punctuation in language subjects through the State Examinations Commission's Reasonable Accommodations at the Certificate Examinations process.

A student can also apply for an exemption from Irish and/or a Third Language if applying for entry to the National University of Ireland.

School Accommodation Provision

331. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the provision of prefabricated accommodation and its related expense at a school (de-

tails supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54520/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The school referred to by the Deputy was established in September 2015 under the patronage divesting process. In order to facilitate the opening of the school its initial establishment has been in interim start-up accommodation, pending a permanent school becoming available.

In order to cater for the school's growing enrolment numbers, additional interim accommodation was required and my Department devolved the delivery of this additional interim accommodation to the school patron body.

I understand from the school patron that delivery of the additional temporary accommodation is currently being progressed and will be installed once the necessary statutory approvals have been received.

Officials from my Department received an application for the relevant grants and payment was made in this regard in late 2018.

Special Educational Needs

332. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the way in which the parents of a child can access a publicly funded assessment (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54532/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): As the Deputy may be aware my Department in September 2017 introduced a new model to support pupils with special educational needs in our schools. The new model differs significantly from the old Resource Allocation Model, in that Special Education Teacher allocation is now frontloaded into schools to support children with special educational needs. Rather than having to make individual application to the NCSE for additional supports schools can now respond to individual needs in a flexible way and pupils do not have to have a psychological assessment, or a diagnosis of a disability, in order to access Special Education Teaching. This means that those with highest level of need can access the highest level of support within the school in a timely manner.

Educational Psychologists from my Department's National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) work with schools using a problem solving model to help schools identify need and interventions to support those needs. Under the new model, NEPS encourages schools to use a continuum based assessment and intervention process whereby each school takes responsibility for initial assessment, educational planning and remedial intervention for pupils with learning, emotional or behavioural difficulties. Teachers may consult their NEPS psychologist should they wish to for advice. Only in the event of a failure to make reasonable progress, in spite of the school's best efforts in consultation with NEPS, will the psychologist become involved with an individual child for intensive intervention or assessment.

This system is in line with international best practice and allows psychologists to give early attention to urgent cases and also to help many more children indirectly than could be seen individually. It also ensures that children are not referred unnecessarily for psychological assessment and have equality of access to support prioritised on their individual needs.

NEPS understands dyslexia in the context the severity and persistence of an individual's needs over time and their response to intervention. This approach aligns with the new Special Educational model in schools which focuses on the identification of need and the matching of specific interventions to that need. Specific interventions are therefore tailored, by the school,

to the individual's observed needs by the school, rather than being generic to a specific difficulty or disability.

Therefore, in response to your specific query I can advise that, in the first instance, parents should discuss their concerns in relation to their child or young adult with the Principal involved and request a review of the child's current Student Support Plan with a view to discussing his/her response to interventions in place and the appropriateness of involvement of the NEPs psychologist.

I hope this clarifies the issue for the Deputy.

Teacher Training Provision

333. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to reinstate the grant for student teachers to attend a Gaeltacht course as part of their college course; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54533/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The decision to stop the Gaeltacht placement grants was taken during the economic crisis when, unfortunately, very difficult decisions had to be made to stabilise the nation's finances. Priority was given to protecting resources for front line education services as far as possible.

The Deputy should note that, to assist with the costs of the Gaeltacht placement, students who are in receipt of a student grant which includes a 100% fee grant, or who would have qualified for a full fee grant but for the Free Fees Scheme, can apply for funding towards travel and accommodation costs under the field trip element of a fee grant, subject to the normal terms and conditions of the student grant scheme. Apart from this, in circumstances of particular need, students may apply for support under the Student Assistance Fund. Information in relation to this fund is available through the Access Officer in the third level institution attended.

Special Educational Needs

334. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide a list of autism spectrum disorder, ASD, special classes in County Meath. [54535/18]

335. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a town (details supplied) in County Meath does not have an ASD unit. [54536/18]

336. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to deliver special classes and ASD units in the schools to be newly opened in September 2019. [54537/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I propose to take Questions Nos. 334 to 336, inclusive, together.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) has a statutory function to plan and co-ordinate the provision of education and support services to children with special educational needs including Autism, in consultation with the relevant education partners and the Health Service Executive (HSE). This includes the establishment of special class and special school placements in various geographical areas where there is an identified need.

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

classes. Details of all special classes for children with special educational needs are available by county on the NCSE website www.ncse.ie

In Co. Meath, there are 3 special schools and 59 special classes attached to mainstream schools in Co. Meath. Of these, 3 are Early Intervention classes, 35 are primary special classes and 16 are post primary special classes.

The NCSE identifies the need for special class and special school placements nationally on an ongoing basis, and where specialised provision is required to support children with Special Educational Needs, it is planned and established to meet that need.

Schools may apply to the NCSE to open a special class where a need has been identified in their area, i.e. a number of students have professional reports indicating they require the support of a special class.

SENOs may also approach a school directly where they are aware that a special class is or will be required in the near future.

The NCSE, in looking to open special classes, must take into account the present and future potential need for such classes, taking particular account of the educational needs of the children concerned. The NCSE will also take account of location and sustainability in looking to establish special classes in certain areas.

Where a school is not in a position to accommodate a special class within its existing accommodation, it is open to the school to submit an application to the Department for capital funding to re-configure existing spaces within the school building to accommodate the class or to construct additional accommodation.

In the case of all new schools, it is general practice to include a Special Education Needs Base (SEN Base) in the accommodation brief for new school buildings, unless local circumstances indicate that it will not be required. Typically, a two classroom SEN Base is provided in new primary schools and a two or four classroom SEN Base is provided in new post primary schools.

I have arranged for the Deputy's question on the location of special class provision in the Meath area to be forwarded to the NCSE for their attention and direct reply.

My 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 on the 3rd of December 2018, provides 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.

School Accommodation Provision

337. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 213 of 20 November 2018, the status of the project brief; when work with regard to same will be concluded; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54541/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): As the Deputy is aware, a capital project to provide improved accommodation for the schools in question is included on my Department's Construction Programme. In this regard, my Department will be making direct contact with the school authority shortly.

Schools Building Projects

338. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on whether it is equitable that conditions of planning associated with new educational buildings are not funded by his Department; and his further views on whether his Department should be responsible for additional costs associated with the planning condition as set by the local authority. [54550/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): My Department deals with conditions of planning associated with new educational buildings on a case specific basis. My Department provides funding towards the cost of conditions of planning where it is deemed appropriate. My Department also works with School Authorities to appeal conditions of planning where it is judged to be warranted.

Emergency Works Scheme Appeals

339. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the decision to refuse emergency works funding for a school (details supplied) for the development of a proposed sewerage system upgrade project will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1005/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The school to which the Deputy refers recently submitted an appeal to my Department requesting a review of its application for funding under the Emergency Works Grant Scheme to address sewerage system issues at the school.

My Department has recently requested additional information in relation to this appeal and it is envisaged that a decision will issue to the School Authorities following receipt of this information.

School Staff

340. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps which can be taken in relation to school secretaries to ensure their employment is secure (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1008/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Though schemes were initiated in 1978 and 1979 for the employment of Clerical Officers and Caretakers in primary and secondary schools, where staff employed on these schemes are paid directly by the Department, these schemes have been largely phased out and have been superseded by the more extensive capitation grant schemes.

Under these schemes, the majority of primary and voluntary secondary schools in the Free Education Scheme now receive assistance to provide for secretarial, caretaking and cleaning services. Within the schemes, it is a matter for each individual school to decide how best to ap-

ply the grant funding to suit its particular needs. Where a school uses the capitation grant funding to employ a secretary or caretaker, such staff are employees of individual schools.

My Department has recently made significant efforts to improve the pay of School Secretaries and Caretakers who are employed using capitation grant assistance. In 2015 my Department engaged with the Unions representing school secretaries on negotiations and agreed to enter an independent arbitration process on the issue. The Arbitrator recommended a cumulative pay increase of 10% between 2016 and 2019 for school secretaries and caretakers comprehended by the terms of the arbitration process and that a minimum hourly pay rate of €13 for such staff be phased in over the period 2016 to 2019. Following the arbitration process, grant funding used by schools to fund the salaries of ancillary staff is being improved on a phased basis between 2016 and 2019 in order to enable schools to implement the arbitration outcome.

I am personally very much aware of this as an issue and the important role that School Secretaries and Caretakers play in the running of schools.

School Placement

341. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to increase the number of places in south County Kildare for children diagnosed with autism scheduled to start primary school in September 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1026/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) has a statutory function to plan and co-ordinate the provision of education and support services to children with special educational needs including Autism, in consultation with the relevant education partners and the Health Service Executive (HSE). This includes the establishment of special class and special school placements in various geographical areas where there is an identified need.

Since 2011, the NCSE has increased the number of special classes from 548 in 2011 to 1,459 across the country now, of which 1,196 are Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) special classes. Details of all special classes for children with special educational needs are available by county on the NCSE website www.ncse.ie

In Co. Kildare, there are currently 4 special schools and 75 special classes in mainstream schools, including 6 ASD Early Intervention classes, 46 primary ASD classes and 15 ASD post primary ASD classes.

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

The NCSE identifies the need for special class and special school placements nationally on an ongoing basis, and where specialised provision is required to support children with Special Educational Needs, it is planned and established to meet that need.

I have arranged for the Deputy's question on emerging need in the Kildare area to be forwarded to the NCSE for their attention and direct reply.

My 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 on the 3rd of December 2018, provides 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.

School Management

342. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the contacts he has had with a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1033/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): While my Department has yet to receive formal correspondence from the patron of the school referred to by the Deputy, I understand that the patron may be considering potential options relating to the future of the school. In the event that such contact is made, my officials will assist the patron, as appropriate, in this regard.

Third Level Costs

343. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans in place to alleviate the stress caused to students as a result of the change in structure of the pharmacy degree here following the signing of a statutory instrument by then Minister for Health (details supplied). [1035/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Under the Pharmacy Act 2007, the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (PSI) has responsibility for defining and ensuring the standards of education and training for pharmacists qualifying in Ireland. This includes developing standards, policies and carrying out accreditation of pharmacy degree programmes. The Minister for Health approved changes to the 5 year Masters in Pharmacy (MPharm) programme structure effective from September 2015 which supports the dispersal of placements throughout the five years (rather than focussed on the final year as was the case for students commencing study prior to 2015).

Tuition fees are state-funded for the first four years of the pharmacy programme for students who satisfy the Free Fees criteria. A tuition fee will, however, have to be paid by all students for the final year (Masters) of the programme, as this is a postgraduate Level 9 award and funding is not available under the Free Fees Initiative for postgraduate study.

SUSI grant support is available for those students who meet the qualifying criteria such as means, residency, nationality and progression. Different supports are available to undergraduate and postgraduate students. Qualifying students attending integrated/intercalated courses, will be initially assessed in respect of the undergraduate portion of the course. A separate application will be required in respect of the portion of the course deemed to be the postgraduate element.

Students in third-level institutions who experience exceptional financial need can apply for support under the Student Assistance Fund. This Fund assists students, in a sensitive and compassionate manner, who might otherwise be unable to continue their third level studies due to their financial circumstances. Details of this fund are available from the Access Office in the

third level institution attended. In addition, tax relief is available on postgraduate tuition fees paid. Details in relation to this relief are available from the Revenue Commissioners.

Schools Building Projects Status

344. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the new community school which has been sanctioned for Clonakilty, County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1043/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The school to which the Deputy refers is at an advanced stage of the tender process. The School Authority (Cork ETB) was recently authorised to issue the Letter of Intent to the preferred tenderer. Subject to no issues arising it is anticipated that construction will commence in the first quarter of 2019.

Oideachas Gaeilge

345. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** den Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna i bhfianaise aitheantas agus moladh a bheith ag dul dó as an gcomhairliúchán poiblí maidir leis an gcóras díolúine Gaeilge a leasú chun deis a thabhairt don phobal aighneachtaí a sheoladh isteach, an bhfuil an próiseas teoranta fós do na moltaí sa pháipéar comhairliúcháin agus sa dá dhréacht-chiorclán; agus an bhfuil a Roinn chun moltaí eile a chur i gcuntas, mar shampla, córas nua a chur i bhfeidhm chun nach mbeadh gá leis an gcóras díolúine amach anseo. [1061/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Táthar tar éis an Páipéar Comhairliúcháin maidir leis an treo chun cinn do na Díolúintí ó Staidéar na Gaeilge a fhorbairt mar fhreagra ar na torthaí i dtuarascáil taighde na Cigireachta maidir leis an bpróiseas, na nósanna imeachta agus na cleachtais a bhaineann leis an gcinnteoireacht faoi dhíolúintí ó staidéar na Gaeilge. Áirítear leis dréachtchiorcláin leasaithe do bhunscoileanna agus d'iar-bhunscoileanna ina léirítear na príomhathruithe atá molta do na próisis, na himthosca agus na critéir maidir le deonú díolúintí ó staidéar na Gaeilge.

Soláthraítear leis an suirbhé ar líne an deis do gach duine den phobal chun trácht breise a dhéanamhar na príomhathruithe molta, agus ar na dréachtchiorcláin leasaithe atá curtha i láthair agus ar na socrúithe i gcoitinne dá mba mhian leo. Agus síneadh á chur leis an spriocdháta don tréimhse chomhairliúcháin go dtí an 18 Eanáir 2019, chuir mé méadú leis na deiseanna d'fhreagróirí chun faisnéis níos mionsonraithe i scríbhinn a sholáthar do Rannóg Bheartas, Churaclam agus Measúnacht mo Roinne dá mba mhian leo forlíonadh a chur lena n-aighneacht ar líne.

Chonacthas leibhéal spéise fíor-ard sa chomhairliúchán seo. Déanfar machnamh cúramach ar na freagraí chun socrúithe a leasú agus a chríochnú maidir le díolúintí ó staidéar na Gaeilge.

School Accommodation Provision

346. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position in relation to the proposed development plan for a school (details supplied); if his officials have met with the school to discuss advancing the development plans in view of the significant population increase in the general area; if there are additional accommodation or emergency works applications with his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1069/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I can confirm to the Deputy that my Department approved grant to the school in question for additional accommodation. The school subsequently sought additional funding to complete the project and this was approved recently. The school has been advised accordingly.

In addition, my Department approved grant to the school for works under the Emergency Works Scheme. The project has been devolved to the Board of Management for delivery and my Department has now given approval to the school to commence the works in question.

The Deputy will be aware that in April 2018 my Department announced plans to establish 42 new schools over the next 4 years. The area where this school is located was one of the areas identified to establish a new post primary school in 2019. This new school will provide additional school capacity to meet demographic need in the area.

Special Educational Needs Staff

347. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress made to date on the implementation of the front-loading of inclusion support assistant posts, a recommendation from the National Council for Special Education; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1075/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The Comprehensive Review of the Special Needs Assistant (SNA) Scheme which set out to ensure that the Scheme is achieving the best outcomes possible for children with special educational needs was published by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) in May 2018.

One of the recommendations is in regard to front-loading of support and another recommends using the title 'Inclusion Support Assistant' to better reflect the positive focus of the role.

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

Work in this regard is underway and I expect to bring these proposals for implementation of the Review's recommendations to Government shortly.

Schools Building Projects Status

348. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the proposed special school for County Louth that will merge schools (details supplied); the reason for the significant delays in the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1080/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): A building project which involves 2 new replacement school buildings on a single campus greenfield site for the schools referred to by the Deputy is included in my Department's 6 year Construction Programme.

A project brief was finalised in late December and the project will be delivered via the ADAPT programme. The ADAPT programme uses a professional external Project Manager to coordinate and drive the respective design teams on each project.

In this regard, a tender competition is in train to establish a Project Manager framework which is expected to be in place by early March. The formulation of tender documentation is underway and once the framework has been established a tender exercise will be carried out to appoint a Project Manager for this particular project.

All schools with projects on the ADAPT programme will be contacted shortly by my Department to provide an update on the status of their respective project. I wish to confirm to the Deputy that my Department is committed to providing a new school building for the school in question.

Schools Building Projects Status

349. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the major building project for a school (details supplied); the specific details in terms of target dates of commencement and completion; the details of the temporary accommodation that will be provided during the construction phase; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1081/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The school to which the Deputy refers is at an advanced stage of the tender process. The Board of Management were recently authorised to issue the Letter of Intent to the preferred tenderer. Subject to no issues arising it is anticipated that construction will commence in the first quarter of 2019.

With regards temporary accommodation to be provided on site by the contractor during the construction phase, this will be configured in two blocks and will provide for: 8 general classrooms, 4 SET rooms, 2 offices, 2 toilets and 1 shower.

Literacy Programmes

350. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of persons that attended adult literacy and numeracy classes in each of the 16 education and training boards, ETBs in the past four years; the amount of funding spent on adult literacy and numeracy tuition in each ETB for each of those years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1176/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): Details of the allocation of funding for adult literacy programmes and total number of beneficiaries in the past four years are outlined in the tables in the following link.

[debates%20authoring/webattachments.nsf/0/21C3C7DD357DD06280258384003A4816/\$File/PQ%201176%20adult%20literacy.docx?openelement">Adult Literacy]

School Staff

351. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a school (details supplied) will retain its teacher allocation in view of the fact that its teacher-pupil ratio is higher than other DEIS 1 schools in the area. [1189/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): DEIS Urban Band 1 have a more favourable staffing schedule than other schools. DEIS Urban Band 1 junior schools operate on a general average of 1 teacher for every 20 pupils. Schools with senior classes with DEIS

Urban Band 1 status operate on a general average of 1 teacher for every 24 pupils. DEIS Urban Band 1 vertical schools, such as the school referred to by the Deputy, operate on a general average of 1 teacher for every 22 pupils.

The school referred to by the Deputy has a mainstream staffing of Principal and 2 classroom teachers and returned an enrolment of 61 for 30th September 2018. As a result, the school is operating on an average pupil teacher ratio of 1 classroom teacher to every 20.33 pupils, which is lower than the average allocation ratio of 22:1.

The general staffing allocation arrangements for 2019/20 are currently being finalised and will be available on my Department's website next month. At that stage, schools will be able to establish their staffing for the coming school year.

Apprenticeship Data

352. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of new registrations on craft based apprenticeships in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1201/19]

353. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of new apprenticeship programmes introduced in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1202/19]

354. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of new registrations on new apprenticeships programmes in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1203/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 352 to 354, inclusive, together.

The information requested by the Deputy is set out on the following tabular statement.

Apprenticeship Type	Number of Programmes introduced in 2018	Number of Registrations in 2018
New consortia	9	590
Craft	n/a	5,058
Total	9	5,648

Education and Training Boards

355. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the redevelopment of a barracks (details supplied); his plans for the site; the reason for the delay in the redevelopment plans; when proposals are likely to progress further; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1242/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I wish to confirm to the Deputy that my Department is continuing to engage with the local Education and Training Board (ETB) relating to a proposed project on the site to which she refers. My Department will be in further contact with the ETB relating to the proposed project.

Autism Support Services

356. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if funding will be provided to a school (details supplied) in County Kildare to complete a project. [1253/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The school referred to by the Deputy has already received the grant funding in question. The relevant start-up grant is provided at the time of the establishment of a new ASD class in a school for the purpose of setting up that class. It is a one-off grant in that context and has been provided to the school in respect of all the ASD classes sanctioned for it.

My officials have informed the school that the Department is not in a position to provide a further grant in those circumstances. The school has subsequently submitted an appeal to the Department which will be given due consideration and responded to in due course.

Teaching Qualifications

357. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the difficulties faced by teachers who have professionally trained abroad in trying to secure teaching posts here; the efforts under way to address the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1290/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The Teaching Council is the body with statutory authority to register teachers in this State, including those who have professionally trained abroad.

A person who has completed a teacher education qualification outside the State and is seeking to register with the Teaching Council must have their qualifications assessed to determine that they are comparable and equivalent to accredited qualifications in Ireland. Where shortfalls are identified, a teacher may seek the advice of the Teaching Council as to how the shortfalls should be addressed.

The Teaching Council considers applications from teachers who qualified outside Ireland, either in another EU/EEA member state or outside the EU/EEA, who are deemed fully qualified in the member state or home country. Each application is assessed individually by the Council.

EU/ EEA qualified teachers, in accordance with EU Directive 2005/36/EC, are entitled to have their qualifications recognised in all other member states. This recognition may be granted subject to conditions, including addressing any shortfalls. The Teaching Council is the competent authority in Ireland for assessing applications from people who qualified as teachers in other EU/EEA countries.

Currently the assessment and registration process for teachers qualified outside of Ireland may take up to 12 weeks from receipt of all application documentation and depending on the time of year. However one of the actions in the Teacher Supply Action Plan, which I published in November 2018, is for the Teaching Council to develop a more streamlined process for the registration of teachers qualified in jurisdictions outside the State. A number of approaches are being considered by the Council to streamline the registration process and achieve this action.

Further information on the registration requirement for teachers wishing to teach in Ireland are available on the teaching Council website at www.teachingcouncil.ie.

Schools Building Projects

358. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question no. 241 of 18 September 2018, if the accommodation needs of a school (details supplied) have been agreed; when a design team will be appointed for the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1330/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): As the Deputy is aware, a building project for the school to which he refers is included in my Department's 6 Year Construction Programme. In the context of progressing the building project, my Department undertook a technical site visit to the school.

Following the visit, my Department wrote to the school authority relating to the school's interim accommodation needs. The school subsequently advised that further consideration was needed on the matter and that they would revert to my Department in due course. A response is awaited, My Department has since written to the school seeking an indication as to when the school expects to be in a position to respond.

Schools Building Projects Status

359. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department has received the pre-qualification report in relation to the building of a school (details supplied); if so, if it has been approved; when tenders will be invited for the project from the shortlist of contractors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1331/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The major building project referred to by the Deputy is currently at Stage 2b - Detailed Design.

The pre-qualification process to select a shortlist of suitable contractors is now complete and the Design Team is currently completing work to ensure the new school building is NZEB compliant.

Once this work is complete the Department will be in contact with the Board of Management with a view to progressing the project to tender stage.

A tender stage normally takes between 7 and 8 months to complete.

Schools Building Projects Status

360. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the pre-qualification process for a school (details supplied) has been concluded; if so, if tenders have been invited for the project from the shortlist of contractors; if so, the closing date for receipt of tenders; when construction will commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1332/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The major building project referred to by the Deputy is at an advanced stage of architectural planning, Stage 2(b) - Detailed Design which includes the application for Planning Permission, Fire Cert and Disability Access Cert and the preparation of tender documents. All statutory approvals have been secured.

The outcome of the pre-qualification process has been notified to contractors who expressed interest in tendering for this project. Feedback and issues arising from same are currently being dealt with by the school and its Design Team. When this process has concluded the project will then be progressed to tender stage.

A tender stage normally takes between 7 and 8 months to complete.

Schools Building Projects Status

361. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the pre-qualification report for a school (details supplied) has been received; if the report has been approved; if tenders have been invited from the shortlist of contractors; if so, the closing date for receipt of tenders for the project; when construction will commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1333/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): As the Deputy may be aware, the project to which he refers has been devolved for delivery to Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board (KWETB).

The pre-qualification process for the project has now been completed by KWETB. Approval has been given for KWETB to proceed to issue tender documents to the shortlisted contractors in that respect. These can be expected to issue before the end of this quarter.

At this point, it is not possible to provide an accurate timeline either for completion of the tender process or for completion of any later stages of the project.

Schools Site Acquisitions

362. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the required clarifications have been received from the vendor of the site for schools (details supplied); if satisfactory, if a design team will be appointed for both projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1334/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): As previously confirmed to the Deputy, there is ongoing close engagement with Kildare County Council and discussions with the landowner of the proposed site. Due to commercial sensitivities relating to site acquisitions in general, I am not in a position to provide further details at this time.

Schools Building Projects

363. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a project manager has been procured for the ADAPT programme; if so, when the manager will contact a school (details supplied) to progress its school building project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1335/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): A building project for the school referred to by the Deputy is included in my Department's 6 year Construction Programme.

A project brief has been finalised and the project will be delivered via the ADAPT programme. The ADAPT programme uses a professional external Project Manager to coordinate and drive the respective design teams on each project.

In this regard, a tender competition is in train to establish a Project Manager framework which is expected to be in place by early March. The formulation of tender documentation is

underway and once the framework has been established a tender exercise will be carried out to appoint a Project Manager for this particular project.

All schools with projects on the ADAPT programme will be contacted shortly by my Department to provide an update on the status of their respective project. I wish to confirm to the Deputy that my Department is committed to providing a new school building for the school in question.

Schools Building Projects Status

364. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the pre-qualification report for a school (details supplied) has been received; if so, if it has been approved; when tenders will be invited for the project from the shortlist of contractors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1336/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The process of Pre-Qualification of contractors for the project in question is underway. For this particular project, pre-qualification of reserved specialists for the mechanical and electrical works is also required. The Pre-qualification process culminates in the compilation of shortlists of suitable candidates for each respective discipline.

The shortlist was submitted to my Department for review on January 11th 2019.

When this review is complete the project will then be progressed to tender stage which normally takes between 7 and 8 months to complete.

This project is included in the Department of Education and Skills' 6 year construction programme.

Schools Designation

365. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a decision has been made on the application by a school (details supplied) to become co-educational; if not, the issues delaying the sanctioning; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1337/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I can confirm to the Deputy that my Department has received an application from the Patron of the school in question for a change of status.

The application is currently under consideration and my Department will be in further contact with the Patron once a decision has been reached.

Schools Building Projects Status

366. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if tenders have been invited for the completion of the Maynooth Education Campus, Maynooth, County Kildare; the number of contractors from which tenders have been sought; the closing date for receipt of tenders for the project; when it is envisaged the successful contractor will be on site; if the completion date remains as June 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1340/19]

391. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position

in regard to Maynooth Education Campus having particular regard to the urgent need arising from the burgeoning population; the extent to which he expects work to proceed at an early date towards completion in line with expectations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1743/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I propose to take Questions Nos. 366 and 391 together.

As the Deputies will be aware, the project to which they refer has been devolved for delivery to Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board (KWETB).

A contractor is currently on site on the Maynooth campus completing the external fabric of both school buildings. Separately, the process of appointing a replacement contractor to complete the works is well underway. A pre-qualification process in that respect has been completed.

Tender documents are expected to issue to the shortlisted contractors in the next fortnight or so with a view to having a contractor on site in Q2, 2019. It is fully expected that the buildings will be available for occupation prior to September 2020.

Schools Site Acquisitions

367. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 137 of 21 November 2018, if agreement has been reached on a new site for the school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1341/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): As previously confirmed to the Deputy, a potential site for the school to which the Deputy refers has been identified and discussions are ongoing. Due to commercial sensitivities relating to site acquisitions in general, I am not in a position to provide further details at this time.

Schools Building Projects Status

368. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 115 of 9 October 2018, if tenders have been sought for the appointment of a design team for a school (details supplied); if so, the closing date for receipt of tenders; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1343/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The Deputy will be aware that the project to which he refers has been devolved for delivery to Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board (KWETB).

My Department has given approval to KWETB to proceed with the appointment of a Design Team for the project. That process is currently underway.

Gaelcholáistí Issues

369. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if it is still his plan that the north County Kildare Gaelcholáiste will open in September 2019 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1344/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Maynooth Community Col-

lege opened in 2014 with an Irish-medium Aonad and it was stated that should the Aonad demonstrate sufficient viability after four years from its date of establishment, a Gaelcholáiste would be established. As the Deputy will be aware, Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board (ETB) and An Foras Pátrúnachta had been working through the practical arrangements necessary to facilitate the establishment of a new Gaelcholáiste.

My Department received correspondence from both of these parties in December 2018 and is considering same in the context of the establishment of a new Gaelcholáiste. The Department is conscious of timelines for the establishment of a new school and of the need to provide parents in the area with certainty and intends to confirm arrangements for this coming September very shortly.

School Staff

370. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to ensure that a school (details supplied) retains its third mainstream classroom teacher in September 2019 due to extenuating circumstances; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1347/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The criteria used for the allocation of teaching posts is published annually on the Department website. The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September.

The staffing schedule operates in a clear and transparent manner and treats all similar types of schools equally irrespective of location.

The staffing schedule also includes an appeals mechanism for schools to submit a staffing appeal under certain criteria to an independent Appeals Board.

Staffing arrangements for the 2019/20 school year are currently being finalised and will be published on my Department's website next month. At that stage, schools will be able to establish their staffing for the coming school year and submit a staffing appeal to the Primary Staffing Appeals Board.

Student Universal Support Ireland Administration

371. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address concerns (details supplied) with regard to Student Universal Support Ireland, SUSI assessments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1446/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): My Department will provide circa €440m for measures to help people to access further and higher education in 2019.

The Report of the Expert Group on Future Funding (Cassells Report) clearly outlines the funding challenges in the higher education sector and offers a number of potential policy approaches for consideration. In order to build a political consensus regarding a future approach to funding the higher Education Sector the then Minister for Education and Skills referred the expert group report on future funding of higher education to the Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills for their consideration. The Committee requested that the Department undertake an economic examination of the three policy options proposed by the expert group to assist the Committee in forming its view of the most appropriate option.

In Q4 2018, my Department applied to the European Commission Structural Reform Support Programme (SRSP) which provides tailor-made support to all EU countries for their institutional, administrative and growth-enhancing reforms to carry out the analysis of the three policy options identified by the Expert Group. Formal decision-making by the European Commission on projects that have been successful in obtaining supporting is expected by end-February 2019.

Having this evaluation undertaken through the Commission's Structural Reform Support Programme will provide the type of international expertise, analysis, and objectivity that would be beneficial to a major evaluation of this nature.

Policy decisions in relation to the Student Grant Scheme will be considered in the wider context of the Cassells Report, however, the statutory based Student Grant Scheme and Student Support Regulations continue to be reviewed annually by my Department, following consultation with various stakeholders. Changes to the Student Support Act 2011 are also proposed under the Government's Brexit Contingency Action Plan; to ensure that eligible students attending colleges in the UK and eligible UK nationals studying here, continue to receive grant support.

It is anticipated that the Student Grant Scheme and Student Support Regulations for the 2019/20 academic year will be published in early April 2019. Students attending college in the academic year 2019/20 will be required to submit their grant application to SUSI (via www.susi.ie) to have their eligibility for grant assistance assessed.

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

Tax relief at the standard rate of tax may be claimed in respect of tuition fees paid for approved courses at approved colleges of higher education. Further information on this tax relief is available from the Revenue Commissioners at www.revenue.ie.

Oideachas trí Ghaeilge

372. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna an bhfuil sé i gceist aige casadh le heagraíocht (sonraí tugtha) chun cúrsaí oideachais trí Ghaeilge a phlé go ginearálta; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [1453/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Bheinn breá sásta cruinniú a bheith agam leis an eagraíocht seo chun oideachas trí mheán na Gaeilge a phlé leo.

Féadann siad dul i dteagmháil le m'oifig chun na socrúithe cuí a dhéanamh chuige seo.

Oideachas Gaeilge

373. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna cén fáth nach bhfuil an deontas do scoileanna Lán-Ghaeilge atá á íoc le scoileanna deonacha amháin á íoc freisin le scoileanna atá faoi chúram na gColáistí Oideachais agus Oiliúna, na bPobalscoileanna agus na Scoileanna Cuimsitheacha agus atá ag múineadh trí Ghaeilge (sonraí tugtha); agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [1454/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Sna socruithe cistiúcháin atá déanta ag an Roinn le haghaidh meánscoileanna deonacha, scoileanna cuimsitheacha agus pobail agus le haghaidh scoileanna agus coláistí na mBord Oideachais agus Oiliúna (BOO) léirítear na socruithe éagsúla bainistíochta agus úinéireachta a bhaineann le scoileanna an dara leibhéal.

Maoinítear meánscoileanna deonacha i scéim an tSaoroideachais, atá faoi úinéireacht agus bhainistíocht phríobháideach, trí dheontais per capita. Íoctar deontas per capita breise le scoileanna in earnáil na meánscoileanna deonacha ina múintear trí Ghaeilge go hiomlán nó i bpáirt. Ní hé seo an modh maoinithe áfach, a bhaineann le hearnálacha na scoileanna Pobail agus Cuimsitheacha ná le scoileanna na mBord Oideachais agus Oiliúna. I gcás na hEarnála Pobail agus Cuimsithí cuireann an Roinn maoiniú ar fáil ar bhonn buiséid atá bunaithe go príomha ar líon na scoláirí. Lena chois sin glactar san áireamh fachtóirí breise a athraíonn ó scoil go chéile, fachtóirí ar nós bail na bhfoirgneamh, méid na scoile srl.

Déantar leithdháiltí ar na BOO ar bhonn buiséid i ndáil le costais ardoifige agus costais eile lena n-áirítear iad siúd a bhaineann le scoileanna. Tugtar a lán neamhspleáchas do Bhoird Oideachais agus Oiliúna maidir le bainistiú agus leithreasú a gcuid buiséad agus tá cead ag gach BOO a chuid leithdháiltí a dháileadh amach de réir na dtosaíochtaí atá aige agus de réir a chuid riachtanas. Ní mór saincheisteanna maidir le maoiniú i dtaobh scoile ar leith a bhainistiú ó bhuiséad an Bhoid Oideachais agus Oiliúna lena mbaineann. Ní chuireann an Roinn leithdháiltí maoinithe ar leataobh do scoileanna aonair in earnáil na mBord Oideachais agus Oiliúna.

Tuigeann an Teachtaire Dála áfach go bhfuil tuilleadh feabhsuithe fógartha i mBuiséad 2019 sa mhéid go gcuirfear maoiniú caipitlíocha méadaithe ar fáil don earnáil scoile i gcomhair na scoilbhliana 2019/20 agus sna buiséid neamh-íoc san in earnáil na mBord Oideachais agus Oiliúna.

PQ 1454 2019 – Bi-lingual grant

The funding arrangements made by the Department for voluntary secondary, comprehensive and community and ETB schools and colleges reflect the different management and ownership arrangements that apply to schools at second level.

Voluntary secondary schools, in the Free Education scheme, which are privately owned and managed, are funded by way of per capita grants. An additional per capita grant is paid to schools in the voluntary secondary sector in which instruction is through the medium of Irish in full or in part. However, this is not the method of funding that applies to the Community and Comprehensive or the ETB sectors. In the case of the Community and Comprehensive Sector the Department provides funding on a budget basis that is based mainly on pupil numbers, but also takes into account additional factors which vary from school to school such as condition of buildings, size of school etc.

The ETB allocations are made on a budget basis in respect of head office and other costs, including those relating to schools. ETBs are given a high level of autonomy in the management and appropriation of their budgets and each ETB is allowed to distribute its allocations in line with its priorities and perceptions of need. Any funding issues for an individual school have to be managed from within the relevant ETB's budget. The Department does not earmark funding allocations for individual schools in the ETB sector.

However, the Deputy is aware of the further improvements announced in the 2019 Budget which will see increased capitation funding for the school sector for the 2019/20 school year and in the non-pay budgets in the ETB sector.

Broadband Service Provision

374. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of secondary schools that do not have access to high speed broadband. [1513/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The delivery of high quality internet connectivity for all schools is a key objective of my Department. It is accepted that good connectivity is essential to ensure that schools are facilitated to progress the embedding of digital technologies in teaching and learning and for the implementation of new and revised curriculum.

All post-primary schools and some special schools are now on high speed broadband through the Department's High Speed Broadband Programme, managed by HEAnet.

The need to improve broadband connectivity to primary schools is recognised in the Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020, and access to high speed broadband is one of the indicators identified in the Digital Strategy Action Plan. An interdepartmental working group has been established to determine how best to address broadband connectivity to primary schools in collaboration with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment, in the context of the National Broadband Plan and the Intervention Strategy, and proposed industry provision.

The policy of my Department through the Schools Broadband Access Programme is to offer the best quality connectivity to all schools in line with the technical solutions available in the market and within financial constraints. Currently investment of some €15m is allocated annually for the provision of internet connectivity to schools. As the deputy is no doubt aware broadband capacity can vary across geographical locations and is dependent on local infrastructure which can impact on the service that can be provided in individual schools.

The Department reviews the availability and quality of services and upgrades schools under the programme when the opportunity arises, in line with contractual and budgetary requirements. Currently, over 1,400 primary schools have been awarded download speeds of 30Mbps or greater (the baseline download speed required under the National Broadband Plan). This represents more than one third of all primary schools which is a significant improvement in recent years, given that less than 100 primary schools were on those speeds in 2012. Further schools are likely to be upgraded to those speeds in 2018, through EIR's 300K Rural Deployment commitment and industry provision.

Departmental Correspondence

375. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he received correspondence from a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; if a response to the correspondence has issued to the person; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1559/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): My officials have advised that no such correspondence has been received in my Department to date. If the Deputy wishes to supply any further information regarding the matter I will be happy to make enquiries.

Higher Education Schemes

376. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the measures

being taken to promote equality of opportunity in higher education; the efforts being made to remove barriers to accessing higher education and to promote greater participation by those under represented in the sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1560/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The National Access Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-2019 (NAP) was launched in December 2015, and it aims to ensure that the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels reflects the diversity and social mix of Ireland's population. Irish Travellers are identified as a target group within the Plan.

To support the implementation of the National Access Plan (NAP), the Department of Education and Skills (DES) established the *Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH)* fund in 2016. Through PATH the Government committed more than €16 million over three years to increase access to higher education by the target groups identified in the NAP and will see many new initiatives emerge that will support greater levels of access and participation.

I recently published a Progress Review of the NAP in which it has been recommended that the terms of the National Access Plan be extended by two years to 2021. This is necessary to allow for the implementation of the Access Data Plan and to ensure that the targets for the new National Access Plan are set based on the new data. Sufficient time needs to be provided for baseline data to be collected and verified. An extension of the term would also enable initiative such as PATH to be more fully implemented and evaluated, and allow learning outcomes to be used to inform the next National Access Plan.

The Department also provides a suite of supports costing in the region of €400 million that are intended to assist students from disadvantaged backgrounds, and other under-represented groups, to overcome financial barriers to accessing and completing Further and Higher Education. These supports include the student grants, the fund for students with disabilities, the student assistant fund and a number of bursary schemes.

The annual core grant allocation by the HEA to each higher education institution includes an access funding element which is based on the number of students from access target groups who are participating in each institution as derived from the return of annual student data by each institution to the HEA.

Summer Works Scheme

377. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount of funding allocated to a school (details supplied) under the most recent allocation of the summer works scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1567/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The school to which the Deputy refers has been granted funding under the most recent round of the Summer Works Scheme. The project has been devolved for delivery to the school authority so it is now a matter for the Board of Management to advance the design and construction work.

With regard to the funding allocated, this is commercially sensitive until the tender process for a contractor for the project has been completed.

School Catchment Areas

378. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to

request schools to provide information detailing individual school catchment areas for primary schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1569/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The question of enrolment in individual schools is the responsibility of the managerial authority of those schools and my Department does not seek to intervene in decisions made by schools in such matters. It is the responsibility of the managerial authorities of schools to implement an enrolment policy in accordance with the Education Act 1998 and the Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018.

My Department's main responsibility is to ensure that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all pupils seeking places. Parents have the right to choose which school to apply to and where the school has places available the pupil should be admitted. However, in schools where there are more applicants than places available a selection process may be necessary. This selection process and the enrolment policy on which it is based must be non-discriminatory and must be applied fairly in respect of all applicants. However, this may result in some pupils not obtaining a place in the school of their first choice.

As the Deputy is aware the Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018, which was signed into law by the President on the 18th July 2018, is an important piece of legislation which will introduce a more parent-friendly, equitable and consistent approach to how school admissions policy operates for the almost 4,000 primary and post-primary schools in this country and a fair and balanced school admission process for all pupils.

Schools Building Projects Status

379. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of developments at a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1593/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The major building project referred to by the Deputy is currently at an advanced stage of architectural planning, Stage 2(b) – Detailed Design.

The pre-qualification process to select a shortlist of suitable contractors is now complete and the Design Team has also completed the necessary work to ensure the new school building is NZEB compliant.

The project is currently being progressed to tender stage.

A tender stage normally takes between 7 and 8 months to complete.

Schools Amalgamation

380. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the amalgamation of the national schools in Cahir, County Tipperary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1594/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I wish to advise the Deputy that I understand the amalgamation process involving the schools, referred to, will be finalised with the delivery of the major school building project.

The building project will deliver a new 16 classroom primary school with special needs

unit. The project is currently at Stage 2b of the architectural planning process - detailed design stage. The statutory consents including planning permission, disability access certificate and fire safety certificate have been granted.

The process of Pre-Qualification of contractors for the project in question is underway. The pre-qualification process culminates in the compilation of a shortlist of suitable candidates for each respective discipline. The project will then be progressed to tender stage which normally takes between 7 and 8 months to complete.

Schools Refurbishment

381. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the dilapidated condition of a school building (details supplied); the timeline for the planned refurbishment and extension to the school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1608/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): As the Deputy may be aware, the project to which she refers has been devolved for delivery to the local Education and Training Board. The pre-qualification process for the appointment of contractors is ongoing. It is not possible to say exactly when the project will proceed to tender at least until the pre-qualification process has been completed.

Education and Training Boards

382. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department has inspected the conditions at a school (details supplied) with regard to safety regulations for ventilation and access to fire exits. [1609/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): As the Deputy may be aware, a building project to provide improved accommodation for the school to which she refers has been devolved to the local Education and Training Board (ETB) for delivery. The ETB has advised my Department that the pre-qualification process for the appointment of contractors for the project is ongoing.

I wish to confirm to the Deputy that my Department is not aware of the specific matters to which she refers.

Schools Health and Safety

383. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he is satisfied that all school buildings in the Fingal area meet fire and safety regulations. [1610/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The Department initiated a programme of fire safety assessments in 55 schools in Quarter 4 of 2017. This involved 30 schools constructed by Western Building Systems under Design and Build contracts and a representative sample of 25 other schools constructed over the last 20 years. A number of schools in the Fingal area were included in this assessment process. Fire Safety Consultants have visited all 55 schools and Fire Safety Assessment reports have been received in my Department.

The Fire Safety Consultants have engaged directly with the fire officers in their respective

local authorities to advise of remedial works planned and underway. The fire officers have broadly welcomed the Department's proactive approach to dealing with the issues highlighted and have indicated their acceptance of the course of action being followed, including the identified remediation works and the fact that the schools continue to be occupied on a day-to-day basis.

The assessments are intended to give a clear picture of whether there may be issues arising out of compliance with fire safety certificates in school buildings. The assessments focus on the conformance of the school building with relevant fire safety obligations, and where deemed necessary, on recommendations for remedial actions in order to satisfy those obligations. The reports identify various housekeeping, maintenance and remedial works to be addressed and the Department has engaged the services of KSN Project Managers with a full technical team including Architects, Engineers and Fire Safety Consultants, to organise and oversee any necessary remedial works. My Department has no reason to believe that there are issues with fire safety provisions in schools generally, including in the Fingal area. These additional steps are an added precaution being taken by my Department prompted by recent concerns in Ireland and abroad regarding fire safety in public buildings.

Energy Conservation

384. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of schools set to receive energy retrofits in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1613/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): In the National Development Plan (2018-2027) €2.5bn is identified for the refurbishment and construction of schools. Part of this is intended for a deep energy retrofit of schools built prior to 2008.

My Department and the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland are currently involved in an energy efficiency retrofit pilot scheme for schools. The longer-term outcome of this scheme will be to create an accurate and scalable model for energy efficient retrofits of schools across the country.

This pilot commenced in 2017 when ten schools received energy retrofits. In 2018, six schools received retrofits. For 2019 we are hoping to expand this programme and expect to make an announcement in that respect shortly.

Energy Conservation Measures delivered to date include fabric (roofs, walls, glazing and doors), heating (boilers, controls, Building Management systems), and electrical (LED lighting and solar PV).

Schools Building Projects Status

385. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress being made in providing a new school building for a school (details supplied); the timeline for this project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1618/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): A building project for the school referred to by the Deputy is included in my Department's 6 year Construction Programme.

A project brief is being finalised and the project will be delivered via the ADAPT pro-

gramme. The ADAPT programme uses a professional external Project Manager to coordinate and drive the respective design teams on each project.

In this regard, a tender competition is in train to establish a Project Manager framework which is expected to be in place by early March. The formulation of tender documentation is underway and once the framework has been established a tender exercise will be carried out to appoint a Project Manager for this particular project.

All schools with projects on the ADAPT programme will be contacted shortly by my Department to provide an update on the status of their respective project. I wish to confirm to the Deputy that my Department is committed to providing a new school building for the school in question.

Schools Building Projects Status

386. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide a progress report on a new school building project for schools (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1619/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The major building project referred to by the Deputy is at an advanced stage of architectural planning Stage 2b (Detailed Design). All statutory approvals have been secured.

The Stage 2(b) report was submitted to my Department in late September 2018 and following an initial review was deemed incomplete. The report has been returned to the Design Team for revision, along with guidance comments from my Department. The Design Team is currently completing work on a revised submission.

Upon receipt and review of the revised Stage 2(b) report, my Department will advise the Board of Management of the timeline for the progression of this project to tender and construction.

Schools Site Acquisitions

387. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress that has been made in identifying and securing a site for a new school building for a school (details supplied) in County Dublin; if this project is now included on the schools building work programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1620/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): As the Deputy is aware, my Department is currently in the process of acquiring additional land owned by South Dublin County Council adjoining the site of this school. While a building project for this school is not on the current schools building works programme, the additional land offers the potential to enhance current facilities and support future development. There is ongoing engagement with officials from South Dublin County Council on this matter.

School Textbooks

388. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the estimated amount it would cost in 2019 if the budget for school books grant increased by 20%; and if he

will make a statement on the matter. [1643/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The estimated cost of a 20% increase in the book grant for primary and post-primary schools is circa €20m.

The Department provides a book grant to all recognised primary and post primary schools within the Free Education Scheme in order to provide assistance for books including Book Rental Schemes.

Under this scheme, the Department provided funding of €16.7 million in 2018 to all of these schools. It is a matter for the Board of Management of each individual school to decide on its own policy in relation to the use of this funding in the school but they are expected to adopt a cost-conscious approach to the selection of books for use in their classes. The current arrangement relies on the local knowledge of the school in order to ensure a fair allocation of funds to those most in need. The arrangements in relation to this scheme are set out in Circular 0046/2013 which is published on the Department's website at http://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0046_2013.pdf

School Transport Provision

389. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding school transport in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1657/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): School transport is a significant operation managed by Bus Éireann on behalf of the Department.

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

There are currently over 117,500 children, including over 13,000 children with special educational needs, transported in over 5,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually.

In general children are eligible for school transport if they meet the distance criteria and are attending their nearest school.

Children who are eligible for school transport and who have completed the application process on time are accommodated on school transport services where such services are in operation for the 2019/20 school year.

Children who are not eligible for school transport may apply for transport on a concessionary basis only and will be facilitated where spare seats are available after eligible children have been accommodated.

In cases where the Department is satisfied that the nearest school is full, eligibility for school transport will be determined based on the distance that children reside from their next nearest school having regard to ethos and language. Further information in this regard is available on my Department's website www.education.ie.

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

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

390. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a matter with regard to the pupil-teacher ratio in a school (details supplied) will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1680/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The criteria used for the allocation of teaching posts is published annually on the Department website. The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September.

The staffing schedule operates in a clear and transparent manner and treats all similar types of schools equally irrespective of location.

The staffing schedule also includes an appeals mechanism for schools to submit a staffing appeal under certain criteria to an independent Appeals Board.

Staffing arrangements for the 2019/20 school year are currently being finalised and will be published on my Department's website next month. At that stage, schools will be able to establish their staffing for the coming school year and submit a staffing appeal to the Primary Staffing Appeals Board.

Question No. 391 answered with Question No. 366.

Departmental Correspondence

392. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the customer complaints received by his Department in each of the years since 2016; if the complaints are grouped into categories; the nature of the complaints; the resolution of same; and the number progressed to the relevant Ombudsman in each of the years since 2016. [1870/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): My Department aims to consistently provide high quality services to customers, as outlined in our Customer Charter. The complaints procedure in place in my Department is designed to address instances when our customers are dissatisfied with the service they have received. It guides staff in investigating and responding to all complaints and, where possible, advises on resolution of complaints.

My Department published its complaints procedure on the Department's website. This procedure informs customers how to make a complaint and the steps involved once the complaint has been made. Complaints can be made to any member of staff in relation to the service received. If a customer is not satisfied that a complaint has been dealt with at the point of service, he/she can make a formal complaint to my Department's Customer Services Unit. <https://www.education.ie/en/The-Department/Customer-Service/Customer-Complaints-Procedures.pdf>.

The number of formal complaints received by my Department in 2016, 2017, 2018 and to date in 2019 are as follows:

2016 - 5 formal complaints received, none progressed to the Ombudsman

2017 - 4 formal complaints received, none progressed to the Ombudsman

2018 - 3 formal complaints received, none progressed to the Ombudsman

to-date 2019 - 2 formal complaints received and ongoing

Complaints received in years 2016 - 2018 did not progress to the Ombudsman as they were resolved locally within the Department. Further details are contained in the following table.

Year	Nature of complaint	Date resolved	Progressed to Ombudsman/n
2016	Insufficient response to a query.	04/04/2016	N
2016	Alleged insufficient certification	08/06/2016	N
2016	Incremental credit issue	12/10/2018	N
2016	Complaint regarding service received	03/05/2016	N
2016	Payment issue	13/10/2016	N
2017	Enrolment issue	05/07/2017	N
2017	Board of Management issue	15/03/2017	N
2017	Assessment issue	02/06/2017	N
2017	Assessment issue	02/06/2017	N
2018	Payment complaint	04/07/2018	N
2018	Assessment issue	21/12/2018	N
2018	Complaint regarding customer service received	12/11/2018	N
2019	Grant decision complaint	Ongoing	Ongoing
2019	Inspection issue	Ongoing	Ongoing

Parental Leave

393. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding the forthcoming legislation on parental leave; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1105/19]

481. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when legislation (details supplied) in relation to parental leave will be implemented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1563/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 393 and 481 together.

It is important to note that the Government has always been, and continues to be, supportive of the principle of Parental Leave. In fact, as part of Budget 2019, the Government announced the introduction of a new paid parental leave scheme, which will commence later this year. This new scheme will initially provide two weeks of paid, non-transferable leave per parent, with a view to expanding the scheme and increasing the number of weeks of paid leave for both parents in future years.

During the debate in Dáil Éireann on the Parental Leave (Amendment) Bill 2017, I strongly suggested that the relevant Oireachtas Committee would carry out detailed pre-legislative scrutiny on this Bill. If this had occurred, it would have allowed all stakeholders to scrutinise the

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proposed legislation and to report on any policy or legal issues which may have been identified. It is my view that this is what should happen with all such legislation. Unfortunately, this scrutiny did not take place and it has now arisen that a number of Government Departments have raised certain issues which need to be clarified.

Subsequently, it has been brought to my attention that the Bill's sponsors have decided not to proceed with the Committee Stage in the Seanad at this time.

Taxi Licences

394. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the length of time applications for taxi licences are taking to be processed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1363/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Small Public Service Vehicle (SPSV) industry in Ireland is regulated by the National Transport Authority in accordance with the provisions of the Taxi Regulation Act, 2013, which falls under the remit of my colleague, the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, Mr. Shane Ross, T.D.

An Garda Síochána is currently deemed the licensing authority under section 6 (2) of the Taxi Regulation Act 2013.

As such, the Deputy will appreciate that I, as Minister for Justice and Equality, have no role in the administration of SPSV licences.

However, to be of assistance I have requested the current processing time for SPSV licences from An Garda Síochána and will respond to you directly on receipt of a Garda report.

Taxi Licences

395. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when an application by a person (details supplied) for a taxi licence will be processed. [1364/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will appreciate that I, as Minister for Justice and Equality, have no role in the administration of Small Public Service Vehicle (SPSV) licences, which is a matter for An Garda Síochána. However, to be of assistance I have been in contact with the Garda Authorities to make the necessary enquiries in respect of the individual case the Deputy has raised.

I have been informed that this application for a licence was received in Newbridge Garda Station on the 8 January 2019, and is currently being processed by An Garda Síochána in accordance with current legislation. It is estimated that the licence will be processed by 18 January 2019.

I would also advise that, in the first instance, queries in relation to such matters be directed to the Garda Station at which the application was made.

Child Detention Centres

396. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of occasions on which An Garda Síochána were called to respond to an incident at Oberstown Deten-

tion Centre in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019; and the Garda unit which attended on each occasion. [54036/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have requested the information from the Garda authorities and I will contact the Deputy directly when this information is to hand.

Wards of Court

397. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of applications in each of the past five years for wards of courts; the number approved by the courts; the number of these cases contested by persons opposing the wardship; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54095/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy is 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 provided the following figures for wardship applications and declarations for persons over the age of 18 in the last 5 years:

Adult Wardship Applications and Declarations

-	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Applications for Wardship *	367	369	344	294	409
Wardship Declarations	309	219	289	325	321

Note: * Application is a case where a petition or other application for wardship has been submitted and President of the High Court has signed an inquiry order directing that an inquiry be made into the capacity of the respondent.

The Courts Service has advised that there is a difference between the number of applications initiated and the number of declarations over the period. The most common reason for this is that many respondents in wardship applications are persons over 70 years of age. An application can take some months to complete and it often happens that the respondent passes away between the date of the application but prior to a declaration order being made. The Courts Service has informed me that objections to applications for wardship are not common and have only arisen in adult wardship cases. However, the Courts Service does not maintain statistics on the number of objections lodged, although it is estimated that approximately 10 such objections were lodged in 2018. The Courts Service has further advised that any such objections must be grounded on medical evidence.

In terms of persons under the age of 18, the Courts Service has informed me that it does not maintain statistics on the number of minor wardship applications but has confirmed that all such applications are dealt with promptly and without delay. The Courts Service has provided the following figures for minor wardship declarations in the last 5 years:

Minor Wardship Declarations

-	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Wardship Declarations	12	19	21	26	23

Naturalisation Applications

398. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if an appraisal of application for stamp 4 and naturalisation will be arranged in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54115/18]

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.

Representations received from the applicant, together with all other information and documentation on file, will be fully considered, 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.

Naturalisation Eligibility

399. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if an application for stamp 4 and regularisation of residency and eligibility for naturalisation will be re-examined in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54116/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned has been granted permission to remain in the State, on immigration Stamp 3 conditions, for the period to 15 August 2019. This decision was conveyed in writing to the person concerned by letter dated 15 August 2013.

The decision to grant such status was arrived at following the detailed consideration of the case of the person concerned, as well as the cases of all family members involved, under Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended). This decision would have had regard for all information and documentation on file at the time the decision was made.

It will be open to the person concerned to apply for the renewal of that permission in advance of its expiry date. However, I am advised that the INIS would be prepared to review the case of the person concerned in circumstances where they presented documentary evidence to show that they had a concrete offer of paid employment available to them. The Deputy will appreciate that any such offer of paid employment must be on the prospective employer's headed paper; it must describe the specific position being offered; it must set out the proposed salary or salary scale; it must provide an indication that any such position is available immediately, is whole-time and is not subject to seasonal factors. Upon receipt of documentary evidence of the

nature described, the INIS will undertake a review of the case of the person concerned.

Further, it will be open to the person concerned to apply to the Citizenship Section of my Department for a Certificate of Naturalisation when she is in a position to meet the lawful residency criteria applicable to the lodgement of such applications. Details on the criteria to be met by persons lodging such applications are available from my Department's Website (www.justice.ie).

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

Residency Permits

400. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the action that can be taken to regularise residency in the case of a person (details supplied); if temporary residency status can issue in the case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54118/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that it would appear that the person's presence in the State is unlawful. INIS has no record of a request for permission to reside in respect of the person concerned.

The Deputy will appreciate that, under the relevant provisions of the Immigration Act, 2004, a non-national may not be in the State other than within the terms of a permission from the Minister for Justice and Equality.

In order to allow for a full examination of the individual circumstances, the person concerned should write to Unit 2, Domestic Residence and Permissions Division, INIS, 13/14 Burgh Quay, Dublin 2 and provide a detailed account and documentary evidence of their personal circumstances since their arrival in this State.

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

401. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the procedure to be followed to facilitate regularisation of residency in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54119/18]

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), the person concerned has not submitted written representations.

The position in the State of the person concerned will now be decided by reference to the provisions of Section 3 (6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and all other applicable legislation. If any representations are submitted, they will be considered before a final decision is 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.

Naturalisation Applications

402. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the procedure to be followed to achieve Irish citizenship in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54121/18]

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 an application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy. A determination on whether an applicant satisfies the statutory criteria attendant to naturalisation can only be made after an application is received.

It is open to any individual to lodge an application for a certificate of naturalisation if and when they are in a position to meet the statutory requirements as prescribed in the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended, which governs the granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation.

Detailed information on Irish citizenship and naturalisation, as well as the relevant application forms, is available on the INIS website at www.inis.gov.ie. The website also contains guidance on the completion of an application for naturalisation and an on-line naturalisation residency calculator which individuals may find of assistance in establishing if the statutory residency requirements are met.

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

403. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in the determination of an application pursuant to section 3(11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54126/18]

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 con-

cerned is the subject of a Deportation Order signed on 25 August 2017.

Representations were received on behalf of the person concerned requesting that the deportation order be revoked, pursuant to the provisions of Section 3(11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended). This request will be considered as soon as possible.

The Deputy might wish to note that the decision to ensue from the consideration of this request will be to have the existing deportation order 'affirmed' or 'revoked'. Once such a decision has been made, this decision will be notified in writing. In the meantime, the deportation order remains valid and in place.

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.

Prison Service Data

404. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the numbers of prisoners kept in Cork prison on a monthly basis from January 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54135/18]

405. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of prisoners in Cork prison sleeping on mattresses on a monthly basis since January 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54136/18]

406. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on the constant overcrowding in Cork prison; if concerns have been raised in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54137/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 404 to 406, inclusive, together.

I wish to inform the Deputy that the two sets of statistics requested are provided in the following tables.

I can further inform the Deputy that Cork Prison is the main committal prison for male prisoners from the counties of Cork, Kerry and Waterford and that the current operational capacity figure for the Prison is 296. In 2018 the average daily population figure was 288.

The Deputy will appreciate that prison Governors are required by law to accept all prisoners into their custody who have been committed to prison by the Courts. The Irish Prison Service therefore has no control over the numbers committed to custody at any given time.

The actual number of beds available on a given day can be less than the capacity figure as cells may be unavailable for different reasons such as repairs and maintenance. Furthermore, where local management assess a prisoner as being unsuited to share a cell for reasons of vulnerability or propensity to violence, a cell designated as being operationally suitable for two prisoners may, temporarily, house only one prisoner.

Where the number of prisoners exceeds the maximum capacity in any prison, my officials make every effort to deal with this through a combination of inter-prison transfers and struc-

tured Temporary Release.

Decisions in relation to temporary release are considered on a case by case basis and the safety of the public is paramount when those decisions are made.

The numbers of prisoners accommodated in Cork prison on a monthly basis for 2018

Month	Average Daily Number of Prisoners
January	285
February	288
March	293
April	282
May	289
June	295
July	295
August	290
September	275
October	278
November	291
December	293

Stats Mattresses

-	Jan-18	Feb-18	Mar-18	Apr-18	May-18	Jun-18	Jul-18	Aug-18	Sep-18	Oct-18	Nov-18	Dec-18
1st	0	0	0	0	0	0	14	1	0	0	1	3
2nd	0	0	0	0	0	0	20	0	0	0	1	4
3rd	0	0	0	0	0	0	21	0	0	0	2	1
4th	0	0	0	0	0	0	21	0	0	0	0	6
5th	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	0	0	0	0	8
6th	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	7
7th	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	8
8th	0	0	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	6
9th	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
10th	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	4	0	0	0	4
11th	0	0	0	0	4	5	0	0	0	0	0	3
12th	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	3	0	0	0	2
13th	0	0	0	0	3	0	3	3	0	0	3	2
14th	0	0	3	0	2	1	0	3	0	0	0	0
15th	0	4	0	0	1	0	0	3	0	0	5	0
16th	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	4	5
17th	0	0	0	0	5	1	10	0	0	0	1	0
18th	0	0	0	0	0	1	7	0	0	0	2	0
19th	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
20th	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
21st	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	3	1
22nd	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0
23rd	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0

-	Jan-18	Feb-18	Mar-18	Apr-18	May-18	Jun-18	Jul-18	Aug-18	Sep-18	Oct-18	Nov-18	Dec-18
24th	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	0	0	0	5	0
25th	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	0	0	0	2	1
26th	0	3	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0
27th	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	1
28th	0	0	0	0	0	14	0	0	0	0	5	0
29th	0	N/A	0	0	0	16	0	0	0	0	1	1
30th	0	N/A	0	0	0	14	0	0	0	0	1	1
31st	0	N/A	0	N/A	0	N/A	0	0	N/A	0	N/A	0

Garda Stations

407. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a new Garda station is being considered within an area (details supplied) in County Dublin by the Garda Accommodation Board. [54177/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will appreciate that the Garda Commissioner is primarily responsible for the effective and efficient use of the resources available to An Garda Síochána and for carrying on and managing and controlling generally the administration and business of An Garda Síochána. This includes responsibility for the formulation of proposals in relation to the opening and closing of Garda stations, taking into account crime trends and policing priorities, to ensure that the best possible use is made of these resources. As Minister, I have no direct role in these matters.

I can confirm to the Deputy that the Garda Building and Refurbishment Programme 2016-2021 does not include provision for development of a new Garda station at Cherrywood.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that the determination of the need for a new Garda Station at any location, including Cherrywood, would be considered by An Garda Síochána in light of a range of factors including policing priorities and the overall accommodation requirements of the organisation, including in the context of the ongoing expansion of the Garda workforce.

Domestic Violence Policy

408. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combatting violence against women and domestic violence will be ratified. [54185/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Programme for Government includes a commitment to implement the Istanbul Convention as a significant legal instrument in the fight against domestic and sexual violence and ratifying the Convention is a Government priority.

The Criminal Law (Extraterritorial Jurisdiction) Bill 2018 is the final legislative action required to enable Ireland to ratify the Istanbul Convention. This technical piece of legislation provides for individuals who commit particular offences abroad being liable to be prosecuted under Irish law. These include offences under the Non-Fatal Offences Against the Person Act 1997 and the Criminal Law (Rape) (Amendment) Act 1990, as well as murder and manslaughter.

ter. This Bill passed second stage in the Seanad on 18 December and the Minister's aim is that the legislation will be enacted speedily to ensure ratification of the Istanbul Convention in early 2019.

The ratification of the Istanbul Convention will send an important message that Ireland will not tolerate violence against women and domestic violence, and is committed to protecting and supporting victims of this violence.

Direct Provision System

409. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the steps being taken to ensure that residents in direct provision centres are being advised of their right to vote in local elections in 2019; and the way in which contact with candidates will be facilitated in order that residents can engage fully with the democratic process. [54193/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): The Reception and Integration Agency, which is responsible for the operating of accommodation centres, provides information to residents regarding the rights of those living in state provided accommodation to vote in various elections and referenda. The most recent circular was completed in the third quarter of 2018 and sent to all centres for display in the public areas and on notice boards where residents can view it. It outlines eligibility to vote based on the residence and legal status of those living in the accommodation. It also details how to check the register and how to apply for inclusion on the electoral register.

This circular also covers canvassing by politicians during elections and states "Political representatives may, if they wish, provide their contact details or details of political meetings outside the centre." It also states that canvassers and politicians may leave material "on the public notice board / tables in the accommodation centre for the information of residents."

In keeping with the standard rules regarding votes, this can only be done within the 30 day period leading up to a referendum or election (local, national or European).

Garda Deployment

410. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if An Garda Síochána has been given a role or directives by his Department for the eviction of families from homes, farms and businesses. [54195/18]

411. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason An Garda Síochána is being employed to implement the eviction of families by private banks; if the State receives payment from these banks for the actions of An Garda Síochána; and if An Garda Síochána has a role in vetting the security personnel employed by the banks that carry out these evictions. [54196/18]

412. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his attention has been drawn to the fact that Garda involvement in eviction actions can do significant damage to the relationship that exists between An Garda Síochána and residents in rural and urban areas. [54197/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 410 to 412, inclusive, together.

At the outset, I can advise the Deputy that no directives have been issued by my Department to An Garda Síochána in matters relating to repossessions, and it is certainly not correct to say that An Garda Síochána are being employed to implement evictions.

The removal of individuals from property is not conducted by An Garda Síochána. Their role in relation to repossessions is to uphold the law in facilitating an order of the Court to be carried out safely, to ensure public order and to facilitate peaceful protests where they arise. The law and procedures governing the execution of Court Orders are contained in the Enforcement of Court Orders Acts and the Rules of Court made thereunder and any dispute in relation to the enforcement of a Court Order is a matter for the Courts.

As the Deputy will no doubt be aware, the persons in attendance at recent repossessions at North Frederick Street and more recently in Roscommon were not subject to regulation by the Private Security Authority (PSA). However, following these incidents, I convened a Working Group chaired by a senior official from my Department to examine the administrative, legislative, resources, security and any other matters necessary with a view to bringing the regulation and licensing of security personnel assisting those enforcing court orders within the remit of the PSA. The group have been requested to report to me by January 2019.

Departmental Expenditure

413. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the cost incurred by his Department in 2018 for the use of taxi services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54214/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): In 2018, my Department spent €173,043.90 on taxi services. This expenditure included expenditure for a wide range of agencies and other bodies funded from the Justice Vote, including the Criminal Assets Bureau, Data Protection Commissioner, Forensic Science Laboratory, Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission, Insolvency Service of Ireland, International Protection Appeals Tribunal, National Disability Authority, Probation & Welfare Service and the Property Services Regulatory Authority.

The most recent contract for taxi services was put in place in September 2018, following a procurement competition operated by the Office of Government Procurement.

Use of the taxi contract is governed by a policy issued to all staff - the Departmental taxi account is only used where absolutely essential and where public transport or other cheaper alternatives are either not available or are not viable.

Land Ownership

414. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to address the issue of unauthorised access to lands by persons without permission; and his further plans to introduce further changes to protect landowners from unauthorised entries. [54223/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The general legal position in relation to trespass is that it is a civil wrong and, for the most part, can be addressed by means of a civil remedy through the courts.

However, trespass may be dealt with under criminal law in certain circumstances and a range of offences are already provided in legislation.

The Criminal Justice (Public Order) Act 1994, as amended, contains provisions specifically relating to the unauthorised entry onto and occupation of land. Part IIA of that Act, comprising sections 19A to 19H, as inserted by the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2002, provides for offences in relation to illegal trespass and occupation of land which result in a range of specified adverse consequences. Such land includes privately owned land and public land provided or maintained by a statutory body. The legislation empowers the Garda Síochána to direct trespassers to leave the land concerned and, if necessary, remove any object belonging to them from the occupied land. A person who is guilty of an offence under this Part of the Act is liable on summary conviction to a fine of up to €4,000 or a term of imprisonment of up to one month, or both.

The Prohibition of Forcible Entry and Occupation Act 1971 also contains provisions relating to trespass. Under this Act it is an offence to forcibly enter land, including buildings, or remain in forcible occupation, or to encourage or advocate the commission of such an offence. The word “forcibly” is defined as using or threatening to use force in relation to persons or property, and such action is not necessarily linked to any other crime. A person guilty of a first offence under the Act is liable on summary conviction to a fine of up to €500 or imprisonment for a term of up to 6 months, or both. A second or subsequent offence under the Act is punishable, on summary conviction, by a fine of up to €1,000 or imprisonment for a term of up to 12 months, or both. Conviction on indictment for an offence under the Act can result in a fine of up to €5,000 or a prison term of up to 3 years, or both.

These are significant legislative provisions and penalties in relation to trespass; however, the law is kept under review. The provisions relating to trespass and occupation of land that were inserted into the 1994 Act were brought forward by the then Minister for the Environment and Local Government, and no doubt my colleague the current Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government will also keep these matters under review.

Data Protection Commissioner

415. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he has received requests for additional staff or extra resources from the Data Protection Commission; his plans to review the adequacy of the staffing levels and resources at the Commission, particularly in view of a recent announcement by a company (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54224/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): In recognition of Ireland’s commitment to deliver effective data protection regulation and protection of the data privacy rights of EU citizens, the Government has made clear that the existence in Ireland of a professional and competent data protection regulator is a critical enabler to the development and growth of our digital economy. Consequently, the Government has demonstrated this commitment by providing significant additional resources, in terms of funding and staff resources, to the Data Protection Commission (DPC) in recent years.

In Budget 2019, the DPC was allocated €15.2 million which is an increase of more than 30% over its allocation in 2018. The 2019 budget allocation is approximately eight times the €1.9 million allocated to the then Office of the Data Protection Commissioner in 2014 and a doubling of the DPC’s 2017 allocation. This very significant increase in budgetary provision demonstrates the Government’s continuing commitment to meeting the funding requirements of the Irish data protection authority.

The DPC will have approximately 130 staff by the end of January 2019. It is envisaged that

its staff numbers will grow to circa 170 by the end of 2019; this is in line with the budgetary submission that the DPC made to my Department in late 2018 which my officials then considered in conjunction with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

The Government is committed to keeping the resourcing of the DPC under on-going review. My Department will continue to monitor the impact of implementation of the GDPR, the impact of any possible future regulatory changes as well as any changes within industry, in conjunction with the DPC, to ensure that the DPC continues to have the resources required to fulfil its important, statutory objectives.

Garda Reserve

416. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when applicants for the Garda reserves that applied in April 2017 will be called to complete their full training; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54226/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Under the Garda Síochána Act 2005, the allocation of resources including the recruitment and training of Garda members and members of the Garda Reserve is entirely a matter for the Garda Commissioner and I, as Minister, have no responsibility in this matter.

An Garda Síochána has indicated that a training class of approximately 100 Garda Reserves will commence training in the first quarter of 2019.

It should also be noted that to inform future decisions around the use of the Reserve, An Garda Síochána is currently conducting a strategic review as a matter of priority. This approach is in line with the recommendation in the Report of the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland.

On 18 December 2018, the Government endorsed the report of the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland and agreed to accept all 157 key recommendations contained in the report, including those related to the Garda Reserve. On 18 December 2018 I also published a four year high level plan, ‘*A Policing Service for the Future*’, which sets out the approach to implementation of the Commission’s recommendations. The Strategic Review of the Garda Reserve will be one of the key issues advanced throughout 2019.

Garda Recruitment

417. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to alter the age requirement for trainee members of An Garda Síochána. [54227/18]

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 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.

Garda Training

418. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the basis upon which the different pass levels in the fitness bleep test for Garda on probation have been set; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54233/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for An Garda Síochána including the training of the members and staff and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter.

I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that all Gardaí recruited since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014 undertake the new 2 year training programme which leads to a Bachelor of Arts in Applied Policing and is accredited by the University of Limerick. The programme is the outcome of a comprehensive review of foundation training for entrants to An Garda Síochána and exemplifies best practice.

As part of the Professional Competence Module of the BA in Applied Policing, probationer Gardaí must pass a fitness assessment. This assessment, which has been in place since the inception of the BA in Applied Policing in 2014, was devised by the Department of Health, Sport and Exercise Science at Waterford Institute of Technology. It is a fair and attainable assessment and ensures probationer Gardaí have the physical capacity to perform the full range of physical duties for which they are responsible, such as pursuing fleeing suspects and controlling persons who resist arrest.

I understand that the assessment requires probationer Gardaí to complete a shuttle test, otherwise known as the “fitness bleep test” which measures cardio fitness and involves continuous running between two lines 20 metres apart in time to recorded beeps which decrease every minute. The probationer Gardaí also complete tests to measure muscular endurance involving the performance of a number of press ups and sit ups subject to a time limit. The level of fitness required to pass each test is adjusted to take account of age and gender.

Prison Service Data

419. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of prisoners kept in the new Cork prison above the peak capacity figure throughout 2018; the reason the peak capacity figure was breached; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54235/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I wish to inform the Deputy that the statistics requested in relation to the number of prisoners kept in Cork prison above the peak capacity figure throughout 2018 are provided on the following table.

I can advise the Deputy that Cork Prison is the committal prison for male prisoners from the counties of Cork, Kerry and Waterford and that the current operational bed capacity figure for the Prison is 296. In 2018 the average daily population figure was 288.

The Deputy will appreciate that prison Governors are required by law to accept all prisoners into their custody who have been committed to prison by the Courts. The Irish Prison Service therefore has no control over the numbers committed to custody at any given time.

Finally, I am further advised by my officials in the Irish Prison Service that the actual number of beds available on a given day can be less than the capacity figure as cells may be unavailable for different reasons such as repairs and maintenance. Furthermore, where local manage-

ment assess a prisoner as being unsuited to share a cell for reasons of vulnerability or propensity to violence, a cell designated as being operationally suitable for two prisoners may, temporarily, house only one prisoner.

Where the number of prisoners exceeds the maximum capacity in any prison, my officials make every effort to deal with this through a combination of inter-prison transfers and structured Temporary Release.

Decisions in relation to temporary release are considered on a case by case basis and the safety of the public is paramount when decisions are made.

Date	Number in Custody	Number above 296 capacity
27th February 2018	299	3
28th February 2018	299	3
1st March 2018	299	3
2nd March 2018	301	5
5th March 2018	301	5
15th March 2018	304	8
22nd March 2018	298	2
23rd March 2018	299	3
26th March 2018	297	1
27th March 2018	301	5
14th May 2018	298	2
15th May 2018	299	3
16th May 2018	299	3
17th May 2018	303	7
11th June 2018	298	2
12th June 2018	299	3
13th June 2018	300	4
14th June 2018	300	4
21st June 2018	298	2
26th June 2018	299	3
27th June 2018	303	7
28th June 2018	307	11
29th June 2018	310	14
2nd July 2018	313	17
3rd July 2018	310	14
4th July 2018	314	18
17th July 2018	300	4
18th July 2018	297	1
19th July 2018	297	1
20th August 2018	300	4
8th November 2018	297	1
15th November 2018	298	2
4th December 2018	301	5
5th December 2018	301	5
6th December 2018	303	7

Date	Number in Custody	Number above 296 capacity
7th December 2018	303	7
10th December 2018	299	3
11th December 2018	298	2
12th December 2018	297	1
Total		195

Private Security Authority

420. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans in relation to improvements regarding the regulation and licensing of personnel enforcing court orders by the Private Security Authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54238/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have convened a working group to examine the administrative, legislative, resource, security and other matters necessary to bring the regulation and licensing of security personnel assisting those enforcing court orders within the remit of the Private Security Authority.

I expect to receive a report from the group, which is chaired by a senior official in my Department, shortly. I will consider the matter further when this report is received and take all the necessary and appropriate steps to ensure the regulations are robust and comprehensive.

Direct Provision Data

421. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of parents and children in direct provision centres nationally in each of the years 2016 to 2018; the number of parents and children ready to move out of the direct provision centres but awaiting appropriate or affordable housing in each of the years 2016 to 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54240/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): The statistical information requested by the Deputy is as follows:

Year	Parents	Children	Total
2016	899	1219	2118
2017	1007	1312	2319
2018	1179	1613	2792

It is important to note that not all of those who apply for international protection choose to reside in accommodation provided by the Reception and Integration Agency. There are also people residing in RIA accommodation who are no longer in the protection process (such as those who have received international protection status, or have Deportation Orders issued against them and are obliged to remove themselves from the State).

Some 12% of the people currently residing in the accommodation centres provided by RIA, over 700 people, have permission to remain in Ireland.

The Reception and Integration Agency does not have details of those awaiting appropriate or affordable housing as matters of housing comes under the remit for each local authority.

Where an individual or family has permission to remain in Ireland they can access the mainstream housing supports and services on the same basis as nationals/European Economic Area

nationals.

Considerable work continues to be done to support residents with status to move out of accommodation centres and to secure permanent accommodation in the community. A number of NGOs have been awarded funding specifically to assist and support residents with international protection status move out of accommodation centres into longer term accommodation.

Closed-Circuit Television Systems

422. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the initial cost of a Garda controlled CCTV system; and the estimated annual cost of same. [54256/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, decisions in relation to the provision and allocation of Garda resources, including the installation of Garda CCTV systems, are a matter for the Garda Commissioner in the light of his identified operational demands. As Minister, I have no direct role in that matter.

I understand from the Garda authorities that it is difficult to provide the specific figure requested, as the requirements for each proposed CCTV system depend on a range of location-specific factors. A specification and associated projected cost could be estimated only following full survey and design.

In particular, I am informed that CCTV systems are complex by their nature. I am informed that among the key issues to be considered in any case and which would impact on costs are the physical nature of the areas to be covered by CCTV, provision of a suitable gantry or pole where necessary, the availability of electrical power and availability of a network route to transmit the CCTV images to the Garda control point and to transmit commands to the camera in the case of remote control.

Accordingly, given the range of factors which can impact on costs, it is not possible to provide an initial or annual cost for Garda controlled CCTV systems. However, I can confirm that the Garda Vote contains an annual allocation of some €1.5 million for the maintenance and upgrade of Garda CCTV systems.

Departmental Staff Training

423. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the training for INIS and GNIB officials that deals specifically with racial profiling; if training is provided as to the way in which to deal with and treat foreign nationals with respect; and the way in which persons that have negative experiences based on racial profiling or inappropriate comments can make a complaint or seek redress. [54369/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I wish to make clear at the outset that officers of the Irish Naturalisation Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department or the Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB) do not engage in racial profiling.

Officers of GNIB and INIS undergo customer service training that includes training on awareness of different cultures and dealing with customers from other backgrounds in a culturally sensitive way. They also receive training on Human Rights obligations.

Details of customer complaint arrangements are provided on the INIS website www.inis.gov.ie and provided to customers by Immigration Officers upon request. Details of this email

address are also provided on the Dublin Airport website under Immigration Contact Details.

The Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission receives and responds to complaints made by members of the public concerning the conduct of the members of An Garda Síochána.

Protected Disclosures Data

424. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if disclosures have been made to his Department under the Protected Disclosures Act 2014 by serving, past or retired prison officers or prison personnel in the Irish Prison Service in each of the years 2015 to 2018; the number of cases in each year; and the status of each case that was submitted. [54372/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Protected Disclosures Act 2014 took effect from 15th July 2014. It provides comprehensive protections for workers in both the public and private sectors against penalisation by their employers in circumstances where they have raised concerns about potential wrongdoing. A protected disclosure, in the 2014 Act, is a disclosure of information which, in the reasonable belief of the worker, tends to show one or more relevant wrongdoings; came to the attention of the worker in connection with the worker's employment; and is disclosed in the manner prescribed in the Act.

The Deputy will be aware that a discloser need not refer to the Protected Disclosures Act 2014 in making a protected disclosure. Furthermore, some correspondence which purports to be a protected disclosure does not fall under the terms of the 2014 Act as described above. This may be because it does not disclose relevant wrongdoings as described in the Act, or because the complainant is not an worker as required under the Act.

Both my Department, and the Irish Prisons Service have comprehensive Protected Disclosures Policies in place.

The following table details the treatment of *potential* protected disclosures in the years 2015-2018 made to my Department. It describes the status of those disclosures which were determined to be protected disclosures within the meaning of the 2014 Act, following assessment or review. Information concerning Protected Disclosures is available in Annual Reports under the 2014 Act published by my Department on its website.

In addition to the following table, I am informed that a further 4 protected disclosures were received directly by the Irish Prison Service during the period in question.

Year	Correspondence relating to the Irish Prison Service assessed as Potential Protected Disclosure	Status
2015	1 anonymous disclosure received.	Closed following investigation.
2016	7 disclosures received, of which 5 deemed not to be Protected Disclosures.	Five of the disclosures were assessed and closed as they did not meet the requirements of the Protected Disclosures Act. Of the two remaining disclosures: One disclosure was externally reviewed and found to be a protected disclosure by the reviewer. The case is subject to ongoing legal proceedings. The Department has engaged a legal firm to investigate subsequent allegations of penalisation. In the other case, one element of the disclosure was upheld and recommendations were made to the Irish Prison Service.

Year	Correspondence relating to the Irish Prison Service assessed as Potential Protected Disclosure	Status
2017	6, of which 4 deemed not to be Protected Disclosures.	Four of the disclosures were assessed and closed as they did not meet the requirements of the Protected Disclosures Act. Of the two remaining disclosures, one was investigated but not upheld due to lack of evidence the disclosure was anonymous resulting in inability to obtain further information. In the other case, an external investigation was carried out and a report produced. The findings of the investigation are under consideration.
2018	11, of which 2 deemed not to be a Protected Disclosures.	Two of the disclosures were assessed and closed as not meeting the requirements of the Protected Disclosures Act. Four of the disclosures have been assessed and found to be Protected Disclosures. Independent investigations will commence in 2019. The remaining five disclosures are being assessed.

Prison Service Staff

425. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if there is a clear pathway for internal disciplinary issues regarding officers, personnel and management employed in the Irish Prison Service, including being put on notice for transfer to another prison facility here, gross negligence accusations or health and safety issues; the pathway available to seek an independent impartial investigation and fair hearing for such issues; the protective controls in place to protect persons facing such disciplinary issues while an investigative process is underway; and the due process available to ensure there is no victimisation or penalisation for an ongoing case. [54373/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Director General of the Irish Prison Service that the procedures for dealing with disciplinary issues relating to prison grades are set out in S.I. No.289/1996 Prison (Disciplinary Code for Officers) Rules, 1996 as amended by S.I. No.438/2009 Prison (Disciplinary Code for Officers) (Amendment) Rules 2009.

This Statutory Instrument provides for an oral hearing to be held by the Governor where an alleged breach of discipline occurs and that an officer has a right to appeal.

Transfers within the Irish Prison Service are based on the exigencies of the service and, in general, vacancies are filled in each location in line with the agreed transfer protocol on the basis of seniority in the grade. However, there are occasions where the transfer of an officer to another prison or location is required for personal, medical or health and safety reasons, or to ensure that an investigation, disciplinary or dignity at work processes can be addressed expeditiously and fairly.

The Irish Prison Service policies in relation to Dignity at Work, Protected Disclosures and the Grievance Process are accessible to all employees of the Irish Prison Service. The Irish Prison Service is committed to the provision of staff support services to all employees including the Employee Assistance Service and an Independent Counselling Service, which is available to all staff and is free of charge. It is a 24/7 freephone helpline, with access to up to 6 counselling sessions for support covering a wide range of issues.

Additionally, the Irish Prison Service is a member of the Integrity at Work programme (IAW), which is an initiative of Transparency International Ireland aimed at promoting a safer working environment for people who speak up about wrongdoing.

Protected Disclosures

426. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his attention has been drawn to the case of a person (details supplied); and the actions being taken to investigate the matter thoroughly. [54374/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I can inform the Deputy that correspondence was received in my Department from the person in question, which was treated as a potential protected disclosure. Having been assessed independently, the matter is being investigated in accordance with the Protected Disclosures Policy of my Department. It would be inappropriate for me to comment any further on the individual case.

Visa Applications

427. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a request for a visa in the case of persons (details supplied) will be examined; and if the decision of the INIS in the case will be expedited. [54384/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have been advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the visa applications referred to were approved and issued on 13 December 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 INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

In addition, applicants may themselves e-mail queries directly to INIS (visamail@justice.ie).

Immigrant Investor Programme Data

428. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of approvals granted under the immigrant investor programme in each of the years 2014 to 2018; the overall amount invested under the programme in each of the years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54393/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Immigrant Investor Programme (IIP) was introduced in April 2012 to encourage inward investment to create business and employment opportunities in the State.

A breakdown of the number of approvals and the overall value of approved applications for the years referred to by the Deputy is set out in the following table.

Application Year	Number of Approved Applications	Total Value of Approved Applications
2014	30	€14,950,000
2015	65	€35,250,000
2016	272	€154,100,000
2017	294	€269,500,000
2018	38	€32,000,000
TOTAL	699	€502,800,000

It should be noted that a total of 420 applications were received in 2018 of which 379 are currently being processed. A decision on a significant number these applications is expected in the coming weeks once processing has been completed.

Garda Compensation

429. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason for the delay in drafting the Garda Síochána (compensation) Bill 2017 in view of the approval of the heads of the Bill and agreement that no further pre-legislative scrutiny was required by the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Justice and Equality on 9 May 2017. [54426/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Government is committed to reforming the system that provides compensation to members of An Garda Síochána who are injured in the course of their duty. The Scheme of the Garda Síochána (Compensation) Bill which was published in 2017 provides for new arrangements that will result in a more efficient and cost-effective system.

The major reform at the heart of the Scheme that has been published is a move away from the current arrangements under which the Minister for Justice and Equality approves cases to proceed to the High Court for determination of quantum to one where quantum is assessed by the Personal Injuries Assessment Board (PIAB) and cases are handled to conclusion by the State Claims Agency (SCA).

In the time since the Scheme was published, my Department has consulted with PIAB and the SCA to further refine the new regime and the Scheme is currently with the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel for drafting.

Allowing for other competing demands, I would hope that it will be possible to publish the Bill during 2019.

Departmental Expenditure

430. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the budget and spend in his Department for marketing, media and social media in each of the years 2016 to 2018; the projected spend for 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54468/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The total spending by my Department on marketing, media and social media for each of the years from 2016 to 2018 is included in tabular format below. The funds allocated allowed the Department to raise public awareness of valuable initiatives including those dedicated to combatting domestic violence and human trafficking.

Spend in my department for marketing, media and social media may be allocated on a case-by-case basis. As such a full projected 2019 spend is not available. However, at this stage, the sum of €950,000 has been allocated for the national awareness campaign on sexual violence, to cover both media buying and creative advertising.

[Budget and Spend].

Departmental Staff Data

431. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of staff in his Department employed to work on marketing, media and social media in 2018. [54485/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): My Department's Press and Communications Office, which carries out all media-related work and which involves responding to a significant volume of media queries daily and also supports a range of internal communications, is staffed by seven full-time civil servants. In addition I have one media advisor.

Gambling Sector

432. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of premises in Dublin with slot machines; the licensing requirements for the operation of these machines; the legislative measures he is taking to address the use of slot machines in premises in Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54503/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): While the Minister for Justice and Equality has legislative oversight of gaming and lottery activities under the Gaming and Lotteries Act 1956, my Department has no current role in respect of the licensing and regulation of gaming (slot) machines.

Lawful gaming in amusement and gaming arcades in Ireland is confined to areas in respect of which Part III of the Gaming and Lotteries Act 1956 is in force. Part III is only in force where a resolution has been passed by the relevant local authority to permit gaming machines.

'Slot machines' are not defined in Irish law. However, 'gaming machines' are defined in the Finance Act 1975 and 'amusement machines' are defined in the Finance Act 1992. A gaming machine allows a player to win a monetary prize, of any amount, or a non – monetary prize in excess of €7 in value. An amusement machine allows a player to win no more than an opportunity to play the machine again or to obtain a non-monetary prize up to €7 in value.

An operator of gaming machines must first apply to the District Court for a certificate for a gaming licence. This is required for each premises where it is intended to make gaming machines available for play. Provided the District Court grants this certificate, the operator must then apply to the Revenue Commissioners for a Gaming Licence for each premises concerned. The Gaming and Lotteries Act 1956 provides that Revenue shall, on the application of a person who has been granted a certificate for a gaming licence by the District Court and on payment of the relevant excise duty, issue to that person a Gaming Licence.

An operator of gaming machines must also apply to Revenue for a Gaming Machine Licence in respect of each gaming machine made available for play. Gaming Machine Licences may only be issued by Revenue Commissioners to an operator who already holds a Gaming

Licence (for premises) and who has paid the relevant excise duty.

An operator of amusement machines must apply to the Revenue Commissioners for an Amusement Machine Permit and pay the relevant excise duty. An application for an Amusement Machine Permit must include a schedule of the public places in the State where amusement machines are to be made available for play. Operators of amusement machines must also apply to Revenue for an Amusement Machine Licence for each amusement machine made available for play and pay the relevant excise duty.

While licensing of these machines is not the direct responsibility of my Department, to assist the Deputy, I have had enquiries made of the Revenue Commissioners.

I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that there are 2 premises in Dublin that either currently have a Gaming Licence (and are licensed to make gaming machines available for play) or were so licensed up to a recent date.

I am also advised by the Revenue Commissioners that a complete figure for the number of premises in Dublin specifically that are licensed for the operation of amusement machines is not readily available, as permits may be issued to an operator for any premises in Dublin or in other locations where amusement machines are made available.

I am again advised by the Revenue Commissioners that they are currently undertaking a national compliance project in relation to gaming and amusement machines. Questions with regard to this matter should be referred to my colleague the Minister for Finance.

As the Deputy will see from the above, the legislation in this area is complex, therefore I hope to publish the Gaming and Lotteries (Amendment) Bill early in the current Oireachtas session. This will be an interim reform measure, pending the bringing forward of comprehensive gambling control legislation.

The amendments proposed under the Bill address certain deficiencies with regard to the conduct of activities regulated under the Gaming and Lotteries Act 1956, and provide for the modernisation of that Act by way of, among other matters, arrangements for the better promotion of lotteries, updating certain stake and prize limits and standardising the minimum gambling age at 18.

As regards wider reform of gambling licensing and regulation, the Working Group on Gambling is currently finalising its Report to Government. This Group was established to review the provisions of the 2013 General Scheme of the Gambling Control Bill and other relevant developments since. These included matters relating to the future approach to be taken to the licensing of gaming machines.

I hope to bring this Report to Government for approval as soon as possible.

Visa Applications

433. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in the determination of an application for a visa in the case of persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54524/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the applications referred to were refused on appeal by the Visa Office in Dublin. The decisions were communicated to

the applicants on 8 January 2019.

It is open to the applicants to submit fresh visa applications at any time. However, they should bear in mind the reasons for refusal and be in a position to address them in any new application. 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.

Child Maintenance Payments

434. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to establish a statutory child maintenance service in line with similar agencies in other states; his views on whether requiring parents to seek recourse through the courts to obtain child maintenance places an unnecessary financial burden on parents and creates additional work for the courts system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54528/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The establishment in Ireland of an agency comparable to the child maintenance services in other states would require substantial changes to the legal framework for determining issues relating to child maintenance. The requirement of Article 34 of the Constitution that justice be administered in courts established by law by judges appointed in the manner provided by the Constitution is a matter that would have to be carefully considered.

Parents are not automatically required to seek recourse through the courts to obtain child maintenance. It is open to parents whose relationship has broken down to decide between themselves on maintenance arrangements for their children. If they experience difficulties in reaching agreement on maintenance arrangements, they can try to work out a maintenance agreement through mediation. The general objective of the Mediation Act 2017, which came into operation on 1 January 2018, is to promote mediation as a viable, effective and efficient alternative to court proceedings, including proceedings relating to maintenance of children, thereby reducing legal costs, speeding up the resolution of disputes and relieving the stress involved in court proceedings.

Parents may seek a determination from the courts in cases where there are issues arising from disagreements about the provision of maintenance for dependent children, or failure by persons with maintenance responsibilities for children to provide proper maintenance. Relevant legislation in this area includes section 11 of the Guardianship of Infants Act 1964, the Family Law (Maintenance of Spouses and Children) Act 1976, section 8 of the Family Law Act 1995, section 13 of the Family Law (Divorce) Act 1996 and section 45 of the Civil Partnership and Certain Rights and Obligations of Cohabitants Act 2010. The Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 provided for a number of improvements in the law relating to maintenance of children.

The law as it stands provides several mechanisms, including possible penalties, where a person fails to comply with court-ordered maintenance obligations. Section 10 of the Family Law (Maintenance of Spouses and Children) Act 1976 enables a maintenance creditor to apply to the court for an order that maintenance be paid by way of attachment of earnings, so the maintenance due is deducted directly from income. A person can apply for an attachment of earnings order when applying to court for a maintenance order, if he or she is concerned that

maintenance will not be paid, or he or she can apply later if the maintenance is not paid.

The maintenance creditor may seek to recover sums owing through the courts by utilising the enforcement mechanisms available under section 8 of the Enforcement of Court Orders Act 1940 (as substituted by section 63 of the Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2011). In addition, where the failure to pay maintenance is as a result of unwillingness, as distinct from inability, to pay, under section 9A of the Family Law (Maintenance of Spouses and Children) Act 1976, the District Court has the power to regard a failure by a parent to comply with a court order relating to maintenance as contempt of court and to deal with it accordingly, including by means of imprisonment.

While I have no plans at present for the establishment of a statutory child maintenance service, the Deputy will be no doubt aware that First 5 - A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019-2028, which was published in November 2018, includes a commitment that the Department of Justice and Equality will commence and progress a review of the effectiveness and accessibility of arrangements for recovery of maintenance payments by non-resident parents, including an examination of arrangements in other jurisdictions to ascertain the possibilities for making the maintenance recovery process easier for parents, improving the outcomes for children and reducing as far as possible the need for court proceedings for maintenance recovery. This review, which is set out under Strategic Action 3.1, is to be commenced within two years of the publication of the Strategy.

The Government is committed to significant reform of the courts, including the establishment of a family law court structure that is streamlined, more efficient, and less costly. My Department is working on a General Scheme of a Family Court Bill which will aim to streamline family law court processes, clarify jurisdictional issues and provide for a set of guiding principles to help ensure that the Family Court will operate in a user-friendly and efficient manner. The intention is to establish a dedicated Family Court within the existing court structures. The Family Court Bill will support the proposals in the Mediation Act 2017 by encouraging greater use of alternative dispute resolution to assist in more timely resolution of family law cases.

Garda Deployment

435. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí stationed in the Dublin 7 and 15 areas; the number that are community gardaí; the number of unfilled roles in the areas as of the end of 2016, 2017 and 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54548/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for the distribution of resources, including personnel, among the various Garda Divisions and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. Garda management keeps this distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the optimum use is made of these resources.

Dublin 7 and Dublin 15 are in the Dublin Metropolitan Region (DMR) West Division. The Garda strength of the DMR West from 2009 to 30 November 2018 as provided by the Garda Commissioner is available on my Department's website through the links below.

Garda Number by Division, District and Station

Community policing is at the heart of An Garda Síochána as it recognises that every community, either urban or rural, has its own concerns and expectations. The role of a community

Garda is not a specialist role in An Garda Síochána; rather it is the case that all Gardaí have a role to play in community policing in carrying out their duties. The official categorisation of Community Garda simply refers to those who are exclusively assigned to building relationships with local communities and civil society including giving talks to schools, community groups and others. It is a matter for the Divisional Chief Superintendent to determine the optimum distribution of duties among the personnel available to him or her having regard to the profile of the area and its specific needs.

The information requested by the Deputy in relation to the Community Garda Strength in Cabra, Mountjoy, Bridewell and Blanchardstown Garda stations in each of the years from 2016 to 30 November 2018, the latest date for which figures are currently available, as supplied by the Garda Commissioner are as set out in the attached table.

For more general information on Garda Facts and Figures please see the following link:

http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/An_Garda_Siochana_facts_and_figures.

Garda Strength Presented - Community Gardaí - Total

Station	Cabra	Cabra	Mountjoy	Mountjoy	Bridewell	Bridewell	Blanchardstown	Blanchardstown
Year	Community Gardaí	Total	Community Gardaí	Total	Community Gardaí	Total	Community Gardaí	Total
2016	6	61	42	191	21	158	11	143
2017	7	59	34	191	13	162	15	163
2018*	7	61	30	211	11	174	14	181

*As of 30 November 2018

Total: means all those Gardaí at a station all of whom have community policing as an inherent part of their role.

Community Gardaí: are those with the official categorisation and are exclusively assigned to building relationships with local communities including giving talks to schools, community groups and others.

Garda Vetting

436. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason a person (details supplied) is being treated as if they were convicted of a crime; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1065/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): 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. I have no role in the processing of individual vetting applications.

With regard to the application of the Probation Act, I am informed that there are circumstances in which the application of the Act may be disclosed. Section 1(2) of the Probation Act allows the court to apply the provisions of the Act to a person who has been convicted on indictment of any offence punishable with imprisonment. Accordingly, court outcomes which result in Section 1(2) of the Probation of Offenders Act 1907 being applied are recorded as convictions. This being the case, the application of the Act may be disclosed in the vetting procedures.

The Deputy will appreciate that while it is the role of the National Vetting Bureau to provide vetting disclosures, it is for individual employers to determine their own vetting requirements and to assess the relevance of disclosed convictions to the vacancies they seek to fill. Therefore, it is not necessarily the case that the disclosure of a previous conviction to a potential employer means that the employer will automatically not consider a person for employment.

Coroners Service

437. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the length of time it is taking from the date the post mortem is held to the date of the release of the results of the post mortem to the next of kin of the deceased by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1103/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As Minister for Justice and Equality, I do not have any role in relation to the conduct of post mortems or the release of the results of post mortems to the next of kin by the coroner when available.

Coroners are officials who are independent in function and who deal with the families of the deceased during the most difficult of times. Due to the nature of their work they are acutely aware of the potential impact of any unnecessary delays in the release of the results of their investigations.

Crime Data

438. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of burglaries reported to An Garda Síochána in a district (details supplied) in each quarter of 2018; if he will provide a comparison with 2017; the number of perpetrators apprehended for each incident; the number brought before the courts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1137/19]

439. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of burglaries reported to An Garda Síochána in a district (details supplied) in each quarter of 2018; if he will provide a comparison with 2017; the number of perpetrators apprehended for each incident; the number brought before the courts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1138/19]

440. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of burglaries reported to An Garda Síochána in a district (details supplied) in each quarter of 2018; if he will provide a comparison with 2017; the number of perpetrators apprehended for each incident; the number brought before the courts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1139/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 438 to 440, inclusive, together.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Central Statistics Office (CSO), as the national statistical agency, is responsible for the compilation and publication of recorded crime statistics, and the CSO has established a dedicated unit for this purpose.

However, to be of assistance, I have asked the CSO to forward any available statistics in this matter directly to the Deputy.

Garda Deployment

441. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí in each of the three policing districts located within a division (details supplied) by rank; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1140/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of personnel and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. Garda management keeps this distribution under review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities to ensure optimum use is made of the resources.

The Garda strength of the DMR North Central Division from 2009 to 30 November 2018 as provided by the Garda Commissioner is available on my Department's website through the following link:

Garda Number

For more general information on Garda Facts and Figures please see the following link:

http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/An_Garda_Siochana_facts_and_figures.

Garda Equipment

442. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda vehicles including bicycles in each of the three policing districts located within a division (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1141/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): There has been very significant investment in Garda resources across the State in recent years. The Government's Capital Plan 2016 – 2021 provides €46 million for investment in the Garda fleet, to ensure that An Garda Síochána has a modern, effective and fit-for-purpose fleet. This is in addition to the investment of almost €30 million in the period 2013 to 2015. In total from 2013 to 2017, almost €44 million has been invested in the fleet with some 2,000 vehicles coming on stream in that period to ensure that Gardaí can be mobile, visible and responsive on the roads and in the community to prevent and tackle crime.

As the Deputy will appreciate, decisions in relation to the provision and allocation of Garda vehicles across the various Garda divisions are a matter for the Garda Commissioner in the light of his identified operational demands and the availability of resources. As Minister, I have no role in that matter.

However I understand from the Garda authorities that Garda management keeps the distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the optimum use is made of these resources. Responsibility for the efficient deployment of all official Garda vehicles in each Division is assigned to the Divisional Officer, who may allocate vehicles between districts and stations, as required by operational requirements.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that the information as requested by the Deputy, namely the number of Garda vehicles and bicycles assigned to DMR North Central, is as set out in the following tables.

-	DMR North Central - Bicycles
Store Street District	24
Fitzgibbon Street District	4
Bridewell District	4

	Cars	Vans	Motor-cycles	4x4	Others	Total
DMR NORTH CENTRAL DIVISION	47	12	2	3	5	69
BRIDEWELL DISTRICT	12	4	1	0	4	21
FITZGIBBON STREET DISTRICT	12	3	0	2	0	17
STORE STREET DISTRICT	23	5	1	1	1	31

Misuse of Drugs

443. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of stop and searches under misuse of drugs legislation in 2018 across each of the three policing districts located within a division (details supplied); the way in which this compares with each of the previous five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1142/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have requested a report from the Garda Commissioner in relation to the information sought by the Deputy. I will reply further to the Deputy when this report is to hand.

Garda Station Refurbishment

444. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress being made with the redevelopment and refurbishment of a Garda station (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1143/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): There has been unprecedented investment in An Garda Síochána in recent years, in support of the Government's commitment to ensure a strong and visible police presence throughout the country to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and deter crime. €1.76 billion has been allocated to the Garda Vote for 2019, representing an increase of over 6% over the initial allocation for 2018. Very significant capital investment is also being made in An Garda Síochána, including to address deficiencies in the Garda estate.

The Deputy will appreciate that the Office of Public Works (OPW) has responsibility for the provision and maintenance of Garda accommodation. The programme of replacement and refurbishment of Garda accommodation is progressed by the Garda authorities working in close cooperation with the OPW. This includes identifying and progressing any necessary remedial or refurbishment works required at individual stations. As Minister, I have no direct role in these matters.

I am advised by the Garda authorities that the refurbishment works at Fitzgibbon Street Garda Station will be carried out in two phases. The initial phase of enabling works commenced in

September 2018. This phase is expected to be completed in April 2019.

The second phase of works will commence soon thereafter. It is currently anticipated that those works will take approximately twelve months to complete.

Garda Stations

445. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress made to date on the delivery of a new permanent Garda station in an area (details supplied) as outlined in Project Ireland 2040; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1144/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will appreciate that the Garda Commissioner is primarily responsible for the effective and efficient use of the resources available to An Garda Síochána, including responsibility for the formulation of proposals in relation to the opening and closing of Garda stations. In addition, the programme of replacement and refurbishment of Garda accommodation is progressed by the Garda authorities working in close cooperation with the Office of Public Works (OPW), which has responsibility for the provision and maintenance of Garda accommodation. As Minister, I have no direct role in these matters.

I understand from the Garda authorities that An Garda Síochána is currently engaging with the Dublin Port Company, the OPW and other relevant State stakeholders, regarding the provision of a single shared facility for all the State agencies with an operational requirement for a presence at Dublin Port.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that such a shared facility is expected to include office space for Garda Immigration Officers working in Dublin Port, rather than provision of a Garda station.

Garda Operations

446. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will provide a progress report on the actions undertaken across 2017 and 2018 with regard to the implementation of an operation (details supplied) by Garda officers in conjunction with organisations such as an organisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1145/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, actions undertaken in respect of particular Garda operations are a matter for the Commissioner. As Minister, I have no direct role in this regard.

I have requested the specific information sought by the Deputy from the Commissioner and I will write to him directly on receipt of same.

Garda Station Expenditure

447. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress made to date with regard to a programme (details supplied); the initial works made with regard to the period beyond 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1147/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Very significant capital

investment is being made in An Garda Síochána, in support of the Government's commitment to ensure a strong and visible police presence throughout the country, to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and deter crime.

The programme of replacement and refurbishment of Garda accommodation is progressed by the Garda authorities working in close cooperation with the Office of Public Works (OPW), which has the responsibility for the provision and maintenance of Garda accommodation. As Minister, I have no direct role in these matters.

The Deputy refers to the Garda Building and Refurbishment programme 2016-2021. The programme is based on agreed Garda priorities in relation to their accommodation needs nationwide and involves over €60 million exchequer funding spread across both the OPW and Garda Votes as well as a major PPP. This investment is intended to address deficiencies in the Garda estate and provide fit-for-purpose facilities for Garda members and staff as well as the public interacting with them.

The programme includes planned works at over 30 locations, including:

- major refurbishment of selected stations and facilities, including facilities for meeting victims of crime;
- essential remedial works to selected existing stations; and
- development of large scale Property and Exhibit Management Stores (PEMS).

The programme also includes a Cell Refurbishment Programme and provision of improved Custody Management Facilities.

Good progress is being made in implementation of the programme. I am informed by the Garda authorities and the OPW that work has already been completed at 83 stations under the Cell Refurbishment Programme. I further understand that refurbishments have been completed at locations including Tralee, Mullingar and Stradone; that remedial works have been completed in a number of locations, including Newport and Bailieboro; and that PEMS stores have been completed in Ennis and Castlebar. I further understand that fire safety works have been completed at a number of locations and that custody facilities have been completed at Henry Street, Limerick. I am informed that a range of other refurbishments and works included in the programme are progressing. In some cases contractors are on-site; while in other cases works are at various points in the design and procurement phases.

The Deputy will also be aware that in addition to works complete or ongoing under the Building and Refurbishment Programme, three new Regional and Divisional Headquarters have been constructed in Galway, Wexford and Kevin Street, Dublin with the provision of Government funding of over €100 million. Each of these headquarters has been completed and is now operational.

Other major building projects progressing in relation to the Garda estate include the ongoing refurbishment of Fitzgibbon Street station; development of a facility at Military Road, Dublin; and the Garda Station Pilot Re-opening Project.

These and other developments are the result of the unprecedented investment currently being made in An Garda Síochána and demonstrate the Government's commitment to addressing the deficiencies in the Garda estate and the accommodation needs of the organisation in accordance with agreed Garda priorities and in a planned and structured way.

Refugee Data

448. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of applications received during the first call for proposals under the refugee protection programme humanitarian admission programme 2 by nationality of the beneficiaries; the number of applications granted by nationality of the beneficiaries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1190/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Irish Refugee Protection Programme Humanitarian Admission Programme (IHAP), which I announced in May 2018, provides a new humanitarian pathway for eligible family members coming from the world's top ten major source countries of refugees, as part of the Government's plan to realise the full commitment of 4,000 agreed under the Irish Refugee Protection Programme in September 2015.

The Programme provides for up to 530 vulnerable family members to be admitted under the programme before the end of 2019. The first IHAP window for proposals closed on 30 June 2018.

Of the 908 applications received a significant number from eligible countries were incomplete (694 applications in respect of 1,672 beneficiaries). It is open to these proposers to submit completed applications for subsequent rounds of the scheme. In that regard, I announced the second call for proposals on 20 December 2018 and which is open until 31 January. A further 21 applications were received in respect of non-eligible countries.

The tables below set out the number of completed applications received and granted to date following the first call for proposals. A further 31 proposals received are undergoing final processing and a decision in respect of these applications will issue shortly.

Completed applications and Grants from Eligible Countries

	Completed Applications Received	Completed Applications Received	Applications Granted	Applications Granted
Nationality	Proposers	Beneficiaries	Proposers	Beneficiaries
Democratic Republic of Congo	55	95	21	31
Syria	71	181	28	56
Somalia	26	94	5	12
Afghanistan	33	99	11	22
Sudan	21	27	13	15
Eritrea	3	3	3	3
South Sudan	3	9	-	-
Burundi	1	2	1	2
Myanmar	1	1	-	-
Total	214	511	82	141

Legal Aid Service Expenditure

449. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the extent of the funding provided either directly or indirectly through agencies controlled by his Depart-

ment for the provision of advocacy services during 2018; the proposed expenditure figures for 2019; the number of advocacy cases dealt with in 2018 by each of the advocacy organisations so funded; and the number of staff and volunteers in each advocacy organisation in December 2018. [1197/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Please see the information set out in the table in relation to Transparency International Ireland and the Free Legal Advice Centre Ltd.

Additionally, the Legal Aid Board (LAB), which is a statutory agency of my Department, has had provisions in place for the appointment of advocates to assist persons of limited capacity in child care proceedings since 2007. The LAB provided €53,931.90 for such services in 2018. This funding supported 34 advocacy cases. These advocacy services were provided by 9 sole practitioners and 4 advocacy service organisations, the staffing arrangements for which are not readily available.

Name of organisation	2018 funding	Purpose of funding	Casework details	December 2018 staffing	Proposed 2019 expenditure
Free Legal Advice Centre Ltd. (FLAC)	€138,000	€98,000 went towards the information, advice and advocacy carried out by FLAC throughout Ireland with €40,000 dedicated to develop a free legal advice and advocacy clinic for the Roma Community.	51 advocacy case files (in addition to the large volume of requests for advice and information dealt with).	577 volunteers and 17 staff members	€138,000
Transparency International Ireland	€70,000	As part of a three year funding commitment the Department contributes towards the Integrity at Work Programme to support employers to develop a workplace culture of openness and integrity where workers are supported to speak up about any kind of wrongdoing.	The expenditure for 2018 was to support the costs of the Speak Up/ TLAC Helpline Co-ordinator and direct programme expenses.	A total of 8 staff members and volunteers.	€35,000
	Total: €208,000				

Garda Data

450. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí deployed to the Tipperary division in each of the years 2015 to 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1218/19]

451. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of districts in the Laois and Offaly division; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1219/19]

452. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of dis-

tricts in the Carlow and Kilkenny division; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1220/19]

454. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí in the Tipperary division by district in each of the years 2010 to 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1222/19]

455. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí in the Laois and Offaly division by district in each of the years 2010 to 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1223/19]

456. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí in the Carlow and Kilkenny division by district in each of the years 2010 to 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1224/19]

460. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of front-line sergeants available for duty in Nenagh and Roscrea, County Tipperary as of 1 January 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1228/19]

461. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of front-line sergeants available for duty in Cahir and Cashel, County Tipperary as of 1 January 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1229/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 450 to 452, inclusive, 454 to 456, inclusive, 460 and 461 together.

As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of personnel and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. Garda management keeps this distribution under review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities to ensure optimum use is made of the resources.

The Garda strength of each Garda Division by District, Station and Rank from 2009 to 30 November 2018, the latest date for which figures are currently available, as provided by the Garda Commissioner are available on my Department's website through the following link:

Garda Numbers

For more general information on Garda Facts and Figures please see the following link:

http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/An_Garda_Siochana_facts_and_figures.

Garda Deployment

453. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if there is a specific model used nationally to determine the number of gardaí deployed from passing out in Templemore to the divisions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1221/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for the distribution of resources, including personnel, among the various Garda Divisions and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. Garda management keeps this distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the optimum use is made of these resources.

I am informed by the Commissioner that the Cohort model of resource allocation is currently utilised for the allocation of personnel within An Garda Síochána, including newly attested probationer Gardaí from the Garda College. The allocation and transfer of Garda Personnel using the Cohort Model is determined by a number of factors, including crime and non-crime workload, minimum establishment, population, area, policing arrangements, and operational strategies. When considering the allocation of resources to a Division, comprehensive consultation is carried out with local Garda management during which all factors are taken into consideration.

In relation to the allocation of newly attested Gardaí, it is important to keep in mind that they have a further 16 months of practical and classroom-based training to complete in order to receive their BA in Applied Policing. To ensure that they are properly supported and supervised and have opportunities to gain the breadth of policing experience required, the Commissioner's policy is to allocate them to specially designated training stations which have the required training and development structures and resources in place, including trained Garda tutors and access to a permanently appointed supervisory Sergeant who is thoroughly familiar with their responsibilities under the training programme.

I am further informed by the Commissioner that while not all Garda Stations are training stations it is important to note that the allocation of probationer Gardaí to a Divisional training station facilitates the reassignment of Gardaí to other stations within the Division, if required, by the Divisional Officer.

Questions Nos. 454 to 456, inclusive, answered with Question No. 450.

Garda Deployment

457. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí that transferred out of the Tipperary division without replacement in each of the years 2010 to 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1225/19]

458. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí that transferred out of the Carlow and Kilkenny division without replacement in each of the years 2010 to 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1226/19]

459. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí that transferred out of the Laois and Offaly division without replacement in each of the years 2010 to 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1227/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 457 to 459, inclusive, together.

As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for the distribution of resources, including personnel, among the various Garda Divisions and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter.

I am informed by the Commissioner that the deployment of Garda personnel is continually monitored and reviewed in the context of crime trends and policing priorities to ensure the optimum use of Garda resources. A dynamic distribution model of resource allocation, known as the Cohort model, has been in use by Garda management since 2015 for the allocation of personnel, including newly attested probationer Gardaí from the Garda College. The allocation and transfer of Garda Personnel using the Cohort Model is determined by a number of factors, including crime and non-crime workload, minimum establishment, population, area, policing

arrangements and operational strategies. When allocations are taking place, comprehensive consultation is carried out with Local Management during which all factors are taken into consideration.

I am advised by the Commissioner that it is not possible to provide the information requested for the number of Gardaí that have transferred without replacement out of the Divisions in question. Whilst there is a policy not to transfer a Garda from a Division without provision of a replacement, in order to deliver an effective policing service, it is essential that Garda management has the flexibility to deploy Garda resources to meet operational policing needs taking account of the Cohort model of resource allocation.

Questions Nos. 460 and 461 answered with Question No. 450.

Garda Deployment

462. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí non-affected or on light duties in Nenagh and Roscrea, County Tipperary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1230/19]

463. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí non-affected or on light duties in Cashel and Cahir, County Tipperary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1231/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 462 and 463 together.

As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for the allocation of all resources, including personnel, and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter.

I am advised by the Commissioner that employees of An Garda Síochána are facilitated, when necessary, with accommodations in workplace arrangements following periods of absence and on medical advice. Such accommodations may include adapted patterns of working time and modifications of duties to facilitate reintegration into the workplace.

I am further advised that An Garda Síochána is committed to supporting all employees for medical or recuperative reasons following injury or a period of illness and will continue to afford all reasonable accommodations to employees as deemed necessary in consultation with the Chief Medical Officer.

I have been informed that non-effective is the term used in An Garda Síochána when a member has reported as unavailable for duty due to illness.

I am advised by the Commissioner that Roscrea Garda Station forms part of the Nenagh District in the Tipperary Division and on 31 December 2018 the latest date for which figures are currently available the strength of the Nenagh District was 85, and as on 09 January 2019, 8 members were non-effective and 7 members were on light duties.

I am further advised by the Commissioner that Cashel Garda Station forms part of the Cahir District in the Tipperary Division and on 31 December 2018, the latest date for which figures are currently available, the strength of the Cahir District was 70, and as on 09 January 2019, 11 members were non-effective and 4 members were on light duties.

Garda Stations

464. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to reopen the Garda Stations at Dolla, Toomevara and Ballingarry North, County Tipperary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1232/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will appreciate that the Garda Commissioner is primarily responsible for the effective and efficient use of the resources available to An Garda Síochána and for carrying on and managing and controlling generally the administration and business of An Garda Síochána.

I have asked the Commissioner for the information requested and when it is received I will write directly to the Deputy.

Public Inquiries

465. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the steps he has taken to set up a public inquiry into the death of a person (details supplied) as agreed to by a vote in Dáil Éireann; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1267/19]

466. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on the length of time GSOC has taken to investigate complaints regarding the investigation into the death of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1268/19]

472. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of a motion passed by Dáil Éireann relative to an inquiry into the death of a person (details supplied); if all matters leading to their death, the investigation afterwards and the court cases which ensued will be included as part of the inquiry; if the inquiry will be a public inquiry; his overall approach to the inquiry; and the timeframe for same. [1371/19]

489. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the request for a statutory inquiry as requested by the family of a person (details supplied) will be granted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1654/19]

491. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in establishing a public inquiry (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1780/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 465, 466, 472, 489 and 491 together.

As the Deputy will be aware, I have addressed the matters referred to in these questions over the recent weeks and months in some detail. While the status of the GSOC investigation remains unchanged I can offer Deputies some update into the investigation of issues related to this tragic case.

The outcome of GSOC’s criminal investigation was set out in an interim report issued last year, which was provided to the family of the late Shane O’Farrell. The investigation concluded that no criminal misbehaviour by members of An Garda Síochána was disclosed. GSOC’s investigation found that, while no such conduct occurred which would require criminal sanction, certain aspects were identified as requiring further investigation which may lead to disciplinary proceedings against one or more members. The investigation of those matters by GSOC is still on-going. In the circumstances I do not propose to comment further while the investigation is proceeding. I know that it can be frustrating that investigations are not completed as quickly as people would like. However, our overriding concern must be that investigations are compre-

hensive and conducted to the highest standards.

As Minister for Justice and Equality, I am acutely conscious of my responsibility - and that of all Members of the House – to respect the independence of the Ombudsman Commission and guard against improper interference with its investigations.

With regard to the motion passed by this House last June, it referred to the need to examine the actions of the Gardaí, the Director of Public Prosecutions, GSOC and the Courts. The terms of the motion largely reflect the calls by the family of the late Shane O’Farrell for a public inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the road traffic incident in which he tragically lost his life. I would remind the House of the constitutional independence of the Courts and the statutory independence of the Gardaí, the Director of Public Prosecutions and GSOC. These are important matters which must be taken into consideration if there is to be a further examination or investigation of issues related to this tragic case.

I have, as I said previously in the House, been considering the terms of the motion and what options might be available to me in response to it and, in this regard, I am engaging with the Attorney General to determine how I may proceed in relation to the terms of the motion.

I am awaiting the Attorney’s advice and when I receive it I will be better placed to decide how to proceed.

Asylum Seeker Accommodation

467. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of dwellings allocated by each local authority to meet the housing needs of persons seeking asylum here and persons that are classified as refugees on an annual basis from 2014 to date by year in tabular form; the number of dwellings by local authority, by year in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1319/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am unable to provide the figures requested by the Deputy. The allocation of dwellings by local authorities is a matter for the relevant local authorities and as such does not come within my remit. The responsibility of my Department relates to those who present here seeking international protection (i.e. asylum and subsidiary protection), to whom accommodation and coverage for certain other needs must be provided to those without the resources to do so, while they are awaiting a decision on their status.

There is no obligation on an applicant to accept the offer of accommodation. Some choose to live with friends or family living in the wider community or to source and provide for their own private accommodation. There is no restriction on the freedom of movement of applicants throughout the State.

Persons who have been granted refugee status, subsidiary protection or a permission to remain are being assisted in transitioning from accommodation centres to housing. Work is underway with the NGO community, housing agencies, local authorities and religious groups to provide assistance to these persons. The Jesuit Refugee Service and the Irish Refugee Council have also both received funding support in this regard. There are currently 700 such persons in accommodation centres, comprising families and individuals, which is placing pressure on the system in terms of providing necessary accommodation to newly arrived individuals claiming international protection.

Garda Information and Communications Technology

468. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to reform Garda technology to ensure that gardaí can access real time information regarding the status of a driver licence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1321/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Garda Mobility Strategy aims to provide frontline members with greater connectivity to back-office systems harnessing the power of mobile technology and forms part of the Modernisation and Renewal Programme 2016-2021. A pilot programme was operated in Limerick Garda Division from December 2017 to September 2018, with very positive feedback.

A key application developed for the Mobility pilot was a Traffic App, which allowed members of An Garda Síochána to search for vehicle information by entering a vehicle registration number into the mobile phone. The app gathered information recorded on PULSE in respect of the vehicle, including tax status, ownership information and driver disqualifications. The utilisation of mobile devices enable Garda members to be more efficient and effective by having mobile access to relevant core policing applications, a wide-range of up-to-date information and the ability to input and update information in real time.

A total of €1.5 million was provided for in current spending in Budget 2019 to allow the roll-out of the Mobility project to commence.

The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform recently produced an informative YouTube video on the Garda Mobility Strategy: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eNyKMywyS9k>.

Garda Strength

469. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the Garda strength, broken down by rank and including Garda reserves, based at each station in a Garda district (details supplied) in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1322/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of personnel and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. Garda management keeps this distribution under review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities to ensure optimum use is made of the resources.

The Garda strength of the Cork City Division by Rank from 2009 to 30 November 2018 as provided by the Garda Commissioner is available on my Department's website through the following link.

Garda Numbers

The Garda Reserve strength by Station for the Cork Division, as on 30 November, the latest date for which figures are currently available, as provided by the Garda Commissioner from 2009 is available on my Department's website through the link below.

Garda Reserve Strength

For more general information on Garda Facts and Figures please see the link below.

Residency Permits

470. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in the determination of an application for the new student scheme by a person (details supplied); when the application is likely to be concluded; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1348/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that it received an application for permission to reside in this State on 8 November 2018. I am further informed that INIS wrote to the person on 11 January 2019 seeking further information and documentary evidence. The Deputy will appreciate that applications are dealt with in chronological order and I understand that a decision will issue in due course in light of a response from the person concerned.

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.

Mutual Legal Assistance

471. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if all documentation has been furnished from the mutual legal assistance department following a request from Turkish authorities in the case of a person (details supplied); if such an official request has been received; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1353/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The provision of mutual legal assistance by Ireland to another state is governed by the Criminal Justice (Mutual Assistance) Act, 2008, which provides for, amongst other things, a legislative basis for the 1959 Council of Europe Convention on Mutual Assistance, to which both Ireland and Turkey are signatories.

My Department is obliged to deal in confidence with requests for mutual legal assistance in criminal investigations. However, given the circumstances of this particular case, I can inform the Deputy that a request for Mutual Legal Assistance was received from the Turkish Authorities on 17 December 2018 and that the matter is receiving attention.

Question No. 472 answered with Question No. 465.

Garda Support Services

473. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if stress interventions and-or counselling sessions are mandatory following traumatic incidents involving gardaí at work, further to Question No. 295 of 16 October 2018, and his response regarding the analysing of the report and consultations with An Garda Síochána. [1382/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I know the Deputy will agree that we should never underestimate the dangers the men and women of An Garda Síochána face and the traumatic incidents they encounter in the course of their duty. The Government is committed to supporting the work of An Garda Síochána and to ensuring that the organisation is properly resourced to carry out its important role in protecting our communities.

As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for An Garda Síochána including the provision of employee welfare supports. As outlined in my response to the Parliamentary Question referred to by the Deputy, I am informed by the Commissioner that following a traumatic incident at work, the interventions and counselling provided are not mandatory for members of An Garda Síochána, however, the supports and services outlined in my previous response remain as stated.

The recently published Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland report recognises that policing is an unusually stressful job and recommends that An Garda Síochána requires mandatory counselling for Gardaí following a traumatic incident.

On 18 December 2018 the Government endorsed the report of the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland (CoFPI) and agreed to accept all 157 key recommendations contained therein, including mandatory counselling and a Wellness programme.

On 18 December I also published a four year high-level implementation plan, “A Policing Service for the Future”, which will be overseen by a dedicated Programme Office in the Department of the Taoiseach as recommended in the Commission’s report. As outlined in the implementation plan, work on the development of a Wellness programme in An Garda Síochána will commence in Q2 2019.

Parole Boards

474. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress made to date with the proposed Parole Bill 2016 that will place the parole board on a statutory footing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1455/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy may be aware, the report of the Penal Policy Review Group, submitted to Government in November 2014, recommended that a Parole Board should be established on a statutory footing with the power to make decisions on sentences. Following the publication of the report, work commenced on a General Scheme of a Bill on the establishment of a Parole Board on a statutory basis.

In April 2017, the Government agreed to focus on the Private Members Parole Bill 2016 that had been brought forward by Deputy Jim O’Callaghan and to work in partnership with Deputy O’Callaghan to achieve this objective. It was also agreed that appropriate amendments to the Bill would be brought forward in consultation with Deputy O’Callaghan. The Bill passed Committee Stage in Dáil Éireann on 24 April 2017.

The Bill provides for establishing a Parole Board on a statutory basis to determine releases from prison of long sentence offenders. It sets out the criteria to be considered in deciding on the release of prisoners, which include risk to public safety and the extent to which release will facilitate the prisoner’s reintegration into society.

Substantial amendments to the Bill were developed in conjunction with Deputy O’Callaghan and, on 8 May 2018, the Government approved the drafting of these amendments by the Office

of the Parliamentary Counsel to the Government. That drafting work is underway and my officials will continue to engage with Deputy O’Callaghan throughout this process.

Visa Applications

475. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in the determination of an appeal for a long-stay visa in the case of a person (details supplied); when the appeal will be concluded; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1495/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service of my Department that the decision referred to has not yet been finalised. It is not possible to give a definitive date but the Deputy can be assured the applicant will be advised when a decision is 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 Data

476. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of short-stay C visa applicants awaiting a decision; the expected waiting period from the submission of an application to the decision date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1518/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Decisions regarding the grant or refusal of visas are made in a number of INIS Visa Offices overseas, the INIS Visa Office in Dublin, and at Embassies of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade which process certain visa applications under delegated sanction from my Department.

The processing times for visa decisions are published on the Visa pages of each Visa Office and Embassy website. The table underneath sets out the dates of reception for short-stay ‘C visa’ applications currently being processed in the Dublin Visa Office, and the number of those applications currently on hand.

Purpose of Visa Applications	Processing date in the Dublin Visa Office	Number of applications on hand (as of 14 January)
Visit	04 January 2019	95
Business	04 January 2019	5
Study	21 November 2018	5
Join Family (EU Free Movement)	See note below	
Other*	04 January 2019	20

*Includes training; exam; conference/event; performance/tournament; and sundry applications.

I am also advised by INIS that the visa service is experiencing an increase in the number of visa applications across most categories, in line with increased economic activity generally. Notwithstanding this, processing times are on a par with, and in many cases, better than last year.

The business target for processing ‘short-stay C’ visas is within eight weeks (current processing time in Dublin for most categories is within two weeks). However, the processing time at each office and location worldwide is determined by a number of factors such as the volume and complexity of applications, whether investigation is required or not, individual circumstances, peak application periods, seasonal factors, and the resources available. While every effort is made to process applications as quickly as possible, processing times inevitably vary as a result.

In relation to applications under the Free Movement Directive (2004/38/EC), there had been an exponential increase from the second quarter of 2015 in the number of such applications. That gave rise to a caseload of around 10,500 applications which had to be assessed very carefully to ensure that any fraudulent applications or potential abuses of the Directive were detected and dealt with appropriately. Considerable progress has been made in that regard with the majority of these applications now processed.

The central concern in deciding on visa applications, as with all visa services worldwide, is to strike an appropriate balance between protecting the country’s vital national interests by maintaining an effective immigration regime while at the same time facilitating travel for those who meet the criteria. Each visa application is therefore decided on its own merits taking all factors into account.

Visa Applications

477. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to introduce a different visa system for persons visiting here on business as opposed to the system involving the current short-stay C visa, which also applies to certain holidaymakers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1519/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): All short stay visas are referred to as ‘C’ visas, and are issued for a number of different reasons, including tourism, business and family reasons.

Persons from visa-required countries seeking to enter the State for business purposes can apply for a short stay business visa, which enables them to travel to Ireland and work within one 14 day period. Where appropriate, a multi-entry visa can be granted for persons regularly coming to the State for business purposes. For persons seeking to conduct business in the State for a period in excess of 14 days, and have met certain criteria, there are specific options available, including a permission under the Atypical Work Scheme operated by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) or for an Employment Permit through the Department of Business, Enterprise & Innovation.

Furthermore, the British Irish Visa Scheme (BIVS), underpinned by a Memorandum of Understanding drawn up between my Department and the UK Home Office, also applies to business travellers on a short stay visit. The BIVS visa allows a short-stay visitor to visit both Ireland and the UK (and the North and South of the Island) without the need for two separate visas. While a BIVS visa is only currently available to national residents of India and the People’s Republic of China, it is intended to extend its availability to other countries on a phased basis

following discussions with the UK authorities.

The BIVS builds on the success of Ireland's Short Stay Visa Waiver Programme which was first introduced in 2011, and extended in October 2016 for a further five years to 31 October, 2021.

The Programme enables nationals of 17 countries to travel to Ireland for a short stay using a valid UK visit visa. The countries covered under the programme are: Bahrain, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, India, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Montenegro, Oman, People's Republic of China, Qatar, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Thailand, Turkey, Ukraine, Uzbekistan.

At present, there are no plans to introduce further changes to the visa regime for persons travelling to the State for business purposes which is designed to be as flexible as possible to meet requirements.

Private Security Industry Regulation

478. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the legislation that governs the regulation and registration of private security firms operating on behalf of a bailiff or the courts; the progress of the working group that has been established to examine the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1536/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The law and procedures governing the execution of Court Orders is contained in the Enforcement of Court Orders Acts, 1926 to 1940 and the Rules of Court made thereunder. Sheriffs or County Registrars acting as Sheriffs are responsible to the Court for the enforcement of court orders. Sheriffs are officers of the court and are independent in the exercise of their functions and duties under statute and rules of court.

The Enforcement of Court Orders Acts 1926 to 1940 also govern the role, function and powers of Court Messengers who support Sheriffs (or County Registrars acting as Sheriffs) in the enforcement of court orders. Every Court Messenger when assisting in or executing an execution order is furnished with a warrant in writing authorising the Court Messenger to execute or take part in the execution of the execution order.

The Deputy will appreciate that I have no role in these matters but I am informed that the enforcement of a court order is considered on a case-by-case basis and where additional support may be required, for example, where the court has granted an order for possession, the Sheriff assesses the risks involved and makes his/her recommendations to the bank or lending institution's solicitor as to what additional security arrangements may be necessary. I understand that these additional personnel are sourced, contracted and paid for by the bank or lending institution and the Sheriff then appoints them as bailiffs. The employment of bailiffs in these circumstances is governed by section 2 of the Enforcement of Law (Occasional Powers) Act, 1924.

I convened a Working Group to examine the administrative, legislative, resource, security and other matters necessary to bring the regulation and licensing of security personnel assisting those enforcing court orders within the remit of the Private Security Authority. I expect to receive a report from the group, which is chaired by a senior official in my Department, shortly. I will consider the legislation that governs the regulation and registration of private security firms operating on behalf of a bailiff or the courts further when this report is received and take all the necessary and appropriate steps to ensure the legislation is robust and comprehensive.

Criminal Assets Bureau

479. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if there are additional Criminal Assets Bureau officers being deployed in County Meath in view of the almost doubling of active CAB targets in the county in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1552/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Criminal Assets Bureau (CAB) is a multi-agency statutory body established under the Criminal Assets Bureau Act 1996. Its primary objective is to identify the proceeds of criminal activities and deprive people of the benefits of such criminal proceeds. The CAB operates nationally and is supported in its work by a network of approximately 380 trained asset profilers. These asset profilers work hand-in-hand with local Garda management and communities and I am pleased to say this has proved extremely effective.

I am informed by CAB that four additional Gardaí attached to the Meath Garda Division were trained as Divisional Asset Profilers during 2018. This brings to eight the number of Divisional Asset Profilers attached to the Meath Division, representing a 100% increase.

I can assure the Deputy that the Government is committed to ensuring that CAB is adequately resourced to deliver on its statutory functions.

Protected Disclosures

480. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the process he has engaged in by which a panel of barristers is evaluating allegations of corruption in protected disclosures by serving and former gardaí; the number of such cases; the process to appoint the barristers; the terms of reference; if permission has been sought from An Garda Síochána in relation to its willingness to participate; and the relationship between this process and the Disclosures Tribunal. [1556/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Under the Protected Disclosures Act 2014 a protected disclosure refers to the disclosure of relevant information which, inter alia, tends to show one or more relevant wrongdoings, including commission of an offence or failing to comply with a legal obligation. As the Deputy will appreciate, not all protected disclosures involve allegations of corruption. It is not necessary for a person to cite the 2014 Act in order for correspondence to be a protected disclosure. An organisation in receipt of correspondence makes an assessment under the 2014 Act to determine if it should be treated as a protected disclosure.

The Act allows members of An Garda Síochána to make a protected disclosure to one or more of a number of persons, including to the Minister of the day. Since 2014, my Department has received 24 letters from current or former members or employees of An Garda Síochána in relation to matters which might be regarded as a protected disclosure. The Deputy will be aware that in 2016 my predecessor referred two of these disclosures for assessment by a retired High Court Judge and this resulted in the Government setting up the Disclosures Tribunal.

I have, in consultation with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the Attorney General, established a panel of counsel to assess disclosures made to me by members or former members of An Garda Síochána. The panel is to provide independent advice to my Department on how each case should be treated and the panel has recently commenced this work.

In order to ensure an independent assessment of these matters, counsel have been instructed to assess all relevant documentation relating to the allegations, without prejudice, and to make whatever recommendations they see fit.

There is no timeframe specified in the Act for the assessment of protected disclosures. The Deputy will appreciate that, by their very nature, this correspondence may involve varying degrees of complexity and careful consideration of each is of the utmost importance. However, I am anxious that there will be no unnecessary delays in carrying out the assessment and following through on any recommended actions.

As the Deputy will appreciate, the preservation of anonymity is paramount to ensuring the process is maintained in such a manner that those who wish to bring forward concerns may do so in good faith and without any fear of retribution. As has been advised to those whose cases have been referred to the panel, this process is not intended to act as an investigative tool but rather a mechanism whereby my Department can receive independent advice regarding the most appropriate manner in which to deal with the concerns outlined. On this basis, the question of An Garda Síochána participating in this process does not arise. My officials have, however, sought the permission of the person who made the disclosure to refer it to the panel.

Finally, I can assure the Deputy that this panel is not intended to interfere in any way with the work of the Disclosures Tribunal.

Question No. 481 answered with Question No. 393.

Irish Prison Service

482. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of ISL interpreting hours provided to the Irish Prison Service in each of the years 2015 to 2018. [1604/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I wish to inform the Deputy that it has not been possible in the timeframe available to collate the information sought for the period in question. I will revert to the Deputy as soon as this information has been compiled.

Closed-Circuit Television Systems Provision

483. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to launch a new community CCTV system grant scheme that contains a much larger maximum allocation allowance in view of the difficulties and low pick-up rate of the previous schemes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1607/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will be aware that CCTV systems installed for the purposes of crime prevention and as aids to policing in areas to which the general public routinely have access, such as town centres, fall into two distinct but complementary categories, namely Garda CCTV systems and community-based CCTV systems.

Community CCTV is governed by section 38(3)(c) of the Garda Síochána Act 2005 and the Garda Síochána (CCTV) Order 2006 (SI No 289 of 2006). This legal framework requires that any proposed community CCTV scheme must:

- be approved by the local Joint Policing Committee,

- have the authorisation of the Garda Commissioner, and
- have the prior support of the relevant local authority, which must also act as data controller.

This is the legal basis for all community CCTV schemes, regardless of how they are funded.

The Programme for a Partnership Government commits to supporting investment in CCTV systems. In furtherance of this commitment, a grant-aid scheme to assist groups in the establishment of community-based CCTV systems in their local areas is being administered by my Department. Eligible groups, including community groups and local authorities, can apply for grant-aid of up to 60% of the total capital cost of a proposed CCTV system, up to a maximum total of €40,000.

There have to date been 28 applications to the scheme. 20 applications have been approved, involving approved grants totalling more than €500,000. A further 5 applications to the scheme are currently being assessed and considered. The remaining 3 applications have been returned to the applicants concerned to enable them to supply the information necessary to qualify for grant aid.

In establishing the grant-aid scheme, the Department consulted broadly, including with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner, An Garda Síochána, the Office of the Attorney General and the Local Government Management Agency. The Department continues to actively engage with all relevant parties, reflecting the reality that all relevant parties have the same objective – safer and more secure communities. With this in mind, my Department keeps all aspects of the scheme under review, and is currently further streamlining the application documentation.

I am keen to ensure that all interested groups, in both rural and urban areas, have the opportunity to take advantage of the availability of the grant aid scheme. If the Deputy is aware of groups wishing to avail of the scheme, further details are available to download from my Department's website - www.justice.ie and support and guidance is available to help interested groups through a dedicated email address, communitycctv@justice.ie.

Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal Data

484. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of cases lodged with and not settled by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal as at 31 December 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1621/19]

485. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of cases settled by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal in 2018; the cost of these settlements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1622/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 484 and 485 together.

The Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal administers the Scheme of Compensation for Personal Injuries Criminally Inflicted. Under the terms of the Scheme, the Tribunal is entirely independent in the matter of individual decisions on applications for compensation.

I can advise the Deputy that in 2018 a total of €6,442,241.90 compensation was paid to 18 applicants under the Scheme of Compensation for Personal Injuries Criminally Inflicted.

Because of the manner in which cases are recorded, in particular applications which are

received but not actively pursued by the applicant, it is not possible at this time to provide the Deputy with the number of active cases not settled by the Tribunal. I have requested an assessment of the caseload of the Tribunal and have asked my officials to examine this assessment and to obtain the views of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal in this regard. I will contact the Deputy when this exercise has been completed.

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

Question No. 485 answered with Question No. 484.

Garda Resources

486. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the resources set aside for the operation of the Garda anti-corruption unit; the benchmarks that will be used to ensure it meets international best practice standards in investigating corruption; and if statistics will be gathered and published on the number of allegations and-or reports, detections, investigations and prosecutions undertaken or supported by the unit. [1640/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for carrying on and managing and controlling generally the administration and business of An Garda Síochána and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter.

I have requested the specific information sought by the Deputy from the Garda Commissioner and I will write to her on receipt of same.

Garda Transport Data

487. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of marked and unmarked Garda cars and vans attached to each Garda district in the Limerick division as of 31 December 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1647/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will be aware that there has been very significant investment in Garda resources across the State in recent years. The Government’s Capital Plan 2016 – 2021 provides €46 million for investment in the Garda fleet, to ensure that An Garda Síochána has a modern, effective and fit-for-purpose fleet, in addition to the investment of almost €30 million in the period 2013 to 2015. In total in the period 2013 - 2017, almost €44 million has been invested in the fleet with some 2,000 vehicles coming on stream to ensure that Gardaí can be mobile, visible and responsive on the roads and in the community to prevent and tackle crime.

Decisions in relation to the provision and allocation of Garda vehicles across the various Garda divisions are a matter for the Commissioner in light of his identified operational demands and the availability of resources. As Minister, I have no direct role in that matter. I understand however that Garda management keeps the distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure their optimum use. Responsibility for the efficient deployment of all official vehicles in each Division is assigned to the Divisional Officer, who may allocate vehicles between districts and stations as required by operational requirements.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that the following table sets out detail on the vehicles assigned to Limerick Divisional Fleet as at 31 December 2018, the latest date for which figures are currently available.

	Cars			Vans		
	Marked	Unmarked	Total	Marked	Unmarked	Total
LIMERICK DIVISION	32	29	61	10	8	18
Bruff District	2	1	3	2	0	2
Henry Street, Limerick District	13	21	34	3	8	11
Newcastlewest District	10	3	13	3	0	3
Roxboro Road District	7	4	11	2	0	2

Garda Training

488. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí who took the Garda HGV course in 2018; the duration of the course; the frequency with which this course is held; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1648/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As you will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for An Garda Síochána including the training of the members and staff and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter.

I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that 9 Garda members underwent the HGV Course (Class C1) in 2018. The duration of this training course is 5 days and HGV Courses are delivered based on operational demand.

Question No. 489 answered with Question No. 465.

Gambling Legislation

490. **Deputy Louise O’Reilly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the Gambling Control Bill 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1665/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): The Deputy will be aware that the Government granted permission to review the 2013 General Scheme of the Gambling Control Bill by way of Decision of 10 January 2018.

To advance this review, I chaired an Inter-Departmental Working Group on Gambling, comprising all stakeholder Departments and the Office of the Attorney General. The Group met on 5 occasions between February and June of 2018 and reviewed all of the provisions of the 2013 Scheme. The Group and officials in my Department continue to study developments.

The Group is currently finalising its Report, with a final meeting scheduled for late January 2019. I hope to bring the Group’s report to Government for consideration as soon as possible after this meeting.

The Group in its deliberations had particular regard to the Government’s preference for the

establishment of an independent regulatory authority as set out in its Decision of 10 January 2018.

Question No. 491 answered with Question No. 465.

Departmental Correspondence

492. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the customer complaints received by his Department in each of the years since 2016; if the complaints are grouped into categories; the nature of the complaints; the resolution of these; and the number progressed to the relevant ombudsman in each of the years since 2016. [1876/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Department of Justice and Equality is committed to delivering high quality customer service. My Department aims to provide its customers with a complaints procedure that is accessible, efficient, effective, standardised and fair. The Customer Service Charter and our Customer Service Action Plan 2016 – 2018 set out the commitments and standards of service that customers can expect in their dealing with the Department. A new Customer Service Charter and Customer Service Action Plan for 2019 – 2021 is currently being finalised.

The Department defines a customer service complaint as an expression of dissatisfaction concerning the provision of a service or services. This does not cover requests for reviews or appeals against decisions taken in the operation of a scheme or service.

If a customer is not happy with the standard of service received, they are advised to contact the Division of the Department that they were dealing with to have the matter resolved in the first instance. If this does not resolve the issue customers may contact the Department's Customer Service Officer directly who will investigate the complaint. If the complaint is concerning the standard of service provided by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS), customers are advised to contact the Quality Customer Service Officer for that area.

In the event that a customer is not satisfied with the outcome of the investigation, he/she has the right to pursue the matter further with the Office of the Ombudsman. In some circumstances people contact the Ombudsman directly with their complaint, who if deemed appropriate may then refer the matter back to my Department. It should be noted that in accordance with the provisions of Section 5 of the Ombudsman Act, 1980 the remit of the Ombudsman's Office does not extend to naturalisation or immigration matters. However, INIS do engage with the Ombudsman's Office on matters raised with that Office.

Figures shown in the table below reflect the number of complaints received by the Customer Service Officer since 2016. This does not include any complaints that have been resolved by a Division directly. The Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) have provided figures in relation to complaints received by email to the INIS customer service mailbox.

This Department does not categorise complaints or record the other information sought by the Deputy, but this matter will be reviewed in the context of the forthcoming Customer Service Action Plan. Once the Customer Service Officer has investigated a complaint and the customer has been advised of the outcome the matter is recorded as closed.

Complaints received by the Customer Service Officer	2016	2017	2018
	1	4	2

Complaints received by email to INIS Customer Services	2016	2017	2018
	29	170	298

Work Permits Eligibility

493. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her views on a matter (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [54219/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The employment permits system is managed through the operation of the Highly Skilled Eligible Occupations List (HSEOL) and the Ineligible Categories of Employment List (ICEL). These occupations lists are reviewed twice yearly to keep pace with rapid labour market changes and to be proactively identifying and addressing shortages as they arise.

Ireland is a leader EU -wide in linking labour market intelligence to economic migration policy and is guided by research undertaken by Solas, the Expert group of Future Skills Needs, Government Strategies as well as through a public consultation process.

The occupation of Civil Engineer is not on the ICEL and is therefore currently eligible for a General Employment Permit. CAD Technicians are currently ineligible for an Employment permit.

A review of these lists is underway at present and is expected to be finalised before the end of January 2019. The review commenced with a public call for submissions from stakeholders and interest groups requesting changes to the lists. Submissions have been received in respect of a range of occupations including many from the construction sector, and those submissions and other relevant research and data are now being examined.

Changes to the occupation lists are made following a clear demonstration that recruitment difficulties within Ireland and across the EEA are not as a result of factors such as salary, employment conditions or lack of upskilling opportunities but that genuine skills and labour shortages exist for the specific occupations in question.

Any proposed changes to the Highly Skilled and Ineligible lists will be submitted to me for approval following their consideration by the Interdepartmental Group on Economic Migration. Changes to the lists are made by way of amending Regulations under the Employment Permit Acts and it is expected that the process will be completed as soon as possible in early February. The outcome of the review of occupations lists will then be made available on the Department's website.

Work Permits Eligibility

494. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the consultation process regarding eligible occupation lists for employment permits; if this consultation will only examine the construction sector; the timeframe for the completion of the consultation and report of the outcome; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [54504/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The

employment permits system is managed through the operation of the Highly Skilled Eligible Occupations List (HSEOL) and the Ineligible Categories of Employment List (ICEL). These occupations lists are reviewed twice yearly to keep pace with rapid labour market changes and to be proactively identifying and addressing shortages as they arise.

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Foreign Direct Investment

495. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to provide funding for advance factories in 2019 for potential foreign direct investment in the regions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [54040/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The first phase of the IDA's €150m Regional Property Programme (RPP) is scheduled to conclude this year. The final advance buildings planned in the initial programme are currently under construction in Dundalk, Galway, Waterford and Limerick and are on track for completion by the end of 2019.

As part of Budget 2019, an additional €10m of funding was allocated to the IDA to increase its property budget to €47m. This budgetary increase will allow the Agency to begin a second phase of the RPP this year, which will see work begin on new buildings in Carlow, Athlone, Dundalk and Monaghan.

More broadly, the RPP remains an important tool through which we can help encourage further investment from overseas firms into regional Ireland. As the IDA's record 2018 results demonstrated, significant progress has already been made in terms of generating new FDI-driven employment opportunities outside of Dublin. 58% of all IDA client-supported employment, in fact, is now located outside the capital. I am confident that the next phase of the RPP will help us increase, in due course, that percentage even further.

IDA Ireland Site Visits

496. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation when sites will be identified as suitable for the location of large-scale data centres; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [54103/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): In 2017 IDA Ireland appointed Jacobs Engineering, supported by AOS Planning, to identify potential strategic land banks in Ireland that would be particularly suitable for the sustainable development of data centre projects. The study was commissioned to understand what locations in Ireland are best placed to win and sustain this type of investment. The evaluation process, which has since been completed by Jacobs, focused on evaluating all potentially viable land options that would be compatible with the complex and evolving needs of data centre investments.

As indicated previously, the study is for internal IDA Ireland purposes only and is not intended for publication due to its commercial sensitivity.

Over recent years, leading international technology and computing companies have announced several significant data centre investments for Ireland and the goal is to ensure that this trend continues. In that context, IDA Ireland, supported by the relevant key stakeholders, will continue to highlight credible and flexible property solutions that form part of the competitive value proposition for this sector.

Foreign Direct Investment

497. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation further to Parliamentary Question No. 140 of 21 June 2018, if there have been developments in relation to the possible location of an inward investment project at a location (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [54104/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The IDA Ireland business and technology park in Killygarry, County Cavan covers approximately 17 hectares. The main tenant on the park at present is ATA Group, an Enterprise Ireland (EI) client. IDA Ireland has completed a sale, in the past number of months, of other land at the park to a separate EI client company. It is hoped that this recent investment will generate new employment opportunities for the area. The IDA will continue as well to seek new investment for the Park and the wider region from overseas firms.

With respect to Cavan more generally, IDA Ireland markets the County as part of its North-East region, together with Louth and Monaghan. The Agency has a dedicated regional manager for the area and has an office in the Cavan Innovation and Technology Centre. As part of its strategy to encourage investment to the area the Agency is focusing on sectors including agri-food, manufacturing, tourism and internationally traded services. The IDA also regularly engages with key stakeholders on the ground in Cavan including local authorities, the education sector and both overseas and indigenous companies with a view to generating new employment opportunities.

Brexit Supports

498. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if a specific funding programme will be introduced to assist small and medium enterprises in the Border region that are totally or heavily dependent on the Northern Ireland or British market due to the difficulties that will arise from Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter.

[54111/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department and its agencies are providing extensive supports, schemes and advice to ensure that businesses are prepared for Brexit. These measures aim to assist businesses in identifying key risk areas and the practical preparatory actions to be taken over the coming weeks.

My Department and I have been very active in the ‘Getting Ireland Brexit Ready’ public information campaign. This campaign includes workshop events throughout the country aimed primarily at business and people most impacted by Brexit. A ‘Getting Ireland Brexit Ready’ event was recently held in Monaghan in October and I was delighted to welcome many businesses from the Border Region. Officials from my Department and agencies also participated in the Getting Ireland Brexit Ready event in Letterkenny in Donegal on Friday 30 November last, which included Enterprise Ireland, IDA, the LEOs, NSAI and the HSA.

As part of Budget 2019, I allocated an additional €1 million to InterTradeIreland (ITI). ITI works with SMEs on an all-Ireland basis and is particularly well-placed, given its remit to develop cross-border trade, to help SMEs prepare for the particular North-South challenges associated with Brexit.

The ITI Brexit Advisory Service provides a focal point for SMEs working to navigate any changes in cross-border trading relationships arising as a result of Brexit. As part of the service, ITI has organised a series of awareness events focused on improving knowledge of customs processes and procedures and identifying actions that can be taken in areas such as logistics and supply chain management.

ITI also offers a Brexit Start to Plan voucher scheme, which enables businesses to get professional advice on how best to plan and prepare for the UK’s withdrawal from the European Union. This support helps businesses obtain advice on specific areas such as tariffs, currency management, regulatory and customs issues and movement of labour, goods and services. ITI vouchers are worth up to €2,250 (inclusive of VAT) each. Companies are finding the vouchers very useful and there has been strong demand which can be attributed to the media campaign conducted by ITI across a range of platforms.

The Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) in the Border Regions are the first-stop-shop for anyone seeking guidance and support on starting or growing their business. The LEOs have organised various events to enable companies to learn about the potential impacts and opportunities of Brexit. In addition, 402 LEO clients have received one-to-one mentoring solely focused on Brexit.

The LEOs engage in a number of other schemes to help companies prepare for Brexit. Technical Assistance Grants for Micro Export are offered as an incentive for LEO clients to explore and develop new market opportunities. Also, additional capital funding of €5 million was announced in Budget 2019 for local enterprise development.

In addition, the six LEOs in the Border region are working together with their Northern Ireland counterparts under the EU Co-Innovate Programme. The aim of Co-Innovate is to give SMEs from the manufacturing and tradable services sectors in the eligible regions the tools and tailored support to help them to innovate, differentiate and compete successfully.

In December, I announced a further €30 million in funding for successful projects under Call 2 of the competitive Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF). Taking the first and second calls of the REDF together, the Border Region had seven successful projects with a total funding allocation of more than €10.6 million. This funding will drive enterprise development

and job creation in the Border Region.

In April 2017, I asked all the Regional Action Plan for Jobs Implementation Committees to start a process to refresh and refocus all Regional Plans to ensure their relevance and impact out to 2020. This will ensure that the Plans remain effective and that they continue to deliver jobs across the country, in all regions, and can be robust in addressing the challenges we face, including Brexit. As a result, both the North-West and the North-East will both have their own plans in the new iteration and Brexit will be an ongoing priority area for both Committees. These plans are being finalised and will be published in February.

The €300 million Brexit Loan Scheme provides relatively short term working capital, 1-3 years, to eligible businesses with up to 499 employees to help them innovate, change or adapt to mitigate their Brexit challenges. The scheme is open to eligible businesses from all regions of the country, including those in the Border counties. Businesses can confirm their eligibility with the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) and if deemed eligible, can apply to one of the participating finance providers for a loan under the scheme.

The Future Growth Loan Scheme was announced in Budget 2019. The scheme will provide a longer-term facility, 8 to 10 years, of up to €300m to support strategic capital investment for a post-Brexit environment by business at competitive rates. This is jointly funded by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. Loans of €50,000 to €3m will be available, with loans of under €500,000 being provided on an unsecured basis. The scheme will be available to eligible Irish businesses, including those in the primary agriculture and seafood sectors, to support strategic, long-term investment in a post-Brexit environment. The SBCI has issued an “Open Call” for financial institutions to apply by 11 February 2019 for designation as a lending partner under the Scheme. It is expected that this Scheme will be operational in early 2019.

Last week I announced the Enterprise Ireland (EI) Annual Results where every region in Ireland recorded increases in employment, including a 9% increase in the North West and a 3% increase in the North East. Nationally, a record 215,207 people are now employed in EI supported companies. Over 23,700 of these jobs are in the Border region. Some of the recent EI jobs announcements for the region have included 90 new jobs in E & I Engineering in Donegal, 80 new jobs in Crust & Crumb in Co. Cavan and 200 new jobs in Combilift in Co. Monaghan.

EI also recently launched a new Customs Insights Online course which is a new online training support to help all businesses understand how customs work including the documentation and process required to operate and succeed post Brexit. The Customs Insights course explains in clear and simple terms the main customs rules and included the key actions companies can take to prepare for customs after Brexit and the options from Revenue that are available to make the customs process more efficient. This will be available for any company to use whether they are importers or exporters and also whether they are agency clients or not.

In order to help build the enterprise capability in this region, under the Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF) EI invested in seven successful projects in the Border region with a total funding allocation of more than €10.6 million. This funding will drive enterprise development and job creation in the Border Region.

Enterprise Ireland will continue to engage with its clients including those in the Border region to ensure they have the supports required to prepare for any kind of Brexit.

While I have seen a very positive uptake of the supports available, not everyone is engaging. With Brexit around the corner, I want businesses, particularly those around the Border counties to know my Department and agencies are here to help. My Department and its agencies are pro-

viding extensive supports, schemes and advice to ensure that businesses are prepared for Brexit.

Departmental Expenditure

499. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the cost incurred by her Department in 2018 for the use of taxi services; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [54203/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Department incurred taxi costs totalling €39,771.36 during 2018.

The Department's Travel and Subsistence policy requires that taxis should only be used where no other form of suitable public transport is available, or where there is a justifiable reason to use a taxi.

The 2018 costs cover taxi services availed of by staff of the Department and its Offices undertaking official business across the country and whilst representing Ireland at various meetings abroad.

Staff of the Offices are directly employed by the Department and they include the Companies Registration Office, the Labour Court, the Patents Office, the Office of Director of Corporate Enforcement and the Workplace Relations Commission.

For domestic taxi usage the Department avails of taxi services on account and as provided for under the shared services framework operated by the Office of Government Procurement.

The total costs are based on information provided to the Department by the Payroll Shared Services Centre who process travel and subsistence claims on behalf of the Department and its Offices.

Work Permits Applications

500. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if a work permit will be granted for a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [54303/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Employment Permits Section of my Department informs me that it has not received an application for an Employment Permit in respect of the named person (details supplied).

National Standards Authority of Ireland

501. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation further to Parliamentary Question No. 259 of 11 December 2018, if she will address matters (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [54311/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The regulation of carbon monoxide alarms is a policy matter for my colleague, the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, Eoghan Murphy TD. The National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI), an agency under my remit, carries out national standardisation activity in support of policy makers and regulators in their functions.

As I advised in my reply to you of 11 December last, the NSAI Gas Technical Standards Committee agreed in November 2018 that NSAI would undertake a scoping exercise to assess the feasibility of producing a standard for the installation of carbon monoxide monitors in commercial buildings. This work will commence by the end of Q1 2019.

NSAI will consult with relevant Government Departments and agencies to determine the levels of interest, policy support and availability of guidance for the development of such a standard. It will also engage with a wide range of other stakeholders, including fuel suppliers/distributors, trades groups, device manufacturers, interested societal stakeholders and other public bodies, whose expertise and technical knowledge would be essential for the elaboration of a national standard, with a view to establishing a working group as appropriate.

While it is not usual to solicit submissions by the public during the development stage of a standard, once the work is underway members of the public may submit views directly to the working group or through any of the members of the group, particularly the relevant public bodies.

Following its elaboration, the draft document will be made available through the NSAI website for public comment during which time any interested party, including members of the public, may submit their observations. All comments received will be reviewed by the committee members who will decide the final text by consensus.

Departmental Expenditure

502. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the budget and expenditure in her Department for marketing, media and social media in each of the years 2016 to 2018; the projected expenditure for 2019; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [54457/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The table below provides details of expenditure incurred by my Department and its Offices on marketing and media, including advertising campaigns, over the period 2016 to 2018.

It is not possible at this stage to provide details of the projected spend by my Department in 2019 on marketing and media initiatives as projects which are considered beneficial will only be identified over the course of the year.

With regard to the Offices under the aegis of my Department, the Companies Registration Office estimates that it will spend €103,000 on business awareness campaigns in 2019. Due to the change of name of the Patents Office to the Intellectual Property Office of Ireland, it is estimated that expenditure of €30,000 will be incurred by that Office on marketing and media in this regard in 2019.

My Department and its Offices use external service providers having regard to the business needs for such services. In engaging such providers, the Department and its Offices are mindful of the need to secure value for money while achieving desired outcomes.

Expenditure incurred by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation and its Offices over the period 2016 to 2018 on Marketing, Media and Advertising Campaigns

Description of Marketing/Media Initiative and Advertising Campaign	Service Provider	Expenditure Incurred in 2016
Advertising campaign to raise awareness of the Prompt Payment Code	Strategem b.t.l. Ltd.	€36,232
Information campaign for the implementation of the Construction Contracts Act, 2013	Mediavest Ltd	€19,523
Newspaper advertising regarding mandatory e-filing campaign. Companies obliged to file annual returns with CRO electronically in 2017.	Mediavest Ltd	€40,617
Web development and creative video and radio production costs associated with the actionplanforjobs.ie awareness campaign to promote business supports for SMEs.	Atomic Advertising Ltd	€12,054
Communications Services for WRC including PR, media monitoring, advising on design, content and production of reports and brochures.	Barberry Ltd	€4,982
Design of Digital distribution of DBEI Business Bulletin	Acton BV	€1,623
WRC Magazine Advert	TFS Media Agency T/A 256 Media	€677
Communication Services for WRC, including media Monitoring	Fuzion Communications	€443
WRC branded promotional pens	National Pen Ltd	€996
WRC Exhibition space	National Ploughing Association of Ireland	€2,394
WRC at SFA Annual Conference 2016	IBEC-Small Firms Association	€2,399
WRC Exhibition Stand at TY Expo 2016	Transition Year Ireland	€517
WRC Exhibition Stand at ISME 2016 National Conference	Irish Small and Medium Enterprise Association	€1,599
Total Expenditure Incurred in 2016		€124,056
Description of Marketing/Media Initiative and Advertising Campaign	Service Provider	Expenditure Incurred in 2017
Advertising campaign to raise awareness of the Prompt Payment Code	Strategem b.t.l. Ltd.	€25,165
Information campaign for the implementation of the Construction Contracts Act, 2013	Mediavest Ltd	€1,765
Workplace Relations Commission advert in National Ploughing Championship catalogue	Guerin Media Ltd	€1,230

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Description of Marketing/Media Initiative and Advertising Campaign	Service Provider	Expenditure Incurred in 2016
Radio and newspaper advertising relating to the Workplace Relations Commission's "Walk Through Working Life" campaign launched at the 2017 Ploughing Championships	Fuzion Communications	€4,404
Advertising in relation to the opening of the Workplace Relations Commission Sligo Office	Fuzion Communications	€3,198
Design of advertisements for WRC	Fuzion Communications	€5,899
Production/design of artwork for WRC	Paul Martin Communications Ltd	€148
Design and production of pull up banners for WRC	Hudson Print Room Ltd	€1,107
Artwork for WRC work programme	Print Stations	€117
Provision of Communication services to the Workplace Relations Commission	Fuzion Communications	€12,122
WRC Jobs Expo Stand	Careers Unlimited	€3,690
WRC Jobs Expo Stand	Careers Unlimited	€2,592
Supply and set up WRC Marquee at National Ploughing Championships	All in One Event Hire	€4,898
WRC Exhibition space, admission tickets	National Ploughing Association of Ireland	€4,902
WRC Exhibition Stand at TY Expo 2017	Transition Year Ireland	€517
WRC Exhibition Stand at Zeminar 2017	Zeminar	€2,454
WRC at SFA Annual Conference 2017	IBEC-Small Firms Association	€2,460
WRC Exhibition Stand	ICTU	€450
Design, production, delivery and erection of WRC Serpentine Exhibition stands and banners	Applied Signs and Display Ltd	€34,409
Newspaper and radio advertising regarding mandatory e-filing campaign. Companies now obliged to file annual returns with CRO electronically.	Mediavest Ltd	€161,249
Design of Digital distribution of DBEI Business Bulletin	Acton BV	€1,623
Total Expenditure Incurred in 2017		€274,399
Description of Marketing/Media Initiative and Advertising Campaign	Service Provider	Expenditure Incurred in 2018

Description of Marketing/Media Initiative and Advertising Campaign	Service Provider	Expenditure Incurred in 2016
Advertisement in the August 2018 edition of the Accountancy Ireland magazine to create awareness of the supportingsmes.ie online tool	Chartered Accountants Ireland	€3,247
Advertising Location Signs for WRC at the Tullamore Show	Tullamore & County Offaly Show	€100
Advertising costs relating to the recruitment of external adjudicators	Public Appointments Commission	€3,424
Adverts costs in Agriland (On Line advertising)	Fuzion Communications	€1,476
Newspaper advertisements seeking written submissions in respect of the Labour Court review of Joint Labour Committees 2018	Media Vest Limited	€7,169
Design of advertising for Workplace Relations Commission stand at National Ploughing Championships	Fuzion Communications	€2,287
Workplace Relations Commission seminar - The World of Work – A shifting landscape – design of brochures and PR	Fuzion Communications	€3,266
Workplace Relations Commission employment rights public awareness campaign – Market Garden	Irish Farmers Journal	€8,467
Advertisement promoting Workplace Relations Commission stand at the National Ploughing Championships	Irish Farmers Journal	€3,764
Advertisement promoting Workplace Relations Commission stand at the National Ploughing Championships	Westmeath/Offaly Independent Print Co Ltd	€708
Radio advertisement promoting Workplace Relations Commission stand at the National Ploughing Championships	Midlands 103	€5,910
Advertisement promoting Workplace Relations Commission stand at the National Ploughing Championships	Guerin Media Ltd	€431
Newspaper advertising to promote awareness of the Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund and the launch of the first call for funding	Mediavest Ltd	€10,677
Targeted LinkedIn campaign to promote awareness of the Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund and the launch of the first call for funding	Spark Foundry	€2,742
Printing of Trade Licensing information leaflets	Print Depot	€215

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Description of Marketing/Media Initiative and Advertising Campaign	Service Provider	Expenditure Incurred in 2016
Communication services for WRC including PR, Advising on the design, content and production of reports, brochures, documents and audio-visual concepts and productions, media monitoring	Fuzion Communications	€8,961
Print and supply for Ploughing	Vestigo Logistics Ltd	€7,770
Design and Print for Ploughing Marquee	Vestigo Logistics Ltd	€1,769
WRC branded promotional pens	National Pen Company	€2,810
Promotional merchandise, mugs, bags, highlighters, bottles and WRC branded Jackets and Polo shirts	Zip Office Solutions	€12,528
WRC Exhibition space	National Ploughing Association of Ireland	€4,953
WRC at Taking care of Business exhibition	Health & Safety Authority	€727
WRC Exhibition Stand School Summit	Bell Media Ltd	€2,706
WRC Exhibition Stand at ITBA Expo 18	Irish Thoroughbred Breeders Association	€1,230
WRC Jobs Expo Stand	Careers Unlimited	€9,840
WRC Exhibition Stand at Retail Retreat 2018	Retail Excellence Services Ltd	€3,075
WRC Stand at GradIreland Live	GTI Media Ltd	€2,429
WRC HR Leadership Summit 2018 Sponsorship	IBEC-Small Firms Association	€6,150
WRC Trade Stands advertising and Entrance Tickets	Tullamore and County Offaly Agricultural Show	€819
WRC Conference Stand and Media Advertising	Business Studies Teachers Association of Ireland	€500
WRC Marquee set up National Ploughing Championships	All in One Event Hire	€4,971
WRC Stand at ISME Annual Conference 2018	Irish Small and Medium Enterprise Association	€2,768
WRC Chair and Table Rental for Exhibition	Exhibition and Conference Services Ltd	€160
WRC Chair and Table Rental for Exhibition	Total Event Rental	€268
Design of Digital distribution of DBEI Business Bulletin	Acton BV	€1,623
Print and delivery of 6,000 Brexit Ready leaflets	Fine Print Ltd	€610
Print and delivery of 3,000 Brexit Ready leaflets	Impress Printing Works Ltd	€330

Description of Marketing/Media Initiative and Advertising Campaign	Service Provider	Expenditure Incurred in 2016
Printing of 6 DBEI and GOI branding pull ups (inc. provision of poles and carry cases)	Power Design	€1,205
Design and print of Brexit leaflets for the National Ploughing Championships	Wilson Creative	€861
Nomadic Stand	Wilson Creative	€470
Nomadic Stand	Wilson Creative	€1,180
Total Expenditure Incurred in 2018		€134,596

Departmental Staff Data

503. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of staff in her Department employed to work on marketing, media and social media in 2018. [54474/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): In my Department, the Communications Unit coordinates and deals with all queries from the media. This Unit also informs the public via traditional and social media about policies, functions and activities of the Department.

This Unit is currently led by the Head of Communications - Principal Officer level – who was appointed on 17 July 2017. The Department made this appointment as part of a wider drive to strengthen professional expertise within its corporate functions, which is a key objective of the Civil Service Renewal Plan.

The Press function within the Communications Unit is supported by a staff complement of five (one Assistant Principal Officer, one Administrative Officer, one Executive Officer and two Clerical Officers). The Communications Unit also leads on engagement with a broad range of stakeholders and with the Agencies under the remit of the Department, to inform the media and the general public on policy matters across the wide mission of my Department, its Offices and Agencies.

The Department is committed to ensuring effective communication with all of our customers, both internal and external and we endeavour to ensure that all possible assistance is given to all of our customers in accessing information on the wide range of services that we provide.

In addition to the Press function, the Communications Unit is further supported by a staff complement of five (one Assistant Principal Officer, one Higher Executive Officer, two Executive Officers and one Clerical Officer).

During 2018, my Department recruited two Communications and Media Assistants at Executive Officer grade, one of whom was appointed to the Companies Registration Office and the second to the Workplace Relations Commission. These roles support both these Offices in the effective use of social media, preparation of media content for their respective websites, and assisting with event planning management.

My Department is continuously committed to maintaining and improving its commitment to, and delivery of, the highest standards of quality customer service. As a result, the staffing complement in the Communication Unit has increased in an effort to engage with and respond

to the growing demands from the media and the general public on the wide range of Departmental policies, functions and activities.

Enterprise Ireland Investments

504. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of cumulative redeemable convertible preference shares Enterprise Ireland holds; the value of the investments; the number of companies that are supported in this way; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [54505/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Enterprise Ireland provides financial and non-financial supports to clients. Support to client companies is tailored to the company's stage of development, its business plan and level of ambition. In 2017 Enterprise Ireland provided €203,276,000 in financial support to industry (figures for 2018 will not be available until Enterprise Ireland's 2018 Annual Report is published later this year). This financial support was administered to clients via equity investments such as Cumulative Convertible Redeemable Preference Shares (CCRP) Shares and Ordinary Shares and grant aid.

In 2017 Enterprise Ireland made 388 equity investments in 319 companies totalling €36.9m. These investments were matched by domestic and international investors. At the end of 2017 Enterprise Ireland's Direct Equity Portfolio held equity investments in 1,526 client companies. This portfolio generated income of €26.8m from share sales, share redemptions and dividends.

The table below details the level of investment by Enterprise Ireland in companies using CCPR Shares as of September 2018 (figures for year end are not available).

EI CCRP Portfolio at (as of the September 2018)

	Cost €'m	Number of invest-ments	Number of compa-nies
Total CCRPs	€134.4	830	571

Industrial Disputes

505. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the position regarding the joint labour committee Sunday rates for security workers; if her attention has been drawn to the fact that many security staff are of the view that the Sunday rate should be increased to double pay in line with many other workers; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [54530/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen): Joint Labour Committees (JLCs) are provided for under the Industrial Relations Act 1946 and were reformed by the Industrial Relations (Amendment) Act, 2012. A JLC is comprised of equal numbers of representatives of employers and workers in a sector.

The JLC for the Security Industry was established by SI. 377 of 1998, as amended by SI. 30 of 2014, which remains in force.

JLCs meet under an independent Chairperson to discuss proposals for terms and conditions to apply to specified grades or categories of workers in the relevant sector. If agreement is reached, the JLC publishes details and invites submissions from interested parties.

If, after consideration of any submissions received, the Committee adopts the proposals it will submit them to the Labour Court for consideration. The Labour Court will in turn consider the matter, and if appropriate, will then make a recommendation on the adoption of the proposals. My role as Minister, provided that I am satisfied that the Labour Court has followed due process, is to approve an Order giving effect to the recommendation. The current Employment Regulation Order for the Security Industry came into effect on 1st June 2017 (S.I. No. 231 of 2017).

The constitution and proceedings of JLCs is set out in the Fifth Schedule to the Industrial Relations Act, 1990. As Minister, I have no function in the determination of the terms of Employment Regulation Orders which under legislation is a matter solely for the relevant JLC and the Labour Court.

IDA Ireland Jobs Data

506. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of IDA Ireland-supported jobs created in each county in 2018, by county; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1039/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): IDA Ireland's performance in 2018 resulted in the sixth consecutive year of strong growth under the Agency's current strategy. By the end of last year, total employment in the Agency's client companies stood at 229,057. Every region in Ireland has seen foreign direct investment-driven employment gains and there are now over 132,000 people employed across 681 firms in IDA client companies located outside of Dublin. 58% of all IDA client-supported jobs, in fact, are now located outside the capital. I am determined, together with the IDA, to see this trend continue and we will be doing everything possible in 2019 to encourage more firms to invest further in the regions.

The table below provides a breakdown of jobs created by IDA supported companies in each county for 2018.

	New Jobs Created (Gross Gains)	Additional Jobs Created (Net Change)	Total Jobs
Carlow	275	275	1150
Cavan	15	-59	1096
Clare	494	-58	6948
Cork	3177	2087	38867
Donegal	212	172	3564
Dublin	11039	6231	96760
Galway	1971	1466	19969
Kerry	122	54	2241
Kildare	639	386	8838
Kilkenny	36	-5	711
Laois	4	-12	122
Leitrim	26	25	909
Limerick	1458	1189	11796
Longford	171	155	900
Louth	349	139	3903

	New Jobs Created (Gross Gains)	Additional Jobs Cre- ated (Net Change)	Total Jobs
Mayo	426	344	4828
Meath	122	67	1632
Monaghan	13	12	162
Offaly	78	65	1232
Roscommon	123	32	1171
Sligo	184	13	2251
Tipperary	296	55	3720
Waterford	471	374	7064
Westmeath	502	493	3466
Wexford	171	152	3139
Wicklow	411	388	2618
Grand Total	22,785	14,040	229,057

IDA Ireland Funding

507. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the funding awarded to companies by IDA Ireland in 2018, by county in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1040/19]

520. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the companies that received in excess of €500,000 in grants from the IDA in 2018, in tabular form; the grant amount for each of these companies in 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1574/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 507 and 520 together.

IDA Ireland is authorised by my Department to provide a range of financial supports to companies in the form of employment, capital, research and development, environmental and training grants. These grants remain an important means of encouraging firms to invest in Ireland, particularly in regional locations.

I am informed by the IDA that information on the total of grants paid to client companies in 2018 will be made available once they have been audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General. This audit should be completed by mid-2019.

IDA Ireland Supports

508. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if she will liaise with IDA Ireland to ensure that Drogheda is front and fore on its website in the Border area, including setting up an invest in Drogheda section which will highlight the many positive aspects in setting up business in Drogheda (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1090/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The content of IDA Ireland's website is an operational matter for the Agency. However, the IDA has confirmed that the "Invest in" initiative will be reviewed as part of their communications plan which will be implemented when the Agency publishes their new five-year strategy in 2020.

This Government is fully committed to the creation of high-quality and sustainable employment across Ireland, including in County Louth. There are now 3,903 people employed in IDA client companies in Louth with 139 net new jobs added in 2018. The new National Development Plan recognises the importance of Dundalk and Drogheda as key centres in the context of the Dublin-Belfast economic corridor. Both towns have a strong track record in attracting multinational companies due to the quality of the local infrastructure as well as their proximity to Dublin's transport hubs. I am therefore confident that we will be able to sustain and grow investment levels in County Louth, including in Drogheda.

IDA Ireland Data

509. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the net increase in IDA supported jobs during 2018; the regions of the country which lost and gained such jobs in 2018; the impact of Brexit on FDI job creation; the cost per job of the new positions created by FDI in 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1099/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): IDA Ireland's performance in 2018 resulted in the sixth consecutive year of strong growth under the Agency's current strategy. By the end of last year, total employment in the Agency's client companies stood at 229,057 with 14,040 net new jobs added. Every region in Ireland has seen foreign direct investment (FDI) employment gains and there are now over 132,000 people employed in 681 IDA client companies located outside of Dublin, with 56% of all net new FDI jobs created last year based in regional locations.

Information on the IDA cost per job for 2018 is currently unavailable. I have been informed by the Agency that it will be available when the 2018 Annual Report is published in June of this year.

IDA Ireland is actively supporting its clients in responding to the challenges raised by Brexit while also seeking to capitalise on possible investment opportunities that may arise. I am pleased to say that the Agency secured over 55 Brexit-related investments in 2018 with over 4,500 associated jobs.

Despite these positive FDI trends, the Government is focused on our need to remain as competitive as possible. A new five-year strategy for IDA Ireland will be prepared this year to ensure the Agency remains able to compete for, and secure, more first-rate investment projects and to meet other challenges ahead.

Work Permits Applications Data

510. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of work permits applied for in each of the years 2010 to 2018; the number refused; the number granted; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1204/19]

511. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the average waiting time for a work permit to be processed; the number of permits awaiting processing; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1205/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 510 and 511 together.

The Employment Permits section in my Department has experienced a large increase in

demand for employment permits throughout 2018 due to our continued economic success, growing labour market and reduced labour surplus, which has in turn contributed to increased processing times for applications.

In 2018, 16,768 employment permit applications were accepted, a 27% increase over 2017 (13,217). Over the same period 13,398 permits were granted, an 18% increase over 2017 (11,354) so productivity is improving. My officials inform me that, at the end of 2018, approximately 2,620 applications were awaiting processing.

Good progress had been made in reducing processing times in Q4 2018, with processing times for Trusted Partners falling from 7 weeks to 5 weeks, and from 16 weeks to 12 weeks for standard applications by December last. This was achieved through a combination of increased resources, staff working overtime and some ICT and other operational improvements. In addition, solutions are also being developed to eliminate the impact on processing times of seasonal challenges and work is underway on developing a new IT system which will further reduce processing times.

Finally, the statistics requested by the Deputy are set out in the following table:

Year	Applications Accepted	Permits Granted	Permits Refused
2010	7,967	7,877	1,212
2011	6,054	5,374	1,216
2012	4,925	4,139	965
2013	4,602	3,923	547
2014	6,303	5,496	588
2015	9,021	7,265	906
2016	11,317	9,383	1,651
2017	13,217	11,354	1,516
2018	16,768	13,398	1,38

Brexit Supports

512. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of businesses that have availed of the Brexit scorecard to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1208/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Enterprise Ireland has introduced a number of Brexit specific programmes to help Irish companies remain resilient in the face of uncertainty. One of these measures is an online “Brexit SME Scorecard” to help all Irish businesses self-assess their exposure to Brexit. As of 7 January 2019, 3,712 Brexit Scorecards have been completed.

The Scorecard generates a report on weak areas with suggested actions and resources, and information on events for companies to attend, to prepare for Brexit. While the Brexit Scorecard is available to all companies, Enterprise Ireland client exporting companies that utilise the Scorecard will then be able to engage with the agency’s experts both domestically and through the overseas offices in global markets for support in devising a strategy.

I should also point out that the Brexit Scorecard is only one of a wide range of supports offered by my Department and its Agencies to help businesses prepare for Brexit.

Brexit Supports

513. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of businesses that have availed of the be prepared grant to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1209/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Brexit presents the most significant economic challenge of the past 50 years, and it is important that we prepare for any long-term structural and disruptive change that may emerge. Being prepared is crucial to ensure resilience to emerging challenges. In 2018, EI approved funding of €74m for 535 of its most Brexit-exposed clients with exports to the UK of greater than 20%, or an average of €140,000 per company to support their business growth in the context of Brexit.

To promote awareness, and supported by a national Prepare For Brexit campaign, Enterprise Ireland (EI) launched a €5k Be Prepared Grant that supports the costs of SME clients in preparing a plan to mitigate risks and optimise opportunities arising from Brexit. To date, 151 Be Prepared Grants have been approved to client companies.

Enterprise Ireland provides a range of other financial and non-financial supports to companies to prepare for Brexit. These include:

- The Brexit SME Scorecard, an interactive online platform which can be used by all Irish companies to self-assess their exposure to Brexit under six business pillars.

- The Act On Programme which provides an independent consultant to companies for a course of two half day to assist them decide on specific actions to address some of the risks and opportunities from Brexit.

- The Strategic Consultancy Grant supports the hiring of a strategic consultant typically to assist the company in the development and/or the implementation of strategic initiatives. It is designed to facilitate business growth as the consultants can act as coach, mentor, facilitator, analyst for the company.

- The Market Discovery Fund specifically supports companies in their market diversification plans. The grant aims to incentivise companies to research viable and sustainable market entry strategies.

- The Agile Innovation Fund has been developed to support product, service and process innovation to build competitive advantage.

- Brexit Advisory Clinics to increase the awareness of Brexit amongst companies. Last year Enterprise Ireland ran 11 Brexit advisory clinics throughout the country. Approximately 915 people attended these events.

- A new Customs Insights Online course at the end of 2018 to demystify customs procedures. This is available for any company to use, importers or exporters and whether they are agency clients or not. The course will highlight the responsibilities of companies and will explain some of the main customs procedures and documentation involved.

A major initiative which my Department introduced last year for all Brexit impacted firms was the €300 million Brexit Working Capital Loan Scheme, under which accessible finance is made available to businesses at favourable terms. So far, 332 companies have been approved for eligibility under this scheme. My Department is also exploring the development of a longer-term Business Development Loan Scheme which would assist firms in long term investing for a post-Brexit environment.

The 31 Local Enterprise Offices nationwide have organised a range of events and initiatives to assist their client companies prepare for Brexit. These include technical assistance, a lean for micro initiative, mentoring and training, seminars and workshops.

Finally, InterTrade Ireland are rolling out a €2,000 Brexit 'Start to Plan' readiness voucher scheme, which enables companies to purchase specialist advice in areas such as customs, tax, tariff and non-tariff barriers, legal and labour mobility issues.

Departmental Programmes

514. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of businesses that have availed of the market discovery fund to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1210/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): A key strategy for Irish companies to withstand current global economic challenges is to diversify their export footprint. Enterprise Ireland (EI) launched the Market Discovery Fund in January 2018 with the aim of encouraging companies to expand into new markets by helping with the costs of researching viable and sustainable market entry strategies. Since then, 208 Market Discovery Grants have been approved by EI.

The Fund provides support towards both internal and external costs incurred by companies when researching new markets for products and services. Eligible companies can receive support when they are looking at a new geographic market for an existing product/service, or when looking at exporting a new product/service to a market that they already do business in.

The Market Discovery Fund is available across three levels:

- Level 1: Grant up to €35K
- Level 2: Grant greater than €35K but less than €75K
- Level 3: Grant greater than €75K but less than €150K

The maximum funding is 50% of eligible expenditure up to a maximum grant of €150,000. Eligible expenditure includes, but is not limited to, salary support, consultancy costs, trade fair costs and foreign travel.

EI is actively promoting the suite of supports available to client companies to ensure that they are prepared for Brexit.

The Market Discovery Fund is only one of a wide range of supports offered by my Department and its agencies to help support businesses prepare for Brexit. In 2018, EI approved funding of €74m for 535 of its most Brexit-exposed clients with exports to the UK of greater than 20%, or an average of €140,000 per company to support their business growth in the context of Brexit.

Brexit Supports

515. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of businesses that have applied for loans from the Brexit loan scheme; the number of applications that have been refused; the number of businesses by county that have

been approved funding; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1211/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Brexit Loan Scheme provides affordable working capital to eligible businesses with up to 499 employees that are or will be impacted by Brexit and meet the scheme criteria. The €23 million exchequer funding (€14 million from my Department and €9 million from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine) has been leveraged to provide a fund of up to €300 million.

It has been designed to assist eligible Irish businesses in the short-term to deal with the challenges of Brexit, which include the pressures of increased market instability and currency volatility. The scheme is open to both State Agency clients and businesses that do not have any relationship with State Agencies. Sole traders may also apply.

The scheme features a two-stage application process. First, businesses must apply to the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) to confirm their eligibility for the scheme. The SBCI assess the applications and successful applicants receive an eligibility reference number.

Successful applicants can then apply for a loan under the scheme with one of the participating finance providers. Approval of loans under the Brexit Loan Scheme is subject to the finance providers' own credit policies and procedures.

The scheme was launched in March 2018, as of 11 January 2019, there have been 369 applications received, of which 325 have been approved, and a further 36 are being processed and 63 loans progressed to sanction at finance provider level to a value of €14.8 million. Six businesses were deemed not eligible. These figures were issued as an interim update, more detailed information is available on a quarterly basis.

Information on the number of businesses approved for funding by county could identify individual enterprises. A more meaningful approach is to look at the activity by industry, economic regional level and innovation criteria. For example, Manufacturing accounts for 38% of approvals, Brexit impacted exporters account for almost 50% of approvals while 20% of approved applications relate to investments in new products or markets.

Brexit Supports

516. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of businesses that have availed of the Brexit start planning vouchers to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1212/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department and its agencies and bodies are providing a range of supports to help companies to prepare for Brexit.

The "Start to Plan" voucher scheme is offered by InterTradeIreland (ITI) as part of its Brexit Advisory Service. ITI works with SMEs on an all-Ireland basis and is particularly well-placed, given its remit to develop cross-border trade, to help SMEs prepare for the North-South challenges associated with Brexit.

The "Start to Plan" vouchers, valued at €2250, enable companies to access professional advice on specific areas such as tariffs, currency management, regulatory and customs issues and movement of labour, goods and services. There has been strong demand for the voucher scheme, with over 650 vouchers approved to date.

ITI is planning to expand its range of Brexit supports in 2019. The proposed initiatives will include a “Start to Act’ voucher, valued at €5,000, which will assist companies to implement recommendations and advice received through the initial voucher scheme. The Brexit Advisory Service will also increase its digital learning delivery, making content available in an online training environment that can be conveniently accessed by SMEs.

To support this important work, my Department is providing an additional €1 million in capital funding to ITI in 2019. This funding will enable the body to engage with more of the companies that are seeking its support through the Brexit Advisory Service, as well as meeting demand for existing programmes which are all designed to promote and support cross-border trade.

Enterprise Ireland Data

517. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of new jobs supported by Enterprise Ireland in 2018, by county in tabular form; the number of jobs supported by Enterprise Ireland by county; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1571/19]

518. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of companies supported by Enterprise Ireland in 2018, by county in tabular form; the number of new companies supported by Enterprise Ireland in 2018, by county; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1572/19]

519. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the amount of grants provided to businesses by Enterprise Ireland by county in 2017 and 2018, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1573/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 517 to 519, inclusive, together.

On an annual basis Enterprise Ireland (EI) works with approximately 5,000 manufacturing and internationally traded services companies through the agency’s network of 10 offices in Ireland and 33 international offices.

In 2018, EI client companies reported strong employment performance with 215,207 people employed and 18,846 new jobs created. The tables below present the figures for the following:

- The number of new jobs supported by EI in 2018 by county
- The number of total jobs supported by EI in 2018 by county
- The number of companies supported by EI in 2018 by county
- The number of new companies supported by EI in 2018 by county
- The amount paid to EI companies by county in 2017 and 2018

Support to client companies is tailored to meet the individual needs of each client company in order to equip them to succeed in global markets. Every EI client company is assigned a developmental adviser who works with them to identify areas that can be optimised and improved. These areas are not just addressed through direct financial assistance, but through a wide range of soft supports, such as mentoring and management development programmes. These soft supports are not captured in the following tables.

Table 1: The number of new jobs supported by EI in 2018 by county

By county	2018 Total Gains (PFT+Other)
Carlow	332
Cavan	549
Clare	425
Cork	1,810
Donegal	512
Dublin	7,286
Galway	658
Kerry	237
Kildare	393
Kilkenny	430
Laois	179
Leitrim	63
Limerick	874
Longford	216
Louth	565
Mayo	582
Meath	563
Monaghan	514
Offaly	342
Roscommon	127
Sligo	158
Tipperary	448
Waterford	681
Westmeath	196
Wexford	276
Wicklow	430
Grand Total	18,846

Table 2: The number of total jobs supported by EI by county

By county	2018 Total Jobs
Carlow	3,221
Cavan	5,842
Clare	4,102
Cork	23,902
Donegal	3,818
Dublin	76,815
Galway	8,091
Kerry	4,727
Kildare	8,923
Kilkenny	4,549
Laois	1,527
Leitrim	607

By county	2018 Total Jobs
Limerick	9,553
Longford	2,979
Louth	5,923
Mayo	4,692
Meath	7,135
Monaghan	5,626
Offaly	4,307
Roscommon	1,764
Sligo	1,916
Tipperary	5,921
Waterford	6,849
Westmeath	3,536
Wexford	4,674
Wicklow	4,208
Grand Total	215,207

Table 3: The number of companies supported by EI in 2018, by county (measured by the number of companies that have received payment in 2018)

County	No. of companies Paid in 2018
Carlow	21
Cavan	22
Clare	36
Cork	157
Donegal	31
Dublin	526
Galway	100
Kerry	45
Kildare	52
Kilkenny	22
Laois	18
Leitrim	7
Limerick	63
Longford	14
Louth	49
Mayo	43
Meath	39
Monaghan	31
Offaly	15
Roscommon	11
Sligo	27
Tipperary	33
Waterford	28
Westmeath	19

County	No. of companies Paid in 2018
Wexford	30
Wicklow	41
Grand Total	1,480

Table 4: The number of new companies supported by EI in 2018 by county (measured by the number of HSPUs receiving payment from EI in 2018)

Client County	No. of HPSUs
Carlow	<5
Cavan	<5
Clare	5
Cork	26
Donegal	6
Dublin	145
Galway	20
Kerry	5
Kildare	5
Kilkenny	5
Limerick	7
Longford	<5
Louth	7
Mayo	7
Meath	6
Monaghan	<5
Offaly	<5
Roscommon	<5
Sligo	5
Tipperary	5
Waterford	7
Westmeath	<5
Wexford	<5
Wicklow	5
Grand Total	285

Table 5: The amount paid to EI companies by county in 2017 and 2018

Payment € by County	2017 Payments	2018 Payments
Carlow	€1,118,817	€856,501
Cavan	€2,509,330	€3,864,594
Clare	€3,490,451	€1,711,261
Cork	€9,630,852	€8,258,735
Donegal	€1,738,720	€1,306,644
Dublin	€34,113,688	€32,090,000
Galway	€4,678,283	€5,050,853
Kerry	€2,683,363	€2,471,050

Payment € by County	2017 Payments	2018 Payments
Kildare	€3,567,276	€4,131,644
Kilkenny	€2,943,649	€2,593,097
Laois	€345,759	€561,312
Leitrim	€142,319	€350,560
Limerick	€3,475,348	€4,297,737
Longford	€1,076,148	€4,000,876
Louth	€4,063,517	€3,079,928
Mayo	€5,021,555	€1,034,750
Meath	€1,177,941	€996,976
Monaghan	€7,191,630	€2,088,998
Offaly	€1,408,973	€1,031,220
Roscommon	€1,524,042	€121,099
Sligo	€981,489	€758,406
Tipperary	€2,507,609	€2,243,651
Waterford	€1,269,362	€1,732,163
Westmeath	€1,162,769	€1,226,009
Wexford	€2,136,312	€4,716,005
Wicklow	€1,740,122	€3,944,132
Total	€101,699,324	€94,518,201

Question No. 520 answered with Question No. 507.

Brexit Supports

521. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the status of the uptake of all Brexit related supports and services under the remit of her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1644/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys)(Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department and its agencies are working to provide extensive supports, schemes and advice to ensure that businesses are prepared for Brexit. These measures aim to assist businesses in identifying key risk areas and the practical preparatory actions to be taken over the coming weeks.

I made Brexit one of my top priorities in the allocations of funding for 2019 in my Department and I have allocated further funding to Brexit-related support from agencies and offices of my Department as part of Budget 2019. I have allocated an additional €5 million capital funding to the Local Enterprise Offices, an increase of 22% for 2019, and a further €1 million allocated to InterTrade Ireland to help SMEs prepare for the particular North-South challenges associated with Brexit. I have allocated an additional €3m to Enterprise Ireland and €2m to IDA Ireland to expand their global footprints and drive the diversification of trade and investment. Additional resources have also been distributed across Science Foundation Ireland and the Health and Safety Authority and the NSAI for 2019 to support enterprises adjust to the new relationships with the UK and pursue new opportunities.

Informed by detailed research, my Department has put in place a package of measures in response to the needs of businesses affected by Brexit-related uncertainty. The Brexit Loan

Scheme, launched in March of 2018, provides relatively short-term working capital, 1 to 3 years, to eligible businesses with up to 499 employees to help them to innovate, change or adapt to mitigate their Brexit challenges. Businesses can confirm their eligibility with the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) and, if deemed eligible, can apply to one of the participating finance providers for a loan under the scheme.

As at 11 January, there have been 369 applications for eligibility under the scheme, of which 325 have been approved to date, with a further 36 being processed by SBCI. 63 of those applications have progressed to sanction at bank value, to a total value of €14.83m.

Work continues on the development of the Future Growth Loan Scheme, which will provide a longer-term facility, 8 to 10 years, of up to €300m to support strategic capital investment for a post-Brexit environment by business at competitive rates.

InterTrade Ireland also plays a major role as part of Ireland's Brexit response and offers Brexit-related advisory services to eligible businesses. To date, more than 4,000 SMEs have directly engaged with the Brexit Advisory Service.

ITI offers a Brexit Start to Plan voucher scheme, which enables businesses to get professional advice on how best to plan and prepare for the UK's withdrawal from the European Union. This support helps businesses obtain advice on specific areas such as tariffs, currency management, regulatory and customs issues and movement of labour, goods and services. ITI vouchers are worth up to €2,250 (inclusive of VAT) each. As of its most recent report and the end of November 2018, 811 businesses have applied for a Brexit Start to Plan voucher, of which 657 have been approved.

Enterprise Ireland has established a Prepare for Brexit online portal and communications campaign, as well as an online "Brexit SME Scorecard" to help Irish businesses self-assess their exposure to Brexit and a "Be Prepared Grant" to support SME clients in planning to mitigate risks arising from Brexit. It has also launched a new Eurozone Strategy to help SMEs broaden their export footprint beyond the UK.

Over 3,700 business have used Enterprise Ireland's Brexit Scorecard to date and 85% of EI client firms are now taking actions, while 151 applications for the Be Prepared grant have been approved. 165 EI clients have received funding under its "Act On" programme, which supports the engagement of a consultant to help clients identify weaknesses and improve resilience. EI has also hosted 11 Brexit Advisory Clinics.

EI also recently launched a Customs Insights Online course which is a new online training support to help all businesses understand how customs work including the documentation and process required to operate and succeed post Brexit. The Customs Insights course explains in clear and simple terms the main customs rules and included the key actions companies can take to prepare for customs after Brexit and the options from Revenue that are available to make the customs process more efficient. This will be available for any company to use whether they are importers or exporters and also whether they are agency clients or not.

The Local Enterprise Offices [LEOs] are the first-stop-shop for anyone seeking guidance and support on starting or growing their business. The LEOs have organised various events to enable companies to learn about the potential impacts and opportunities of Brexit. In addition, over 400 LEO clients have received one-to-one mentoring solely focused on Brexit. Technical Assistance Grants for Micro Export are offered as an incentive for LEO clients to explore and develop new market opportunities. 391 LEO clients have been approved for the Technical Assistance Grant.

My Department has also been active in the ‘Getting Ireland Brexit Ready’ public information campaign. This campaign includes workshop events throughout the country aimed primarily at business and people most impacted by Brexit. These events have so far taken place in Cork, Galway, Monaghan, Dublin, Limerick and Donegal.

Small and Medium Enterprises Supports

522. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if she will consider producing a small business strategy as proposed by an association; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1690/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): As Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, I want to assure the Deputy that small firms are at the heart of my Department’s business supports and strategies. I am acutely aware of the importance of SMEs to the Irish economy. The latest Central Statistics Office (CSO) Business in Ireland 2016 report states that in Ireland, SMEs accounted for 99.8% or nearly 250,000 active enterprises and over 68% of all persons engaged. SMEs generated 50.2% of total Turnover in the business economy and over 41% of Gross Value Added was attributed to these enterprises.

My Department’s supports for SMEs include access to finance, management development, mentoring supports, business development programmes, market supports and trade promotion, in addition to a range of progressive regulatory and oversight functions. The agencies and offices under the aegis of my Department that work directly with SMEs include Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, Local Enterprise Offices, InterTradeIreland, Microfinance Ireland, Companies Registration Office, Registry of Friendly Societies, National Standards Authority of Ireland, Workplace Relations Commission and the Labour Court, Science Foundation Ireland, Patents Office, Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement, Competition and Consumer Protection Commission and the Health and Safety Authority.

I have discussed the need for a strategy focused on entrepreneurs and small businesses with my officials since I became Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation. We have been engaging with the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) regarding such a strategy. I launched the “Review of SME and Entrepreneurship issues and policies in Ireland” with the Secretary General of the OECD Ángel Gurría and my colleague Pat Breen TD, Minister of State for Trade, Employment, Business, EU Digital Single Market and Data Protection on 8 March 2018.

This is a pivotal 18-month project which will see a comprehensive review of the SME business ecosystem and policies, using OECD expertise in a structured and defined process. My Department hosted two study missions in June and November of last year, where the OECD team and international experts met with over 100 stakeholders from multiple departments, agencies, representative groups and business owners. The Small Firms Association along with other small firms’ representative groups, including members of my Department’s Advisory Group on Small Business which Minister Breen chairs, and other bodies such as Chambers Ireland and ISME were involved in this engagement.

The resulting recommendations and issues identified by the report will form the basis of a long-term SME Strategy for Ireland. We will hold an SME strategy conference in Dublin in mid 2019; engaging with stakeholders and policymakers to ensure we use the levers available to enact the OECD’s recommendations. It is intended to include recommended actions in the government wide Future Jobs Initiative as part of my focus on keeping small businesses at the heart of the government policy.

Areas covered by the OECD analysis include taxation, the regulatory environment, productivity challenges, skills and regional development. It also includes an assessment of the main SME-targeted programme areas, including SME workforce skills, standards adoption, internationalisation, financing and innovation.

I am committed to keeping the focus of the government's business strategy on indigenous firms. As the vast majority of Irish firms are SMEs, this strategy will be aimed at smaller companies. My Department and I will ensure that Ireland continues to be an excellent place to start, grow and scale a business.

The OECD report is due to be published in Q3 of 2019.

Programme for Government Initiatives

523. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of emigrants who have been facilitated to return here as part of the commitment outlined in the Programme for a Partnership Government; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1787/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Government's goal is to support the creation of an additional 200,000 jobs by 2020, including 135,000 outside of Dublin, and to attract back at least 70,000 emigrants. The whole of Government effort to deliver on these objectives is supported by the annual Action Plan for Jobs, and from 2019, its successor, the Future Jobs programme.

The CSO estimates that between April 2017 and April 2018, 28,400 Irish emigrants returned to Ireland. As the economy continues to grow and approaches full employment, this trend is likely to continue.

Since the first Action Plan for Jobs was launched in early 2012, there are almost 385,700 more people at work bringing total employment in the State to 2,265,000 (as of Q3 2018). My Department and its agencies have a range of initiatives to connect with Irish emigrants (and others) to outline the careers and entrepreneurial opportunities in Ireland. These include:

- IDA Ireland actively promotes Ireland as a location for new investment and Enterprise Ireland has specific targets to attract entrepreneurs to Ireland with a focused marketing programme underway in international markets.

- Since 2016, my Department has funded TechLife Ireland- a partnership with Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland and the Irish Technology industry- to promote and brand Ireland as a top destination to pursue a career in technology and attract top tech professionals to Ireland. Industry is playing an important role in supporting the initiative and driving its development.

- Science Foundation Ireland encourages leading researchers to move to Ireland raising Ireland's profile as a location for research excellence and career advancement: for example, through SFI's Future Research Leaders and Research Professorships Programmes.

Finally, I would emphasise that ensuring a continued focus on attracting foreign direct investment and maintaining and improving competitiveness is critical to attracting talent back to Ireland.

Job Creation Data

524. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the average of one job created or supported by Enterprise Ireland, the IDA and InterTradeIreland; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1788/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland client companies create highly skilled, well-paid and sustainable jobs. The cost of those jobs to the State is calculated by taking into account IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland expenditure to all firms in the period of calculation. Only jobs created during and sustained to the end of each seven-year period are credited in the calculations.

The average cost per Enterprise Ireland job is €4,828 in the 2011-2017 period compared to €7,350 in the period 2010-2016, a decrease of 34%. The cost per IDA Ireland job for the period 2011-2017 is €8,057 compared to €9,148 from 2010-2016, a decrease of almost 12%. Information for the 2012-2018 range will be available when both Agencies publish their annual reports later this year.

InterTrade Ireland (ITI) does not measure cost-per-job but operates a range of programmes to assist small and medium enterprises (SMEs) explore new cross-border markets, develop new products, processes and services. These initiatives, through supporting cross border firms to grow and expand, do help create and sustain jobs on the island of Ireland. While figures for last year are not yet available, in 2017 there were 2,611 companies engaged in North-South business through ITI's trade and innovation activities & services.

Enterprise Ireland Funding

525. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of companies Enterprise Ireland initiated proceedings against to revoke grants in each of the years 2016 to 2018; the number of these that were successful; the value of grants that were revoked in these years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1789/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Enterprise Ireland supports companies in regional and rural areas to start, innovate and remain competitive in international markets, now and into the future. Enterprise Ireland provide a range of financial and non-financial supports for homegrown business start-ups to scale and succeed in international markets, these supports are tailored to a company's stage of growth and level of ambition.

Enterprise Ireland understands that businesses may succeed and fail and the agency seeks to recover funding from businesses who have not met the terms and conditions of the funding awarded. Each grant agreement includes a clause that requires the business to return funding if these terms and conditions are not met which is signed by the businesses.

Proceedings for reclaiming funds are ongoing and may take time in some cases. There are also companies who have closed down and therefore have no ability to repay. In the last three years, monies from 8 companies have been recovered in full with 5 more companies making part payments to Enterprise Ireland.

The following table represents the number of companies with proceedings issued, value of funding revoked and the amount recovered to date.

The number of companies Enterprise Ireland initiated proceedings against to revoke grants in each of the years 2016 to 2018

Year	No of companies	Amount Revoked	Amounts Recovered
2016	6	€393,303.94	€53,537.00
2017	11	€673,405.69	€162,196.40
2018	6	€484,193.81	€13,480.00

IDA Ireland Funding

526. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of companies the IDA initiated proceedings against to revoke grants in each of the years 2016 to 2018; the number of these that were successful; the value of grants that were revoked in these years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1790/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): IDA Ireland is authorised by my Department to provide a range of financial supports in the form of employment, capital, research and development, environmental and training grants. These grants are an important means of encouraging companies to invest in Ireland, particularly in regional locations.

In all instances where financial assistance is approved by IDA Ireland for a client company, the Agency and the client enter into a grant agreement which is a legal and binding contract. While the content of the contract is confidential, the agreement includes conditions and milestones that the client is required to comply with before any financial assistance is provided.

Clients sign the grant agreement in full knowledge that the penalty for non-performance is a pro-rata repayment of grants. IDA Ireland revokes grants where clients have not achieved the agreed performance target or, if appropriate, in the event of a company closure. These cases are reported in the Agency's Annual Financial Statements. In 2017, the IDA recovered €5.031m in respect of four clients with €346,000 recovered from one client in 2016.

The IDA initiated proceedings against one company in 2017. No proceedings were initiated in 2016. Information on grant repayments for 2018 will be available when the Annual Financial Statements are published as part of the Agency's Annual Report later this year.

InterTradeIreland Funding

527. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of companies InterTradeIreland initiated proceedings against to revoke grants in each of the years 2016 to 2018; the number of these that were successful; the value of grants that were revoked in these years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1791/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): InterTradeIreland (ITI) offers a range of trade and innovation initiatives which assist SMEs to explore cross-border markets, develop new products and services and to become investor ready. It does not, however, provide grant assistance to firms in the way that the State's principal enterprise agencies do with their clients. ITI did not, therefore, initiate any proceedings against companies in order to revoke grants in the period referenced.

Departmental Communications

528. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and In-

novation the customer complaints received by her Department in each of the years since 2016; if the complaints are grouped into categories; the nature of the complaints; the resolution of same; and the number progressed to the relevant Ombudsman in each of the years since 2016. [1865/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Customers who wish to complain about the quality of customer service provided by my Department can submit a complaint under the Department's complaint procedures. These procedures, along with the Department's customer charter and customer action plan, were updated recently in accordance with the customer service actions outlined for implementation in "Our Public Service 2020". In keeping with best practice, the Department's complaint procedures provide an accessible, transparent and user - friendly system of dealing with complaints about the quality of service received which are available on the Department's website. These complaint procedures do not, however, provide for complaints relating to business decisions taken by the Department e.g. the non granting of an employment permit. Appropriate appeal mechanisms are available for these situations.

Complaints made about the quality of customer service provided by the Offices of my Department fall to be dealt with under the complaint procedures developed by each Office having regard to their business needs and appropriate appeal mechanisms are available for business decisions taken by the Offices of the Department.

Over the period 2016 to date, I can confirm that there were no complaints received by my Department or its Offices under the complaint procedures relating to the quality of customer service provided.

Invalidity Pension

529. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Health the reason persons on the invalidity pension have not been allowed to obtain the benefits of working longer hours, such as counterparts on the disability benefit scheme which was announced in December 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54066/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): From the 1st December 2018, the medical card earnings disregard for persons in receipt of Disability Allowance was increased from €120 to €427 per week and applies to the assessment process for both single persons and to family assessments. This measure gave effect to one of the key recommendations of the Make Work Pay for Persons with Disabilities Report. It follows the implementation of another recommendation of the Report to dispense with the requirement that work be of a "rehabilitative nature" for the medical card earnings disregard purposes, that was implemented by the HSE in May 2017. Invalidity Pension is a weekly payment made by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection to people who cannot work because of a long-term illness or disability and meet the appropriate social insurance (PRSI) contributions. It is a social insurance payment and therefore is not subject to a means test or have an income disregard/taper in the same way as Disability Allowance. However, for persons in receipt of partial capacity benefit, further work will be undertaken in 2019 to examine how this measure might also be applied to this cohort.

Dental Services Provision

530. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE covers children (details supplied) with a condition; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54076/18]

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.

Medical Qualifications

531. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health the reason doctoral level training is required to qualify as a professional psychologist compared to others that work in the mental health sector qualified at degree level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54142/18]

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

Hospital Investigations

532. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health the policy on the funding of external and-or internal reviews and-or investigations of patient care in hospitals; the cost of such reviews or investigations in each of the past ten years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54325/18]

533. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health the policy on the funding of external and-or internal reviews and-or investigations of patient care in hospitals; the cost of such reviews or investigations at Galway University Hospital in each of the past ten years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54326/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 532 and 533 together.

As the Deputy's questions refer to service matters, I have referred the questions to the HSE for direct reply.

Mental Health Services Provision

534. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 440 of 27 November 2018, the timeframe for a new design team to be appointed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54397/18]

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

Long-Term Illness Scheme Coverage

535. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health if persons with exocrine pancreatic insufficiency will be allowed access to a medication (details supplied) on the long-term illness scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54035/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the

community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Mental Health Services

536. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health if he will request Kerry community services to provide a full-time security person at the Sliabh Mish unit, UHK, in view of the ongoing security issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54038/18]

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 Minister as soon as possible.

Patient Transfers

537. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health his plans to move a resident of a unit (details supplied) who requires one-to-one specialist care to a nursing home in which the standard of care they are receiving will not be attainable; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54041/18]

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 Minister as soon as possible.

Hospital Appointments Status

538. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 390 of 27 November 2018, the reason a person (details supplied) was told they had an appointment in March 2019 and has now been informed they are not on a waiting list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54042/18]

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

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

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

Hospitals Data

539. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the number of attendances at a facility (details supplied) in each of the years 2010 to 2018 and to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54050/18]

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

Hospital Facilities

540. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the status of a review of an injury unit (details supplied); the detail of the review; when it will be concluded; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54051/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The establishment of Hospital Groups has enabled a better configuration of hospital services with benefits relating to safety, quality, access, cost and sustainable medical staffing. Hospitals working together in a group can support each other, providing a stronger role for smaller hospitals in delivering less complex care, and ensuring that those who require emergency or complex planned care are managed safely in larger hospitals.

The Smaller Hospitals Framework focuses on the future role of smaller hospitals and outlines the wide range of services that can be provided within these smaller hospitals. Medical Assessment Units, Urgent Care Centres and Minor Injuries Clinics provide a safe and local alternative to EDs and work has begun in my Department on a review of these, as committed to in the Programme for a Partnership Government 2016.

As a Model 2 hospital, in line with the Smaller Hospitals Framework, Monaghan Hospital has a Minor Injuries Unit located on site which provides an important service to the local community. I recently met with the RCSI Hospitals Group, which includes Monaghan Hospital, to discuss how all hospitals within the group can develop and contribute to improvements in both scheduled and unscheduled care for patients.

I am committed to securing and further developing the role of our smaller hospitals with the expansion of services delivered in these hospitals, especially in services such as day surgery; ambulatory care; medical services and diagnostics.

Hospital Appointments Status

541. **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. [54052/18]

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 sched-

uled 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.

National Children's Hospital Expenditure

542. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the projected final cost for the new national children's hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54053/18]

578. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health if he will report on the rising costs of the children's hospital; the way in which the projected costs are accumulating; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54237/18]

600. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the reason given for the significant levels of additional extra funding required for the national children's hospital at St. James's Hospital; the measures he is taking to prevent further increases; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54314/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 542, 578 and 600 together.

The children's hospital is one of the most complex and important public capital projects that this country has ever embarked upon. The hospital will facilitate the implementation of a new model of care that will have a profound impact on all paediatric services once the new hospital is open.

Considerable work has been undertaken on the project since April 2017 when Government gave the green light for the construction of the hospital. Enabling works on the main hospital site are complete and Phase A construction works (substructure works on the main site), which commenced in October 2017, are also now nearing completion. The Phase B 7-storey above ground works will begin early this year. Development is also well advanced on the paediatric outpatients and urgent care centres. Works at Connolly are on target for practical completion of the building in the Spring with the opening scheduled for July 2019. Works at Tallaght are underway with a target hand-over date of July 2020, and the construction of the main hospital to be completed in 2022.

At an early stage in the process, it was determined that the traditional method of procurement was not suitable or realistic for a project of this size and complexity. Accordingly, the contract is subject to a two-stage process with stage one consisting of a scope refinement and value engineering process, based upon tendered rates, to finalise the Phase B works (above ground). This approach allowed the early phases of work to commence on site while also allowing for the detail of later phases to be finalised and agreed. This approach brings issues on cost to the fore much earlier in the life of the project than is the case where traditional procurement approaches are deployed.

Following the completion of the second stage of the two-stage tender procurement process, the final cost of the design, build and equipment programme for which the National Paediatric Hospital Development Board is responsible is now at €1,433 million, €450m more than advised to Government in April 2017. €319m of the additional cost relates to construction costs, and the balance of €131m, which includes €50m in VAT, relates to costs associated with staff, consultants, planning, design team fees, risk/contingency, and Management Equipment Service.

As I have already stated the increased cost is a matter of great concern and I have made it clear that Phase B of the construction project must be delivered within budget and timescale. Accordingly, there will be an independent review, commencing in January, of the escalation in cost in determining the adjusted contract sum, the contributory factors and associated responsibilities so that any potential weaknesses are identified and comprehensively and speedily resolved in the interests of the successful completion of the project and the effective management of public funds. The National Paediatric Hospital Development Board will be required to provide on-going assurance to the HSE, Department of Health and Government that Phase B of the project is being delivered within budget and timescale.

Hospital Facilities

543. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the reason the proposed second radiology room in Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda, was not provided as part of the new expanded accident and emergency department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54060/18]

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

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Administration

544. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Health if consideration will be given to changing the rules of the fair deal scheme to enable families and persons who are in nursing homes under the fair deal scheme to sell or rent their houses without financial penalty to help increase the number of properties available for purchase and rent and therefore help to alleviate the housing crisis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54062/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The Nursing Homes Support Scheme (NHSS), commonly referred to as *Fair Deal*, is a system of financial support for people who require long-term residential care. Participants contribute to the cost of their care according to their means while the State pays the balance of the cost. The Scheme aims to ensure that long-term nursing home care is accessible and affordable for everyone and that people are cared for in the most appropriate settings.

Participants in the Scheme contribute up to 80% of their assessable income, such as their pension and a maximum of 7.5% per annum of the value of assets held, such as their principal private residence or cash assets. The first €36,000 of an individual's assets is not counted at all in the financial assessment. The capital value of an individual's principal private residence is only included in the financial assessment for the first three years of their time in care. This is known as the three year cap. No participant will pay more than the actual cost of care.

Under NHSS rental income is considered income for the purpose of the financial assessment, and is assessed at 80% less any allowable deductions.

Action 17 of the Strategy for the Rental Sector commits the Department of Housing, Planning, and Local Government (DHPLG) to examine the treatment under the Nursing Homes Support Scheme's financial assessment of income from the rental of a person's principal private residence where they move into long term residential care. The Department of Health is currently engaging with the DHPLG in this regard.

It also is worth noting that the decision to rent out a home resides with the home-owner, therefore creating the possibility of older people in nursing homes becoming landlords and taking on the many responsibilities associated with that role. This would involve the consideration of many practicalities. As such, there are significant complexities in examining changes to the NHSS, particularly to ensure the ongoing fair, equitable and sustainable operation of the scheme. As a result there are competing interests and issues that must be fully considered.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

545. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Health if Spinraza will be made available to children with SMA to prevent permanent deterioration in their condition; the timeframe for the introduction of this drug to the children in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54065/18]

604. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the distress the parents of children with SMA are experiencing due to the delay in making the drug Spinraza available (details supplied); the steps he will take to ensure that this matter is resolved at the drugs meeting in January 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54321/18]

654. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the provision of a drug (details supplied) to persons with SMA; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54491/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 545, 604 and 654 together.

The HSE has statutory responsibility for medicine pricing and reimbursement decisions, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013. The Act specifies the criteria for decisions on the reimbursement of medicines.

Nusinersen (Spinraza) is indicated for the treatment of 5q spinal muscular atrophy (SMA), a disorder characterised by progressive muscle atrophy and weakness.

An application for Nusinersen is currently undergoing assessment by the HSE.

The statutory assessment process involves a Health Technology Assessment followed by detailed consideration by the HSE expert groups on new Drug therapies, including the Technology Review Group for Rare Diseases and the HSE Drugs Committee.

The assessment focus is twofold and particularly centred on reviewing the evidence of the clinical effectiveness of this new drug therapy i.e. the benefits for patients undergoing clinical trials; and on the cost effectiveness of the product in view of the prices being charged for the drug.

The application is currently going through the final stages of assessment, and the various reports are due to be considered shortly by the HSE Leadership Team, following which the final decision will be notified.

Health Insurance Cover

546. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Health his views on the fact that athletic

therapy and training is not recognised by a company (details supplied); if representations will be made to the company to include this in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54073/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Health insurance providers operate in a competitive market and are free to impose certain terms and conditions on their policies, providing they comply with the Health Insurance Act, 1994 (Minimum Benefit) Regulations, 1996. The regulations ensure that all consumers obtain a minimum level of health insurance cover regardless of what plan they purchase and that every plan available is inclusive of a minimum suite of benefits/procedures.

As the Minister for Health, I have no role to play in the commercial decisions of any health insurer and am therefore not in a position to determine or direct insurers to provide cover for any particular procedure or service, other than those outlined in the regulations.

Emergency Departments

547. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that when persons attend emergency departments with mental health problems, including suicide ideation, there is no help available for them, they are simply sent back out into the streets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54074/18]

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 Minister as soon as possible.

Services for People with Disabilities

548. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health if full care day service and respite care will be sanctioned for a person (details supplied). [54078/18]

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

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

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

Medical Card Applications

549. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health when a decision will be made on a medical card application by a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54082/18]

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

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

550. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Health the status of the reimbursement of the drug Cinryze; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54090/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the pricing and reimbursement of medicines; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Services for People with Disabilities

551. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health when a residential placement will be provided for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54091/18]

552. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health when the oversight by the mediator of provision of appropriate services by an organisation for the coming 12 months will occur in order to ensure that the irregularities in the treatment of a person (details supplied) in the clinical department of the organisation contracted by the HSE are not repeated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54093/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I propose to take Questions Nos. 551 and 552 together.

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

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

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

553. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health when a national lead for youth mental health will be in place in line with recommendation 8 of the National Youth Mental Health Taskforce Report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54099/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The Department of Health published the Youth Mental Health Task Force report in December 2017. The recommendations of the Taskforce have now been incorporated into the service plans of a number of lead agencies, many of which do not fall directly under the aegis of the Department. The implementation timeframes are outlined in the report itself, and there is an overall three year timeframe for completing all of the actions contained in the report. The HSE have established

a working group to put into action the recommendations contained in the report where they are named as the lead agency. The group are in the process of defining the job specification for the post of national youth mental health lead.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

554. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health when the Pathfinder project will be implemented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54100/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): Having obtained Civil Service Management Board and Ministerial approval, the establishment of a youth mental health Pathfinder team is a mental health priority for the Department of Health. The proposal is to utilise Section 12 of the Public Service Management Act 1997 to formalise a new model for collaborative working within Government, and placing these on a statutory footing. This section has never been utilised before, and there are a number of administrative, budgetary, governance and legal arrangements that need to be put in place to ensure a robust and workable model for Pathfinder. Currently consultation is ongoing between the Department of Health and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to progress these issues as soon as possible.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Funding

555. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health when strategic funding for youth mental health will be announced as per recommendation 10 of the National Youth Mental Health Taskforce Report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54101/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The Task Force recommended on-going support for large-scale projects that can improve the quality and frequency of research on youth mental health issues, such as the “My World” and ‘Growing Up in Ireland’ surveys. The independent body with the necessary expertise for assessing research proposals and awarding research funding is the Health Research Board. It is not envisaged that there will be any direct political involvement in that process as the Health Research Board is fully responsible and competent make all the required decision and awards. The recommendations of the Youth mental health task force published in December 2018 will be implemented over a three year time frame. A decision on how to provide additional funding for mental health specific research has yet to be decided upon.

Hospital Appointments Status

556. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54102/18]

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 Applications

557. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when a medical card will issue in the case of persons (details supplied); when the application will be concluded; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54122/18]

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

HSE Staff

558. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health his plans to increase the number of paid assistant psychologist posts in primary care nationwide; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54130/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The post of Assistant Psychologist is a new grade within the HSE on a pilot basis. Their role is to support psychology services in primary care settings and to provide early and cost-effective interventions for children and adolescents. The creation of the role is key to delivering a “stepped care” model in which service users receive the level of required support and/or intervention appropriate to their assessed need.

An ongoing evaluation is being conducted on these roles as part of the governance structures of the Assistant Psychologist pilot project

Hospital Waiting Lists

559. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Health when a procedure will take place for a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54133/18]

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

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

560. **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. [54147/18]

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

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

561. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for a person (details supplied) will be expedited. [54148/18]

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.

National Cervical Screening Programme

562. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Health the timescale for the results of repeat cervical smears; and the reason for delays in relation to the matter. [54153/18]

704. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the backlog of cervical cancer screening smears awaiting examination; the wait time; the steps he is taking to clear the backlog in view of the anxiety the waiting time is causing for many women; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1093/19]

813. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the waiting time for women for cervical screening results; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that women are waiting in excess of three to four months to receive their results in counties Cavan and Monaghan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1748/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 562, 704 and 813 together.

In May 2018, I asked CervicalCheck to make the necessary arrangements to provide that any woman who had had a CervicalCheck smear test, and whose GP considered that they should have a further test, to access such a further test without charge. This decision was made in good faith to address the considerable fears of the many anxious women in Ireland as a result of significant media coverage of the issues that emerged in late April.

In the months since then, there has been a significant increase in the volume of women presenting for smear tests. This includes women who have availed of the out of cycle tests, but also a greater number of women presenting for scheduled screening.

This increased level of engagement with the programme is very welcome. However, the increased demand has undoubtedly put immense pressure on lab capacity and the HSE has advised that, currently, results of smear tests may take up to 20 weeks from the time of the test, and that it may take longer in a small number of cases.

The HSE has been working actively with the labs to manage this issue and to improve turnaround times for smear tests. The HSE reports that laboratories have agreed to undertake additional recruitment, provide for overtime and manage annual leave in an effort to minimise the backlog. In addition, the HSE is aiming to source additional screening capacity, which would improve the turnaround time of results. However, sourcing capacity and resources is a global challenge as countries start to move to primary HPV screening, which vastly reduces the requirement for cytology screening staff.

The HSE is currently developing a capacity plan to take account of available capacity and expected demand, with the aim of bringing the programme into stabilisation this year. The issue remains a priority concern for me, for my Department and for the HSE.

While the provision of out of cycle smears ceased on the 31 December 2018, it is important to be clear that this backlog will take some time to resolve. It remains a priority concern for me, for my Department and for the HSE.

Disabilities Assessments

563. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Health if the assessment criteria for a person (details supplied) will be amended to include those persons affected on one side hemiplegia; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54163/18]

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 servic-

es they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

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

Respite Care Services

564. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the actions he has taken to address failings found within the "Your service, your say" system in view of media reports; if the actions include a full review; if official contact has been made with those affected; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54164/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): I understand that the Deputy's question arises in the context of a Prime Time programme which was broadcast on 25 October last.

Arising from the programme the Department contacted the Health Service Executive on the issues raised and was assured that the care and wellbeing of the residents is the primary consideration of the Person in Charge of each residential care centre. The overarching principle is that families play an important role in the care of their loved one and that visiting should be facilitated in the interest of the resident unless there are compelling reasons why this cannot be done.

At the request of the Director General the HSE commissioned a report from the National Director of Community Operations to ascertain the facts in relation to the instances of visiting restrictions in place in each of the nine Community Healthcare Organisations.

Each Chief Officer was requested to ensure that where a restriction has been applied that this should be kept under on-going review, that the guiding principle of maximum inclusion of families is upheld and that the consideration of the issue is informed by the most recent regulatory report in respect of each centre insofar as that report makes reference to families, family's views, visiting, inclusion etc.

Each Chief Officer has now reviewed the restrictions currently in place within their area of responsibility. On foot of this review the HSE has advised the Department that it does not routinely use visiting restrictions in residential care centres across the country. There are currently 11 instances where visiting to residents is restricted across the country across public Older Persons and Mental Health Services. This is in the context of currently providing over 7,000 such beds across those services. In addition, visiting restrictions are in place in relation to 3 residents in Disability Centres.

In some instances, the residents in question are Wards of Court and in other cases, family members hold Enduring Power of Attorney and have requested certain restrictions. In other cases, there are safeguarding concerns.

The cases need to be viewed in the context of the entire service and reflects the HSE's aspiration that restrictions to visiting are a last resort after all other appropriate interventions have failed. In the case of one of the individuals featured on the Prime Time programme, a mediation process is being progressed.

In a broader sense, the Government has approved the development of a national adult safe-

guarding policy for the health sector and work to formulate this policy is under way. The policy, when developed, will cover the public, voluntary and private health sector and will include proposals on collaboration, information-sharing and referral arrangements between the health sector and other key sectors. It is intended to circulate a draft policy for public consultation around the end of 2019 before submitting final policy proposals to Government for approval. Following Government approval, appropriate underpinning legislation will be prepared.

Abortion Services Provision

565. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health his views on the operation of a three day waiting period for women who will seek abortion services in view of a discrepancy between his previous statements and that of the chief medical officer. [54166/18]

576. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Health if the details of the mandatory waiting period under section 12 of the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018 will be clarified by guidelines in order to give surety to those seeking to terminate a pregnancy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54231/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 565 and 576 together.

As the Deputies are aware, Section 12 of the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018 provides that a termination of pregnancy may be provided after a period of not less than three days has elapsed from the date on which a medical practitioner has certified that the pregnancy concerned has not exceeded 12 weeks of pregnancy.

My Department provided written clarification on the operation of this section of the legislation to the HSE in December, ahead of the service for termination of pregnancy commencing on 1 January 2019.

In practice, under section 12 of the Act, the day on which the doctor certifies that the pregnancy has not exceeded 12 weeks counts as the first day. The termination may then be carried out after the third day has “elapsed”. For example, if the woman visits the doctor and the doctor certifies that the pregnancy has not exceeded 12 weeks on a Monday, then Monday counts as the first day. Tuesday and Wednesday are the second and third day. Once Wednesday has “elapsed” the termination may take place, so it may be carried out at any time on Thursday.

Committee of Public Accounts

566. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health if the chief executive officer of the HSE will be an accountable officer to the Oireachtas Standing Committee of Public Accounts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54178/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health Service Executive (Financial Matters) Act 2014 the Director General is the Accountable Person to the Committee of Public Accounts. The Health Service Executive (Governance) Bill 2018 is currently before the House of the Oireachtas. It provides for the Chief Executive Officer to appear before the committee as an Accountable Person.

Hospital Waiting Lists

567. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if a hospital procedure for a person (details supplied) will be expedited. [54180/18]

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.

General Practitioner Contracts

568. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the average processing time for a general medical services contract application; the criteria involved in the process in order to be awarded such a contract; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54181/18]

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.

Departmental Funding

569. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health if an organisation (details supplied) will receive an increase in funding in view of the fact that its caseload has increased significantly since 2012 further to a meeting with his Department in July 2018 in which a case was accepted but funding allocation was not sanctioned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54183/18]

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 this is primarily a matter for my colleague the Minister for Children & Youth Affairs, Katherine Zappone, T.D.

Orthodontic Services Provision

570. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive orthodontic treatment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54186/18]

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

Assisted Human Reproduction Services Provision

571. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health when a financial support scheme for women seeking assisted human reproduction and IVF treatment, or both, will be put in place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54191/18]

777. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 526 of 6 November 2018, the status of his plans to put in place a financial support scheme for women seeking assisted human reproduction and IVF treatment, or both; if he has identified and considered policy options for a public funding model; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1539/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 571 and 777 together.

In October 2017, the Government approved the drafting of a Bill on assisted human reproduction (AHR) and associated areas of research, based on the published General Scheme. The process of drafting this Bill will be completed in conjunction with the Office of the Attorney General. In addition, the Joint Committee on Health is currently conducting a review of the General Scheme of the Assisted Human Reproduction Bill 2017 as part of the pre-legislative scrutiny process, which began in January of last year. The review is on-going and the Committee intends to publish its report early this year. However, it is not possible at this time to give a definitive timeline for the completion of the draft Bill and its subsequent passage through the Houses of the Oireachtas.

In order to support the commencement of the legislation, officials in my Department are working with the HSE to develop a model of care for infertility to ensure the provision of safe, effective and accessible services through the public health system as part of the full range of services available in obstetrics and gynaecology.

The Government has approved a €1 million fund for use in relation to providing public AHR treatment during 2019. Officials in my Department are currently examining options in relation to the operation and administration of this fund, which includes determining the access criteria that will apply. Once I have had the opportunity to review and approve these proposals, there will be an announcement regarding the commencement of this fund for 2019.

It should also be noted that, currently, patients who access IVF treatment privately may claim tax relief on the costs involved under the tax relief for medical expenses scheme. In addition, a defined list of fertility medicines needed for fertility treatment is covered under the High Tech Scheme administered by the HSE. Medicines covered by the High Tech Scheme must be prescribed by a consultant/specialist and approved by the HSE 'High Tech Liaison Officers'. The cost of the medicines is then covered, as appropriate, under the Medical Card or Drugs Payment Scheme.

Drugs Payment Scheme Coverage

572. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health if the drug refund scheme will be extended to include drugs prescribed outside the State for persons accessing IVF treatment abroad; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54192/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the

community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

HSE Staff

573. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health his plans to introduce better pay and job security for assistant psychologists and recognise this as a HSE post in itself; if the short-term half year contracts will be ceased; his further plans to cease unpaid voluntary assistant psychology in order that psychology graduates can be employed to address the mental health and waiting list crisis here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54199/18]

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

Departmental Expenditure

574. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Health the cost incurred by his Department in 2018 for the use of taxi services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54212/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The costs incurred by my Department in respect of taxi services during 2018 was €1832.00.

Hospital Services

575. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if the case of a person (details supplied) will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54228/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Patients opting to be treated privately in a public hospital have chosen to pay the consultant and the hospital in respect of the services that each provides. Under the Health Act 1970 (as amended), the HSE is required to levy statutory private in-patient charges on all patients opting to receive private in-patient services, irrespective of the type of accommodation provided. The charging regime now distinguishes between the accommodation of private patients in single rooms and multi-occupancy rooms with the former charged at a higher rate.

The allocation of single rooms within public hospitals is closely aligned with the clinical needs of patients and is therefore dictated on operational or clinical grounds and not on the public or private status of the patient, so patients are not guaranteed a single room on admittance to a public hospital.

Question No. 576 answered with Question No. 565.

Disability Services Provision

577. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for Health when an assessment of needs will be arranged for a child (details supplied) in County Tipperary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54232/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Govern-

ment 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.

Question No. 578 answered with Question No. 542.

Hospital Services

579. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the number of children on a waiting list for children's ophthalmology inpatient services in County Kildare in each of the years from 2011 to 2018 and to date in 2019; and the number of children waiting three, six, nine, 12 and in excess of 12 months, respectively, in tabular form. [54257/18]

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

Waiting list figures for December 2018, published last week by the NTPF show that considerable improvements have been made to the number of patients waiting for an Inpatient or Day case procedure which have fallen to 70,204 from the peak of 86,100 in July 2017. This represents a reduction of over 18% in the overall number of patients waiting for a procedure. Furthermore, the number of patients waiting over 9 months has almost halved since July 2017 from 28,100 to 14,900.

My Department is working closely with the NTPF and the HSE to finalise a Scheduled Care Access Plan for inpatients/daycase and outpatients for 2019. In this regard, the NTPF and HSE will continue to work closely with Hospital Groups, inviting proposals to improve access for patients waiting for hospital procedures.

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

Total Number of Children Waiting for an Ophthalmology Procedure in Co. Kildare by Year by Wait Time Band 2011-2019

Sum of Total	Wait Time Bands					Grand Total
	0-3 Months	3-6 Months	6-9 Months	9-12 Months	12 Months +	
2011	8	12	4			24
2012	18	5				23
2013	15	5				20
2014	18	13	4	1		36
2015	15	12	4	7	6	44
2016	12	9	10	7	11	49
2017	23	9	8	3	9	52
2018	10	14	3	7	3	37
2019	11	11	7	7	3	39

Speech and Language Therapy Waiting Lists

580. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health when a child (details supplied) will receive speech and language therapy; the average waiting time to receive the service; his plans to improve the waiting time for autistic children; the number of new staff appointed to the service in the past 12 months by grade; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54258/18]

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.

Traveller Community

581. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that Travellers are six times more likely to die from suicide than those in the settled community; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54260/18]

582. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the national Traveller health action plan and national Traveller suicide prevention project; and if 5% of funding from the mental health budget will be ring-fenced in order that its vision for a change of policy on mental health will be applied in a culturally sensitive way. [54261/18]

584. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the timeframe to implement and give effect to the Traveller action plan and suicide prevention strategy. [54263/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 581, 582 and 584 together.

I am aware of the challenges faced by the Traveller community, having visited Pavee Point in May 2018 and launched an Evaluation Report of the Traveller Cultural Awareness Training programme in Kilkenny in October.

One of the goals of Connecting for Life - Ireland's National Strategy to Reduce Suicide, which runs from 2015 to 2020, is to target approaches to reduce suicidal behaviour and improve mental health amongst particular high-risk groups. Members of the Traveller community are recognised in this strategy as being one of the priority groupings most vulnerable to suicide.

To address this issue, targeted mental health and stigma reduction campaigns are in development for the Travelling community. To date, this has involved focus group testing of the national mental health Little Things campaign messaging with traveller groups. Based on this process, the National Office for Suicide Prevention will further develop the communication campaigns using appropriate messaging and media channels for this target population group. The Samaritans (funded under the Connecting for Life strategy) are also working at a local level to promote their service to this priority group.

In addition, the HSE and Primary Care Social Inclusion currently funds Exchange House

Ireland to deliver targeted health programmes. This includes two suicide prevention projects targeting the Traveller Community; the National Traveller Suicide Prevention Service and Travelling to Wellbeing.

Exchange House Ireland provides a range of services and supports to approximately 8,000 Travellers annually. The National Office for Suicide Prevention commissioned a review of the projects (2016-2017) in line with its goal to build the evidence base in support of targeted initiatives for priority groups, and to further inform its role in funding suicide prevention initiatives and establish how the existing projects align with the Connecting for Life strategy.

The Oversight Group working on the refresh of the Vision for Change national mental health policy proposes that policy changes will benefit all those engaging with mental health services. The Terms of Reference for the Group place a particular emphasis on social inclusion and the needs of vulnerable groups, including the Traveller community, which will be incorporated into the final report with a focus on reducing stigma and discrimination.

The Department of Justice and Equality led on the development of the new National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy which was published in June 2017. The Strategy contains a set of specific actions aimed at improving the situation for Traveller and Roma communities in Ireland, including agreed health-related actions. The HSE is developing a detailed action plan on Traveller health as one of the commitments in the Strategy.

I understand the draft action plan is being finalised by the HSE.

HSE Staff Training

583. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health if targeted services, training and support will be provided for mental health workers to have the competency to work with clients from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. [54262/18]

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 Minister as soon as possible.

Question No. 584 answered with Question No. 581.

Hospital Appointments Status

585. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a cataract operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54266/18]

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

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

are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

Hospital Appointments Status

586. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a cataract operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54267/18]

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

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

587. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a cataract operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54268/18]

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

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

588. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a cataract op-

eration for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54269/18]

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

589. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a cataract operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54270/18]

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

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

590. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a cataract operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54271/18]

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

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has

been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

Hospital Appointments Status

591. **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. [54272/18]

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

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

592. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a cataract assessment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54273/18]

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

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

593. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a cataract assessment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54274/18]

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

594. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on waiting list for cataracts (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54275/18]

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

It is acknowledged that cataract surgery is among the most common surgical procedures carried out in the Ophthalmology specialty. It was in this knowledge that when proposals for the joint HSE/National Treatment Purchase Fund Inpatient and Day Case Action Plan were under development last year, I sought a particular focus on reducing waiting times for a number of high volume specialties including cataracts. The Action Plan, allocated a quarter (5,000 out of 20,000) of the planned NTPF procedures to cataract treatments.

Waiting list figures for December 2018, published last week by the NTPF show that considerable improvements have been made to the number of patients waiting for an Inpatient or Day case procedure which have fallen to 70,204 from the peak of 86,100 in July 2017. This represents a reduction of over 18% in the overall number of patients waiting for a procedure. Over the same period, the waiting lists for Cataracts has reduced from over 10,000 to 6,440 representing a reduction of 36%.

Furthermore, the number of patients waiting over 9 months has almost halved since July 2017 from 28,100 to 14,900. The impact is particularly noteworthy when one considers the improvements to the Waiting Lists for those particular specialties which were the focus of the Inpatient/Daycase Action Plan in 2018 including the numbers waiting over 9 months for a Cataract procedure which have fallen by 87% since July 2017.

The Action Plan also recommended that the HSE and NTPF identify sustainable initiatives to improve waiting times. In this context, a dedicated centre for cataract surgery in Nenagh

opened last July, and at full capacity will be capable of delivering up to 2,000 procedures annually. The centre is ideally located to enable the UL hospital group, in collaboration with the HSE and NTPF, to maximise the use of the Centre through collaboration with other hospital groups so that patients from surrounding regions can be referred to the Centre for their treatment.

My Department is working closely with the NTPF and the HSE to finalise a Scheduled Care Access Plan for inpatients/daycase and outpatients for 2019. In this regard, the NTPF and HSE will continue to work closely with Hospital Groups, inviting proposals to improve access for patients waiting for hospital procedures.

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

-			Sum of Amount				Column Labels
Row Labels	0-3 Mths	3-6 Mths		6-9 Mths	9-12 Mths	12-15 Mths	Grand Total
South Infirmary Victoria University Hospital		41	18	19	2	1	81
Grand Total		41	18	19	2	1	81

Average Wait Time (days) - Kerry Resident 123

Average Wait Time (days) - General 128

-				Sum of Amount					Column Labels
Row Labels	0-3 Months	3-6 Months	6-9 Months	9-12 Months	12-15 Months	15-18 Months	18-24 Mths	24+ Mths	Grand Total
	835	500	352	168	147	119	199	117	2437
	835	500	352	168	147	119	199	117	2437

Average Wait Time (days) - Kerry Resident 241

Average Wait Time (days) - General 252

Hospital Appointments Status

595. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment will be scheduled for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54299/18]

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

Nursing Home Services

596. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Health the reason his Department through the National Treatment Purchase Fund pays a higher rate for nursing home care for some persons depending on their geographical location in view of the fact that regulations and the cost base are the same for all persons who qualify. [54304/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) has been designated by the Minister for Health pursuant to Section 40 of the Nursing Homes Support Scheme Act as a body authorised to negotiate with proprietors of registered nursing homes to reach agreement in relation to the maximum price(s) that will be charged for the provision of long-term residential care services to Nursing Homes Support Scheme residents. As part of this function, the NTPF enters into “Approved Nursing Home Agreements” with registered private and voluntary nursing homes to record the maximum price(s) that have been negotiated.

The NTPF take the following guidelines into account in negotiating prices; (a) costs reasonably and prudently incurred by the nursing home and evidence of value for money, (b) price(s) previously charged, (c) local market price and (d) budgetary constraints and the obligation of the State to use available resources in the most beneficial, effective and efficient manner to improve, promote and protect the health and welfare of the public.

The Report of the Nursing Homes Support Scheme (NHSS) Review published in 2015 identified a number of issues for more detailed consideration, including a review of the pricing mechanism used by the NTPF, with a view to:

- Ensuring value for money and economy, with the lowest possible administrative costs for clients and the State and administrative burden for providers;
- Increasing the transparency of the pricing mechanism so that existing and potential investors can make as informed decisions as possible; and
- Ensuring that there is adequate residential capacity for those residents with more complex needs.

A Steering Group was established to oversee and manage the pricing review. The Steering Group is chaired by the NTPF and includes representatives from the Department of Health and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER). As part of its work on the review the NTPF sought various inputs including external expertise and stakeholder engagement to inform the review. These inputs are being considered in detail.

The NTPF are now close to completing the report and aim to discuss the draft report and next steps early this year.

Once complete the report of the review will then be submitted to the Department.

Home Care Packages Funding

597. **Deputy Frank O’Rourke** asked the Minister for Health when funding for a home care package will be approved in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54310/18]

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.

Crisis Pregnancy Services

598. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if the crisis pregnancy helpline will

be accessible to deaf women; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54312/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Deputy's question concerns a service issue, it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Health Services

599. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE has a policy of providing mediation in order that issues that arise can be addressed in a calm and considered manner in view of the fact that spousal visits (details supplied) are important; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54313/18]

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.

Question No. 600 answered with Question No. 542.

Abortion Legislation

601. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the protections for conscientious objection provided for student midwives, pharmacists and doctors in the Health (Regulation Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018. [54315/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Deputy will be aware, the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act was passed by the Houses of the Oireachtas on 13 December 2018 and enacted signed by the President on the 20 December 2018.

The service for termination of pregnancy was introduced on 1 January 2019.

Conscientious objection is covered under Section 22 of the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018. It states that where he/she has a conscientious objection, a medical practitioner, nurse or midwife shall not be obliged to carry out, or participate in the carrying out, a termination of pregnancy. The Act makes it clear that conscientious objection cannot be invoked in an emergency situation, when the risk to a pregnant woman's life or health is immediate.

In the event of a doctor, nurse or midwife having a difficulty in undertaking a required medical procedure, he or she will have a duty to make arrangements for the transfer of the woman's care to a colleague.

I brought amendments to this section in the Dáil to ensure that it is clear that conscientious objection extends to all those who may be asked to directly participate in providing termination of pregnancy services, including students. The amendments ensured that student nurses and midwives are clear that they may refuse to participate in termination of pregnancy procedures on the grounds that they have a conscientious objection. Medical practitioners were already covered by Section 22.

It would not be reasonable to include any other personnel such as pharmacists, as this could have the effect of blocking a woman's access to a lawfully provided and, in some cases, medically-indicated treatment.

However, pharmacists are obliged to comply in full with the statutory Code of Conduct for Pharmacists, published by the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland. Principle 1 of the Code of Conduct states that “*a pharmacist should ensure that in instances where they are unable to provide prescribed medicines or pharmacy services to a patient, they must take reasonable action to ensure these medicines/services are provided and the patients care is not jeopardised.*”

I understand that the Council of the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland has approved a new Code of Conduct for pharmacists, which it will be submitting to the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission for approval before it comes to me as Minister for approval.

Part 5 of Principle 4 on page 9 of the proposed Code of Conduct makes provision for conscientious objection, subject to the pharmacist referring a patient to an alternative provider if the pharmacist cannot provide a professional service or medicinal product, so that patient care is not jeopardised or compromised.

A footnote to the Principle makes specific reference to a pharmacist transferring the care of a pregnant woman who wishes to avail of services for the termination of pregnancy.

Ministerial Meetings

602. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the meetings he had with a person (details supplied) in the past two years; the reason and outcomes of such meetings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54316/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I wish to advise the Deputy that, in line with the Freedom of Information Act 2014 and the Data Protection Acts, Ministerial Diaries are published retrospectively on a quarterly basis.

With regard to the Deputy’s specific query, the individual in question was a member of an Irish College of General Practitioners delegation who met with me on 15 January 2018 as part of my engagements on termination of pregnancy with the medical colleges. On the 12th December 2018, he attended a briefing I arranged for Senators, and assisted in answering medical questions which were coming up as the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Bill was being debated in the Seanad.

Autism Support Services

603. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for Health if funding will be approved for the provision of specialised autism specific services for persons (details supplied) in County Tipperary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54317/18]

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

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

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

Question No. 604 answered with Question No. 545.

Pharmacy Services

605. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if the unpaid internship operated by an organisation (details supplied) relating to pharmacy students will be re-examined; if a paid internship will be reintroduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54324/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (PSI) is the pharmacy regulator in Ireland and is responsible for regulating pharmacists and pharmacies in the public interest. Several of the PSI's functions under the Pharmacy Act 2007 relate to education, including promoting and ensuring the highest standards in education and training for the qualification to practise as a pharmacist, and make sure that relevant experience is gained in the course of that pharmacy education and training.

In 2010 the PSI commissioned a review of the five year programme of education and training for the pharmacist qualification in Ireland. One of the recommendations included the introduction of an integrated 5-year Masters level programme of education and training for pharmacists in line with international best practice, to replace the previous 4 year Bachelor plus 1 year in-service practical training programme.

A National Forum was established to advise and assist the Council of the PSI in its oversight of the development and ongoing delivery of the new fully integrated programme of pharmacy education, training and assessment. The National Forum for Pharmacy Education and Accreditation Interim Report of November 2013 noted that it was an essential component of the integrated degree that the student remain a student for the full five years of study. Under the previous model, students became employees during their final year.

Since September 2015, students commencing their pharmacy education undertake a PSI-accredited five-year fully integrated Master's degree programme in pharmacy, with the first cohort awarded this MPharm degree graduating in 2020. This programme is operated by the schools of pharmacy in three universities in Ireland (Trinity College Dublin, University College Cork and Royal College of Surgeons Ireland).

This newer pharmacy programme provides for both the academic and practical experience that is required by students to qualify to practise as a pharmacist in Ireland. Students qualify after 5 years with a Masters in Pharmacy and are eligible to apply for registration as a pharmacist with the PSI.

The Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (Education and Training) (Integrated Course) Rules 2014 (S.I. No. 377 of 2014) is the legislation which underpins the new 5 year MPharm educational programme. It includes the programme recognition and accreditation requirements, and details about the in-service training placements for students.

Part of the PSI's accreditation process involves visits to the universities operating the MPharm programme, which includes meeting with representative students at each School of Pharmacy. The accreditation teams assess the programme of training and education various standards, including one related to students and the supports available to students.

The PSI has stated that it will continue to engage with the academic institutions that deliver

the MPharm programme and their role is to ensure the quality of the MPharm programme and high standards in education and training for the qualification to practise as a pharmacist.

Services for People with Disabilities

606. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the location of a new facility (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54327/18]

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

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

Respite Care Services

607. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health his plans to address the respite crisis being experienced for dozens of families at a facility (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54328/18]

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

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

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

Services for People with Disabilities

608. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health his plans to address the lack of supported living for persons with disabilities in counties Cavan and Monaghan (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54329/18]

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

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

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

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

Home Help Service

609. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if a matter regarding home help in the case of a person (details supplied) will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54330/18]

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.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

610. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health if consideration has been given to granting pregnant mothers with type 1 diabetes access to the FreeStyle Libre device; his plans for this measure to come into practice in the near future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54331/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Appointments Status

611. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) can expect an appointment. [54333/18]

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

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

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

respond to the Deputy directly.

Services for People with Disabilities

612. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the reason respite care or home support has not been provided to a family (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54335/18]

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

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

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

Health Services

613. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health when medical treatment for a person (details supplied) will be restored back to its original level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54336/18]

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.

Mortality Data

614. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons with epilepsy who have died in counties Mayo, Galway and Roscommon in the past two years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54340/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): According to the Central Statistics Office (CSO), the number of people that have died due to epilepsy in counties Mayo, Galway and Roscommon for the most recent available years 2016 and 2017 is outlined in table 1:

Table 1 Number of deaths in selected counties for epilepsy (ICD-10 Codes G40 & G41), 2016-2017*

-	2016	2017*
Galway	2	4
Mayo	8	8
Roscommon	0	1
Total	10	13

It is not possible to produce information on the number of people who died with epilepsy as an underlying condition as the CSO only collects mortality information on causes which directly contributed to the death.

The CSO use the Tenth Revision of the International classification of Diseases, Injuries and Causes of Death (ICD-10), as recommended by the World Health Organisation, to classify deaths in Ireland. Natural cause deaths are coded with a single underlying cause of death only. The selection process for this is in line with the WHO cause of death rules for ICD-10.

Epilepsy is included in ICD-10 codes G40 and G41.*Data for 2017 is provisional and subject to revision.

Health Services

615. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will meet with a group (details supplied) to discuss an area of concern; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54341/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is an operational issue, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Services for People with Disabilities

616. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Health if he will report on the assessment of needs for a child (details supplied). [54344/18]

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

617. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for a person (details supplied) will be expedited. [54345/18]

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.

Ambulance Service

618. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a specific call (details supplied) made to the ambulance service in County Cork; the reason the response time was so slow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54361/18]

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

Dormant Accounts Fund Grants

619. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health if an organisation (details supplied) will be considered for future funding under the dormant accounts fund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54362/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The overall administration of the Dormant Accounts fund is a matter for the Minister for Rural and Community Development.

With regard to how individual measures are funded, Ministers put forward proposed measures for inclusion in annual action plans. The final annual action plan then details the measures to be funded from the dormant accounts fund. It is then a matter for each relevant Department to deliver these measures, as for any other voted expenditure.

The most recent annual action plan was published in July 2018 and is available on that Department's website, while preparation of the next action plan is a matter for the Minister for Rural and Community Development. Funding for any purpose must be detailed and approved within an annual action plan.

My Department received approval for a number of initiatives in 2018, including four which will be delivered nationally by HSE Disability Services.

Dormant Accounts Fund Grants

620. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health if an organisation (details supplied) will be considered for future funding under the dormant accounts fund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54363/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The overall administration of the Dormant Accounts fund is a matter for the Minister for Rural and Community Development.

With regard to how individual measures are funded, Ministers put forward proposed mea-

asures for inclusion in annual action plans. The final annual action plan then details the measures to be funded from the dormant accounts fund. It is then a matter for each relevant Department to deliver these measures, as for any other voted expenditure.

The most recent annual action plan was published in July 2018 and is available on that Department's website, while preparation of the next action plan is a matter for the Minister for Rural and Community Development. Funding for any purpose must be detailed and approved within an annual action plan.

My Department received approval for a number of initiatives in 2018, including four which will delivered nationally by HSE Disability Services.

Services for People with Disabilities

621. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Health if he will report on the provision of services to persons (details supplied) with multiple needs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54364/18]

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

622. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for a person (details supplied) will be expedited. [54367/18]

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

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

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

Services for People with Disabilities

623. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) can expect to be admitted to the National Rehabilitation Hospital. [54376/18]

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

624. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) is not being called for a MRI scan; the reason they were provided with false information; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54378/18]

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

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

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

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

625. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health the reason information confirming cessation of business is not being accepted by the Primary Care Reimbursement Service in the case of a person (details supplied); if the application can be reviewed and reassessed in view of the medical circumstances; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54382/18]

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

Home Care Packages Funding

626. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Ques-

tion No. 422 of 4 October 2018, the reason deprivation rates and area socioeconomic profiles are not used to calculate funding allocations for funding for home care packages; the reason he has not directed the HSE to develop a funding model that takes these factors into consideration when allocating funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54385/18]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

627. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) cannot get an earlier appointment in Beaumont Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54386/18]

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

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

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

Health Services Provision

628. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health his plans to introduce a national eye care scheme for children under 16 years of age. [54398/18]

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

General Practitioner Services Provision

629. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health if a general practitioner can charge a person for a home visit even if the patient is in receipt of a medical card; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54399/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the General Medical Services (GMS) contract, GPs must be available to provide services in their practice premises or by way of domiciliary visits, as appropriate, for their medical card and GP visit card patients for 40 hours each week. They must also make arrangements to enable contact to be made with them, or a locum/deputy, for urgent cases outside of these hours. It is a matter for the GP to decide whether it is

appropriate to see the patient in his/her surgery or in the patient's home based on clinical need.

There is no provision under the GMS GP contract for persons who hold a medical card or GP visit card to be charged for a home visit which their GP deems necessary.

If a patient who holds a medical card or GP visit card believes they have been incorrectly charged for services provided by their GP, they may wish to report the matter to their HSE Local Health Office who can investigate the charge.

Healthcare Infrastructure Provision

630. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the building projects approved by county; the amount of funding provided to date for each project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54400/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of healthcare infrastructure projects, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly in relation to this matter.

Mental Health Services Staff

631. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the mental health nurse vacancies by county in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54401/18]

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

632. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health the future plans of his Department and the HSE for an association (details supplied) and the provision of its services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54407/18]

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.

General Practitioner Services

633. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of recorded violent assaults on general practitioners and their staff in the course of their work over the past

ten years, either at their practice premises, on home visits or at out-of-hours centres, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54408/18]

634. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the measures he plans to introduce in the new GMS contract to ensure the protection of general practitioners from violence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54409/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 633 and 634 together.

The safety of people who provide health services is of paramount importance. It is a complex issue as those being cared for may not always have the capacity to be responsible for the actions they carry out.

Currently there is no data available on the number of violent assaults on general practitioners and their staff.

As the Deputy will be aware, talks between the State and the IMO the on the development of a package of measures and reforms to modernise the current GMS contract are ongoing. There is a wide range of issues being discussed and I expect that the issue of patients presenting with violent behaviour will be considered in this context.

I look forward to positive and productive engagement with all parties concerned. In line with the long-established approach to such processes, and by agreement of the parties concerned, I am not in position to give further details while engagement between the parties is under way.

Cannabis for Medicinal Use

635. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health if consultants must send a letter of application for each prescription for medicinal cannabis; and the time in which it takes to process same. [54410/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Irish-based medical practitioners who wish to prescribe cannabis-based products containing Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) require a Ministerial licence issued under the Misuse of Drugs Acts 1977 to 2016 in order to do so.

The Chief Medical Officer has advised that the granting of such a licence must be premised on an appropriate application being submitted to the Department of Health, which is endorsed by a medical consultant who is responsible for the management of the patient and who is prepared to monitor the effects of the treatment over time.

Ministerial licences are time limited. The initial licence is valid for a period of twelve weeks and subsequent licenses in respect of the same patient are valid for 24 weeks.

It is also important to note it is unlawful for a prescriber to issue a prescription for a controlled drug unless it complies with the requirements for controlled drugs prescriptions specified in the Misuse of Drugs Regulations.

The Deputy may be aware that the Department of Health website contains detailed information on medical cannabis, including clinical guidance on the use of medical cannabis and details on how a medical practitioner may apply for a Ministerial licence. This information can be found at:

health.gov.ie/blog/publications/cannabis-for-medical-use.

Cannabis for Medicinal Use

636. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health if consultants choosing to prescribe medicinal cannabis under the existing licensing system are assuming personal liability for possible negative side effects on their own personal insurance; and if the HSE does not accept possible liability in relation to same. [54411/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under existing arrangements consultants in public hospitals are covered by the Clinical Indemnity Scheme (CIS) in respect of the prescription of tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) based products for a patient under their care provided that the consultant is permitted to do so under a licence granted by the Minister for Health under the Misuse of Drugs Acts and where he/she has exhausted all other treatment options for that patient.

In relation to private consultants the CIS covers the excess over the indemnity ceilings (or CAPS) set by the State for private indemnifiers of consultants working in private practise settings. Effectively, the private indemnifier's liability in respect of any claim is capped at the relevant indemnity ceiling and the State assumes responsibility for any amount in excess of the cap. Consultants in private hospitals should check with their Medical Defence Organisations to establish that such organisations will cover them up to the Caps limit in cases where they are considering prescribing THC-based medicines for a patient, under licence from the Minister and where he/she has exhausted all other treatment options for that patient.

Cannabis for Medicinal Use

637. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health if in order to apply for a licence for medicinal cannabis a consultant is required to go through an exhaustive list of conventional medications (details supplied). [54412/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Misuse of Drugs legal framework, it is open to a medical practitioner to apply for a Ministerial licence for medical cannabis for the treatment of a patient under his or her care.

It is important to note that the decision to prescribe or not prescribe any treatment, including cannabis treatment, for an individual patient is strictly a decision for the treating clinician, in consultation with their patient. The Minister for Health has no role in this clinical decision-making process.

In late 2016 I requested the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) to carry out a review of the scientific evidence of the potential medical use of cannabis. The HPRA report was published in February 2017. In this report the HPRA advised that cannabis should only be made available for the treatment of patients with specified medical conditions which have failed to respond to all other previous treatments, and where there is at least modest evidence that cannabis may be effective and such patients should be under the direct supervision of an appropriately trained and experienced medical consultant.

I would strongly advise that the Deputy and any persons interested in the use of cannabis for medical purposes to consult the Department of Health website which contains detailed information on the matter, including information on the types of cannabis products and the specified medical conditions for which they may be used to treat, as well as clinical guidance on its use. This information can be found at the following website:

Hospital Appointments Status

638. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); if an appointment will be scheduled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54414/18]

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

639. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment will be scheduled for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54417/18]

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.

Maternity Services Provision

640. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the status of the provision of a 20 week anomaly scan for all expectant mothers at the Midlands Regional Hospital, Mullingar. [54418/18]

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

Eating Disorders

641. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the supports available for persons with an eating disorder; his views on the case of a person (details supplied) raised in correspondence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54420/18]

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.

Ambulance Service Response Times

642. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health the reason a response has not issued to a person (details supplied) in relation to ambulance call out times in County Leitrim; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54422/18]

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

Services for People with Disabilities

643. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a respite house and services at a location (details supplied) in County Leitrim; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54423/18]

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

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

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

Home Help Service Provision

644. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if home help will be sanctioned in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54429/18]

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

possible.

Hospital Charges

645. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Health if the use of debt collection agencies for the collection of debts to the health service will be discontinued; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54433/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Patient charges are a key element of the overall funding envelope of the Irish health system and are taken into account when agreeing the Annual Estimates and the subsequent preparation of the annual National Service Plan.

These charges typically include:

- Out-patient charges;
- Emergency Department charges;
- Daily in-patient charges; and
- Long-term stay charges.

There are cohorts of people who are exempt from these charges, including, but not limited to persons with full eligibility, women receiving services in respect of motherhood, children up to the age of six weeks, children suffering from diseases prescribed under section 52 (2) of the Act, and persons receiving services for the diagnosis or treatment of infectious diseases.

In addition, patients who opt for private in-patient services in public hospitals are liable for a range of private accommodation charges. There are no exemptions from these charges.

Non-collection of debts owed directly impacts on the affordability of services provided by the Health Service Executive in any year. It is therefore incumbent on the HSE to take all reasonable steps to pursue amounts owed for services delivered. Debt collection agencies are engaged when normal billing arrangements have been unsuccessful.

Services for People with Disabilities

646. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 745 of 7 September 2018, the reason for the delay in appointments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54434/18]

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

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

Mental Health Services

647. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health if regular mental health services were available over the Christmas 2018 period in hospitals nationally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54445/18]

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 Minister as soon as possible.

Services for People with Disabilities

648. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the number of personal assistant hours allocated in County Kildare in the past five years in tabular form. [54450/18]

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.

Orthodontic Services Data

649. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the number of orthodontists employed by the HSE to cover County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54451/18]

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

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Data

650. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the number of residents in nursing home care facilities nationwide. [54452/18]

651. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the estimated number of persons requiring nursing home care in five, ten, 15 and 20 years, respectively according to demographic analysis. [54453/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 650 and 651 together.

Currently more than 23,200 people are supported in nursing homes under the Nursing Homes Support Scheme (NHSS). This figure does not include those in short stay or transitional care beds, nor does it include those residents of private facilities that pay for their own service

outside of the NHSS. The Health Information & Quality Authority website has information on the number of registered beds for each designated residential care centre, public and private.

The Department's "Health in Ireland - Key Trends 2018" report, published last month, indicates that in 2017 there were 30,674 residential care beds registered with HIQA. It is not possible to determine the exact total number of people in residential care beds at a given time except for those that residents that are supported under the NHSS.

The Capacity Review published earlier this year, in addition to recognising the pressures being faced across the health system in terms of access to healthcare, was also an indication of the Government's desire to plan appropriately for the future. Analysis of future scenarios (based on demographic projections and taking account of envisaged reform measures) shows potential requirements for the period to 2031. On the back of these findings, the Government committed to providing 4,500 additional short and long term residential care beds in the National Development Plan. The exact criteria for the planning and design of these beds will be evaluated on a phased basis as the projects are approved.

Departmental Expenditure

652. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Health the budget and spend in his Department for marketing, media and social media in each of the years 2016 to 2018; the projected spend for 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54466/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Department of Health interprets marketing and media costs as advertising costs. Advertising includes advertising board vacancies and public consultations. Social Media costs in 2018 were incurred in the promotion of Mental Health Services and the Health and Wellbeing Programme.

Advertising costs for 2016, 2017 and 2018 are set out as follows:

2016 Advertising / marketing / PR	€10,394.47
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Social Media	-
2017 Advertising / marketing / PR	€22,302.29
Social Media	-
2018 Advertising / marketing / PR	€37,526.92
Social Media	€70,761.34
Healthy Ireland	€319,694.66

We do not have figures for projected spend for 2019 at this stage.

Departmental Staff Data

653. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff in his Department employed to work on marketing, media and social media in 2018. [54483/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My Department's Press and Communications Office has a Head of Communications at Principal Officer level and six other members of staff who were engaged in work on media and social media in relation to the general work of the

Department during 2018. Separately, a Head of Communications with specific responsibilities in relation to the Sláintecare Programme Office was appointed in December 2018.

In addition there are other employees in various Units throughout the Department whose work would include some elements of communications, media and social media alongside their main duties.

Question No. 654 answered with Question No. 545.

National Treatment Purchase Fund Payments

655. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the amount the NTPF pays per patient per eye for cataract surgery and IOL implants from initial consultation to final review. [54492/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) advises that it procures capacity for the procedures listed in both private hospitals or public hospitals.

In order to ensure competitive pricing as part of its outsourcing programme, the NTPF works with private hospitals from the existing panel agreement and engages in procurement processes through e-tender. The NTPF also works with legal advisors and procurement specialists to ensure that all funding is appropriately spent.

The NTPF advises that as procedures are tendered for through an open procurement process the cost per procedure would be commercially sensitive.

Cross-Border Health Initiatives

656. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the amount the HSE pays per patient per eye for cataract surgery and IOL implants under the Cross Border Health Initiative from initial consultation to final review; and the cost of each respectively in tabular form. [54493/18]

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

Medicinal Products Prices

657. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the reason there is a variance in the amount paid for children's dispensing from initial consultation to final review under the HSE contract between local and community areas. [54494/18]

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

Health Services

658. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the reason primary school

children are being discharged from eye care services with parents being forced to pay for eye examinations prior to appropriate alternatives being put in place. [54495/18]

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

Speech and Language Therapy Waiting Lists

659. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health if he will report on the large increases in waiting lists for speech and language services; the measures he is taking to reduce the waiting lists for initial assessment, first therapy appointment and further therapy; his target for waiting lists for each of these aspects of speech and language; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54500/18]

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.

Speech and Language Therapy Waiting Lists

660. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the reason 15% of children on waiting lists in the south-west CHO area for speech and language services have been waiting longer than one year; the measures he is taking to address same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54501/18]

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.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

661. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the reason 29% of children on waiting lists in the south-west CHO area for CAMHS services have been waiting longer than one year; the measures he is taking to address same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54502/18]

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 Minister as soon as possible.

Youth Services

662. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the plans of the HSE to ensure the continuation of services to young persons availing of the youth health service which is being transitioned into the HSE social inclusion portfolio; if young persons using the service will continue to have a service in place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54508/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): As the issue

raised refers to service matters, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for their direct reply to the Deputy.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

663. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Health if the application for reimbursement of Ocrevus for persons with relapsing MS and primary progressive MS has been discussed by the HSE drugs group; if so, the decisions that were made; if these drugs will be on the agenda for the next meeting of the HSE leadership team; when persons with MS who are eligible candidates for Ocrevus can expect to have access to same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54511/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines under the community drug schemes, in accordance with the provisions of the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for reply to the Deputy.

Services for People with Disabilities

664. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the details of the use of and access to the limited capacity of the respite house in Cootehill, County Cavan; the reason service users and families that would normally benefit from its services are having access denied; his plans for additional respite provision in counties Cavan and Monaghan to cater to the needs of persons across the Border region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54512/18]

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

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

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

National Treatment Purchase Fund Payments

665. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health the range of prices, by lowest and highest in percentage terms, paid by the NTPF for a single cataract operation to a non-HSE provider from first consultation to final check-up in 2018 using the cost of the same operation at a HSE-run hospital as the base cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54513/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) advises that it procures capacity for cataract operations in both private hospitals or public hospitals.

In order to ensure competitive pricing as part of its outsourcing programme, the NTPF works with private hospitals from the existing panel agreement and engages in procurement processes through e-tender. The NTPF also works with legal advisors and procurement specialists to ensure that all funding is appropriately spent.

The NTPF advises that as procedures are tendered for through an open procurement process the cost per procedure would be commercially sensitive.

Medicinal Products Availability

666. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if a matter regarding the treatment of a person (details supplied) will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54514/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Waiting Lists

667. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a bed in a community hospital for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54515/18]

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

Hospital Staff Recruitment

668. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health when a position (details supplied) will be re-advertised in UHK; when the service will recommence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54516/18]

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

Hospital Staff Recruitment

669. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the qualifications required for play specialists (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54517/18]

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

Home Care Packages

670. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be awarded a home care package; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54518/18]

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

Hospital Accommodation Provision

671. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a unit (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54519/18]

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

Health Services Provision

672. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his plans to ensure the out-of-hours services of ET specialists are put in place in UHK (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54521/18]

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.

Ministerial Correspondence

673. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Health if he received correspondence from a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54534/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Correspondence was received in my office from the individual in question on 30 November, 2018. A final reply has issued.

Nursing Home Accommodation Provision

674. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health his plans to ensure there are sufficient numbers of suitable nursing home places available in the case of older persons that require residential care being discharged from hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54540/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly) (Deputy Jim Daly): The National Transitional Care funding initiative was put in place to assist with discharging patients from acute hospitals, whether waiting for NHSS funding or requiring convalescent care, and who can be supported in private nursing home beds. The use of transitional care has proven very valuable to the hospital system and has benefitted the transfer of a significant number of patients to more appropriate settings on their journey home or alternative residential care settings. The national service plan set an expected activity target of 9,160 transitional care approvals for 2018 and preliminary data indicates that there were approximately 11,000 approvals. The expected activity target for this year is 10,980 which is broadly in line with last

year's activity.

In relation to residential service provision beyond the transitional phase the HSE's approach for 2019 is set out in the 2019 service plan, that is, having regard to the available resource, to maximise access to the Nursing Homes Support Scheme, NHSS, for eligible applicants, and to continue to make every effort to maintain the waiting list for funding at the current average four week level, as was the case in 2018, particularly during the peak period of demand.

Hospital Appointments Status

675. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for a person (details supplied) will be expedited. [54544/18]

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

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

676. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for a person (details supplied) will be scheduled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54545/18]

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 Drugs Availability

677. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that medical card patients are being charged for the drug Acupan (details supplied) despite its presence on the list of reimbursable medications for medical card holders; his plans to address same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54549/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Departmental Funding

678. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health his plans to ensure a definitive source of funding to prevent the closure of an organisation (details supplied) in view of the recognition of Irish sign language and the unique opportunity to tackle the marginalisation of those from the deaf community. [54553/18]

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

679. **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. [1000/19]

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

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

680. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1001/19]

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.

Disabilities Assessments

681. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the steps which can be taken to reduce the long delays in disability assessments in counties Kerry and Cork (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1002/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath) (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 Screening Programmes

682. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Health the role his Department or the HSE has in monitoring or overseeing the on-site health screening tests conducted on construction site workers here in conjunction with a trust (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1007/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Construction Workers Health Trust is a national charity and is run by the craft unions affiliated to the Irish Congress of Trade Unions. The service is voluntary, nurse led and incorporates blood pressure measurement, a check for diabetes and high cholesterol, lung function, a height, weight and body mass index, BMI, calculation. Advice is also given on heart health, diet and cancer awareness. If there are any results outside the normal range then the individual is referred to their own GP.

My Department has no overseeing or monitoring function for this service. As this question has referenced the Health Service Executive I have forwarded it on for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Appointments Status

683. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment will be scheduled for a person (details supplied). [1009/19]

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

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

684. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment will be scheduled for a person (details supplied). [1011/19]

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.

Speech and Language Therapy Provision

685. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the steps which can be taken in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[1012/19]

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.

Debt Collection

686. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the arrangements used by the HSE for the collection of outstanding bills; if it uses a third party for the collection of outstanding debts; the procedures and policies in place governing the collection by third parties of debts owed to the HSE; the amount owed to the HSE at the end of 2017; the estimated amount owed at the end of 2018 by relevant category; the value of debt outsourced for collection to a third party; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1013/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Issues around income collection and the use of a third party for the collection of outstanding debts are operational matters for which the HSE are responsible. Therefore I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy on this matter.

Hospital Appointments Status

687. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health if the case of a person (details supplied) waiting a number of months for an appointment will be examined. [1015/19]

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

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

688. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for a person (details supplied) will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1023/19]

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

689. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health the number of children on the waiting list at Cappagh Hospital for hip operations (details supplied); if the operating theatres are being used to their capacity; if emergency operations can be undertaken elsewhere to reduce the waiting lists; the number of professionals qualified to carry out these operations at the hospital; the number waiting on each list; and his plans to reduce the list in 2019. [1036/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Improving access to hospital treatment is a key priority for government. Budget 2019 announced increased funding to the National Treatment Purchase Fund to €75 million, 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.

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.

In relation to the particular queries raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

General Practitioner Contracts

690. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health his plans to extend the age of retirement for general practitioners to 72 years of age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1041/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In July 2015, retirement provisions under the GMS scheme were changed to allow GPs to hold GMS contracts until their 72nd birthday.

Disability Services Funding

691. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Health if assurances will be given to an organisation (details supplied) on the funding of services it provides to the deaf community; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1047/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath) (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to

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

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

Abortion Services Provision

692. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Health his views on the Rotunda Hospital placing an 11 week limit on terminations; if he will address the matter to bring clarity for hospitals and those that may be seeking terminations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1048/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Deputy will be aware, Section 12 of the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018 provides that a termination of pregnancy may be carried out by a medical practitioner where, having examined the woman, he or she is of the reasonable opinion formed in good faith that the pregnancy concerned has not exceeded 12 weeks of pregnancy, after a period of not less than three days has elapsed from the date on which a medical practitioner has certified that the pregnancy has not exceeded 12 weeks.

Officials in my Department continue to engage with the Health Service Executive on a regular basis to facilitate the smooth-running of the service and to resolve any issues that may arise.

I am advised that the HSE has contacted the hospital group in question to bring to their attention that section 12 of the Act allows for termination where the pregnancy has not exceeded 12 weeks, and they are engaging with the hospital to resolve the matter.

Hospital Charges

693. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health if medical card applicants are considered exempt from medical expenses such as hospital stay charges until a decision is made on their application. [1050/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Act 1970 (as amended) provides that all persons ordinarily resident in the country are eligible, subject to certain charges, to public in-patient hospital services. The current public hospital statutory in-patient charge is €80 per day, up to a maximum of €800 in any period of 12 consecutive months. All persons accessing public in-patient services in a public hospital are liable for the statutory public-inpatient charge, subject to a number of exemptions, including where a person is a medical cardholder.

The legislative framework therefore obliges the HSE to levy the statutory in-patient charge on all patients not covered by an exemption. As noted, medical card holders are exempt from hospital charges, however the exemption is only valid from the date of issue of the medical card. Therefore patients continue to be liable for any charges which occurred before a medical card has been issued.

Hospital Appointments Status

694. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 355 of 27 November 2018, when a reply will issue. [1054/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE have confirmed to my Department that a response to the initial parliamentary question was issued to the Deputy on 11 January 2019.

Commencement of Legislation

695. **Deputy Seán Barrett** asked the Minister for Health when all aspects of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 concerning the legal recognition of parentage for same sex couples that are not covered under the Act will be introduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1057/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Parts 2 and 3 of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 contain provisions relating to the regulation of donor-assisted human reproduction, DAHR, procedures carried out in the State, including dealing with the rights of children born as a result of those procedures. The enactment of the Children and Family Relationships (Amendment) Act 2018 was necessary to correct typographical and technical errors in the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015, to enable the subsequent commencement of Parts 2 and 3 of the Act. It is intended that Parts 2 and 3 of the Act will be commenced as soon as possible.

Parts 2 and 3 of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 specifically relate to DAHR procedures where the intending mother is also the birth mother and the child is born in the State. After commencement of Parts 2 and 3, the provisions of the Act are confined to DAHR procedures carried out in the State and where the child is born in the State.

The commencement of Parts 2 and 3 of the Act will also allow for the granting of a retrospective declaration of parentage in relation to a child born as a result of a DAHR procedure, subject to certain conditions.

As Parts 2 and 3 of the Children and Family Relationships Act specifically relate to procedures where the intending mother is also the birth mother, this Act does not encompass surrogacy. Provisions relating to the regulation of surrogacy in Ireland are included in Part 6 of the General Scheme of the Assisted Human Reproduction Bill 2017.

In October 2017 the Government approved the drafting of a Bill on assisted human reproduction (AHR) and associated areas of research, based on the published General Scheme, The Joint Committee on Health is currently conducting a review of the General Scheme of the Assisted Human Reproduction Bill 2017 as part of the pre-legislative scrutiny process, and the Committee intends to publish its report early in 2019.

The process of drafting this Bill will be completed in conjunction with the Office of the Attorney General. As part of this process officials in my Department will ensure that there is coherent interaction between the Assisted Human Reproduction Bill and Parts 2 and 3 of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015. However, it is not possible at this time to give a definitive timeline for the completion of the draft Bill and its subsequent passage through the Houses of the Oireachtas.

Hospital Accommodation Provision

696. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health his plans to expand services in Louth County Hospital, Dundalk in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1070/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The establishment of hospital groups has enabled a better configuration of hospital services with benefits relating to safety, quality, access, cost and sustainable medical staffing. The structure ensures that hospitals working together in a group will be able to support each other, providing a stronger role for smaller hospitals in delivering less complex care, and ensuring that those who require emergency or complex planned care are managed safely in larger hospitals.

The RCSI Hospital Group, which includes both Cavan General Hospital, has identified the need for development of the resuscitation area in Cavan Emergency Department. Future investment in Cavan General Hospital will be considered within the overall acute hospital infrastructure programme, the prioritised needs of the hospital groups and within the overall capital envelope available to the health service.

I recently met with the RCSI Hospital Group to discuss how all hospitals within the group can develop and contribute to improvements in both scheduled and unscheduled care for patients.

I am committed to securing and further developing the role of our smaller hospitals with the expansion of services delivered in these hospitals, especially in services such as day surgery; ambulatory care; medical services and diagnostics.

The national development plan provides €10.9 billion for Health capital developments across the country, including both national programmes and individual projects, across acute, primary and social care. Health capital projects and programmes currently underway will continue. As to be expected with a ten year plan, many proposals are at an early stage and will require to progress through appraisal, planning design and tender before a firm timeline or funding required can be established.

As these are service matters, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to you directly as soon as possible.

Hospital Appointments Status

697. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hip operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1073/19]

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 Accommodation Provision

698. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health the status of the proposed 100 bed unit at the St. Mary's Hospital site, Dublin Road, Drogheda, County Louth; if specific commencement dates have been agreed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1074/19]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

699. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting for cataract procedures on national public waiting lists for 2017 and 2018; the average waiting time to undergo required cataract procedures; his plans to further reduce the waiting times in this area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1077/19]

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

It is acknowledged that cataract surgery is among the most common surgical procedures carried out in the ophthalmology specialty. It was in this knowledge that when proposals for the joint HSE-National Treatment Purchase Fund Inpatient and Day Case Action Plan were under development last year, I sought a particular focus on reducing waiting times for a number of high volume specialties including cataracts. The Action Plan, allocated a quarter (5,000 out of 20,000) of the planned NTPF procedures to cataract treatments.

Waiting list figures for December 2018, published last week by the NTPF show that considerable improvements have been made to the number of patients waiting for an Inpatient or Day case procedure which have fallen to 70,204 from 81,500 in December 2017. This represents a reduction of over 14% in the overall number of patients waiting for a procedure.

In terms of the number of people waiting for cataract treatment in 2017 and 2018 and the average waiting times, the NTPF advise that at the end of 2017 there were 8,027 people waiting for a cataract procedure, with an average waiting time of 195 days, while at the end of 2018 there were 6,440 people waiting for a cataract procedure, with an average waiting time of 131 days. This represents a decrease in numbers waiting of 20% and a reduction in average waiting time of 33%.

The action plan also recommended that the HSE and NTPF identify sustainable initiatives to improve waiting times. In this context, a dedicated centre for cataract surgery in Nenagh opened last July, and at full capacity will be capable of delivering up to 2,000 procedures annually. The centre is ideally located to enable the UL hospital group, in collaboration with the HSE and NTPF, to maximise the use of the Centre through collaboration with hospital groups so that patients from surrounding regions can be referred to the centre for their treatment.

My Department is working closely with the NTPF and the HSE to finalise a scheduled care

access plan for inpatients/daycase and outpatients for 2019. In this regard, the NTPF and HSE will continue to work closely with hospital groups, inviting proposals to improve access for patients waiting for hospital procedures.

Medicinal Products Availability

700. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health the status of the Versatis pain relief plasters under the long term illness scheme; his further plans to reintroduce the plasters on the scheme (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1078/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Medicines play a vital role in improving the health of Irish patients. Securing access to existing and new and innovative medicines is a key health service objective. However, the challenge is to do this in a safe and sustainable manner. Treatment must be appropriate and proportionate and clinical decision-making, such as prescribing, should be based on both patient needs and sound medical evidence.

Lidocaine 5% medicated plasters are licensed for localised relief of post-shingles pain in adults. This is the patch's only licensed use in Ireland. It has been reimbursed in the community drug schemes since 2010.

Clinical concern arose as usage increased significantly, to the point where more plasters were being used in Ireland than in the entire UK National Health Service. In such situations, it is important and appropriate for clinicians to review usage and, in 2016, the HSE Medicines Management Programme, MMP, reviewed the use of the plasters. The review estimated that only 5-10% of prescribing was for the licensed indication.

From September 2017, following the clinical review, the HSE introduced a new reimbursement approval system for the patches, to support appropriate use and patient care. Under these arrangements, the patient's GP or consultant applies to the MMP for reimbursement approval on behalf of the patient. If an application is refused, the clinician may submit an appeal to the MMP, making a clear clinical case for the patient. Information for patients and practitioners is on the HSE MMP website at: hse.ie/yourmedicines.

The outcome of an application or an appeal for reimbursement of lidocaine patches is a matter between the MMP and the treating clinician. The Deputy will appreciate that, as Minister for Health, I cannot intervene in individual cases.

The decision to introduce a new reimbursement approval process for a particular treatment is a matter for the HSE. However, I fully support the objectives of the HSE Medicines Management Programme.

Drugs Payment Scheme

701. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health the position in relation to access for all type 1 diabetes patients to the FreeStyle Libre device under the reimbursement scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1082/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Ambulance Service Provision

702. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health the status of the new ambulance base announced in Project Ireland 2040 for Ardee, County Louth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1086/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of healthcare infrastructure projects, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly in relation to this matter.

Hospital Appointments Status

703. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a scan for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1089/19]

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.

Question No. 704 answered with Question No. 562.

General Practitioner Services

705. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the €20 blood test cost for individuals as in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1115/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the terms of the current GMS contract, GPs are required to provide eligible patients with ‘all proper and necessary treatment of a kind usually undertaken by a general practitioner and not requiring special skill or experience of a degree or kind which general practitioners cannot reasonably be expected to possess.’ There is no provision under the GMS GP contract for persons who hold a medical card or GP visit card to be charged for routine phlebotomy services provided by their GP which are required to either assist in the diagnosis of illness or the treatment of a condition.

The HSE has advised GPs that where a blood test forms part of the investigation or necessary treatment of a patient's symptoms or conditions, this should be free of charge for patients who hold a medical card or GP visit card. Notwithstanding this, I am aware that some GPs are charging GMS patients for phlebotomy services in some circumstances.

This is a matter of concern for me as it has long been the position, under successive Governments, that no user charges should apply to GP services provided to GMS and GP visit card patients. If a patient who holds a medical card or GP visit card believes he or she has been incorrectly charged for routine phlebotomy services by his or her GP, then that patient should report the matter to their HSE Local Health Office.

Abortion Services Provision

706. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the steps he will take to prevent rogue pregnancy agencies from misleading the public with regard to the HSE My Options website; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1116/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Deputy's question concerns a service issue, it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Disability Support Services

707. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the amount allocated in budget 2019 for personal assistant services to enable persons with disabilities to live independent lives; the way in which this allocation compares with the spending on services in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1125/19]

708. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the amount of expenditure allocated in the 2019 National Service Plan of the HSE for personal assistant services to enable persons with disabilities to live independent lives; the way in which this allocation compares with the spending on services in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1126/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath) (Deputy Finian McGrath): I propose to take Questions Nos. 707 and 708 together.

It is the policy of the HSE to provide personal assistant services that are person-centred, equitable and transparent to people with a physical and/or sensory disability. The HSE is committed to protecting the level of personal assistant services and home support services to persons with disabilities.

No additional funding was provided in Budget 2019 for personal assistant hours however the HSE's National Service Plan aims to provide 1.63 million hours of personal assistance to almost 2,500 people, representing an increase of 170,000 hours over the 2018 target. In addition, home support services will provide 3.08 million hours to both adults and children with a disability this year, an increase of 150,000 hours over the target for 2018. Since 2013 the number of personal assistance hours and home support hours has increased by 25% and 28% respectively.

HSE Expenditure

709. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the cost of postal services to the HSE each year; the price paid for letters, envelopes and stamps; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1149/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In response to the Deputy's question, I am not in a position to give you an exact figure for the cost of postal services solely to the HSE. The Department does not keep a breakdown of letters leaving the building nor does it keep a count of envelopes sent to individual recipients.

Our main contact format with the HSE is through electronic methods.

Hospital Appointments Status

710. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment will be scheduled for a person (details supplied). [1151/19]

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

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

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

Health Screening Programmes

711. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the reason those aged 70 years of age and older are refused bowel screening by the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1152/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): BowelScreen, the National Bowel Screening Programme, was introduced in 2012 with a phased implementation plan targeting men and women aged 60 to 69. Initially testing every 3 years was involved and this has moved to 2-year testing intervals.

The intention is to extend the eligible age range for BowelScreen to all aged 55 to 74 years, in line with the National Cancer Strategy 2017-2026. It is envisaged that rollout of the age extension will be on a phased basis from 2021.

Nursing Staff Provision

712. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Health the reason public health nursing hours were reduced for Drumkeeran, County Leitrim (details supplied); the action he will take to ensure these hours are returned to the service for this area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1153/19]

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

Hospitals Data

713. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health the number of hospitals for which name changes have been proposed by the HSE; the number of name changes that subsequently took place; the old hospital names and the new alternative names in each case; the public consultation that took place regarding such name changes; the outcome of such consultation; the cost per hospital for each such name change; the person or body that makes the final decision to change or not change the name of the hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1155/19]

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

714. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be scheduled for a knee replacement. [1169/19]

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.

Blood Donations

715. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if the testing procedures engaged by the Irish Blood Transfusion Service in relation to the testing of all of blood donations it receives are audited or subject to audit by a third party and or independent agency; the screening and or testing that is conducted on all blood donations the service receives; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1181/19]

716. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if the Irish Blood Transfusion Service has considered an individual risk assessment system to be applied to all blood donors when they present to donate at blood donation clinics to assess the actual risk to the national blood supply posed by all blood donors; if the current system takes a full account of all

donors who may be a risk to the national blood supply; his views on whether an individual risk assessment system for all donors would represent a best practice approach to the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1182/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 715 and 716 together.

The remit of the Irish Blood Transfusion Service (IBTS) is to provide a safe, reliable and robust blood service to the Irish health system. A major objective of the IBTS is to ensure that it always has the necessary programmes and procedures in place to protect both the recipients and the donors of blood and blood products. The IBTS constantly keeps all deferral policies under review to ensure the ongoing safety of blood and the products derived from it.

The IBTS is regulated by the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) which is the designated Competent Authority under Irish and European Law. The testing procedures at the IBTS are therefore subject to regular audit by the HPRA.

The IBTS does not generally utilise individual risk assessment. However, the IBTS performs laboratory tests for multiple disease markers on every donation. Tests for the following infectious agents are done on each occasion a donor gives blood

- Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) types 1 & 2
- Hepatitis C Virus (HCV)
- Hepatitis B Virus (HBV)
- Hepatitis E virus (HEV)
- Syphilis (*Treponema pallidum*)
- Human T-Lymphotropic virus (HTLV) type 1 and 2

The testing carried out includes serology, which essentially detects antibodies, and Nucleic Acid testing (NAT) which detects viral genetic material. NAT is very sensitive and is capable of detecting early infections before antibodies are formed. Any donation that is positive for any one of these tests cannot be used for transfusion purposes and is discarded. Further testing is carried out to confirm true infection.

The IBTS also performs selective laboratory tests for certain disease markers based on travel exposure (e.g. West Nile Disease). A certain proportion of the blood supply is tested for Cytomegalovirus (CMV). This is to mitigate the risk of transmission of this common virus to particularly vulnerable patients. All blood is also leucodepleted (i.e. the removal of white blood cells) which adds another layer of protection against CMV infection.

Departmental Agencies Funding

717. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health the extent of the funding provided either directly or indirectly through agencies controlled by his Department for the provision of advocacy services during 2018; the proposed expenditure figures for 2019; the number of advocacy cases dealt with in 2018 by each of the advocacy organisations so funded; and the number of staff and volunteers in each advocacy organisation in December 2018 [1195/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In general, advocacy services are funded

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directly by the HSE rather than by my Department. I have therefore referred your question to the HSE, so that they may reply directly to you on this matter.

However, the Department of Health did provide a small amount of funding to support advocacy services, with a grant funding agreement being put in place in late 2018 with the Irish Cancer Society, acting on behalf of the CervicalCheck Patient Support Group. The Support Group received €150,167 in 2018 to establish a service to provide information, advice and support in a structured and confidential manner to patients and next of kin of those directly affected by the CervicalCheck screening programme and subsequent ongoing official enquiries and investigations. The Support Group had one permanent employee and three voluntary patient representatives as of December 2018.

In addition, the Department of Health commissioned the establishment of a national Patient Safety Advocacy Service in 2018. The service contract was awarded in December 2018. A first payment of €197,100.00 was made in December 2018 to enable the establishment of the service and allow it to commence recruitment and source necessary facilities for the commencement of activities in the second half of 2019.

In May 2018, on an exceptional, once-off basis, funding of €195,000 was provided by the Department to the Irish Deaf Society, an organisation involved in advocacy for the deaf community.

Hospital Waiting Lists

718. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if cataract surgery will be expedited for a person (details supplied). [1213/19]

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

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

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

Hospitals Data

719. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the date the new modular bed building in South Tipperary General Hospital will be operational; the details of all other capital and operational improvements he expects in the hospital in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1234/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of healthcare infrastructure projects, I have asked the HSE to respond to

you directly in relation to this matter.

Mental Health Services

720. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Health the number on waiting lists for adult mental health services by county; the number waiting 0 to three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12, 12 to 18 and more than 18 months, respectively, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1235/19]

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

Hospitals Data

721. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health when the new 60 bed modular unit in University Hospital Limerick will be opened in 2019; the other capital and operational improvements that will be made in the hospital during 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1237/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of healthcare infrastructure projects, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly in relation to this matter.

Medicinal Products

722. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding the HPV vaccine; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1239/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) is responsible for monitoring the safety and quality of all medicines and vaccines that are licensed in Ireland. While no medicine (including vaccines) is entirely without risk, the safety profile of Gardasil, as with all medicines, is carefully monitored and any new evidence concerning side-effects is taken into account. HPV is one of the most closely studied and monitored medicinal products around. The HPRA and the European Medicines Agency (EMA) continually monitor adverse events to vaccination. 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. These are usually mild and temporary reactions to any kind of vaccination.

Pharmaceutical Sector

723. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the analysis his Department has made of the recent OECD report on pharmaceutical innovation and access to medicines (details supplied); his views on the recommendation to publish authoritative information on industry activities and the risks, costs and returns from research and development to better inform policy decisions such as drug pricing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1247/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Medicines play a vital role in improving the overall health of Irish patients. Securing access to new and innovative medicines in a timely manner is a key objective of the Irish Health Service. The OECD report on Pharmaceutical Innovation and Access to Medicines draws on an evidence-based assessment of the current performance of the pharmaceutical innovation system, and presents a critical analysis of policy options for reforms to promote access and sustainability. Officials in the Department are aware of this report.

Ireland is already engaging in a number of the recommendations contained in the report through its international agenda, most notably through its membership of the Beneluxa initiative. The Beneluxa collaboration seeks to enhance patients' access to high quality and affordable treatments, improve the payers' position in the market through joint negotiations, increase transparency on pricing between the collaborating countries, share policy expertise and focus on knowledge building.

Members of the Beneluxa Initiative will work closely together to identify pragmatic solutions to the challenges which we all now face with medicine pricing, sustainability and supply.

The OECD Report also contains recommendations relating to policy options to address the current challenges and advocates for engagement between the State and Industry. I believe that partnership with industry is key to improving access to new medicines. At the last bi-annual meeting between my Department and the Irish Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association (IPHA) a proposed dialogue was discussed. It is envisioned that this will take the form of a structured platform of engagement, building a stronger partnership between the State and industry to create better patient access to new treatments.

An Open Policy Forum also took place on Thursday 15 November 2018 with the Department of Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, Department of Health and the IPHA.

I look forward to more engagement over the course of the year with the aim of building a fairer partnership between industry and the State to help ensure that Irish patients get sustainable access to new medicines in as timely a manner as possible.

Hospitals Data

724. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Health when the new 20 bed cystic fibrosis unit at Beaumont Hospital will commence; when it will be completed; and when it will be fully operational in view of the fact it was included in the Programme for a Partnership Government in May 2016 [1262/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of healthcare infrastructure projects, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly in relation to this matter.

HSE Properties

725. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the status of a site (details supplied); the provisions being made for the graveyard on site; if it will be part of the sale in process; if these sacred grounds will be preserved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1269/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I understand there is no change in the posi-

tion as outlined by the HSE on 4 December 2018 in response to your previous question on this matter on 20 November 2018 [47862/18]. A copy of the HSE reply to that Parliamentary Question is available at the following link:

[HSE reply]

Emergency Departments

726. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the number of emergency department attendances at Cavan General Hospital in each of the years 2012 to 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1276/19]

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

We are coming into a very busy period for our health services, with many sites reporting significant numbers of patient attendances. Hospitals are also reporting a significant increase in the numbers of patients presenting with respiratory and flu-like illness.

Key actions are now underway, as part of the Winter Plan, to support hospitals during this period of peak demand to include: the opening of additional beds, the use of private hospital capacity, frailty intervention teams in EDs, additional homecare packages and transitional care beds, and additional diagnostics in hospitals and for GPs.

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

Home Care Packages Provision

727. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Health the private companies and-or voluntary service providers that are contracted by the HSE to provide home care packages to persons with severe physical and mental disabilities; the qualifications staff working for these agencies are required to have under the law to provide such services; the funding allocated to these providers; the allocation made to each provider; the annual allocation in each of the past ten years; and the complaints mechanism in place in circumstances in which a family is of the view that the level of service being provided or the standard of qualifications of the staff is not appropriate to meet the needs of the person receiving the homecare package. [1277/19]

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

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

Health Care Infrastructure Provision

728. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if the capital requirement and associated methodology pertaining to necessary development of national neurointerventional services at Beaumont Hospital has been provided for as part of the HSE Services Plan 2019 to continue with medical equipment and ambulance replacement and minor capital work programme to deal with prioritised infrastructural risk issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1282/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 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.

Health and Social Care Professionals

729. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health his plans to accept the recommendations to include chiropractors as referrers and practitioners in the upcoming statutory instrument in view of the recommendation by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Health; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1283/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris)(Deputy Simon Harris): Having taken on board all the advices received, I recently signed regulations transposing the Basic Safety Standards Directive (BSSD), the purpose of which is to protect the public, patients, workers and others from all forms of ionising radiation. The regulations were published on 15 January 2019.

The regulations designate those who may refer for radiological tests, those who may carry them out and other functions; nurses, doctors, dentists and radiographers are designated as appropriate. Chiropractors are not designated in the regulations.

The issue of statutory regulation raised by chiropractors will be the subject of work facilitated by CORU involving a risk assessment of a number of professions seeking such regulation later this year. Based on this assessment of risk to the public, recommendations will follow regarding professions to be statutorily regulated. It should be noted that not all statutorily regulated professions are designated for the purposes of the BSSD.

Hospital Consultant Recruitment

730. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the reason a post for a specialist sarcoma consultant has not been filled since the position was created in July 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1284/19]

731. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health his views on whether it is acceptable that sarcoma patients have been denied access to a specialist for over two years due to the fact that a post for a specialist sarcoma consultant has not been filled since the position was created in July 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1285/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 730 and 731 together.

The sarcoma multidisciplinary team in St. Vincent's University Hospital will be expanded with the appointment of a Consultant Oncologist with a special interest in Sarcoma. Following

the advertisement of this post, a successful candidate was identified and an offer of appointment was made. However, the hospital advise that the person involved is not in a position to take up the post until summer 2019.

The new specialist will join the existing team, which has all of the relevant specialties including Surgery, Medical Oncology, Radiation Oncology, Radiology and Pathology, to provide specialist care to patients with sarcoma attending the hospital.

Hospital Waiting Lists

732. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) can expect to receive an operation to remove cataracts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1286/19]

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

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care.

This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

HSE Governance

733. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the timeframe for the appointment of a third-party firm to review the governance arrangements and resources in place in the HSE to support decision making on reimbursement applications from drug companies; the timeframe in which this review will be delivered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1298/19]

734. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if he will make the final report of the review of governance arrangements and resources in place in the HSE to support decision making on reimbursement applications from drug companies publicly available as per international best practice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1299/19]

735. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the scope of the tender for the review of governance arrangements and resources in place in the HSE to support decision making on reimbursement applications from drug companies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1300/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 733 to 735, inclusive, together.

My Department has engaged in a tender process for a review of the HSE reimbursement and pricing decision-making process. As this process is underway, it would be inappropriate for me to comment further on this matter. I expect the tender process to be completed by the end of the first quarter of 2019.

Disabled Drivers and Passengers Scheme

736. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the clinical guidelines and methodology used to determine whether an applicant qualifies for a primary medical certificate; the policy in place to ensure all applications are dealt with on a consistent basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1320/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath) (Deputy Finian McGrath): Responsibility for the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Scheme, operated by the Revenue Commissioners, falls under the remit of my colleague, the Minister for Finance. To qualify for the scheme, an applicant must have a Primary Medical Certificate. To qualify for a Primary Medical Certificate, an applicant must be permanently and severely disabled within the terms of the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Regulations 1994 and satisfy a range of conditions.

The extent of the involvement of health personnel in the scheme relates to making a professional clinical determination as to whether an individual applicant satisfies the medical criteria set out in the Department of Finance regulations. This determination is undertaken by Senior Medical Officers for the relevant local Health Service Executive (HSE) administrative Community Health Organisation, on behalf of the Revenue Commissioners. These HSE personnel have no role in setting or amending the criteria.

A successful applicant is provided with a Primary Medical Certificate. An unsuccessful applicant can appeal the HSE's Senior Medical Officer's decision to the Disabled Drivers Medical Board of Appeal, which is under the auspices of the Minister for Finance. The Appeal Board makes a new clinical determination in respect of the applicant.

I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the element of the Deputy's question related to how HSE personnel apply the strict criteria set out in the regulations and ensure a consistent approach to its application.

Cross-Border Health Services Provision

737. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health if cross-Border workers will retain their entitlement to a medical card after Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1323/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As part of a whole of Government response to Brexit, the Department of Health is working to ensure a comprehensive and coordinated set of preparations to ensure continuity of health services post-Brexit. This work involves the Department and the HSE and other agencies in engaging in intensive Brexit preparedness and contingency planning.

A key consideration will be to ensure that insofar as possible there is minimum disruption to health services and that essential services are maintained on a cross-Border, all-island and Ireland-UK basis.

The Irish and UK Governments are committed to maintaining the reciprocal rights of access to healthcare for both Irish and UK citizens to publicly funded health services. Work is currently ongoing.

Disability Services Provision

738. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the reason a grant to a person (details supplied) was cut in view of the fact they were given a commitment by the HSE that they were entitled to the grant. [1351/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath) (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 Waiting Lists

739. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if an early appointment will be arranged for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1372/19]

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

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

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

Disability Support Services

740. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health when a position will be filled in a service (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1375/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath) (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 Data

741. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the new build at St. Patrick's Hospital, Carrick-on-Shannon, County Leitrim; if a site has been identified and purchased; when work is expected to begin; the expected date of completion; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that HIQA has raised concerns regarding the delay of the rebuild of the hospital which is not compliant with regulations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1377/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of healthcare infrastructure projects, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly in relation to this matter.

Disability Support Services

742. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the position of a person (details supplied) in County Cork on the waiting list for a residential placement; when he expects a place will be offered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1379/19]

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

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

Health Services

743. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if benefit schemes and supports for persons with Wolfram syndrome will be put in place to cover such needs as medical devices, dietary demands, transport to services and personal medical requirements; the supports and services automatically available to date; if he will request the HSE to engage directly with persons (details supplied) to determine their needs and ensure that both are in receipt of the full range of entitlements and services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1380/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Act 2004 specifies that it is the Health Service Executive (HSE) that shall manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its

behalf, health and personal social services. Eligibility for access to various schemes, services and allowances is determined based on an evaluation of an individual's circumstances by the HSE.

As the particular question raised relates to eligibility for a variety of services for a named individual, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy.

Disability Support Services

744. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the reason an application for homecare support to assist in the care of a person (details supplied) in County Cork was refused by the HSE; if he will examine the circumstances that apply in this particular case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1388/19]

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

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

Tender Process

745. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding tenders for taxis to hospitals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1389/19]

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

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Staff

746. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 1358 of 24 July 2018, the number of approved CAMHS psychiatrist posts; the number recommended for each CHO team; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1390/19]

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

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Staff

747. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the breakdown of unfilled consultant psychiatrist positions within CAMHS by county in tabular form; and if he will make a

statement on the matter. [1396/19]

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

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

748. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of beds which are available within CAMHS for persons in County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1397/19]

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

Mental Health Services Staff

749. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the breakdown of unfilled suicide crisis assessment nurse positions by county in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1398/19]

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

Mental Health Services Staff

750. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of full-time positions filled within adult mental health services; the number of full-time positions filled within children's mental health services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1399/19]

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

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Data

751. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons awaiting a Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, CAMHS, appointment in Community Health Organisation, CHO, 5; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1400/19]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

752. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied). [1401/19]

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.

Ambulance Service

753. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the protocol in place with the National Ambulance Service for the dispatching of an air ambulance to the scene of a serious accident; if he will provide a copy of the protocol; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1402/19]

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

Services for People with Disabilities

754. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delay in a person (details supplied) receiving an appointment with the Cavan-Monaghan child development team; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1403/19]

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.

Ambulance Service

755. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the protocol in place with the National Ambulance Service for the transfer of patients between hospitals; if he will provide a

copy of the protocol; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1404/19]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

756. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a cataract operation for a person (details supplied) at University Hospital Waterford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1406/19]

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

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

HSE Governance

757. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the number of bank accounts used by the Health Service Executive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1407/19]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists Action Plans

758. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the process in place to use the services at a hospital (details supplied) for ophthalmology and orthopaedic operations; the number of ophthalmology and orthopaedic public patient operations that took place at the hospital in 2018, including under the National Treatment Purchase Fund, NTPF, agreement; the number planned for same in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1408/19]

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

As a result of Waiting List Action Plan 2018, the Inpatient and Daycase waiting list reduced to 70,200 in December 2018, down from the peak of 86,100 in July 2017. This represents a reduction of over 18% in the overall number of patients waiting for an inpatient or day case procedure. Furthermore, the number of patients waiting over 9 months has almost halved in the

same period, reducing from over 28,100 to just over 14,900.

The NTPF advises that it offered treatment to 40 Ophthalmology public patients and 157 Orthopaedic public patients in relation to Bon Secours Private Hospital Tralee in 2018. In 2019, the NTPF and the HSE will continue to work closely with all Hospital Groups, inviting proposals to improve access for patients waiting for a hospital procedure.

Air Ambulance Service

759. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health his plans to improve helicopter landing facilities at University Hospital Galway; the number of air ambulance and coastguard landings at the hospital in 2017 and 2018, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1412/19]

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

Health Services Data

760. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Health the way in which the ophthalmology waiting list data is compiled; the components considered when producing the waiting list numbers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1442/19]

765. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Health if the ophthalmology waiting list information which is publicly released takes into consideration the wait time for persons to receive and access treatment for eye conditions such as Age-related Macular Degeneration, AMD; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1462/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 760 and 765 together.

In relation to the information requested, I have asked the HSE to provide the Deputy with a direct response.

Hospital Appointments Status

761. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Clare can expect an appointment for a procedure in University Hospital Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1444/19]

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 sched-

uled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

Medicinal Products Availability

762. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health when it is planned to make a drug (details supplied) available to children and adults suffering from spinal muscular atrophy; the estimated number of sufferers here of this condition between children and adults, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1445/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines under the community drug schemes, in accordance with the provisions of the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Appointments Status

763. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Clare can expect an appointment for a cranioplasty in Beaumont Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1447/19]

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

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

Hospital Consultant Recruitment

764. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health the steps he will take to make it more attractive for consultants to apply for new consultancy posts within the Saolta Hospital Group (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1450/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Public Sector Pay Commission in its Report published on 4 September 2018 identified difficulties in attracting consultant applications for advertised posts at present and acknowledged that the pay rates for new entrants had been highlighted as a factor in this. It identified a number of other factors including geographic

location and work/life balance. The Commission also recognised that implementation of the settlement of the 2008 Consultant Contract claim, while necessary of itself, would serve to highlight further the differential in pay between the pre-existing cadre of consultants and new entrants.

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

Question No. 765 answered with Question No. 760.

Health Services Access

766. Deputy Declan Breathnach asked the Minister for Health the measures in place within the ophthalmology healthcare system to avoid lengthy delays in persons accessing treatment for conditions such as AMD; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1463/19]

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.

Medicinal Products Availability

767. Deputy John McGuinness asked the Minister for Health the progress in relation to the approval process for the drug Nusinersen, also known as Spinraza; if the case of a person (details supplied) will be examined; the type of care and medication that his Department and-or the HSE will fund in this case; if he will meet the parents of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1464/19]

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

Nusinersen (Spinraza) is indicated for the treatment of 5q spinal muscular atrophy (SMA), a disorder characterised by progressive muscle atrophy and weakness.

An application for Nusinersen is currently undergoing assessment by the HSE.

The statutory assessment process involves a Health Technology Assessment followed by detailed consideration by the HSE expert groups on new Drug therapies, including the Technology Review Group for Rare Diseases and the HSE Drugs Committee.

The assessment focus is twofold and particularly centred on reviewing the evidence of the clinical effectiveness of this new drug therapy i.e. the benefits for patients undergoing clinical trials; and on the cost effectiveness of the product in view of the prices being charged for the drug.

The application is currently going through the final stages of assessment, and the various

reports are due to be considered shortly by the HSE Leadership Team, following which the final decision will be notified.

I appreciate that this debilitating and progressive condition places enormous pressure on SMA sufferers and their families. It would not be appropriate for me as Minister to comment on individual cases. However, if any patient or their family have concerns in regards to their care I would suggest they discuss this with their treating clinician.

Care of the Elderly

768. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health his plans for the HSE, his Department or an agency under the aegis of his Department to become directly involved in the development of retirement villages or to support the private sector in the development of such villages; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1479/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): A key principle underpinning Government policy is to support older people to live independently in their own homes and communities. The changing demographics and the implications for future health care costs underpin the importance of developing a wider choice of appropriate housing options for older people. The objective is to encourage and facilitate timely planning by older people for their future housing needs, and to rebalance the care model away from residential care to supporting people to remain in their own communities for as long as possible. As the research shows, this reflects the preferences of older people themselves.

Our aim is to ensure that older people will have more choice by developing a range of housing options that are suited to their needs, so they can choose the right option for them. These options may include supported community developments akin to retirement villages, housing with supports projects or other initiatives.

Varying levels of support will be needed to enable older people to continue living in their own homes and communities, including care needs where appropriate. However, it is envisaged that there will always be a cohort of people for whom residential nursing home care is the most appropriate option. The main issue is the significant gap in alternative or intermediary options. This is the issue that I wish to address. There is a need to put in place suitable options to give older people the choice and importantly, to ensure that care is provided in the most appropriate setting. This aligns with the vision of Sláintecare where there is an overarching aim to bring care closer to the community and the person's home.

In November of last year, I hosted an expert conference on housing for older people with my colleague Mr. Damien English T.D. Minister for Housing and Urban Development. The overwhelming view of participants, shared by experts, was that the development of a range of community supports and services in close proximity to older people is key to enabling them to remain living in their chosen environment. The outcome of this conference are being used by officials from both Departments working collaboratively together to inform the development of a suitable policy framework for housing for older people.

This work is actively progressing and a policy framework will be published later this year.

Hospital Waiting Lists Action Plans

769. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Health the way in which he plans to

reduce waiting times for gynaecology in Sligo University Hospital (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1512/19]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

770. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal can expect a date for an appointment at Our Lady's Hospital, Crumlin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1515/19]

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 Delays

771. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delay in processing a medical card for a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1516/19]

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

Hospital Appointments Delays

772. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) will receive an appointment at the earliest opportunity; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1517/19]

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 sched-

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

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

General Practitioner Services

773. **Deputy Seán Barrett** asked the Minister for Health when free general practitioner care will be extended to under 12s which was to be introduced in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1520/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Programme for Government commits to extend in phases, and subject to negotiation with GPs, free GP care to all children under 18 years of age.

Legislative changes would be required for any such extension of free GP care to further cohorts of the population. It would also be subject to agreement by Government on the allocation of funding and the outcome of discussions with GP representatives on contractual matters.

Hospital Appointments Status

774. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive a new appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1527/19]

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

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

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

Mental Health Services Data

775. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on a waiting list for counselling services by mental health service, age, category and length of time waiting. [1532/19]

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

Health Services Provision

776. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) in Dublin 9 is eligible for treatment and to be provided with glasses under the community ophthalmic services scheme as outlined in the HSE response to Parliamentary Question No. 919 of 17 April 2018; his plans to ensure the person is provided the services to which they are entitled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1534/19]

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.

Question No. 777 answered with Question No. 571.

Hospital Appointments Status

778. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1561/19]

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

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

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

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

779. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter regarding the use of Ocrelizumab in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1565/19]

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

In line with the 2013 Act, if a company would like a medicine to be reimbursed by the HSE

pursuant to the community drugs schemes, the company must first submit an application to the HSE to have the new medicine added to the reimbursement list.

As outlined in the Framework Agreement on the Supply and Pricing of Medicines, and in line with the 2013 Act, the HSE will decide, within 180 days of receiving the application (or a longer period if further information is sought from the company), to either add the medicine to the reimbursement list or agree to reimburse it as a hospital medicine, or refuse to reimburse the medicine.

HSE decisions on which medicines are reimbursed by the taxpayer are made on objective, scientific and economic grounds, on the advice of the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE). The NCPE conducts health technology assessments (HTAs) for the HSE and makes recommendations on reimbursement to assist HSE decisions. The NCPE uses a decision framework to systematically assess whether a drug is cost-effective as a health intervention.

The HSE strives to reach a decision in as timely a manner as possible. However, because of the significant monies involved, it must ensure that the best price is achieved, as these commitments are often multi-million euro investments on an on-going basis. This can lead to a protracted deliberation process.

The NCPE completed a health technology assessment on 29 August 2018 for Ocrelizumab (Ocrevus) for the treatment of adult patients with relapsing forms of multiple sclerosis (RMS). They recommended that Ocrelizumab (Ocrevus) not be considered for reimbursement unless cost-effectiveness can be improved relative to existing treatments.

On 4 October 2018 the NCPE completed their assessment for Ocrelizumab indicated for the treatment of adult patients with early primary progressive multiple sclerosis (PPMS). They did not recommend that Ocrelizumab be reimbursed for this indication.

The HSE is the statutory decision-making body for medicine reimbursement. It will make the final decision on whether Ocrelizumab will be reimbursed, taking into consideration the statutory criteria in the 2013 Act.

Primary Care Centres

780. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health the expected opening date for the new primary care centre in Tubbercurry, County Sligo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1566/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of healthcare infrastructure projects, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly in relation to this matter.

Hospital Overcrowding

781. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the number of attendances at a hospital (details supplied) between 2010 and to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1575/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I acknowledge the distress overcrowded EDs cause to patients, their families, and frontline staff working in very challenging working conditions in hospitals throughout the country. Hospitals are increasingly operating at or above

capacity, with year-round demand pressures that are further challenged over the winter months.

We are coming into a very busy period for our health services, with many sites reporting significant numbers of patient attendances. Hospitals are also reporting a significant increase in the numbers of patients presenting with respiratory and flu like illness.

Key actions are now underway, as part of the Winter Plan, to support hospitals during this period of peak demand to include: the opening of additional beds, the use of private hospital capacity, frailty intervention teams in EDs, additional homecare packages and transitional care beds, and additional diagnostics in hospitals and for GPs.

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

Victim Support Services

782. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health when the review of the sexual assault treatment units will be completed; and if it will be published. [1576/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Department of Health is currently undertaking a policy review of sexual assault treatment units (SATUs) and this work is at an advanced stage. The policy review team, which has included government officials and frontline staff, has been working since September 2018. In that time, the team has engaged with more than 200 SATU staff, patients and stakeholders in order to identify and develop practical actions which can ensure a consistently high quality, responsive, compassionate and expert service which is available 24/7, 365 days a year to all patients nationwide. It is expected that the project team will complete its review and report to me in the coming weeks. It is my intention to publish the actions recommended by the policy review team shortly thereafter.

Victim Support Services

783. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the details of currently held full-time and part-time positions and the number of on-call positions in each of the six sexual assault treatment units in tabular form. [1577/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Deputy's query is a service-level matter, it has been referred to the HSE who will respond to the them directly. I have directed my Department to undertake a policy review of national SATU services to assess the efficacy of health policy in this area, including the current staffing model.

The review is ongoing and is expected to conclude in the coming weeks.

Victim Support Services

784. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons that presented to each of the six sexual assault treatment units in 2016, 2017 and 2018, in tabular form. [1578/19]

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

Victim Support Services

785. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the number of days per week and the opening hours for each of the six sexual assault treatment units in tabular form. [1579/19]

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

General Practitioner Contracts

786. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if he will report on the delay in negotiating a new general practitioner contract in view of the promise to do so by successive Ministers; the occasions on which his Department and the HSE have met with representative bodies of general practitioners regarding the contract negotiations; the outstanding issues to be resolved; and the timescale he is operating to in order to complete the process. [1596/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Discussions with GP representatives were progressed on a wide range of items throughout 2017 without reaching a conclusion.

A new phase of discussions commenced in May 2018 based on the mandate set by Government in March. Officials from the Department and the HSE met with the Irish Medical Organisation at the beginning of May to set out the State's position in relation to the GMS contract and to progress this important issue. The State side set out the mandate agreed by Government under which the consultations were being conducted and the package of measures to be agreed.

The Department subsequently wrote to the IMO, at the Organisation's request, setting out these proposals formally. The IMO responded to the Department by letter on 20 July.

Talks between the State and the IMO resumed in October 2018 and there was intensive engagement, particularly in the weeks leading up to Christmas. While some progress was made, there are a number of outstanding issues that need to be progressed before any agreement can be secured.

The State's negotiating team is keen to bring a renewed focus to the engagement with the IMO in coming weeks in an effort to bring matters to a conclusion.

I look forward to positive and productive engagement with all parties concerned. Agreement on the delivery of service improvements and contractual reform would facilitate a very substantial increase in the resourcing of general practice on a multi annual basis.

In line with the long-established approach to such processes, and by agreement of the parties concerned, I am not in position to give further details while engagement between the parties is under way.

National Maternity Hospital

787. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the status of the discussions regarding the governance and ownership of the new national maternity hospital; if he has received the text of the agreement that was agreed in principal in December 2018 according to media reports (details supplied); if he will publish the details of this agreement without further delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1597/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Considerable work has been undertaken to develop a legal framework to protect the State's significant investment in the National Maternity Hospital (NMH) 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 has been engaging with both NMH and St Vincent's Healthcare Group in relation to this legal framework.

There has been some notable progress on the project over recent weeks. St Vincent's Healthcare Group has agreed in principle to provide the State with a 99-year lease of the land upon which the new maternity hospital will be built, and this will allow the State to retain ownership of the new facility. St Vincent's Healthcare Group has also confirmed the process by which the Religious Sisters of Charity will withdraw from the Group and transfer their shareholding to a new company *St Vincent's Holdings CLG*. The Sisters have, of course, already resigned from the Group's Board.

Given the level of State investment, I have sought, and received, the agreement of both the National Maternity Hospital and St Vincent's Healthcare Group that the Board of the new NMH DAC will be competency-based and will include a Public Interest representative.

The overall framework being put in place will, unequivocally, copper-fasten the principle that patient care in the new hospital will be delivered without religious, ethnic or other distinction, and that any relevant medical procedure, which is in accordance with the laws of the land, will be carried out at the new hospital. Work to finalise the suite of legal documents is ongoing with the NMH and SVHG and is expected to be completed early this year.

Health Reports

788. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the status of the progress of the detailed 2019 action plan to implement Sláintecare; the reason for the delay in its publication; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1598/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In September, the Executive Director of the Sláintecare Programme Office commenced refining the Implementation Strategy into a detailed Action Plan for 2019. I can confirm that the Action Plan 2019 has been developed and, following the finalisation of the HSE's National Service Plan, Project Teams are now being established to drive delivery.

The Action Plan will be presented to Sláintecare's High Level Delivery Board in January and will be published thereafter.

The Sláintecare Programme Office is committed to transparency at all stages of the implementation of Sláintecare. The Programme Office will publish rolling plans annually and progress reports will be published on a biannual basis.

Hospitals Discharges

789. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of delayed discharges by hospital; if he will provide a progress report on the 550 homecare packages that were announced as part of the winter plan of the HSE to deal with delayed discharges; the hospitals that have discharged patients under this scheme; the number of patients discharged from each; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1599/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly) (Deputy Jim Daly): As these are service matters I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Abortion Services Provision

790. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the status of his plans to introduce exclusion zones for protests around health institutions such as general practitioner offices and hospitals in view of recent events; the timescale he is working to in order to deliver these exclusion zones; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1600/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): It is my intention to introduce legislation to ensure safe access to premises in which termination of pregnancy services may be provided. The intention of the legislation would be to allow patients, service providers, healthcare staff and members of the public to enter such premises without fear of intimidation or harassment.

While it was originally intended to provide for such safe access in the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Bill 2018, a number of legal issues were identified during the drafting process. In order to allow full consideration of these issues, Government approved the drafting of a separate piece of legislation on safe access to health services.

Officials in my Department will work with the Office of the Attorney General on this legislation.

Respite Care Services

791. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 318 of 19 December 2018, if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the family has been offered respite in Dublin (details supplied); if a more local service will be offered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1601/19]

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

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

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

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

792. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health if an access programme will be established to the drug Spinraza for children with spinal muscular atrophy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1612/19]

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

Nusinersen (Spinraza) is indicated for the treatment of 5q spinal muscular atrophy (SMA), a disorder characterised by progressive muscle atrophy and weakness.

An application for Nusinersen is currently undergoing assessment by the HSE.

The statutory assessment process involves a Health Technology Assessment followed by detailed consideration by the HSE expert groups on new Drug therapies, including the Technology Review Group for Rare Diseases and the HSE Drugs Committee.

The assessment focus is twofold and particularly centred on reviewing the evidence of the clinical effectiveness of this new drug therapy i.e. the benefits for patients undergoing clinical trials; and on the cost effectiveness of the product in view of the prices being charged for the drug.

The application is currently going through the final stages of assessment, and the various reports are due to be considered shortly by the HSE Leadership Team, following which the final decision will be notified

Warmer Homes Scheme

793. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health if he will report on the success or otherwise of the warmth and well-being pilot programme that commenced in 2016 and piloted in parts of Dublin 8, 10, 12, 22 and 24; his plans to expand the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1615/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): The Warmth and Wellbeing Pilot Scheme is a joint initiative between the Department of Health, the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment, the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland and the Health Services Executive (HSE). To date, the HSE have referred 1,345 qualifying households to the SEAI for assessment for energy efficiency upgrades such as attic and wall insulation, boiler replacement, and window and door replacement.

Housing quality is key determinant of health, especially among those who live with respiratory conditions such as Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD). The scheme is a concrete example of working across government to directly address the determinants of health in line with the Healthy Ireland Framework, and has my full support. Officials in my Department have been working very closely with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment on the next phase of the scheme.

The London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine have been contracted to analyse the effectiveness of the scheme. Work is underway to provide a preliminary report on the scheme early in 2019 and a final research report in 2021. The feedback from the majority of scheme participants to date is positive.

Health and Social Care Professionals

794. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an application

by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1631/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a matter relating to the recognition application of an individual health and social care professional, the Health and Social Care Professional Council (CORU), the State regulator in this regard, has been asked to respond directly to the Deputy.

Health Services Reports

795. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Health when the final report of the independent review group on section 38 and 39 service providers and private providers will be published. [1635/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): An Independent Review Group (IRG) was established in July 2017 to examine the role of voluntary organisations in publicly funded health and personal social services. The IRG was composed of Dr Catherine Day (Chair of the group), Prof Jane Grimson and Prof Deirdre Madden.

The IRG was established to examine current arrangements with regard to the role of voluntary agencies in the provision of services across the health and social care sector; to consider the issues currently arising, and those that are likely to arise in the future; and to make recommendations on how the relationship between the State and voluntary organisations should evolve in the future.

As part of its work the IRG examined a wide range of issues, conducted a public consultation process, and met with a number of key stakeholders as well as experts from a number of other countries.

The Review Group has submitted its report to me and it is currently under consideration within my Department. I intend to bring it to Government in the coming weeks.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Review

796. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health his plans to change the nursing home support scheme to ease the financial burden in place for some persons as a result of the exorbitant property prices in urban areas such as in a case (details supplied). [1637/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The Nursing Homes Support Scheme (NHSS), commonly referred to as *Fair Deal*, is a system of financial support for people who require long-term residential care. Participants contribute to the cost of their care according to their means while the State pays the balance of the cost. As such, in the context of the question raised, there are no plans to change the nature of the Scheme in this regard. The Scheme aims to ensure that long-term nursing home care is accessible and affordable for everyone and that people are cared for in the most appropriate settings. It is worth noting that applicants to the scheme can choose any public, voluntary or approved private nursing home. However, in order for financial support to be provided, the nursing home must have an available bed and be able to cater for the applicant's care needs.

Participants in the Scheme contribute up to 80% of their assessable income, such as their pension and a maximum of 7.5% per annum of the value of assets held, such as their principal private residence or cash assets. The capital value of an individual's principal private residence is only included in the financial assessment for the first three years of their time in care. This is

known as the three year cap.

Furthermore, applicants to scheme have the option of applying for The Nursing Home Loan (Ancillary State Support). This is an additional financial support offered through the scheme, the purpose of which is to ensure that a person does not have to sell their home during their lifetime to pay for long-term nursing home care. It is a personal choice and decision for the person going into long term care under the NHSS if they want to avail of this support.

Hospital Appointments Status

797. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health if surgery will be expedited in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1642/19]

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.

Elder Abuse

798. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the steps his Department and agencies under its aegis have taken to address the issue of elder abuse; his plans for further policy initiatives in the area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1651/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The safety and protection of all those, including older people, who may be at risk of harm or abuse is an important priority for the Government.

A framework of policies and procedures for the safeguarding of adults (including older people) who may be at risk of abuse, harm and exploitation within the health sector is in place, and further measures are being developed to strengthen this framework.

In December 2017 the Government approved the development of a national adult safeguarding policy for the health sector. The policy will apply across the wide spectrum of the health sector, i.e. in the public, private and voluntary sectors, and will be supported by any necessary legislation. The development of this policy is now underway.

The HSE published its national adult safeguarding operational policy and procedures, Safeguarding Vulnerable People at Risk of Abuse, in December 2014. This provides clear guidelines and procedures for staff to follow in cases of suspected abuse or neglect of vulnerable adults (including older people). This safeguarding policy was the first such HSE operational policy

to encompass both elder abuse concerns and concerns of abuse and neglect relating to people availing of disability services.

The HSE has established a number of structures to implement its national operational safeguarding policy. This includes:

- A National Safeguarding Office leading the implementation of the policy;
- Specialist Safeguarding and Protection Teams in each of the 9 Community Healthcare Organisation (CHO) areas;
- Nomination of by service providers of more than 1,500 designated safeguarding officers;
- Approximately 43,000 attendances at safeguarding policy and procedures training; and
- An advisory National Safeguarding Committee.

A detailed review of the operation of the HSE's operational safeguarding policy is at an advanced stage and is expected to be completed soon. It is expected that the learning identified from the HSE's review will also help to inform the development of the national policy.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Health Act 2007 provided for the establishment of the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA), its inspection and regulation of designated residential centres for (i) people with disabilities, (ii) older people, and (iii) children, and the framework for registration of these designated centres.

HIQA and the Mental Health Commission are currently in the process of jointly developing National Standards for Adult Safeguarding, with advisory input from the Department of Health among others.

Taken together, the Department's national health sector adult safeguarding policy and legislation, the HSE's revised operational policy and HIQA and the MHC's joint national standards should ensure the continued evolution and improvement of the safeguarding of adults (including older people) who may be at risk in the health sector.

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

799. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health the dermatology waiting lists nationally by hospital. [1659/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Improving access to hospital treatment is a key priority for government. Budget 2019 announced a funding increase from €55 million to €75 million to the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) to provide treatment for patients.

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. In this regard, 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.

The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the following document and shows waiting list figures for December 2018 published by the NTPF. There are 755 patients on the Dermatology IPDC waiting list and of these, over 90% are waiting 9 months or less. There are 44,271 patients on the Dermatology Outpatient waiting list and of these, 64% are waiting 9 months or less.

[Dermatology table]

[Dermatology Table]

Addiction Treatment Services

800. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health his plans to run a nationwide gambling and gambling addiction awareness campaign; if no campaign is planned, the reason therefor; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1661/19]

801. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the funding allocated to help treat persons with gambling addiction in each of the years 2015 to 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1662/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): I propose to take Questions Nos. 800 and 801 together.

Statutory responsibility for Government policy on gambling issues comes under the ambit of the Department of Justice and Equality.

There are no plans under consideration by the Department of Health for a nationwide gambling and gambling addiction awareness campaign.

The Department of Health provides the HSE with an overall allocation for addiction services, which can include gambling addiction. People presenting to the HSE with a gambling addiction are offered the same range of interventions as those with alcohol or drug addiction problems.

The Department does not allocate specific funding to the HSE for the treatment of gambling addiction. It is therefore not possible to identify the proportion of funding specifically spent on individual addictions.

Addiction Treatment Services

802. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons who were treated for gambling addiction in each of the years 2015 to 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1663/19]

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

Addiction Treatment Services

803. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if a lead researcher was found for bulletin 7 of the Drugs Prevalence Survey 2014-15 which focuses on gambling; when this bulletin will be published in view of the fact that it was to be released in 2017; and if he will

make a statement on the matter. [1664/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): The prevalence of drug use and gambling survey 2014/15 included questions on gambling for the first time, at the request of the Department of Justice and Equality. The results from the survey are published in a series of Bulletins. Key findings from the survey, published in Bulletin 1, indicated that 64.5% of respondents aged 15 or older reported gambling in the 12 months prior to the survey and 41.4% of respondents reported gambling in the 30 days prior to the survey.

A detailed analysis of gambling prevalence has been completed and it is intended to publish this as Bulletin 7 later in January.

Bulletins are published on the Department of Health website www.health.gov.ie .

The next prevalence of drug use and gambling survey covers 2018/19.

Dental Services

804. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if the case of a person (details supplied) will be reviewed; the reason the HSE will not provide dental care through the public dental scheme in school in this case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1666/19]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

805. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for a person (details supplied) will be scheduled. [1672/19]

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

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

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

Cancer Screening Programmes

806. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of legal actions that have been lodged against the HSE over the CervicalCheck cervical screening controversy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1692/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The State Claims Agency has a statutory remit to manage personal injury claims, including claims in respect of clinical negligence, on behalf of Delegated State Authorities (DSA's) to include the Health Service Executive.

I have been informed by the State Claims Agency that it has received notification of 90 claims with respect to Cervical Check screening under the National Screening Services (NSS). The Agency expects this number to grow based on the number of women identified by the HSE as part of their audit programme.

Mental Health Services

807. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding a psychiatric ward; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1700/19]

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

Cancer Screening Programmes

808. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health when he received the advice from his officials on the impact of announcing a recheck on cervical smear tests; if he held meetings with his officials at that time, the discussion on same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1722/19]

809. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health the rationale of announcing the repeat cervical smears for women following receipt of advice stating this would have a seriously negative impact on the service; the reason he did not make it known that he had received this advice; if he sought extra funding to resolve the extra waiting times for the women; if extra funding was allocated to address the waiting times for results; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1723/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 808 and 809 together.

In May 2018, I asked CervicalCheck to make the necessary arrangements to provide that any woman who had had a CervicalCheck smear test, and whose GP considered that they should have a further test, to access such a further test without charge. This decision was made in good faith to address the considerable fears of the many anxious women in Ireland as a result of significant media coverage of the issues that emerged in late April. Many thousands of women contacted the CervicalCheck helpline. Requests for additional supports and reassurance were considered in this context, including the provision of an opportunity for a GP consultation for women who wished to discuss their request for a repeat smear. Provision for these out-of-cycle smears ceased at the end of last year, as envisaged, in the context of the reassurance provided by the Report of the Scoping Inquiry about the quality management processes within the laboratories contracted by CervicalCheck.

In terms of the waiting times for results of smear tests, this has resulted from an overall increase in the volume of women presenting for smear tests, including out-of-cycle smears and increased uptake of scheduled screening. This increased level of engagement with the pro-

gramme is welcome. However, the increased demand has undoubtedly put immense pressure on lab capacity.

The HSE has been working actively with the laboratories to manage this and to improve turnaround times for smear tests, and has reported that laboratories have agreed to undertake additional recruitment, provide for overtime and manage annual leave in an effort to minimise the backlog. In addition, the HSE is aiming to source additional screening capacity, which would improve the turnaround time of results. However, the core challenge in relation to smear test turnaround times is availability of laboratory capacity. Sourcing capacity and resources is a global challenge as countries start to move to primary HPV screening, which vastly reduces the requirement for cytology screening staff.

The HSE is currently developing a capacity plan to address available capacity and expected demand, with the aim of bringing the programme into stabilisation this year.

Extra funding to address laboratory capacity issues has not been sought by the HSE. However, significant additional funding has been allocated in 2019 to implement the recommendations of Dr Gabriel Scally's inquiry into the CervicalCheck Screening Programme as well as to implement the switch to HPV testing as the primary screening.

Speech and Language Therapy

810. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if community speech and language services are obliged to discharge children once they reach 8 years of age (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1724/19]

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

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

Home Help Service Provision

811. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health if additional home help hours will be provided to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1747/19]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

812. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation

for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1751/19]

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.

Question No. 813 answered with Question No. 562.

Health Services Staff

814. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health the action being taken by the HSE to accommodate and redeploy staff from Saint Patricks Centre, Kells Road, County Kilkenny; the number of staff involved; the number redeployed to date or accommodated by other agreements; if staff have opted for redundancy; if so, the number; if the Labour Court recommendations have been considered by all stakeholders; if so, the actions to be taken or the actions taken to date; his plans to support the workers who have given loyal service over a number of years and feel abandoned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1785/19]

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

Departmental Correspondence

815. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the customer complaints received by his Department in each of the years since 2016; if the complaints are grouped into categories; the nature of the complaints; the resolution of same; and the number progressed to the relevant Ombudsman in each of the years since 2016. [1874/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The customer service function in my Department manages all email complaints and customer service calls.

We adhere to the Principles of Quality Customer Services through our Quality Customer Action Plan and our Customer Charter. Our customer complaints procedure is published on our website.

The Complaints Procedure covers complaints about issues such as delays, mistakes and poor customer services which the Department provides. The Complaints Procedure does not cover:

Matters of policy;

Complaints relating to a hospital/the HSE or other health agencies;

Matters which are the subject of litigation; or

Matters which have been referred to the Ombudsman or Information Commissioner.

In excess of 10,000 customer service queries received annually. Since my time as Minister, no formal complaints have been made or processed through the complaints procedure

Basic Payment Scheme Applications

816. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on a matter (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54055/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The BPS application submitted under the applicant's parents name and the BPS application submitted under the reference number have now been updated on the Department's system under the one BPS application in the applicant's name. The Department has subsequently processed the transfer of entitlements and payment will issue shortly. The Department has been in contact directly with the applicant in relation to this issue.

Fishing Licences

817. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of marine salmon farm licences and land-based hatcheries; the number of salmon and/or biomass permitted for each; the system in place to check for overstocking as has taken place in the past; the regulation in place to deal with overstocking; the fish farm operators that had penalties imposed; the number of salmon farm licences that have been cancelled in the past ten years; the action he has taken to ensure that all equipment has been removed; the timeframe within which this should happen; if his Department holds bonds from fish farm operators to cover the costs of removing obsolete equipment in the event of an operator no longer being in a position to operate its licence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54063/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department's records indicate 33 marine salmon farm licences. My Department's records also indicate 25 land based salmon hatcheries. In some cases the licences provide for additional species.

Production capacity, maximum cage numbers and/or maximum smolt input is determined on a licence-by-licence basis in the case of marine salmon farms.

Licensed marine salmon farms are inspected on a regular basis by my Department's Marine Engineering Division. Breaches of licence conditions are dealt with by my Department in accordance with the provisions of the 1997 Fisheries (Amendment) Act, the 1933 Foreshore Act and applicable EU legislation.

Circumstances have not required my Department to revoke a marine salmon farm licence during the period referred to by the Deputy.

The matter of unauthorised aquaculture structures on the foreshore is dealt with by my Department in accordance with the applicable Foreshore legislation.

Farm Inspections

818. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the case of a person (details supplied) will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54067/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): A letter issued to the above herdowner on the 27th of February 2018 informing him of a test that was due to be carried out on his herd by the 06th of April 2018. The test was originally due to be paid for by my Department, however as the test was not completed by the due date of the 06th of April, as per my Department's policy, the farmer was charged for the completion of the test. This policy was clearly laid out in the letter which issued to the farmer on the 27th of February. The test was not completed until the 26th of November 2018.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

819. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the funding paid to date to applicants in County Cavan under the 2018 areas of natural constraint scheme and basic payment scheme; the percentage of applicants awaiting payment; when all payments will be made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54109/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Payments amounting to €33.8m under the Basic Payment Scheme have issued to 4,667 out of the 4,700 eligible applicants in Cavan. This represents less than 1% of applicants awaiting payment in Cavan.

Payments amounting to €10.24m under the Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) Scheme have issued to 4,539 eligible applicants in County Cavan. While there are 4,770 applicants with eligible land in County Cavan, not all applicants will meet other scheme requirements. Thus they will not all fall due for payment.

Regular pay runs will continue to take place under both the Basic Payment and ANC schemes to ensure that cases that become clear for payment are paid as quickly as possible.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

820. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the funding paid to date to applicants in County Monaghan under the 2018 areas of natural constraint scheme and basic payment scheme; the percentage of applicants awaiting payment; when all payments will be made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54110/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Payments amounting to €27.1m under the Basic Payment Scheme have issued to 3,943 of the 3,957 eligible applicants in County Monaghan. This represents less than 0.4% of applicants awaiting payment.

Payments amounting to €7.73m under the Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) Scheme have issued to 3,781 eligible applicants in County Monaghan. While there are 4,035 applicants with eligible land in County Monaghan, not all these applicants will meet other scheme requirements and may not therefore be due a payment.

Regular pay runs will continue to take place under both the Basic Payment and ANC schemes to ensure that cases that become clear for payment are paid as quickly as possible.

GLAS Payments

821. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a GLAS payment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54129/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The above named was approved into GLAS 3 with a contract commencement date of 1 January 2017 and has received all payments in respect of the scheme year 2017.

In relation to payment for 2018, administrative checks involving a number of sections within the Department take place on all GLAS claims. All cases must clear validation checks before payment can issue. Department officials are working proactively to complete the checks. Once this case clears validations the 2018 advance payment will be made. GLAS payments are issuing on a weekly basis.

GLAS Payments

822. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason a GLAS payment for a person (details supplied) was for only five hectares of catch crop in view of the fact that they sold ten hectares; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54149/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named was approved into GLAS 3 with a contract commencement date of 1 January 2017 and has received all payments in respect of scheme year 2017 and the 2018 Advance.

An issue arose in relation to the eligible area for payment under the Catch Crop action which resulted in a reduction from 10.31 ha, as paid in 2017, to 5.15 ha for the 2018 Advance payment. This issue has been resolved and a balancing payment for the amount underpaid will issue to the person named shortly.

GLAS Appeals

823. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a matter in relation to the case of a person (details supplied) will be examined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54182/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named was approved into GLAS 1 and has received payments for 2015, 2016, 2017 and the 2018 Advance.

The person named notified GLAS that he was no longer farming a parcel of land claimed as Low Input Permanent Pasture. GLAS section advised the person named by letter on 25 October 2018 that the parcel had been withdrawn from his GLAS contract and that, in accordance with scheme conditions, there would be a clawback of payments already made in respect of this area. It is not permitted to substitute areas withdrawn in these circumstances as the scheme condi-

tions require that parcels declared for GLAS must be farmed under the scheme for the full term of the contract.

Departmental Expenditure

824. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the cost incurred by his Department in 2018 for the use of taxi services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54202/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I wish to advise the Deputy that the cost for taxi services incurred by my Department in 2018, amounted to €46,926.

These costs relate to all taxi travel on official duties claimed by the officials in my Department, including domestic and foreign travel, as well as accounts for such services paid directly by my Department. It also includes transport charges for EU Council of Ministers, bi-lateral meetings and foreign trade missions. This expenditure also covers service providers paid in the first instance by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the cost of which has subsequently been recouped from my Department, for the work of Agricultural Attachés based in the various embassies around the world.

Veterinary Inspection Service Staff

825. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his attention has been drawn to the fact that his nominees to the Veterinary Council have twice in the past number of weeks voted to introduce guidelines that attending veterinary practitioners should not exceed a maximum limit of 30 days between a farm visit and the prescribing of antimicrobials; if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that despite the Council having been made aware that this will leave hundreds of farms in west County Donegal without a veterinary service, his nominees have continued to support the stance of the Council which goes beyond the requirements of his Department or the EU; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54236/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Statutory obligations in relation to the prudent prescribing of veterinary medicines are set out in Regulation 4 (1) of the Animal Health and Welfare (Animal Remedies Veterinary Practice and Veterinary Medicine) Regulations 2017.

The Veterinary Council of Ireland (VCI) is the statutory body prescribed in the Veterinary Practice Act 2005 responsible for the regulation of the practice of veterinary medicine. The Council under Regulation 13 of the VPA, is empowered to establish, publish, maintain and review codes of professional conduct for veterinary practitioners. In November 2018, the VCI reviewed their Code of Professional Conduct in relation to 'Animals Under Veterinary Care' which now states that the period of time between prior direct veterinary clinical contact and the prescribing of antimicrobials should not exceed 30 days. The VCI has stated that this revision is in response to the growing threat of antimicrobial resistance.

Animal Welfare

826. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his

views on correspondence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54300/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department implements strong controls on the welfare of animals being exported, in particular through a comprehensive legislative framework relating to the transport of animals by sea (The Carriage of Livestock by Sea Regulations 2016 (S.I. 356 of 2016)). Indeed, Irish legislative standards for sea transport are recognised by the EU Commission as being amongst the most effective and stringent legislation in force as regards transport by sea. Only ships approved by my Department can load cattle for export from Ireland. Cattle being exported are monitored during the prescribed isolation period by Veterinary Inspectors from the Department and in some cases by Official Veterinarians from the importing countries. This is in addition to work carried out by Private Veterinary Practitioners who carry out the testing required prior to export to enable certification. Animals are inspected and certified by Official Veterinarians from the Department with regard to their health status and fitness for travel before being loaded onto trucks or livestock vessels departing from Ireland.

My Department will continue to work closely with the people involved in the live export business, with other EU Member States and the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), with a view to improving animal welfare (including slaughter) practices worldwide. Ireland has proved its on-going commitment to animal welfare through additional OIE multiannual financial assistance to support its activities to enhance animal welfare worldwide.

Afforestation Programme

827. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of an application by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54320/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I understand that the person named made a submission on the application referred to and is not the applicant. Therefore, I cannot provide any information on the application.

Any person that makes a submission on a forestry application will be advised of the decision when that is available. If they are dissatisfied with the decision, they may appeal it to the independent Forestry Appeals Committee.

Departmental Expenditure

828. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the budget and spend in his Department for marketing, media and social media in each of the years 2016 to 2018; the projected spend for 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54456/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Press and Communications Office in my Department is the primary point of contact between the Department and members of the media, as well as members of the general public. The office is responsible for communicating with media and members of the public regarding the work of the Minister, the Minister of State and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. The Department's social media presence is also managed by the Press and Communications Office.

The vast bulk of my Department's media expenditure is in respect of press notices in the specialised farming press, provincial and national newspapers. This expenditure includes the publication of Statutory Notices that are required to comply with various national and EU legislative requirements. Decisions on the placement of notices are made on a case by case basis, depending on the nature of the advertisement and the target audience.

Year	Amount
2016:	€312,021
2017:	€544,657
2018:	€295,527
2019 (projected):	€300,000

Departmental Staff Data

829. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of staff in his Department employed to work on marketing, media and social media in 2018. [54473/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Press and Information Office in the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine consisted of the Press Officer and three support staff members in 2018. The Press and Information Office is part of the Communications Division and is headed by the Press Officer, who reports to the Head of Division, who in turn reports to the Assistant Secretary with responsibility for Human Resources and Corporate Affairs.

The Press and Information Office is the primary point of contact between the Department and members of the media, as well as members of the general public. The office is responsible for communicating with media and members of the public regarding the work of the Minister, the Minister of State and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

The Department's social media presence is also managed by the Press and Information Office.

GLAS Payments

830. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment will issue in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54538/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named was approved into GLAS 1 and has received payments for 2015, 2016, 2017 and the 2018 Advance. The Department has undertaken a review of 2015 and 2016 GLAS payments. This case has been identified as one of a small number due an additional payment due to an underpayment in 2016. The payment is due to be made in the coming weeks.

Agriculture Scheme Penalties

831. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a penalty decision will be reviewed for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1025/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP) provides for six years of payments to participating farmers for completion of actions which deliver accelerated genetic improvement in the Irish national herd and improvement of its environmental sustainability.

In submitting an application to participate in the BDGP applicants undertake to adhere to the terms and conditions that govern the programme. A key requirement of the programme is that participants must submit genomic samples taken from selected animals using tags supplied to them. As set out in the terms and conditions of the programme, failure to return genomic samples results in no payment issuing, under the programme, for the year in which the breach occurred.

The person named did not submit any genomic samples for 2018, therefore no payment issued. However, if the person named submits the required number of genomic samples the matter can be reviewed.

Special Protection Areas Designation

832. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of landowners per county that have land in hen harrier designated areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1044/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I would like to clarify that the designation of conservation areas for the hen harrier does not come under my Department's remit but rather that function is exercised through the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) of the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. The figures in the table below, provided by the NPWS, indicate the number of landowners (by county) who were notified that their lands are designated (for the protection of the hen harrier) as Special Protection Areas (SPAs).

Site Code	Site Name	County	Landowners Notified by County
4160	SLIEVE BLOOM MOUNTAINS SPA	Laois	310
4160	SLIEVE BLOOM MOUNTAINS SPA	Offaly	146
4161	STACK'S TO MULLAGHAREIRK MOUNTAINS, WEST LIMERICK HILLS AND MOUNT EAGLE SPA	Cork	411
4161	STACK'S TO MULLAGHAREIRK MOUNTAINS, WEST LIMERICK HILLS AND MOUNT EAGLE SPA	Kerry	707
4161	STACK'S TO MULLAGHAREIRK MOUNTAINS, WEST LIMERICK HILLS AND MOUNT EAGLE SPA	Limerick	735

Site Code	Site Name	County	Landowners Notified by County
4162	MULLAGHANISH TO MUSERAMORE MOUNTAINS SPA	Cork	170
4165	SLIEVEFELIM TO SILVERMINES MOUNTAINS SPA	Limerick	131
4165	SLIEVEFELIM TO SILVERMINES MOUNTAINS SPA	Tipperary	372
4167	SLIEVE BEAGH SPA	Monaghan	86
4168	SLIEVE AUGHTY MOUNTAINS SPA	Galway	743
4168	SLIEVE AUGHTY MOUNTAINS SPA	Clare	628
	Total		4,439

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Appeals

833. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if there is a closing date for the lodgement of an appeal by a person to a change in their ANC status following the recent changes made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1058/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Further to the completion of the review of eligible lands under the Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) scheme, which was required by EU regulation, my Department has written to all impacted farmers advising of the status of their lands under the 2019 ANC scheme. These letters included a form to instigate an appeal. The appeals form is also available on www.agriculture.gov.ie

For any farmer who wishes to appeal the status of a particular townland under 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. There is no set closing date for receipt of these appeal forms but applicants should lodge their appeals without delay so that appeals can be processed in time for Autumn 2019. Applicants are also strongly advised to double check that they apply for 2019 ANC on their online application.

Fishery Harbour Centres

834. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the dredging of Howth Fishery Harbour Centre will be sanctioned without delay; the progress made in respect of the application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1062/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Howth Fishery Harbour Centre (FHC) is one of the six designated Fishery Harbour Centres which are owned, managed and maintained by my Department under Statute.

Siltation in Howth Harbour has been recognised as an issue for some time, and the requirement for a dredging project to restore adequate depth in the entrance channel and within the har-

bour is accepted. The Harbour was last dredged in the early 1980s. A number of investigative and preparatory works and initiatives have been undertaken over the last few years in respect of a potential dredging project in Howth FHC. A final site investigation report was received in October 2016 and has been assessed by the Department's Engineers. This report included vital information on the nature and amount of the material to be dredged. The Department also appointed a Consulting Engineer in 2016 to advise on a number of possible developments in Howth, including a dredging project. A final report was issued from the Consulting Engineers in late October 2017 which confirmed that the concentrations of contaminants in the sediment to be dredged are such that while the material cannot be considered inert, it can be classified as non hazardous. This means that dumping at sea will not be permitted, which in turn has a significant effect on the project cost.

Department Engineers subsequently met with Fingal County Council, to review possible operational and permitting requirements. Engagement with the Council is ongoing in regard to exploring disposal options for the dredged material. It would be the Department's view that the material should be treated and re-used to reclaim much needed additional ground for Harbour use.

This project will require Planning Permission, an Environmental Impact Study (EIS) and a Waste License. The permitting process is likely to take up to 24 months. A variety of factors will impact on the cost of a potential dredging project including the disposal options, overall scale of the project, and market factors.

The Department went to tender on the 3rd of October 2018 for a Consulting Engineering practice to bring the project through the planning, environmental permitting and design phase, and should a decision be made to progress the project, this consultant will also be responsible for the supervision of onsite works. The successful tender was commissioned for these works on the 19th of December 2018.

While final decisions haven't been made on the full suite of projects to be undertaken under the 2019 Capital Programme at this stage, the continuation of the preparatory works for a dredging project in Howth as set out above can be expected. As is the case for all developments in the six Fishery Harbour Centres, any future decision with regard to initiating a full dredging works project in Howth will only be considered on the basis of available exchequer funding and competing national priorities.

Animal Disease Controls

835. Deputy Jackie Cahill asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans for BVD testing in view of the fact that it was initially introduced for a three year period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1236/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The BVD Eradication programme is an Animal Health Ireland led collaborative programme with representation from the various industry stakeholders. The programme is overseen by the BVD Implementation Group (BVDIG). My Department is represented on the Group along with farmers, veterinary practitioners and industry experts. The primary testing/surveillance method is through the testing of ear tissue (taken by farmers using tissue tags) from all calves born. This is supplemented by funding from my Department for supplementary blood testing and financial supports as well as the Targeted Advisory Service on Animal Health (TASAH) visits by trained veterinary practitioners under the Rural Development Programme. The operational details of the programme are made by the BVDIG. The agreed 2019 programme foresees a continuation

of the tissue tagging of calves, as well as the aforementioned further supports.

I am pleased to note that the programme results indicate very significant progress has been made in reducing the prevalence of this disease – with the Persistently Infected (PI) birth rate falling from 0.66% in 2013 (the first year of the Compulsory Programme) to 0.06% in 2018. Indeed, the number of positive herds has reduced considerably from 11.27% (9,485) of breeding herds in 2013 to 1.08% (815) herds in 2018. In the early years of the eradication programme, there was a reluctance by some herdowners to dispose of their PI calves at an early stage. The introduction of herd restrictions and a system of neighbour notifications to ensure that they can take the most appropriate biosecurity measures to protect their herds has helped speed up the removal process and this has greatly assisted the eradication programme.

Brexit Supports

836. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to employ additional port inspector posts at Rosslare Europort; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1243/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department is working closely with colleagues across the Public Sector as part of the whole of Government approach to preparations for Brexit.

From an agri-food perspective, whether in the absence of any agreement between the EU and the UK, or in the case of an agreed future trading relationship, live animals, plants, food of animal and non-animal origin, food contact materials, composite and plant products imported from the UK will most likely be subject to import controls, including those imported through Rosslare.

In line with workforce planning processes, my Department continuously assesses business needs and will ensure that additional resources for Rosslare will be facilitated to complement our existing staff at the port as needs arise.

Resource requirements will continue to be assessed on an ongoing basis and my Department will monitor this evolving situation to ensure we are in a position to respond with flexible and expedient solutions.

GLAS Traditional Farm Buildings Scheme

837. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the criteria, deadline and other information in relation to a scheme (details supplied); when the scheme will be launched; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1271/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The 2019 GLAS Traditional Farm Buildings Scheme is administered by the Heritage Council and applications are evaluated and ranked by an expert panel in accordance with selection criteria published as part of the scheme.

One of the conditions of entry to the scheme is that a farmer must have a GLAS contract with my Department. The farmer must also own the building or other related structure for which funding is sought or acting with the permission of the owner.

The principal objective is to ensure that traditional farm buildings and other related struc-

tures that contribute to the character of the landscape, and are of significant heritage value, are conserved for active agricultural use.

Grant amounts vary between €4,000 and €25,000. A grant award will not be for more than 75% of the cost of the works with a maximum available grant of €25,000.

The 2019 GLAS Traditional Farm Buildings Scheme will be launched in late January 2019.

Fish Quotas

838. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the amount of the sentinel herring fisheries quota that remained as at 21 December 2018; if he will consider extending the 2018 management period to 31 January 2019 for vessels with a qualifying track record; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1324/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The quota made available to the Celtic Sea Herring Sentinel Fishery in 2018 is 1,095t (11% of the overall quota for this stock in the Celtic Sea in line with Ministerial policy). Preliminary landing figures received from the SFPA indicate that 743t (68%) was landed in 2018. Under long standing policy, quota may not be carried forward into the following year in respect of individual boats or groups of boats within a fishery, e.g. the Celtic Sea Herring Sentinel Fishery. This policy protects the public ownership of quotas and protects against property rights being established which would transfer ownership of quotas into private hands. EU Regulation provides for the carry over of up to 10% of 2018 final quota, if uncaught, to 2019. Policy provides that an 11% allocation of Ireland's 2019 Celtic Sea herring quota will be made available to the Sentinel fishery in 2019, the available national quota will be adjusted to include any carry over (up to 10%) of uncaught quota in 2018.

The Celtic Sea Herring Sentinel fishery is opened to vessels <17 metres in length overall which are not ring fenced in the main fishery. Track record is not necessary to participate in the fishery.

Agrifood Sector

839. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the specific grant schemes provided to support agrifood festivals that promote tourism and Irish food locally and to an international audience; the dates in 2019 these funding schemes will be open for application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1346/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Funding was provided by my Department for agri-food tourism projects in 2018 under the Rural Innovation and Development Fund. The funding was aimed at initiatives which promote and develop agri-food tourism in rural areas. A decision regarding the availability of funding for 2019 under this initiative is expected shortly. Subject to approval, the scheme is likely to open for applications in the second quarter of the year.

GLAS Payments

840. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a 2017 GLAS farm payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he

will make a statement on the matter. [1350/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The above named was approved into GLAS 3 with a contract commencement date of 1 January 2017.

Administrative checks involving a number of sections within the Department take place on all GLAS claims. These include checks against the BPS application for GLAS claims. All cases must clear validation checks before payment can issue. This case has not cleared the validations as an issue has arisen concerning the Wild Bird Cover action.

Department officials will be in direct contact with the person named regarding this issue. GLAS payments are issuing on a weekly basis.

Inshore Fisheries

841. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the registered licence length of a boat will determine if it will be permitted to fish inshore waters inside the six nautical miles zone; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1352/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I announced the outcome of the review of trawling activity inside the 6 nautical mile zone before the Christmas break.

I undertook an extensive public consultation from 30 April until 11 June 2018 which attracted over nine hundred submissions. There was a wide diversity of views expressed in these submissions, which are published on the Department's website.

I carefully considered the issues raised during the public consultation process and, following a detailed evaluation, decided to exclude trawling by fishing vessels over 18 metres from inshore waters inside the six nautical mile zone and the baselines from 1 January 2020. This refers to overall length of the vessel.

Based on my assessment, I consider that there is a compelling case for excluding trawling by large vessels in coastal waters inside six nautical miles. I am satisfied that there are sufficient fishing opportunities for these vessels outside of six nautical miles. I also believe that these actions will provide wider ecosystem benefits, including for nursery areas and juvenile fish stocks. I am very conscious of the exclusive reliance of small scale and island fishermen on inshore waters and the benefits this change will bring for those fishermen. I firmly believe that this will, in the medium term, provide ecosystem and nursery stock benefits for all fishermen.

I am mindful of the opportunity these measures will provide for further sustainable development of the small scale inshore and the sea angling sectors, which the Government has committed to in the Programme for a Partnership Government.

I also announced that there will be a transition period to 2022 for vessels over 18 metres targeting sprat. This transition is in order to allow a period of adjustment for these vessels, as this fishery is concentrated inside the 6 nautical mile zone.

I recognise that effective change needs time. I have had an extensive and prolonged consultation to flag consideration of change. Allowing a transition period for those vessels involved in the sprat fishery will ensure that the vessels have adequate time to transition to other fishing activities. I have asked BIM to offer affected vessel owners technical assistance to adjust to other fisheries during the transition process.

Vessels over 18 metres will continue to be permitted inside 6 nautical miles to trawl for sprat only until 2022. A total allowable catch of up to 2,000 tonnes, reflecting a reduction on recent years, will be permitted for these vessels during 2020, reducing to 1,000 tonnes in 2021. All trawling activity by vessels over 18 metres for sprat, inside the 6 mile limit, will end from the beginning of 2022.

Animal Disease Controls

842. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the process by which a badger cull can be initiated in cases in which there is a high instance of TB outbreak; if it is possible for a group of farmers in a locality to seek for a badger cull to be carried out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1505/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Capturing of badgers only takes place in areas where serious outbreaks of TB have been identified in cattle herds and where my Department's Veterinary Inspectorate has found, following an epidemiological examination, that badgers are the likely source of infection.

Commencing in 2002, systems were put in place in every Regional Veterinary Office area in the country whereby serious breakdowns of bTB (i.e. breakdowns having 3 or more skin test reactors) were investigated by my Department's Veterinary Inspectorate. If evidence was established of infection being introduced by badgers, this would trigger a survey in the area adjacent to the diseased herd for signs of badger activity and seek to identify the location of badger setts. A targeted removal program would follow the completion of these surveys which involved trapping/removing badgers within a 2km radius of the affected farm to reduce local badger densities.

Therefore, while a group of farmers in a locality cannot request a badger culling of the area, the Minister would encourage any such groups experiencing serious breakdowns of bTB to contact their local Regional Veterinary Office to ensure that an investigation by the state veterinarian has commenced where badgers have been identified as a source of bTB.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Extension

843. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to extend the agri-environment options scheme, AEOS; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1602/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): There are no plans to extend the Agri-Environment Options and Natura Schemes (AEOS). The subsequent agri-environment scheme the Green Low-Carbon Agri-Environment Scheme (GLAS) opened in three tranches commencing in 2015. It was open to AEOS participants to apply to join GLAS, such applicants were required to exit their existing AEOS contract before a GLAS contract could commence. GLAS is now fully subscribed with the target of 50,000 participants met well ahead of target. There are no plans to re-open or extend either scheme.

Agri-environment policy is included in the CAP reform negotiations currently under way and any future schemes will be dependent on the outcome of these negotiations.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme

844. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to introduce a new scheme to replace the agri-environment options scheme, AEOS; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1603/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Green Low-Carbon Agri-Environment Scheme (GLAS) opened in three tranches commencing in 2015 following the closure of the Agri-Environment Options Scheme (AEOS). It was open to AEOS participants to apply to join GLAS, such applicants were required to exit their existing AEOS contract before a GLAS contract could commence. GLAS is now fully subscribed with the target of 50,000 participants met well ahead of target. There are no plans to re-open the GLAS scheme to new applications.

Agri-environment policy is included in the CAP reform negotiations currently under way and any future schemes will be dependent on the outcome of these negotiations.

Equine Identification Scheme

845. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if sufficient resources are being made available to ensure that all equine animals are compliant with registration regulations; and if there is a large volume of equine animals not registered in the north County Cork area, namely Fermoy and Mitchelstown, County Cork. [1641/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The rules governing the timescale within which equines must be identified are determined at EU level. Commission Implementing Regulation 262/2015 (CR 262/2015), which came into effect on 1 January 2016, lays down the rules governing the identification of equidae. This legislation was transposed into national legislation in Ireland via the European Union (Identification of Equidae) Regulations (S.I. No 62 of 2016)(as amended).

Article 12(1) of CR 262/2015 provides that all equine animals must be identified with a passport no later than 12 months from the date of birth of the animal, and in any event, before moving permanently from the holding of origin.

Proper identification of an equine cannot be established visually. Identification of an equine animal is primarily established through its passport, with the microchip (where required) providing further validation.

Equine passports are issued by Passport Issuing Organisations (PIOs) approved by my Department. Information available from these organisations suggests that high rates of compliance with the identification rules are being achieved.

Enforcement of equine identification legislation is primarily undertaken by authorised officers throughout my Department’s Regional Office network. These officers work closely with their veterinary colleagues across the various Local Authorities and liaise with members of An Garda Síochána and Revenue Commissioners Officials, as required. Authorised officers from my Department engage in checks at sales venues including marts and fairs, as well as at horse slaughter plants and at export points including ports and airports. These compliance checks are on-going and will continue to be undertaken.

My Department is not aware of issues relating to unidentified equines in the north County Cork area.

Íocaíochtaí GLAS

846. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Talmhaíochta, Bia agus Mara cén uair a dhéanfar íocaíocht faoin Scéim Ghlas don bhliain 2018 le duine (sonraí tugtha); cén mhoill atá ar an íocaíocht; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [1686/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Glacadh leis an duine ainmnithe thuasluaite isteach i scéim GLAS 1 agus an 1 Deireadh Fómhair 2015 an dáta ar cuireadh tús leis an gconradh. Tá na híocaíochtaí ar fad faighte ag an té sin i leith na mblianta scéime 2015, 2016 agus 2017.

Maidir le híocaíocht i leith na bliana 2018, déantar seiceálacha riaracháin, a mbíonn roinnt rannóg laistigh den Roinn rannpháirteach iontu, maidir le gach éileamh GLAS. Ní mór do gach cás seiceálacha bailíochtaithe a shásamh sular féidir íocaíocht a eisiúint. Tá oifigigh na Roinne ag obair go réamhghníomhach chun na seiceálacha a thabhairt i gcrích. A luaithe a shásóidh an cás seo na seiceálacha bailíochtaithe, déanfar an réamhíocaíocht i leith 2018. Is ar bhonn seachtainiúil a eisítear íocaíochtaí GLAS. Bhí mo Roinn i dteagmháil le pleanálaí an iarratasóra maidir leis an gconradh GLAS.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

847. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the details of outstanding payments made to a farmer (details supplied) in December 2018; the years and the schemes the payments referred to; if entitlements referred to in reply to Parliamentary Question No. 494 of 18 December 2018 have been transferred into the farmer's name; when all further ANC and BPS greening payments will issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1687/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In December 2018 payments under the following schemes issued on foot of receipt of the required documentation to facilitate outstanding payments in respect of a Farm Partnership, linked to a deceased herd owner, to which the person named was also associated:

2015 Areas of Natural Constraint

Voluntary Supply Management Scheme for the Dairy Sector

2015 Basic Payment Scheme

In addition to the payments above, payments under the following schemes issued in December 2018 to the person named:

Herd Owner TB Grant

2016 Areas of Natural Constraint

The person named does not currently have any Basic Payment entitlements in their name which has prevented the Basic Payment from issuing since 2016. My Department sent out the required forms and details of what is required to transfer the entitlements into the name of the person named on 6 December 2018 and has been in contact with the customer since that date. Once the completed forms are received my Department can begin processing the transfer of entitlements application. Outstanding applications for payment under the Basic Payment Scheme can be processed once the payment entitlements have transferred to the person named.

Payment due under the 2017 Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) scheme, which is not linked to payment entitlements, is currently being finalised and payment will issue to the person named as soon as possible.

Animal Slaughtering Standards

848. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the enhanced controls in place on carcase trimming in meat factories; if processors have introduced a payment to affected farmer suppliers to reflect losses incurred as a result of excessive trimming; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1691/19]

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.

Additional monitoring of carcase presentation by my Department's veterinary public health inspection staff (VPHIS) in the factories is currently being implemented in all factories since January 1st, 2019 and will provide a supporting role for the Beef Carcass Classification staff. This should provide further assurance to stakeholders that the appropriate dressing specification is being applied in factories. The controls applied in Ireland are significantly in excess of those required under EU Law.

From January 2019, Meat Industry Ireland has confirmed that processors will introduce a payment to the farmer supplier to reflect any loss, in each case where my Department applies a fine on a particular carcase for non-compliance with the carcase trim specification. Such a payment will be identified on the payment remittance docket, so that farmers will be aware of the penalty.

Agriculture Scheme Appeals

849. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the agriculture appeals office is inundated with agriculture appeals seeking review from farmers that are waiting on responses; if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that in one instance an appeal has been with the office for over two years (details supplied); if this issue will be investigated with the appeals office; his plans to tackle this problem going forward; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1784/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I am aware that the number of requests for reviews of Appeals Officer decisions has increased in recent years. The Agriculture Appeals Act 2001 provides the legal basis for reviews of Appeals Officer decisions. The Act requires that, unless the request for the review concerns the submission of additional information that was not available at the time the Appeals Officer made the decision, the review must only be dealt with by the Director of Agriculture Appeals.

The independent Agriculture Appeals Office has confirmed that an appeal was submitted on 21 October 2016 by a representative for the persons named. A decision and a full analysis of the case was issued by an Appeals Officer to the appellant on 11 May 2017 following an oral hearing of the appeal.

The Appellant requested a review of the Appeals Officer's decision and this was received by the Agriculture Appeals Office in 2017. The request did not include additional information. The

review of the Appeals Officer's decision will establish if the Appeals Officer made an error of fact or law in that decision and whether there is a need to revise the Appeals Officer's decision. Such requests are generally dealt with in order of receipt. A number of requests for reviews were received prior to the request concerned. I am advised that every effort is being made to finalise the review for the person named as soon as possible.

Departmental Correspondence

850. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the customer complaints received by his Department in each of the years since 2016; if the complaints are grouped into categories; the nature of the complaints; the resolution of same; and the number progressed to the relevant Ombudsman in each of the years since 2016. [1864/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The data requested by the Deputy is set out in the table that follows.

Year	Number of customer service complaints received by my Department's Quality Service Unit
2016	60
2017	43
2018	30

The data set out in the table relates to complaints received by the Quality Service Unit of my Department as part of my Department's Customer Service Complaints Procedure. It is important to note that this Customer Service Complaints Procedure concerns complaints regarding customer service, it does not cover requests for reviews or appeals against actual decisions taken in the operation of a scheme or service, as these have a separate appeals process.

My Department is committed to providing a user-friendly, high quality service to all farmers. Where it is considered that my Department falls short of this, my Department's Customer Service Complaints Procedure can be availed of by farmers. There are three steps in the customer service complaints process:

1. Complaints should first be directed to the senior officer in charge of the business area within the Department to which the complaint pertains.

2. If the complainant is dissatisfied with the response received from the Head of the relevant business area, the complaint can be sent to the Quality Service Unit who will examine any customer service aspect of the complaint. The Quality Service Unit will have the matter fully and impartially investigated by an officer who was not involved in the matter giving rise to the complaint.

3. If the complainant remains dissatisfied after steps 1 and 2 above, it is open to the complainant to contact the Office of the Ombudsman. The Office of the Ombudsman examines complaints from people who feel they have been unfairly treated by certain public bodies, for example, Government Departments.

Customer Service complaints are not sub-categorised in my Department and, having regard to my Department's data protection obligations, specific detail in respect of the complaints referred to in the table above cannot be provided, but I can advise that in general they involve dissatisfaction with matters such as alleged:

- Delays in responses to correspondence.
- Delays in payments.
- Lack of notice for inspections.
- Complaints regarding Department staff.

My Department does not maintain records in respect of the number of customer service complaints received by the Ombudsman that are a continuation of complaints received by the Quality Service Unit of my Department as part of my Department's Customer Service Complaints Procedure. Accordingly, the Department is not in a position to provide that particular piece of data requested by the Deputy. However, the following is the total number of Ombudsman cases involving my Department in the years in question.

Year	Number of Ombudsman cases
2016	66
2017	43
2018	45

It is important to note that many of the cases listed in the above table are appeals to the Ombudsman against decisions taken in the operation of a scheme or service rather than complaints concerning customer service, as it is open to customers of my Department to contact the Ombudsman both where they are not happy with the customer service they have received and where they are dissatisfied with decisions taken in the operation of a scheme or service.

Inland Fisheries Stocks

851. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to allocate a quota for fish for an area (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54187/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Canney): Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) manages salmon stocks on an individual river basis as each of Ireland's 147 salmon rivers (including river sections and estuaries) has its own genetically unique stock of salmon. IFI is supported in its management role by scientific advice from Ireland's independent Standing Scientific Committee (SSC), comprising scientists from a range of organisations. IFI also has to have regard EU legislation, most notably the Habitats Directive under which salmon habitats are protected.

Scientific and management assessments of each of the distinct stocks, including the river Shannon, are carried out every year with IFI engaged in extensive stock monitoring which feeds into the SSC's annual reviews. The SSC analyses data from the previous five years and an average of the 5 years of data is used to estimate expected returns for the coming year. The use of a 5 year average ensures that a good or bad year does not have a disproportionate impact on the stock assessment in any single year.

Since single stock management was introduced in 2007, the river Shannon has been assessed as the Upper Shannon (upstream of Parteen) and Mulkear. The section of the lower Shannon, below Parteen to Limerick was included in the Mulkear. The salmon stock assessment in this regard was based on the run of salmon recorded on the Mulkear fish counter.

In this year's assessment, the Scientific Group, at the request of local angling groups to es-

establish a separate conservation limit for the Lower Shannon, assessed the wetted area elements of the entire Shannon catchment and determined that it was appropriate to calculate a separate conservation limit for the Lower Shannon, separate to the Mulkear. This has been set at 4,204 fish in order to sustain a healthy population.

Based on the scientific assessments and management advice from IFI, there is no quota (sustainable harvest) available for salmon for the Lower Shannon catchment for 2019. The lower Shannon is not, therefore, open to salmon angling for the 2019 season.

As part of the stock assessment process for 2019 full catchment wide electro-fishing surveys are planned. Positive results from such surveys may result in a river opening to catch and release angling but would not support a harvest fishery.

Radon Gas Levels

852. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the supports available to homeowners and tenants that wish to carry out a radon test at their home; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1106/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): A number of companies provide radon testing services, with an average cost of €50 for a test. Currently there are no financial supports in place in relation to radon testing. The National Radon Control Strategy Group continues to examine radon testing levels and how they might be increased. Research on behavioural aspects of radon testing and remediation is on-going. The cost of testing, while relatively low, is recognised as a barrier to testing. A research survey was carried out in the Roscommon/East Galway area during late 2018, where a number of householders were offered a free radon test, a 50% grant towards the cost of any necessary remediation work (subject to a maximum of €500), and a free follow-up test following any remediation.

The findings of the survey and other on-going research in the area will form part of the second stage of the National Radon Control Strategy which is currently under development. The strategy will aim to increase radon awareness and testing levels.

Post Office Network

853. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment further to Parliamentary Question No. 181 of 13 December 2018, if the Rural Independent Group motion in relation to An Post passed by Dáil Éireann in November 2016 will be implemented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54079/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I refer to the reply to Question No 181 of 13 December 2018. The position is unchanged.

Inland Fisheries

854. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the amount in the salmon conservation fund; the number of stakeholder conservation projects drawn down from the fund in the past five years; the reason for the radical reduc-

tion in the works carried out under the fund; if the criteria defined by Inland Fisheries Ireland has resulted in a significant reduction of the works; his views on whether the criteria for planning permission imposed by Inland Fisheries Ireland have been detrimental to the delivery of the works; and the reason the fund for the national strategy for angling development was cut in 2018. [54094/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Salmon Conservation Fund (SCF) is generated from fees, due to the State, for commercial and rod licences for salmon and sea trout. 50% of fees are ring-fenced for reinvestment in projects under the SCF aimed specifically at promoting the recovery of salmon stocks and habitats. The fund was established in 2007 and facilitates stakeholder and Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) projects. It was first opened to third party (stakeholder) projects in 2011. Since then, draw-down of funds by stakeholders totalling close to €800,000 has been made across 83 projects. There is a further €1.48 million committed to projects awaiting project completion and drawdown.

I am advised by IFI that the fund currently contains €1.49 million for further allocation and receipts for 2018, currently being processed, are expected to generate an additional €300,000.

Following significant research and consultation IFI launched the National Strategy for Angling Development (NSAD) as the first comprehensive national framework for the development of Ireland's angling resource. The strategy supports IFI's role to conserve, protect, manage and promote Ireland's inland fisheries and sea angling resource which contributes some €836 million annually to the economy.

IFI recognises the key role played by angling clubs and other stakeholder organisations in fisheries development and the NSAD aims to engage stakeholders and maximise the use of volunteerism where it is of benefit to habitat and fisheries development.

All projects are expected to comply with general, financial and environmental governance requirements. IFI acknowledges the challenges for many stakeholder voluntary organisations in meeting governance requirements and has provided a project management office, project officers, online guidance, workshops and meetings to support applications. Developing a project necessarily involves multiple considerations, including Special Areas of Conservation (SAC's) under the Habitats Directive, Special Protected Areas (SPA's) under the Birds Directive, the Water Framework Directive (WFD) and the obligation to achieve good ecological status of water.

As the Deputy will be aware the issue of permission under the Planning Acts is a matter for the relevant Local Authority. As with all funding schemes subject to public governance, requirements relating to statutory permissions, landowner consent etc. are standard. Applicants are asked to confirm that all statutory and environmental requirements are met before funding can be paid. It is for applicants to take a cautious and responsible approach in these matters and IFI cannot set aside or ignore established statutory requirements.

Specifically in relation to planning permission, while not all projects require planning approval, IFI does not adjudicate on planning issues which are in the remit of Local Authorities. IFI work with planning authorities and facilitate pre-planning meetings to assist project applicants.

Funding of €500,000 was approved under NSAD during 2017. In 2018 funding of €2.2 million was approved for delivery of 114 development projects across 23 counties nationwide. This round of funding covered capital infrastructure works.

IFI have ensured support for the implementation of the projects under the strategy. Given the large number of stakeholders, collaboration and partnership is encouraged to ensure the objectives of the NSAD are achieved, particularly the protection and conservation of the resource through stewardship and environmental compliance.

Mobile Telephony Services

855. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to introduce a universal service obligation on mobile telephony providers in relation to the need to provide adequate and up to date mobile telephone coverage nationally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54105/18]

856. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his attention has been drawn to the perceived inadequate mobile telephone coverage in many parts of counties Cavan and Monaghan; if he or the Communications Regulator will engage with mobile telecoms providers to ensure that customers in the area are provided with improved coverage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54106/18]

858. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his attention has been drawn to the inadequate mobile telephone coverage in many parts of counties Cavan and Monaghan; if he or the Communications Regulator will engage with mobile telecoms providers to ensure that customers in the area are provided with improved coverage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54127/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 855, 856 and 858 together.

The EU and national regulatory framework for telecommunications allows for the application of a Universal Service Obligation (USO) in respect of fixed voice services. The existing framework for telecommunications relates solely to voice telephony and Functional Internet Access (28.8 kilobits per second). There is no provision in European or national regulation for a USO in relation to mobile voice services.

The Directive Establishing a European Electronic Communications Code (Directive (EU) 2018/1972), which will come into force following transposition in late 2020, aims to incentivise and encourage increased investment in high speed broadband networks, and contains a provision that would allow Member States to apply a USO for high speed broadband, in specific circumstances, where such networks are available.

Mobile operators are, however, rolling out 3G and 4G networks across Ireland following ComReg's 2012 Multiband Spectrum auction, with at least one operator now having over 90% population coverage of 4G services.

Furthermore, the EU Commission's Digital Single Market Strategy highlights the importance of the 694-790MHz (700MHz) spectrum band for ensuring the provision of broadband services in rural areas. The band is particularly attractive for wireless broadband services, allowing higher speeds and greater coverage over long distances. An EU level Decision has been adopted in order to co-ordinate release of the band in all Member States by 30 June 2020. This proposal will allow mobile broadband services to use this part of the spectrum band, which will provide enhanced mobile services. My Department and ComReg have been working to ensure the necessary measures are taken to facilitate a clearance of the spectrum to meet the 2020 timeline for clearing broadcasting services from the band. In addition, ComReg published a preliminary consultation in June 2018 on a proposed award of spectrum rights of use covering

multi- band spectrum, to include the 700 MHz band.

In terms of ongoing efforts to improve mobile telephony coverage nationally, the Programme for Government specifically included a commitment to a Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce. The Taskforce which is led by my Department and the Department of Rural and Community Development worked with key stakeholders to produce a report in December 2016, available on my Department's website, containing 40 actions to alleviate some of the deficits. An Implementation Group is overseeing implementation of the actions and comprises all key stakeholders responsible for delivery. The Implementation Group meets on a quarterly basis and publishes quarterly progress reports on the implementation status of actions.

Various initiatives are underway under the aegis of the Taskforce, in order to address mobile coverage blackspots:

- My Department and the Department of Rural and Community Development have worked to achieve a greater consensus around site selection for telecoms infrastructure and therefore improve mobile phone coverage.

- Both Departments also worked with a pilot group of local authorities to identify issues relating to mapping local blackspots. This pilot exercise has been completed, with all local authorities having been asked to map local blackspots and identify infrastructure that could potentially be used to provide additional coverage on an economic basis.

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

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

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

- ComReg has developed a licensing scheme enabling households and businesses to use mobile phone repeaters to boost signals into their premises and bring immediate improvements in mobile coverage.

On foot of feedback received from a wide variety of Stakeholders at the National Stakeholder Forum 2018, a suite of new Taskforce actions is currently being developed in ongoing discussions with potential action holders for 2019.

All of these initiatives should help enhance the quality of mobile phone and data services, particularly in rural areas such as counties Cavan and Monaghan.

Broadband Service Provision

857. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the progress achieved in 2018 and to date in 2019 and his plans for the upgrade of

broadband telecommunications infrastructure throughout counties Cavan and Monaghan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54107/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The National Broadband Plan aims to ensure that every home, school and business in Ireland has access to high speed broadband. This is being achieved through a combination of commercial investment across Ireland and a State intervention in those areas where commercial operators acting alone are unlikely to invest. There are approximately 42,000 premises in County Cavan. Since December 2015, the number of premises with access to high speed broadband in Cavan has increased by 5,317, a 13% increase. In total, the number of premises in Cavan with access to high speed broadband is now 23,535, or 56% of the total premises in the county. Approximately another 1,570 premises will be served by eir under that company's ongoing rural deployment.

There are approximately 33,000 premises in County Monaghan. Since December 2015, the number of premises with access to high speed broadband in Monaghan increased by 2,270, a 7% increase. In total, the number of premises in Monaghan with access to high speed broadband is now 16,325, or 49% of the total premises in the county. Approximately another 1,000 premises will be served by eir under that company's ongoing rural deployment.

The remaining 16,985 premises in Cavan and 15,675 premises in Monaghan will be connected under the Government's National Broadband Plan State led intervention.

In April 2017 my Department published an updated High Speed Broadband Map, which is available at www.broadband.gov.ie. This map shows the areas targeted by commercial operators to provide high speed broadband services and the areas that will be included in the State Intervention Area under the National Broadband Plan. The Map is colour coded and searchable by address/Eircode. The Map is updated on a quarterly basis as more premises gain access to high speed broadband.

The procurement process to appoint a bidder for the State intervention network is now at the final stage. My priority is to bring the procurement process to a fair and impartial conclusion as quickly as possible and I will bring a recommendation to Government in this regard in the coming weeks. *Question No. 858 answered with Question No. 856.*

Broadband Service Provision

859. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of broadband coverage at a location (details supplied); his plans to improve same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54132/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The premises referred to by the Deputy is in the AMBER area on the National Broadband Plan (NBP) High Speed Broadband Map, which is available on my Department's website at www.broadband.gov.ie. The AMBER areas represent the target areas for the proposed State led Intervention under the NBP. This intervention is the subject of an ongoing procurement process. The procurement process to appoint a bidder for the State intervention network is now at the final stage. My priority is to bring the procurement process to a fair and impartial conclusion as quickly as possible and I will bring a recommendation to Government in this regard in the coming weeks.

For those premises currently awaiting access to high speed broadband, practical initiatives will continue to be addressed through the work of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce

to address obstacles and improve connectivity in respect of existing and future mobile phone and broadband services.

Under this Taskforce, engagement between telecommunications operators and local authorities through the Broadband Officers is continuing to strengthen. These Broadband Officers are acting as single points of contact in local authorities for their communities. The appointment of these officers is already reaping rewards in terms of ensuring a much greater degree of consistency in engagements.

Inland Fisheries

860. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the reason Inland Fisheries Ireland has withheld its design and deliver service for in-stream works with its new working agreement with the OPW. [54141/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Canney): Fisheries enhancement and in-stream works are now primarily progressed through the National Strategy for Angling Development (NASD). Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) provides a project management office, project officers, online guidance, workshops and meetings to support applications under the NSAD. In addition a panel of appropriately qualified consultants has been formed to provide advice on the design and installation of instream and riparian fisheries enhancement works. IFI and the Office of Public Works (OPW) Flood Risk Management Unit signed a shared service agreement in July 2018, which will see continued collaboration over the next five years in the protection of fishery requirements while carrying out flood risk management investment activities. The agreement will see both parties work closely together to help ensure the country's statutory drainage objectives are achieved with an appropriate focus on the protection of fishery habitats and resources.

The OPW is the lead statutory body for Drainage Maintenance and Flood Risk Management (FRM) in the State, while IFI is the statutory body responsible for the protection and conservation of the inland fisheries resource. Over recent years, IFI has provided training for OPW in the core elements of fish friendly riverine design and channel maintenance.

The revised 5 year agreement, which includes inter alia the provision of dedicated staff support from within IFI, has been secured at a time when Government investment in flood risk management operations is increasing. It follows the recent publication of the Government's Flood Risk Management Plans which will see some €1 billion in funding under the National Development Plan invested in projects across the country to mitigate flood risk. The new partnership formalises the historical working relationship between the two organisations and commits them to continuing their positive engagement for Ireland's fishery habitats and resources.

Energy Schemes

861. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of compressed natural gas public fuelling stations open and operational; the location in which they are based; the number planned and scheduled to open in 2019; the location in which the scheduled stations will be based; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54167/18]

862. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his attention has been drawn to the fact that 14 compressed natural gas refuel-

ling sites were scheduled to be opened between 2016 and 2020 and to date there are none open; the number of stations that will be open by 2020; if the funding that has been made available for the 14 service stations will be lost if they are not all open and operational by 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54168/18]

863. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on whether there are regulatory problems in relation to the provision of compressed natural gas fuelling stations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54169/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 861 to 863, inclusive, together.

The delivery of 14 Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) filling stations, as part of the Causeway Project co-funded by the EU Connecting Europe Facility, is an operational matter for Gas Networks Ireland.

I have been provided with an update on the current status of these stations by Gas Networks Ireland which is set out in the following table.

-	Location	Status
Station 1	Dublin Port	The Commission for the Regulations of Utilities has issued Ireland's first CNG Supplier License to Circle K in December. The introduction of public refuelling will commence shortly (in January) with access being managed at commencement to ensure smooth operation.
Station 2	Exit 8, Cashel	Planning permission is in place with programme on track for operation in July 2019
Station 3	Kinsale Road, Cork	Project is progressing with programme on track for operation in August 2019.
Station 4, 5, 6, 7	Louth, Limerick, Portlaoise and Tipperary (exact locations to be confirmed)	Construction is expected to take place in 2019.
Station 8-14	To be confirmed.	Negotiations in relation to locations are ongoing.

Gas Networks Ireland has stated that is committed to opening these 14 CNG filling stations and is aiming for all of them to be operational by the end of 2020.

Departmental Transport

864. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the cost incurred by his Department in 2018 for the use of taxi services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54205/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department has a contract in place for the provision of taxi services in Dublin,

which was sourced under an Office of Government Procurement framework agreement. In 2018, total expenditure by my Department on taxi fares, at home and abroad, amounted to €20,488. For comparison purposes, taxi expenditure has declined by 35% since 2010, notwithstanding an increase of 49% in staffing levels in the same period.

Energy Conservation

865. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will report on the home energy grants under the auspices of the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland by county (details supplied); the action he will take to increase the uptake of home energy grants in the Dublin region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54264/18]

866. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of applications in relation to home energy grants administered by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland by county in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019; the number refused, accepted and appealed, respectively in each of the years in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54265/18]

871. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the details of home energy upgrades by each of the four Dublin local authorities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54387/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 865, 866 and 871 together.

The home energy grants administered by the SEAI are funded by my Department. The majority of these grants are available to homeowners whose properties were built before 2006. Since the introduction of these grants nearly 400,000 homes across the country have received an energy efficiency upgrade, representing nearly one home in five across the country.

Better Energy Homes provides a financial incentive (typically covering 30% of the cost of works) to private homeowners who wish to improve the energy performance of their homes.

The Better Energy Warmer Homes Scheme provides a range of energy efficiency measures free of charge to low income households vulnerable to energy poverty who meet the defined eligibility criteria.

Better Energy Communities supports energy efficiency upgrades to mixed projects of homes, community facilities and businesses in a local community. This scheme provided funding of €20m in 2018 to 37 projects across the country, upgrading 1,189 homes and 454 community buildings.

The Warmth and Wellbeing Scheme is a joint energy, social and health policy initiative aimed at validating the health impacts of improved energy efficiency in a home. The pilot scheme was established in HSE Community Healthcare Organisation (CHO) 7, specifically in Dublin 8, 10, 12, 22 & 24.

The Deep Retrofit Pilot Scheme launched in 2017 is available to homeowners who want to upgrade their house to an A BER while availing of grant support of up to 50%.

The following table presents the number of homes upgraded and the investment made per county under these schemes in 2018.

Home Energy Grants 2018	BE Homes		BE Warmer Homes		W&W		Deep	
	No. of Homes Completed	Amount Paid (€)	Homes	€	Homes	€m	Homes	€m
Carlow	75	86,750	63	284,919			0	
Cavan	142	157,750	173	851,023			0	
Clare	179	247,025	147	656,465			2	
Cork	1719	2,032,533	506	3,219,158			4	
Donegal	91	161,150	587	2,952,720			16	
Dublin	4360	5,984,299	831	6,571,892	455	12.26	45	
Galway	688	714,975	242	1,346,008			6	
Kerry	352	683,769	329	2,240,881			2	
Kildare	881	883,550	167	900,981			3	
Kilkenny	90	148,700	73	355,177			3	
Laois	169	151,050	95	491,646			1	
Leitrim	32	36,700	58	387,621			0	
Limerick	548	757,207	160	862,130			6	
Longford	56	57,000	72	302,427			0	
Louth	1221	987,536	139	618,487			1	
Mayo	265	452,800	214	1,102,689			64	
Meath	1776	1,513,550	124	877,094			1	
Monaghan	41	45,950	100	425,840			0	
Offaly	112	162,900	90	444,022			0	
Roscommon	90	103,500	116	769,398			0	
Sligo	58	106,350	105	576,251			0	
Tipperary	220	316,850	144	931,468			26	
Waterford	238	325,940	117	1,083,426			11	
Westmeath	126	139,515	140	725,098			1	
Wexford	371	328,850	317	2,058,636			17	
Wicklow	322	509,650	113	810,279			2	
Total	14,222	17,095,849	5,222	31,845,736	455	12.26	211	4.72

A number of actions are already underway to encourage uptake of home energy grants by homeowners. For example, the Better Energy Homes Scheme was expanded in 2018 to support the transition away from fossil fuels, and achieve greater energy savings and emissions reductions, by introducing a new grant for heat pumps and increasing the grant amount available for all other measures. More information can be found on <https://www.seai.ie/grants/home-energy-grants/> In addition, the Better Energy Warmer Homes was expanded in 2018 to include internal and external wall insulation which allows more people to avail of the scheme while also increasing the energy savings and emissions reductions.

The following table sets out the number of applications, completed and cancelled, per county under the Better Energy homes grant scheme. The number of appealed applications is not captured separately as these applications go on to become either completed or cancelled. Applications can be cancelled either by SEAI due to ineligibility or by the homeowner if they change their mind about getting work done.

	2016		2017		2018	
	Completed	*Cancelled	Completed	*Cancelled	Completed	*Cancelled
Carlow	140	6	158	6	75	13
Cavan	184	12	134	12	142	12

Questions - Written Answers

	2016		2017		2018	
	Completed	*Cancelled	Completed	*Cancelled	Completed	*Cancelled
Clare	294	19	297	28	179	22
Cork	2,112	151	1,765	200	1,719	101
Donegal	155	19	157	18	91	27
Dublin	4,637	239	4,791	278	4,360	330
Galway	766	70	811	65	688	68
Kerry	412	35	373	29	352	48
Kildare	634	35	751	51	881	56
Kilkenny	218	15	123	21	90	14
Laois	260	12	230	19	169	24
Leitrim	39	6	46	4	32	5
Limerick	995	43	965	41	548	48
Longford	34	2	109	5	56	17
Louth	486	32	538	27	1,221	43
Mayo	415	30	386	34	265	32
Meath	620	42	605	32	1,776	62
Monaghan	79	3	73	6	41	4
Offaly	153	24	181	7	112	14
Roscommon	164	10	120	6	90	10
Sligo	120	7	108	20	58	8
Tipperary	491	29	378	23	220	21
Waterford	413	21	328	28	238	17
Westmeath	247	17	211	25	126	10
Wexford	503	20	480	27	371	28
Wicklow	402	25	500	20	322	17
Total	14,973	924	14,618	1,032	14,222	1,051

The Deputy has also asked about homes upgraded in each of the four Dublin local authorities. Local authorities are responsible for maintenance and upgrade of their housing stock and my Department therefore does not keep a record of these upgrades. Government funding of approximately €116 million has been provided by the Department of Housing, Planning & Local Government, from 2013 to the end of 2017 to improve energy efficiency and comfort levels in almost 64,000 local authority homes. This was Phase 1 of the social housing retrofit programme and focused on the lower-cost improvements such as cavity wall and attic insulation. In addition, energy efficiency measures have been carried out in over 9,000 vacant houses that have been returned to use since 2014. This effectively means that approximately 50% of the social housing stock has already undergone a level of energy retrofit. Phase 2 will commence shortly and will target higher-cost and higher impact measures such as external insulation and replacement of single-glazed windows. Approximately 30% of the social housing stock, or 40,000 homes are more than 40 years old and will be the main priority for phase 2. The ambition is to achieve a BER B standard for these homes. The timeline will be determined by the funding available over the coming years.

Broadband Service Provision

867. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the progress to date for each of the 41 action points made in the mobile phone and broadband taskforce report published in December 2016 in which his Department has lead or joint responsibility for implementing; if each such action point has been completed, not com-

pleted or is ongoing, respectively; and the revised deadlines for action points not delivered by the original timeframes set out in tabular form. [54283/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce worked with key stakeholders to produce a report in December 2016, available on my Department's website, which contained 40 actions to alleviate some of the coverage deficits across the country. An Implementation Group is overseeing the implementation of the actions and comprises all key stakeholders responsible for delivery. The Implementation Group meets on a quarterly basis and publishes quarterly progress reports on the implementation status of actions. My Department and the Department of Rural and Community Development published the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce Implementation Review 2017 on 21 February 2018, which comprehensively outlines the progress made in 2017 on all of the actions identified by the Taskforce. Of the 40 actions, 29 have been completed, with work on the remaining 11 carrying into the 2018 Work Programme. Following close engagement with stakeholders at the inaugural National Stakeholder Forum 2017, an additional 23 new measures were identified for delivery in 2018.

The Implementation Review 2017 is available on my Department's website at www.dccae.gov.ie. The Quarter 3 Progress Report for 2018 has also recently been published on the website. The Annual Review Report for 2018 which will also encompass progress made on Quarter 4 actions will be published in February.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

868. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on the fact that a number of miles outside large towns such as Navan and Trim businesses, homes and farms are forced to operate with a substandard Internet service (details supplied); his plans for an interim solution to the matter; and if he will work with private enterprise in order to speed up the process. [54323/18]

878. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of homes and businesses in County Meath without access to high speed broadband; the estimated date for these homes and businesses to receive access to high speed broadband; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1482/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 868 and 878 together.

The National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to ensure high speed broadband access (minimum 30 megabits per second) to all premises in Ireland. This is being achieved via a combination of commercial investment and a State led intervention.

The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector. In 2012, less than 700,000, or 30% of all 2.3 million Irish premises had access to high speed broadband. When this Government came into office, this had risen to 52%. Today, 74% of premises can access high speed broadband.

There are approximately 85,307 premises in County Meath. Since December 2015, the number of premises with access to high speed broadband in Meath has increased by 31,564, a 36% increase. In total, the number of premises in Meath with access to high speed broadband is now 62,934, or 74% of the total number of premises in the county. Approximately another 2,468 premises will be served by eir under that company's ongoing rural deployment.

The remaining 19,905 homes, schools and businesses in Meath will be connected under the Government's NBP State Intervention.

In April 2017 my Department published an updated High Speed Broadband Map, which is available on my Department's website at www.broadband.gov.ie. This Map shows the areas targeted by commercial operators to provide high speed broadband services and the areas that will be included in the State Intervention Area under the National Broadband Plan. The Map is colour coded and searchable by address or Eircode.

The specific premises referred to by the Deputy is in the AMBER area on the Map. The AMBER areas represent the target areas for the proposed State led Intervention under the NBP. This intervention is the subject of an ongoing procurement process.

The procurement process to appoint a bidder for the State intervention network is now at the final stage. My priority is to bring the procurement process to a fair and impartial conclusion as quickly as possible and I will bring a recommendation to Government in this regard in the coming weeks.

For those premises currently awaiting access to high speed broadband, practical initiatives will continue to be addressed through the work of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce to address obstacles and improve connectivity in respect of existing and future mobile phone and broadband services.

Under this Taskforce, engagement between telecommunications operators and local authorities through the Broadband Officers is continuing to strengthen. These Broadband Officers are acting as single points of contact in local authorities for their communities. The appointment of these officers is already reaping rewards in terms of ensuring a much greater degree of consistency in engagements.

Broadband Service Provision

869. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the amount which has been received historically under the revenue share terms with Enet regarding MANs phase 1 concession; the amount Enet has received; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54338/18]

870. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the nature of the revisions made to the revenue share agreement between his Department and enet regarding the phase 1 concession agreement with effect from 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54339/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 869 and 870 together.

Enet has, to date paid over €8.8million to the State, under the terms of the MSE I Concession Agreement.

The State has not made any payment to Enet as part of the MSE I Agreement.

It was agreed, as part of the decision to extend the Concession Agreement with Enet in 2017, to increase the State's revenue share in the operation of the Phase I MAN's.

While the details of the revised Revenue Share arrangements are commercially sensitive, it is estimated that the extension of the Concession Agreements will result in a total of €21 million

cost savings to the State between 2020 and 2030.

Question No. 871 answered with Question No. 865.

Environmental Investigations

872. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the position regarding the identification and monitoring of potential sinkholes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54402/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Canney): Identification and monitoring of potential sink holes is a broad and complex topic involving various potential formational mechanisms, both natural and induced. The vast majority of sinkholes are natural occurrences formed from the dissolution and erosion of soluble bedrock, such as limestone and gypsum units. Until sinkholes reach the near surface, they are very difficult to identify, let alone monitor. Features, resembling sinkholes, may occasionally develop above shallow underground mine workings. These features are specifically referred to as crown holes. The majority of abandoned mines in Ireland are not the legal responsibility of the State. As a result, the State does not undertake monitoring at these sites. At all current underground mining operations and recently-closed underground mines, subsidence monitoring is undertaken by the licensee or former mining operator. The results of monitoring at current mines and some closed mines are normally reviewed on a biannual basis by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment. However, detailed subsidence monitoring provides no certainty that potential crown hole development will be identified. Crown holes, like sinkholes, are difficult to identify until the cavity breaks the surface.

Mining subsidence events, including crown holes, have recently occurred at the Drumgoosat gypsum mine in Co. Monaghan, which closed in 1989. Monitoring of this site, including subsidence monitoring, has been occurring since the 1980s. The three relevant authorities, Monaghan County Council, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment, are working together to ensure that the company carries out the necessary investigations to understand the development of the recent subsidence events and that all appropriate actions are taken to ensure the health and safety of the local community.

Departmental Expenditure

873. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the budget and spend in his Department for marketing, media and social media in each of the years 2016 to 2018; the projected spend for 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54459/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I refer to the reply to Questions Nos 467, 476 and 477 of 19 December 2018. The position is unchanged.

Departmental Staff Data

874. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and

Environment the number of staff in his Department employed to work on marketing, media and social media in 2018. [54476/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): There are currently three staff members assigned to the press office of this Department consisting of one Press Officer at Assistant Principal level, one Executive Officer and one Clerical Officer. In accordance with the terms and conditions set out by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, one special advisor with responsibility for press and media is employed at Principal Officer level. In addition, there is a Strategic Development and Communications Unit in the Department. The Unit focusses on: internal communications including developing responses to the findings of the Civil Service Employee Engagement Surveys; supporting Departmental engagement with external stakeholders; and the development and maintenance of the Department's website. In 2018, staffing levels consisted of one Principal Officer (who is also responsible for the Press Office), one Assistant Principal Officer, two Higher Executive Officers, two full time Executive Officers plus one half time Executive, and one Clerical Officer.

A percentage of the time of some of these staff would involve work on media and social media.

Electric Vehicle Grants

875. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his attention has been drawn to the fact that a number of electric vehicles for sale here are not included in the list for the electric vehicle home charger grant scheme; his plans to remedy the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54509/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The owner of an electric vehicle is eligible to apply for the electric vehicle home charger grant if the model of vehicle is currently, or has previously been, eligible for the electric vehicle purchase grant. The electric vehicle purchase grant was introduced in 2011 and details on the home charger scheme can be found at www.seai.ie/grants/electric-vehicle-grants/electric-vehicle-home-charger-grant/. Currently, to qualify for the electric vehicle purchase grant, the electric vehicle must be classified as M1 (passenger vehicle) or N1 (light commercial vehicle) and meet certain requirements including criteria relating to range and tailpipe emissions. For example, plug in hybrid electric vehicles must have a range exceeding 20km in fully electric mode and must be certified with tail pipe emissions of less than 65 gCO₂ per km.

In order for an electric vehicle to be approved under the electric vehicle purchase grant, it is the responsibility of the importer to contact the SEAI directly to register the vehicle with SEAI for the purchase grant scheme, thereby confirming that the vehicle meets the eligibility criteria as required.

Environmental Investigations

876. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of developments (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54551/18]

880. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of developments at an area (details supplied); and if he will make a

statement on the matter. [1568/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Canney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 876 and 880 together.

My Department, Monaghan County Council and the Environmental Protection Agency are working together to ensure that Gyproc carries out the necessary investigations to understand the development of the recent ‘sinkhole’ in Magheraclone. A programme of works has been agreed between the parties including site investigations and the results of investigations will be submitted by the company to the Statutory Authorities for monitoring and verification. Time lines have been set for these works which will be adjusted and revised depending on results. As a precautionary measure Monaghan County Council closed a section of the L4900 road to facilitate the investigative drilling which has commenced at the location. The three Statutory Authorities continue to work closely to ensure that the situation is managed and resolved by the company as promptly as possible.

Electric Vehicles

877. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of electric vehicle charging stations in Limerick county and city, respectively; the number of electric vehicles registered in County Limerick in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1304/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The majority of the existing network of publicly accessible charge points was rolled out by the ESB through its eCars programme. This network includes circa 80 fast chargers, mainly on national routes. A map showing the location of these charge points, including their status and availability, is available on the ESB’s website at www.esb.ie/ecars. ESB eCars informs my Department that there are 26 publically available standard charge points and 4 fast chargers available in Limerick (city and county). It should be noted that this list is limited to ESB eCars public charge points and may not include any installations on private sites such as hotels or chargers installed by other entities. Figures provided by the Central Statistics Office indicate that there were 67 electric vehicles registered in Limerick in 2018.

Question No. 878 answered with Question No. 868.

Illegal Dumping

879. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the amount spent on clearing illegal dumping in each county council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1524/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The total cost of illegal dumping is not collated by my Department as it includes local authority enforcement, disposal and legal costs and also involves costs for other State agencies such as An Garda Síochána. Illegal dumping is first and foremost a matter of individual responsibility and compliance with the law. While enforcement action in this area is a matter in the first instance for local authorities, my Department encourages a multi-faceted approach to tackling the problem, incorporating enforcement, public awareness and education and, as such, provides funding to support the activities of the Waste Enforcement Regional Lead Authorities of approximately €1 million per annum and of the network of local authority waste enforcement

officers of approximately €7.4 million per annum.

In addition, my Department has developed the Anti-Dumping Initiative to work in partnership with local authorities and community organisations in identifying high risk or problem areas, developing appropriate enforcement responses and carrying out clean-up operations. Since 2017 funding of €3.3 million has been made available from the Environment Fund in this regard which has supported over 400 projects across all 31 local authority areas, remediating black spots and equipping local authority enforcement officers with the latest technologies available to support SMART enforcement of our waste laws.

A review of this initiative is underway which will inform a 2019 anti-dumping work programme that will place an increased emphasis on all actors who facilitate the unauthorised movement and disposal of waste.

Question No. 880 answered with Question No. 876.

Waste Management

881. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when he expects the national waste management policy to be reviewed as set out in A Resource Opportunity – Waste Management Policy in Ireland in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1614/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): A review of “*A Resource Opportunity - Waste Management Policy in Ireland*” will be initiated as soon as is practically possible in 2019. This review process will take account of a number of initiatives, such as the European circular economy waste and plastics legislation framework and the reports from the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission and the Price Monitoring Group. This process will inform the development of future national waste management policy, including our environmental goals, regulatory and market structures, and policy instruments and tools.

Warmth and Well-being Scheme

882. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the progress he has made in considering the optimal next steps to achieve the level of ambition as set out in the NDP under the warmth and well-being programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1616/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Warmth and Wellbeing Scheme was established in 2016 as a joint energy, social and health policy initiative with the Department of Health and cross Government support from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. The scheme was designed to objectively measure and validate the health and wellbeing impacts of improving the living conditions of vulnerable people living in energy poverty with chronic respiratory conditions, demonstrating the multiple benefits of energy efficiency. The scheme was established as a pilot in HSE Community Healthcare Organisation (CHO) 7, specifically Dublin 8, 10, 12, 22 & 24. Almost 900 homes in the pilot area have now been upgraded with an investment of €20m. An independent analysis is being carried out by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, in collaboration with the Health Service Executive. Interim findings will be available this year, which will help guide future decisions on the programme.

Medical Waste Disposal

883. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the progress he has made with the relevant agencies and stakeholders to deliver the annual support of €75 for the disposal of medical incontinence wear for vulnerable persons to help meet the average annual cost of disposing of domestic waste; when he expects this support to be implemented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1617/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department is continuing the work of developing a mechanism to provide a €75 support for vulnerable persons with a condition such as lifelong or long-term medical incontinence to help meet the average annual cost of disposing of their domestic waste. I am informed that this process has taken longer than envisaged, due to a number of issues, including data protection issues that have arisen since the introduction of GDPR. However, I can assure the Deputy that I am committed to introducing an annual support as soon as practically possible in conjunction with relevant agencies and stakeholders.

Electricity Grid

884. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the full extent of energy generated from non-fossil fuels and made available to the grid in the course of 2018 with particular reference to the extent to which the full grid requirement can be met from such sources; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1744/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The total amount of renewable generation connected to the grid at October 2018 was 3,857MW, of which wind generation was approximately 3,508MW, hydro was 238MW and biomass was 91MW. Eirgrid estimates that a total of between 3,900MW and 4,300MW of onshore renewable generation capacity will be required to allow Ireland to achieve 40% renewable electricity by 2020. The *Energy in Ireland 2018 Report* was published by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) in December 2018. The report sets out the progress that Ireland has made in reducing reliance on fossil fuels for transport, heating and electricity production. Renewable electricity (or non-fossil fuel) generation accounted for 30.1% of gross electricity consumption in 2017. Corresponding data for the year 2018 is not available yet. The Report also states that renewable energy use grew by 52% between 2013 and 2017. Notwithstanding this, over 90% of all energy used in Ireland in 2017 was from fossil fuels.

Details of the proportions of electricity generated from oil, gas, coal, wind, solar or other renewable sources are available in Table 8 “*Growth rates, quantities and shares of electricity generated by fuel*” on page 29 of the Report.

The EU Renewable Energy Directive 2009/28/EC set Ireland a legally binding target of meeting 16% of our energy requirements from renewable sources by 2020. Ireland is committed to achieving this target through meeting 40% of electricity demand, 12% of heat and 10% of transport from renewable sources of energy. The SEAI analysis states that 10.6% of Ireland’s overall energy requirements in 2017 were met from renewable sources.

Broadband Service Provision

885. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the roll out of high speed broadband in the Glencullen area of County Dublin; the way in which he expects it to progress in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1779/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): In April 2017 my Department published an updated version of the National Broadband Plan (NBP) High Speed Broadband Map. This is available at www.broadband.gov.ie. The Map shows the areas targeted by commercial operators to provide high speed broadband services and the areas that will be included in the State Intervention Area under the National Broadband Plan. The Map is colour coded and searchable by address/Eircode: There are 106 premises in the townland of Glencullen. 34 (32%) fall within the AMBER area and will be served under the State led Intervention, while 72 (68%) premises are in a BLUE area and are or will be served by commercial providers. Information on categories of specific premises can be accessed on my Department's website, www.broadband.gov.ie, by entering the relevant Eircode/address into the High Speed Broadband Map.

The procurement process to appoint a bidder for the State intervention network is now at the final stage. My priority is to bring the procurement process to a fair and impartial conclusion as quickly as possible and I will bring a recommendation to Government in this regard in the coming weeks.

For those premises currently awaiting access to high speed broadband, practical initiatives will continue to be addressed through the work of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce to address obstacles and improve connectivity in respect of existing and future mobile phone and broadband services.

Under this Taskforce, engagement between telecommunications operators and local authorities through the Broadband Officers is continuing to strengthen. These Broadband Officers are acting as single points of contact in local authorities for their communities. The appointment of these officers is already reaping rewards in terms of ensuring a much greater degree of consistency in engagements.

Departmental Correspondence

886. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the customer complaints received by his Department in each of the years since 2016; if the complaints are grouped into categories; the nature of the complaints; the resolution of same; and the number progressed to the relevant Ombudsman in each of the years since 2016. [1867/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): There were eight customer complaints received by my Department in 2016 and 15 received in 2017; all of these were resolved. Nine of the 13 customer complaints received in 2018 have been resolved. None of the complaints had to be referred to the Ombudsman. The categories of complaint included broadcasting, waste, phone bills, eircodes, etc.

Motor Insurance Fraud

887. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the practice of some drivers obtaining a motor insurance disc by

paying a small deposit and then not paying the balance but keeping the insurance disc; and his plans to deal with the issue. [54151/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I am aware of the small cohort of drivers fraudulently displaying motor insurance discs valid for a 12 month period when a premium has only been partially paid, as are the insurance industry. Driving without motor insurance is an offence under the Road Traffic Laws. Enforcement of Road Traffic legislation is a matter for An Garda Síochána.

I understand that the Garda Mobility Strategy aims to provide frontline members with greater connectivity to back-office systems, harnessing the power of mobile technology, and forms part of the Modernisation and Renewal Programme 2016-2021. A pilot programme was operated in Limerick Garda Division from December 2017 to September 2018, with very positive feedback. A key application developed for the Mobility pilot was a Traffic App, which allowed users to search for vehicle information by entering a vehicle registration number into the mobile phone. The trial app gathered information recorded on PULSE in respect of the vehicle, including tax status, ownership information and vehicle warnings, and will when operational be able to tell the Garda at the roadside whether the vehicle is insured.

The utilisation of mobile devices will enable Garda members to be more efficient and effective by having mobile access to relevant core policing applications, a wide-range of up-to-date information and the ability to input and update information in real time. As such it should greatly enhance Garda ability to enforce a variety of Road Traffic laws, including those against driving without insurance.

Motor Tax Exemptions

888. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the process for declaring commercial vehicles such as in the case of a person (details supplied) off the road and then the process post-DOE testing; the reason the test is backdated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54308/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): In order to provide a comprehensive answer to this question we have requested further specific details. An email issued to the Deputy from my office on 11th January seeking clarification on the details of this case. Upon receipt of the Deputy's response, a detailed reply will issue.

Motor Industry

889. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the number of diesel vehicles, both new and second hand, being imported from Britain and Northern Ireland having regard to the implications for greenhouse gas emission targets; the action he is taking to reduce the amount of diesel cars in use; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54356/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The number of used cars imported into Ireland has grown significantly in recent years. As the Deputy is no doubt aware, EU legislation permits the free movement of goods (including new and used cars) between Member States, allowing European citizens greater consumer choice. Manufacturing standards for vehicles are also set at EU level and enforced on an EU-wide basis, meaning that similar rules apply to all vehicles used within the EU, regardless of their origin.

Over the past decade, the diesel-fuelled segment of Ireland's national vehicle fleet has grown. Among the traditional fuels for transport, diesel is more carbon-efficient than petrol as a means of fuelling vehicles, however, diesel is also associated with worsened air quality, which is concerning particularly in urban areas.

Therefore, a range of incentives are now in place - many of them introduced by this Government - to encourage consumers to transition from conventionally-fuelled higher-emitting petrol and diesel vehicles towards lower-emitting alternatively-fuelled vehicles.

A Low Emission Vehicle (LEV) Taskforce was established in 2016. It's first phase of work was on electricity as an alternative-fuel for transport, and the Taskforce's recommendations to Government ahead of Budgets 2018 and 2019 have resulted in a comprehensive suite of measures to incentivise the move to electric vehicles (EVs). The generous incentives on offer include:

- various grants such as the Purchase Grant Scheme, the Reduced Tolling Scheme and the Electric Small Public Service Vehicle Grant Scheme;

- tax incentives such as lower motor tax and VRT relief;

- commercial incentives such as a 0% Benefit-in-Kind rate and an Accelerated Capital Allowance Scheme for EVs and their related infrastructure.

These incentives are having results, with more than double the number of EVs on Irish roads by the end of 2018 than a year previously. The LEV Taskforce has now moved to a second phase of work looking beyond electricity at other alternative fuels and also looking at heavy duty vehicles (HDVs) with a view to continuing the move away from traditional fossil fuels such as diesel.

The manufacturing and efficiency standards for vehicles that are set at European level also play an important role in spurring industry to produce vehicles that are less emitting and more efficient. Working at EU level, Ireland continues to push strongly for better vehicle standards, seeking greater ambition in the various EU-wide regulations that ensure vehicles registered with the Union are increasingly more efficient and less emitting. It is through better technology and improved efficiency that carbon emissions generated by vehicles can be decoupled from increased economic activity and population growth.

Finally, the Deputy will also recall that my colleague, the Minister for Finance, announced in Budget 2019 that from 1 January 2019 a new 1% surcharge on VRT will be levied on all diesel cars that are newly-registered in the State; this will apply whether the newly-registered car is new or was previously used outside of the State.

Motor Tax Rates

890. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the implementation of the European proposal COM 2017/276 relating to motor tax rates; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1148/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): European Commission proposal COM (2017) 276 is a proposal for a Council Directive amending Directive 1999/62/EC on the charging of heavy goods vehicles for the use of certain infrastructures, as regards certain provisions on vehicle taxation. The proposal was adopted by the Commission on 31 May 2017. It is still under consideration by the Council and a Council Decision has not

been adopted as yet.

Marine Safety

891. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to review the safety procedures in maritime operations within the State's jurisdiction. [1698/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Maritime safety is the key concern of the Irish Maritime Administration (IMA) which is a part of my Department. The IMA has many roles in relation to maritime safety both of a preventative and a reactive nature. For instance, the Marine Survey Office carries out maritime transport regulation for ships, seafarers, ports and cargos for safety, security, pollution prevention, accessibility and living and working conditions (for Irish ships in Ireland or worldwide and for foreign ships in Irish ports). The Irish Coast Guard is responsible for the response to, and coordination of, maritime accidents which require Search & Rescue and Counter Pollution & Ship Casualty operations while also having a role in marine communication, surveillance and emergency management in Ireland's Exclusive Economic Zone.

Maritime activity is a multi-faceted area with a wide variety of activities ranging from recreational craft users through to the smaller passenger boats and fishing vessels and on up to larger passenger ships and fishing vessels and internationally trading ships, both passenger and cargo.

Ensuring safe maritime operations and, in the unfortunate instances where things go wrong, an efficient and effective emergency response, is the top priority within the IMA. While these activities are constantly under review as part of the day to day work of the IMA, it is useful to take a step back and conduct a separate review from time to time or as the circumstances require.

For instance, following the tragic incidents involving the Irish Coast Guard RIB off Kilkee in 2016 and, separately, Rescue 116 in 2017, I have instigated a review into the national Search & Rescue Framework whose work is ongoing.

Prior to this, in April 2015 my Department, following a wide consultation, published the Maritime Safety Strategy 2015-2019 which contains a list of actions the IMA is working on implementing.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

892. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the payment of a sports capital grant for a club (details supplied) will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54037/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The Sports Capital Programme (SCP) is the primary vehicle for Government support for the development of sports and physical recreation facilities and the purchase of non-personal sports equipment throughout the country.

Given the substantial investments made under the programme, it is a requirement that where grants or cumulative grants reach a certain threshold, that the State's investment is protected by way of deeds of covenant and charge against the grantee's property. This provides the Department with a guarantee that grant aided facilities will continue to be used for sporting purposes. The Office of the Chief State Solicitor acts on behalf of the Department to ensure that all legal

requirements are completed.

In order for the Department to issue formal approval and allow for the subsequent payment to the club referred to by the Deputy, the Chief State Solicitor's Office must confirm that the legal formalities are complete. I understand the Chief State Solicitor's Office have been in communication with the Club's solicitor in order to get all outstanding matters resolved. Once my Department receives confirmation that the legal formalities have been complete, there will be no undue delay in paying the grant subject to the other terms and conditions of the SCP being adhered to.

Road Projects Status

893. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the progress made to date on the N52 Tullamore to Kilbeggan link road which forms part of Project Ireland 2040; if the pre-appraisal works on the project have been completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54069/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the planning, design and construction of individual roads is a matter for the relevant road authority in relation to local and regional roads, and for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) in with the local authorities concerned, in relation to national roads.

Noting the above position, I have referred your question to TII for a direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Driver Licence Applications

894. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a person (details supplied) can apply for a full driving licence. [54081/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): This is a matter for the Road Safety Authority. I have referred the question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response is not received within 10 days.

Greenways Development

895. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the progress to date of the development of a project (details supplied); when the project will proceed to next stage; the grant aid that will be available for the development; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54113/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The funding call for projects under the Strategy for the Future Development of National and Regional Greenways closed on November 30th. Twenty two detailed applications were received from sixteen Local Authorities and State Agencies, including applications for the projects referred to by the Deputy.

My Department is currently in the process of assessing each application that was received

based on the criteria laid out in the Strategy which I launched in July 2018. This assessment will take time and will be very competitive given the number and quality of applications received. I hope to be in a position to make allocations in Q2 2019.

Road Projects Status

896. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status and timeline of completion of the N73 national secondary road realignment. [54128/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the planning, design and construction of individual roads is a matter for the relevant road authority in relation to local and regional roads, or for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) in conjunction with the local authorities concerned, in relation to national roads.

Noting the above position, I have referred your question to TII for a direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Departmental Expenditure

897. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the cost incurred by his Department in 2018 for the use of taxi services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54218/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): In 2018 my Department incurred costs of €13,196.86 for the use of taxi services.

National Transport Authority

898. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will report on the exclusion of taxis from the publication by the National Transport Authority entitled Operation Open City 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54249/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area. Furthermore, under the provisions of the *Taxi Regulation Act 2013*, the NTA is the Regulator of the small public service vehicle (SPSV) sector.

Given the role of the NTA in this regard, I have referred the Deputy's question to the Authority for direct reply. Please contact my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 days.

Departmental Reports

899. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the progress to date for each of the 41 action points made in the mobile phone and broadband taskforce report published in December 2016 in which his Department has lead or joint responsibility for

implementing; if each such action point has been completed, not completed or is ongoing, respectively; and the revised deadlines for action points not delivered by the original timeframes set out in tabular form. [54282/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): My Department participates in the Mobile Phone and Broadband Task Force Implementation Group. This Group meets quarterly and publishes progress reports each quarter. The Reports are available on the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment website and also on the website of the Department of Rural and Community Development. In addition, a 2017 Implementation Review was published on 21 February 2018.

These reports detail progress with the actions outlined in the original Mobile Phone and Broadband Task Force in addition to new actions outlined in the 2018 Work Programme. A number of the actions for which my Department has lead responsibility have already been delivered while significant progress has been made with others.

Regional Airports

900. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when a decision will be taken in relation to the application submitted on behalf of Waterford Airport, Waterford City and County Council and other interested investors to extend the runway at the airport; if the necessary extra capital of €5 million will be provide to facilitate the extension; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54334/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware, no scheduled air services have operated out of Waterford Airport since June 2016. Accordingly, no capital funding from the Regional Airports Programme (RAP) has been provided to the airport since that time and grant aid towards operational expenses ceased from 2017. In December 2016, I advised the airport that it would be untenable for my Department to continue to disburse taxpayers' money to an airport where no scheduled passenger services were operating. As a result of the foregoing, Waterford Airport advised the Department of its challenging financial state in December 2017.

On foot of requests made by the airport, and to ensure that there would be no disruption to the Coast Guard's Search and Rescue (SAR) service, I sanctioned the provision of €750,000 in grant funding to the airport last year. Two payments of €375,000 were made to the airport in January and December. These were exceptional measures and were provided to allow time for appropriate consideration of the issues arising at Waterford Airport.

In light of the situation outlined, my Department procured the services of independent consultants, Ernst & Young (EY) to advise on the future options for the airport. As part of this review, EY have considered the application submitted by the airport to extend its runway, which included a request for Exchequer support.

In early October 2018, at a meeting of Government, I updated my Cabinet colleagues on the process to consider future options for Waterford Airport. Following that meeting, a copy of the review was provided to the airport and it is my intention, upon receipt and consideration of any views received from the airport by my Department, to bring proposals on the matter to Government.

Road Traffic Legislation

901. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to introduce legislation that would result in driving disqualifications for persons convicted of illegal dumping while using a vehicle; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54357/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Driving disqualifications under road traffic law are imposed to address serious breaches of that law from a road safety perspective. To introduce such a sanction for non-road safety related offences, such as using a mechanically propelled vehicle in the course of illegal dumping activities, would not be in the interests of promoting the safe use of our roads.

Road Safety

902. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will engage with TII to secure the installation of temporary traffic lights to allow the safe crossing of schoolgoing children over a bridge with the least impact on through traffic on the bridge over the Owenriff River on the N59 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54358/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the operation, improvement and maintenance 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 direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Road Projects Status

903. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 902 of 6 November 2018, the timeline for an agreed design for upgrade works on the N11; when works will commence on each identified phase; when all works will be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54370/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As I have already explained, in my role as Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the planning, design and construction of individual roads is a matter for the relevant road authority in relation to local and regional roads, or for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) in conjunction with the local authorities concerned, in relation to national roads.

Noting the above position, I have referred your question to TII for a direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Road Projects Status

904. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the M20 Cork to Limerick motorway; the estimated timeframe for the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54394/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the planning, design and operation of individual roads is a matter for the relevant road authority in relation to local and regional roads, or for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) in conjunction with the local authorities concerned, in relation to national roads.

Noting the above position, I have referred the question to TII for a direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Transport Policy

905. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the Cork metropolitan area transport strategy will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54431/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Deputy will be aware that the draft Cork Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy is currently being finalised by Cork City Council and Cork County Council, in partnership with the National Transport Authority (NTA). The strategy will provide a framework for the planning and delivery of transport infrastructure and services across the Cork Metropolitan Area, for the period up to 2040.

The strategy will include a range of proposed transport interventions across all modes of transport, along with complementary measures including transport demand management, Intelligent Transport Systems and Park and Ride.

I understand from the NTA that a draft Transport Strategy will be published for public consultation in the first quarter of this year. The purpose of this consultation process will be to elicit feedback on any issues or concerns arising in relation to the various proposals. The strategy will then be finalised in light of feedback received.

Departmental Expenditure

906. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount spent by his Department on third party public relations advice, communications advice, online advertising and public awareness campaigns to date in 2018 and to date 2019, by month and company engaged in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54446/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Information on all contracts and external expenditure is published on my Department's website and can be found at the following link: www.dttas.ie/corporate/english/expenditure-external-services.

The information is published on a six monthly basis. The second part of 2018 (July to December) will be published in quarter one of 2019.

Departmental Expenditure

907. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the budget and spend in his Department for marketing, media and social media in each of the years 2016 to 2018; the projected spend for 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54472/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Information on all external expenditure is published on my Department's website and can be found at the following link: www.dthttp://wtas.ie/corporate/english/expenditure-external-services.

The information is published on a six monthly basis. The second part of 2018 (July to December) will be published early in 2019.

Just to note my Department has no expenditure on social media including Facebook and Twitter. It is currently not the Department's intention to have any social media expenditure in 2019.

Departmental Staff Data

908. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of staff in his Department employed to work on marketing, media and social media in 2018. [54489/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): In 2018, my Department's Press Office had 3 full time staff who dealt with media queries. My Department additionally had 2 full-time equivalent staff working on Communications. My Department does not employ staff to work on marketing or social media. In addition, one of my Special Advisers appointed under section 11 of the Public Service Management Act 1997 works primarily on matters relating to press and communications.

Bus Éireann Services

909. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the recent service issues with the 109B bus route through Kilmessan, County Meath will be investigated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54490/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue raised is a matter for Bus Éireann and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the company for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Roads Maintenance

910. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of an application (details supplied) by Leitrim County Council under the low cost safety scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54525/18]

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 the Council's own resources supplemented by State road grants.

When applications for funding under the Department's Safety Improvement Scheme are invited local authorities are asked to submit applications in order of priority. In this context it is up to each local authority to decide its priorities. Allocations are made by the Department taking into account the terms applying to the Scheme and the available budget.

The applications received under the Safety Improvement Scheme, including the junction on the R201 Mohill to Carrick on Shannon road at Laheenamona R201/LS7483 Junction at Us-saun, are under consideration at present. The regional and local road grant allocations will be announced shortly.

Ferry Services

911. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the decision of a company (details supplied) to withdraw its service between Rosslare and France; his views on whether its decision reflects the need for the development of Rosslare Europort; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54526/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Irish Ferries is a private sector company that operates international ferry services from Ireland and it is one of the ferry companies that sail from Rosslare Europort. As part of its business at that port in 2018, Irish Ferries ran three weekly sailings to France (Cherbourg or Roscoff) between April to October, but in December the company announced that it is unlikely to have a ferry service from Rosslare to France in 2019. The company has indicated that its service between Dublin Port and Cherbourg best serves its customers' needs, and it has stated that its investment of €150m on a new ship to provide ferry services between Ireland and France will significantly increase its year-round freight capacity between the two countries and increase the company's summer tourism capacity by 20%.

The Deputy will understand that decisions by ferry operators – including Irish Ferries – in relation to their provision, alteration or suspension of services are operating and commercial decisions of these private companies, subject to any appropriate regulatory frameworks.

Within this overall context, I met the CEO of Irish Ferries earlier this month and discussed the company's announced decision.

The Deputy also asks about Rosslare Europort. As he is aware, the port is owned by Iarnród Éireann and operated and managed as a division of that company which is a commercial State body. As Minister, I am not involved in the management or operations.

Iarnród Éireann has recently completed a detailed report on the development potential of Rosslare and a €15 million plan to transform Rosslare Europort has been approved by the board of Irish Rail. Investment in the port is a matter for the company and Iarnród Éireann is currently examining how it will raise the capital necessary for planned investment. As the Deputy will be aware from previous questions, Iarnród Éireann and Rosslare Europort briefed my Department late last year on the company's plans for strategic development of the port over the coming years.

Separately, I recognise that Brexit will have implications for a number of key ports and airports, and Rosslare continues to work closely with my Department and a range of other relevant Government Departments and Offices in preparing for the additional border controls that will arise from Brexit. In this context, my Department has met Rosslare Port management on a number of occasions over the past year, most recently yesterday, about the infrastructure requirements of the Port in connection with Brexit. My Department has also been meeting ferry and shipping companies regarding their plans for dealing with the challenges of Brexit, including meeting with Irish Ferries last week.

Road Projects Status

912. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the M20 motorway, Macroom bypass and the Dunkettle interchange road projects; the stage at which these projects are; and the estimated completion date on each. [54531/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the planning, design and operation of individual roads is a matter for the relevant road authority (i.e. local authority) in relation to local and regional roads, or for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), in conjunction with the local authorities concerned, in relation to national roads.

Noting the above position, I have referred the question to TII for a direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Military Aircraft Landings

913. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 557, 559 and 560 of 23 October 2018, the basis upon which he provides figures of monthly or annual troop movements in view of the fact that his Department is not in a position to supply the number of troops carried as passengers per flight. [54558/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Under the Air Navigation (Carriage of Munitions of War, Weapons and Dangerous Goods) Order, my Department is responsible for processing applications for permits to allow for the carriage of munitions by civil aircraft through Irish sovereign airspace or Irish airports. The carriage or transit of military personnel does not fall within the scope or remit of the Order.

For statistics relating to passengers movements through Irish Airports, including military personnel, my Department would generally rely on statistics collated and provided by the airport concerned, in this case the Shannon Airport Authority.

Air Services Provision

914. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to address the pricing comparisons between companies (details supplied) and the times for the flights; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1003/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): In the context of the common rules for the operation of air services in the EU, regulation 1008/2008 Article 22(1) provides that air carriers shall freely set air fares and air rates for intra-Community air services. The Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport has no function in respect to the setting of air fares or the schedules of air services which are wholly commercial matters for the airlines.

Transport Infrastructure Ireland

915. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will investigate with the rural link section of Transport Infrastructure Ireland whether there is a feasibility to develop a Sligo to Dromahair, County Leitrim link which would incorporate a

stop for students attending a college (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1004/19]

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

Public Transport Provision

916. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a public transport system will be provided for persons at a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1037/19]

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

Civil Aviation Regulation

917. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the licensing and registration of all drones and drone owners; his plans to make a 10 sq. km exclusion zone for drones around airports in the interest of public safety; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1100/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The new EU Regulation 2018/1139 on common rules in the field of civil aviation, provides for the regulation of drones and drone operators, including licensing and registration. This Regulation lays down detailed standards for all aspects of the design and operation of drones, and the first set of implementing rules for the operation of drones is currently being developed.

Until these new pan-European rules enter into force, the Irish Aviation Authority (IAA) will continue to apply the existing national regulatory requirements in accordance with S.I. 563 of 2015 for the registration and operation of drones.

Ireland is to the forefront in regulating drone use and was one of the first States globally to require the registration of drones in 2015. Ireland remains one of only a small number of EU States that currently has a drone registration system in place.

Currently, all drones operating in the State with a mass of 1 kg or greater are required to be registered via a portal on the IAA Website. Registration is also required for drones with a mass of less than 1 kg, where the operator wishes to fly at or above 15 metres above the ground (or water). When a drone is registered, there are restrictions where it may be flown and it is limited to an operating height of 120 metres above the ground (or water), unless specifically permitted by the IAA.

S.I. 563 of 2015 sets the requirements for drone operations in the vicinity of aerodromes. For aerodromes within controlled airspace, such as Dublin, Cork, Shannon and Ireland West at Knock, S.I. 563 of 2015 prohibits the operation of drones except as permitted by the IAA.

For aerodromes in uncontrolled airspace, such as Kilkenny, Abbeyshrule and Birr, a drone

may not be operated within 5 km of an aerodrome during periods of aircraft operations, unless the aerodrome operator or the IAA has given permission.

Currently the IAA has prescribed two methods for permitting the operation of drones within controlled airspace.

- Aeronautical Notice U 02 – provides for a permission to be obtained from the IAA for drone operations within controlled airspace, under strict conditions. This specific operating permission can provide for managed drone operations in close proximity to an aerodrome, and will only be issued to IAA approved drone operator organisations.

- Aeronautical Notice U 04, which permits the operation of registered drones, from surface to 50 feet above ground level, without a specific operating permission in certain areas within controlled airspace. These areas are depicted in the Notice and are outside the vicinity of aerodromes by a minimum of 3000 metres. The no fly zones associated with these aerodromes vary in dimension. The extent of these dimensions have been derived using a risk based approach coupled with ICAO Annex 14 aeronautical surface penetration calculation criteria.

Cycling Policy

918. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the measures he plans to take to improve the protection of cyclists on roads and streets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1101/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy may be aware I have secured significant improved funding allocations over the period 2018-2021 which will benefit and protect both cyclists and walkers.

These improved allocations over this period include:

- €110 million specifically dedicated to cycling and walking infrastructure in our major urban areas;

- €135 million for sustainable urban transport measures;

- €750 million towards the BusConnects programme in Dublin which will include the delivery of around 200 kilometres of segregated cycling lanes, where possible; and

- €53 million to support the development of new Greenways.

In addition to the above, Government has also made additional money available for cycling projects through both the Urban and Rural Regeneration and Development Funds under the National Development Plan.

The impact of this improved funding is evidenced by the approximate 30% increase to be provided in 2019 under my Department's 'cycling and walking' and 'sustainable urban transport' programmes as compared to 2018's expenditure.

The Deputy will also be aware that I have requested the National Transport Authority establish a new Cycling Delivery Office this year in order to optimise delivery of new cycling infrastructure in line with the significantly increased funding that is being provided.

I am also delighted to say that a number of significant cycling projects will commence work across the Greater Dublin Area and beyond in 2019 which will be of great benefit, once

completed, to the increasing numbers of people who choose cycling as their preferred mode of transport.

As well as these infrastructure improvements, the increased funding I am making available will also allow for the expansion of the Cycle Right training programme in primary schools with an additional 5,000 school children expected to take part as compared to 2018. While other behavioural change programmes, such as Green Schools and Workplace and Campus Smarter Travel, will continue to be funded in line with commitments.

Furthermore my Department is in constant communication with the Road Safety Authority (RSA) about matters of safety. The RSA's 'Cycle Smart, Cycle Safe' campaign directly addressed safety issues for cyclists, while a recent TV led campaign calls on motorists to keep a safe distance when overtaking cyclists on urban and rural roads.

In the area of legislation, I have brought through a number of proposals such as the Road Safety Act 2016 which allows for 20 km/h speed limits to be set by local authorities in residential areas. My Department is proposing to build on the existing legislation in relation to dangerous overtaking which will, in particular, specifically target those drivers who put cyclists at risk.

I believe that the measures and the multi-annual capital expenditure programmes outlined above will positively assist with the better development and provision of cycling infrastructure across the State while improving the safety for all road users.

Road Projects Status

919. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the funding which has been allocated and the estimated cost of the southern distributor road; and if funding will be allocated for it in 2019. [1104/19]

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. Details of the regional and local road grant allocations and payments to local authorities are outlined in the regional and local road grant booklets which are available in the Dáil Library.

The current estimated cost of the Portlaoise Southern Circular Road, to which I assume the Deputy is referring, is €7 million.

In relation to 2019 expenditure, the allocations are expected to be announced shortly.

Brexit Issues

920. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if all relevant information and communications technology infrastructure will be in place at all ports and airports by 29 March 2019 in the event of a no-deal Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1131/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Additional customs, agriculture and health controls will be required for trade with the UK once the UK leaves the EU.

The responsibility for information and communications technology infrastructure underpinning these controls in ports and airports lies with departments and agencies responsible for those controls.

The Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine is responsible for regulation of the agriculture, fisheries, and food industries and monitoring and controlling aspects of food safety through national and EU legislation. I am advised that Department has established a project team to coordinate the identification and delivery of ICT Infrastructure and systems to support the additional requirements of staff engaged in control processes in Dublin Port and Dublin Airport, and other relevant locations in the event of an orderly, or disorderly Brexit. This team is in the process of sourcing and configuring additional ICT Equipment and enhancing existing software systems to support new requirements.

That Department is also working closely with OPW, Government Networks and a number of Telecom providers to ensure there is adequate network connectivity in place. Obviously the delivery timelines in the event of a disorderly Brexit are extremely challenging and I understand the officials in that Department are working with the greatest urgency to ensure the required ICT services are in place by 29th March.

As part of their preparations for Brexit, I am advised by Revenue that priority has been given to upgrading relevant IT systems to have the most advanced systems possible to support and facilitate smooth and efficient trade flows in a post-Brexit environment. Revenue has advised that performance testing is at an advanced stage and based on testing and the work completed to date, Revenue is confident that their various IT systems will support the expected additional workload arising from Brexit. In the event of a no-deal scenario and if required, the upgrades and enhancements to the systems will be ready for March 2019.

To facilitate import controls by the Environmental Health Service at Dublin Airport, Dublin Port and Rosslare Port, the HSE is currently making every effort to ensure that the necessary information and communications technology infrastructure will be in place by 29th March 2019.

Brexit Issues

921. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans or actions to mitigate against the delays to the land bridge that are anticipated in the event of a no-deal Brexit scenario; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1132/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): A substantial proportion of Ireland's exports and imports are transported by truck on Roll-on/Roll-Off ferries to/from the UK for direct UK trade, and onwards via the road and ports network in the UK to EU ports - mainly the port of Calais. This trade is at present relatively frictionless as it is all within the Single Market. However, when the UK leaves the EU, there is concern that the additional customs, agriculture and health controls required for trade with a third country could significantly disrupt our transport connectivity to the UK, and via the UK, to our international markets.

The main pinch-points likely to affect Irish businesses are at Dublin and Rosslare ports, the Port of Holyhead, and the Dover-Calais link. This latter route is favoured by many importers and exporters seeking to transport goods that are perishable or time sensitive on the quickest and most reliable route available. Currently, OPW and other relevant Departments are working to establish the required controls at Dublin port, Rosslare port and Dublin Airport for both a central case and a no-deal scenario.

A major concern is also the impact on the Dover – Calais link. Congestion on this link could considerably disrupt the €21 billion of Irish trade that crosses the UK landbridge and could mean that certain of our goods simply can no longer realistically reach their markets in a timely manner.

The Government's contingency action plan published in 2019 sets out the actions being taken within our ports, with the European Commission and with other similarly affected Member States. In addition, I have today briefed the Government on the existing maritime capacity for direct sailings between Ireland and continental EU ports as a potential alternative route for trade currently using the landbridge.

Sports Capital Programme Data

922. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the projects and funding allocations granted to clubs and organisations across an area (details supplied) since the sports capital programme was re-established in 2011; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1146/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Sports Capital Programme is the primary vehicle for Government support for the development of sports and physical recreation facilities and the purchase of non-personal sports equipment throughout the country.

While the Department does not collate information on the basis of local electoral areas, details of all allocations since 1998 on a county basis are published on my Department's website at www.dttas.ie/sport/english/sports-capital-programme-awards-new.

National Transport Authority

923. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when he expects the NTA to publish a transport plan for Newbridge, County Kildare which was due to be published at the end of 2018; the timeline for the plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1160/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have no statutory function in relation to the development of the transport plan in question.

I understand however that there has been engagement between the local authority and the National Transport Authority (NTA) in relation to the plan and I have therefore referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for consideration and direct reply.

Please notify my office if you have not received a response within 10 working days.

Swimming Pool Programme

924. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to provide a 50 m swimming pool in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1183/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Local Authority Swimming Pool Programme (LASPP), as operated by my Department, provides grant aid to local authorities towards the capital costs of new swimming pools or the refurbishment of existing pools. To date 51 pools have been completed and four swimming pool projects remain in the current LASPP. The priority this year will be on advancing these four projects and sufficient resources are available to cover these commitments.

In relation to the future development of large sport infrastructure projects including swimming pools, the National Development Plan confirmed the establishment of a new Large Scale Sport Infrastructure Fund (LSSIF) with at least €100m available over the coming years. The new scheme opened for applications on 19th November and the closing date for applications is the 17th April 2019. Full details of the scheme and application forms are available on my Department's website at <http://www.dttas.ie/sport/english/large-scale-sport-infrastructure-fund-lssif>. Initially, the scheme has a particular focus on National Governing Bodies of Sport and Local Authorities. New swimming pool projects will be considered under the scheme.

Sports Capital Programme Administration

925. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when successful candidates of a programme (details supplied) will be notified; and the status of same. [1191/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The 2018 round of the Sports Capital Programme opened for applications on Friday 7 September and the application period closed on Friday 19th October. By that deadline, a record 2,337 applications were submitted seeking a total of €162m in funding.

187 of these applications are for projects that were deemed invalid under the 2017 round of the programme that have now submitted corrected documents. These applications are being assessed first and it is planned to make allocations to this category early this year.

For the first time, applicants who have submitted incorrect documentation under this round will be given the opportunity to correct their application during the assessment period. While there will be no undue delay in completing the assessment process, in view of the opportunity to correct documentation, the record number of applications received and the detailed information contained in each application, it is likely to take a number of months to have all applications assessed. Accordingly, I expect that it will be at least the second quarter of this year before the full set of allocations under this current round of the programme are announced.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

926. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a club (details supplied) is included as one of the 187 submissions to the sports capital programme deemed invalid under the 2017 round of the programme and that have now submitted a correct application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1194/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The Sports Capital Programme (SCP) is the primary vehicle for Government support for the development of sports and physical recreation facilities and the purchase of non-personal sports equipment throughout the country.

Applicants that were deemed invalid under the 2017 round of the SCP were invited to correct their applications and have them considered as part of the 2018 round of the Programme. While the club referred to by the Deputy was one of the organisations given this opportunity, the club instead decided to submit a new application. The deadline for the 2018 round of the programme was the 19th October and by that date a record 2,337 applications were submitted seeking a total of €162m in funding.

For the first time, applicants who have submitted incorrect documentation under this round will be given the opportunity to correct their application during the assessment period. While there will be no undue delay in completing the assessment process, in view of the opportunity to correct documentation, the record number of applications received and the detailed information contained in each application, it is likely to take a number of months to have all applications assessed. Accordingly, I expect that it will be at least the second quarter of this year before the full set of allocations under this current round of the programme are announced.

Driver Test Waiting Lists

927. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the waiting list times for the driver test centres in Limerick city; the number of persons on the list in each driving test centre in Limerick City; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1200/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): This is a matter for the Road Safety Authority. I have referred the question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response is not received within 10 days.

Road Projects Status

928. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of progress to date of road projects (details supplied); if each is at planning, design or construction phase; the phases expected to be completed in 2019; the 2018 and 2019 allocations to each project; the spend to date on each project; the estimated cost of completing each project; and the provisional timetable for completion of each project in tabular form. [1248/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the planning, design and construction of individual roads is a matter for the relevant road authority (i.e. local authority) in relation to local and regional roads, or for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), in conjunction with the local authorities concerned, in relation to national roads.

Noting the above position, I have referred the question to TII for a direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

In the case of the Sallins Bypass the construction works are being undertaken by the same contractor who is responsible for the M7 Naas to Newbridge Bypass widening and the main works are under one contract.

Road Projects Status

929. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of progress to date of road projects (details supplied); if each is at planning, design or construction phase; the phases expected to be completed in 2019; the 2018 and 2019 allocations to each project; the spend to date on each project; the estimated cost of completing each project; and the provisional timetable for completion of each project in tabular form. [1249/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the planning, design and construction of individual national roads is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Noting the above position, I have referred the question to TII for a direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Regarding the A5 the planning and implementation of the A5 upgrade project is the responsibility of the Northern Ireland authorities. In this context it will be for the Northern Ireland authorities to consider how to proceed in light of the recent outcome of judicial review proceedings regarding the scheme.

The current funding arrangements in relation to the A5 are governed by the Stormont House Agreement and Implementation Plan - A Fresh Start. This Agreement reaffirmed the Government's commitment to provide funding of £50 million for the A5 project and committed an additional £25 million towards the cost of Phase 1 of the project (Newbuildings to north of Strabane).

Road Projects Status

930. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of progress to date of road projects (details supplied); if each is at planning, design or construction phase; the phases expected to be completed in 2019; the 2018 and 2019 allocations to each project; the spend to date on each project; the estimated cost of completing each project; and the provisional timetable for completion of each project in tabular form. [1250/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the planning, design and construction of individual national roads is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Noting the above position, I have referred the question to TII for a direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Road Projects Status

931. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of progress to date of road projects (details supplied); if each is at planning, design or construction phase; the phases expected to be completed in 2019; the 2018 and 2019 allocations to each project; the spend to date on each project; the estimated cost of completing each project; and the provisional timetable for completion of each project in tabular form. [1251/19]

932. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status

of progress to date of road projects (details supplied); if each is at planning, design or construction phase; the phases expected to be completed in 2019; the 2018 and 2019 allocations to each project; the spend to date on each project; the estimated cost of completing each project; and the provisional timetable for completion of each project in tabular form. [1252/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 931 and 932 together.

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. Each local authority is the contracting authority for the purpose of implementation of regional and local road improvement projects.

Under the National Development Plan, my Department is committed at present to providing grant funding towards the cost of 12 significant capital road improvement schemes. The status and current estimated cost for each of these schemes is set out in the following table.

Name of Project	Estimated Cost of Project €m	Project Completion Date	Stage of Project Life-cycle
R407 Sallins By Pass	57	2020	Implementation/Construction
Coonagh to Knockalisheen	52	2022	Planning/design
Athy Southern Distributor Road	34	2023	Planning/design
Adamstown and Nangor Road Upgrade	18	2019	Implementation/Construction
Eastern Garavogue Bridge and Approach Road	26	2022	Planning/Design
Sligo Western Distributor Road	20	2020	Procurement
R498 Latteragh realignment	15	2021	Planning/design
Tralee Northern Relief Road	11	2021	Detailed Appraisal Phase
Portlaoise Southern Distributor Road	7	2019	Implementation/Construction
Laytown to Bettystown Link Road	5	2020	Planning/design
Dingle Relief Road	4	2019	Implementation/Construction
Shannon Crossing/Kilalloe Bypass/R494 Upgrade	50	2023	Planning/design

As regards the Carrigaline Western Distributor Road, while my Department is not in a position to commit to grant funding the construction of the scheme at this point, the Department has been liaising with Cork County Council with a view to finalising an updated project appraisal. Cork County Council's application for funding for the scheme under the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund was successful and €750,000 has been allocated to the scheme in 2019 under that Fund.

As regards the R157, the R162 Navan to Kingscourt the Carlow Southern Link Road and the Thurles Relief Road these projects were mentioned in the National Development Plan as examples of projects which would be the subject of appraisal. A safety scheme on the R157 Castlefarm/Grange, Maynooth road has been implemented in 2018 and my Department is continuing to liaise with the relevant local authorities in relation to appraisal requirements in relation to these and other schemes.

Coast Guard Services

933. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if concerns have been raised regarding coastguard volunteers having been dismissed from their positions after raising safety issues; and the action he has taken on foot of the raising of such concerns. [1272/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Coast Guard has not dismissed volunteers as a result of raising safety issues. In fact, the IRCG consider this reporting culture as central to the effective management of safety within the organisation. The raising of safety concerns by volunteers is one which the Coast Guard encourages and there are structured systems in place to facilitate this.

The continual improvement in the management of safety issues within the volunteer Coast Guard Units is one which the Coast Guard is dedicated to. The on-going development of the safety management system within the Irish Coast Guard is one whereby all volunteers are duty bound to report, without unreasonable delay, safety issues of which they become aware.

Coast Guard Services

934. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on whether coastguard volunteers should be granted access to the Workplace Relations Commission or some other independent third party as a means of resolving internal disputes. [1273/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The jurisdiction of the Workplace Relations Commission is constrained by legislation to employment rights and information.

IRCG Volunteers are volunteers and not employees of the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport.

The definition of Volunteer as noted in the IRCG Code is that from The Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2011 which defines a 'Volunteer' as a person who does voluntary work that is authorised by a Volunteer organisation and does so without expectation of payment (other than reasonable reimbursement for expenses) or other reward. 'Volunteer organisation' means any body (whether or not incorporated) that is not formed for profit and that authorises the doing of voluntary work whether or not as the principal purpose of the organisation.

There is an independent HR Consultancy firm currently contracted by the Department to assist in resolving Coast Guard volunteer grievances using appropriate processes such as mediation.

Coast Guard Services

935. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on whether coastguard volunteers should have access to a national representative body to advocate for and represent their interests. [1274/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The IRCG is very keen to ensure the views of volunteers are heard and taken into account as they are a vital part in the development and delivery of the Search and Rescue service.

As the Deputy will understand, there is no representative union structure which they can access at a national level since they are not employees per se. However, there is already an existing body in place called the Coastal Unit Advisory Group (CUAG) which is made up of six members elected by the Units independently of management. The purpose of this group is to represent the views of all the Units. The six members are selected on a geographical basis and serve for a period of three years. At all times there should be representation from a coastal search, a boat and a cliff unit. The CUAG meets regularly with the national Volunteers Manager and annually with the IRCG Director. Additional meetings can be called by CUAG or management as necessary.

In addition to this, there are a variety of other avenues through which volunteers raise concerns and advocate their views on issues. These include regular “Sector meetings” in which the IRCG’s Coastal Unit Sector Manager for the particular area facilitates an open forum for the volunteers to raise issues. There are also Technical Advisory Committees (TAC’s) with volunteer representation to advise IRCG management on various technical matters such as personal protective equipment.

In 2019, IRCG also plan to meet with the units on a national basis 3 times a year which, coupled with the sector meetings, will provide additional opportunities for interaction and communication with Coast Guard management.

Road Projects Status

936. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the progress to date on the upgrade of the N26 road linking Ballina to the N5 in County Mayo as listed under page 40 of the National Development Plan 2018-2027; if the project is at planning, design or construction phase; the phases expected to be completed in 2019; the 2018 and 2019 allocations to the project; the spend to date on the project; the estimated cost of completing the project; and the provisional timetable for completion of this project. [1275/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the planning, design and construction of individual national roads is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Noting the above position, I have referred the question to TII for a direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Driver Test Waiting Lists

937. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the waiting period for practical driver tests in each of the driver test centres; and if he will make a

statement on the matter. [1327/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The information the Deputy requests is available on the Road Safety Authority website *www.rsa.ie*.

Driver Test Waiting Lists

938. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the efforts he is making to ensure there is a reduction in the overall number of persons waiting to sit a full driver licence test nationally; his plans to ensure more testers are employed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1345/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I accept that current waiting times remain high but I am assured that measures being put in place by the Road Safety Authority (RSA) will have the desired effect of reducing waiting times for the public. I have approved the appointment of 67 additional Driver Testers, on a phased basis for a period of 12-18 months, to address any surge in driving test applications due to the new legislation in relation to unaccompanied learner drivers. The first cohort of these Testers have been deployed to test centres to conduct driving tests, more Testers are currently in training.

The Authority is also undertaking initiatives in order to increase capacity to deliver extra driving tests. These initiatives include the delivery of 120 extra overtime tests per driver tester who participates, and systems to reduce the number of no-shows and non-conducted driving tests. The Authority plans to introduce a new test booking system in 2019 that will give test applicants much more control over their booking and appointment choice.

Driver Test Waiting Lists

939. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of persons to date on waiting lists for driver tests in Counties Cavan and Monaghan; the length of time they have been waiting in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1411/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): This is a matter for the Road Safety Authority. I have referred the question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response is not received within 10 days.

Tourism Promotion

940. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the steps he is taking to promote the origin of the festival of Samhain and Halloween in Rathcroghan, County Roscommon; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1413/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): My Department's role in relation to tourism lies in the area of developing national tourism policy, while the tourism agencies have operational responsibility for the implementation of this policy.

At agency level, the tourism potential of the various counties and regions is developed and promoted in line with the relevant tourism experience brands, which provide the overarching

context for related tourism product development, marketing and enterprise support. In the case of County Roscommon, this is Ireland's Hidden Heartlands, which, I believe, has very exciting potential to deliver sustainable growth for tourism in the region, resulting in higher revenue and additional jobs.

I have asked Fáilte Ireland to reply directly to the Deputy regarding their plans for County Roscommon generally and the Rathcroghan archaeological complex specifically, including anything aimed at promoting its historic, prehistoric or mythical connections. Please contact my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Wild Atlantic Way Project

941. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the cost to date of the Wild Atlantic Way cycle project under each heading in which payments have been made; if there is outstanding costs; the tendering process involved; the number of bidders that participated in the process; his plans for the future of the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1440/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): My Department's role in relation to tourism lies primarily in the area of national tourism policy. It is not directly involved in the development, management or promotion of particular tourism initiatives, which are matters for the tourism agencies.

With specific regard to the Wild Atlantic Way cycle sportif group participative event, which the Deputy kindly clarified is the cycle project referenced, this is an event initiated and supported by Fáilte Ireland. In that regard, although my Department provides funding to the agency for investment across a range of areas (including participative events and festivals), my Department has no involvement in the management of funding programmes or in related tendering or contractual processes.

Accordingly, I have asked Fáilte Ireland to reply directly to the Deputy in regard to the matters raised. Please contact my private office if you have not received a reply within ten working days.

Driver Licences

942. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will address a matter regarding the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1483/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The operation of the National Driver Licensing Service is the statutory responsibility of the Road Safety Authority, and I have no power to intervene in individual cases. I have therefore referred the Question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response has not been received within ten days.

Rail Services

943. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if Irish Rail is changing and-or upgrading its ticket machines at stations nationwide; and if all stations

that have staff selling tickets will get a new machine and continue to offer this facility. [1508/19]

944. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if some rail stations, including Castlebar, Claremorris and Ballina, County Mayo, will be losing their staff and will no longer have a machine at the end of March, start of April 2019, which allows staff members to sell tickets with only the self-service machines available. [1509/19]

945. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if Irish Rail plans to upgrade its ticket machines at the end of March 2019 or any time in 2019; and if Castlebar, Claremorris and Ballina, County Mayo, will be given a new machine to allow staff to continue to sell tickets to passengers. [1510/19]

946. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if Irish Rail plans to remove its staff from Castlebar, Claremorris and or Ballina train stations; and if staff will be moved or offered redundancy. [1511/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 943 to 946, inclusive, together.

As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport.

Operational matters such as those described by the Deputy are a matter for Iarnród Éireann, in consultation where appropriate with the National Transport Authority.

In light of the Iarnród Éireann's responsibilities on this matter, I have referred the Deputy's questions to it for a more detailed reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Road Network

947. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of incidents in which damage was caused to the Limerick tunnel due to oversized vehicles in each of the years 2010 to 2018; the cost of repair for each of these incidents in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1528/19]

948. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of times the Limerick tunnel was closed in each of the years 2010 to 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1529/19]

949. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of vehicles that used the Limerick tunnel in each of the years 2010 to 2018; the amount in revenue raised from tolls in each of these years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1530/19]

951. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount paid in respect of traffic guarantees to the operators of the Limerick tunnel in each of the years 2010 to 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1553/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 947 to 949, inclusive and 951 together.

As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the

planning, design and operation of individual roads is a matter for the relevant road authority in relation to local and regional roads, or for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) in conjunction with the local authorities concerned, in relation to national roads.

Noting the above position, I have referred the question to TII for a direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Civil Aviation Regulation

950. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the preventative measures put in place to ensure the flying of private drones does not interfere with the operation of Shannon Airport; if incidents in this regard have been reported to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1531/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The new EU Regulation 2018/1139 on common rules in the field of civil aviation, provides for the regulation of drones and drone operators, including licensing and registration. This Regulation lays down detailed standards for all aspects of the design and operation of drones and the first set of implementing rules for the operation of drones are currently being developed. Until these new pan-European rules enter into force, the Irish Aviation Authority (IAA) will continue to apply the existing national regulatory requirements in accordance with S.I. 563 of 2015 for registration and operation of drones.

Ireland is to the forefront in regulating drone use and was one of the first States globally to require the registration of drones in 2015. Ireland remains one of only a small number of EU States that currently have a drone registration system in place.

Currently all drones operating in the State with a mass of 1 kg or greater are required to be registered via a portal on the IAA website. Registration is also required for drones with a mass of less than 1 kg, where the operator wishes to fly at or above 15 metres above the ground (or water). When a drone is registered, there are restrictions where it may be flown and it is limited to an operating height of 120 metres above the ground (or water), unless specifically permitted by IAA.

For aerodromes within controlled airspace, such as Shannon Airport, S.I. No. 563 of 2015 prohibits the operation of drones except as permitted by the IAA.

Currently the IAA has prescribed two methods for permitting the operation of drones within controlled airspace -

- Aeronautical Notice U 02 – provides for a permission to be obtained from the IAA for drone operations within controlled airspace, under strict conditions. This specific operating permission can provide for managed drone operations in close proximity to an aerodrome, and will only be issued to IAA approved drone operator organisations.

- Aeronautical Notice U 04, which permits the operation of registered drones, from surface to 50 feet above ground level, without a specific operating permission in certain areas within controlled airspace. These areas are depicted in the Notice and are outside the vicinity of aerodromes by a minimum of 3000 metres. The no fly zones can vary in dimension. The extent of these dimensions have been derived using a risk based approach coupled with ICAO Annex 14 aeronautical surface penetration calculation criteria.

There has been no report of drone activity at Shannon Airport to date.

Sports Capital Programme

952. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when he expects to announce the results of allocations under the sports capital project. [1590/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin) (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The 2018 round of the Sports Capital Programme opened for applications on Friday 7 September 2018 and the application period closed on Friday 19th October. By that deadline, a record 2,337 applications were submitted seeking a total of €162m in funding.

187 of these applications are for projects that were deemed invalid under the 2017 round of the programme. In these cases, applicants were allowed submit corrected documents in order to make their applications valid. These applications are being assessed first and it is expected that allocations to this category of applicant will be announced shortly.

In relation to the new 2018 applications, for the first time, applicants who have submitted incorrect documentation under this round will be given the opportunity to correct their application during the assessment period. While there will be no undue delay in completing the assessment process, in view of the opportunity to correct documentation, the record number of applications received and the detailed information contained in each application, it is likely to take a number of months to have all applications assessed. Accordingly, I expect that it will be at least the second quarter of this year before the full set of allocations under this current round of the programme are announced.

Climate Change Policy

953. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount of underspend in the carbon reduction programme, B6, in his Department in 2018; the causes for the underspend; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1623/19]

954. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the projects and programmes which will be supported by the €7 million carbon reduction programme in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1624/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 953 and 954 together.

Transport has a critical yet challenging role to play in the national carbon reduction effort. It is a sector where fossil fuel use is firmly embedded and travel demand is growing significantly due to our economic recovery and growing population. Despite this demand growth, 2017 saw a very welcome fall in transport emissions for the first time in four years. Nevertheless, emission savings from technological advancements in improving vehicle efficiencies and new lower carbon fuels are being offset by strong growth in transport demand. Funding under the Carbon Reduction Programme has an important role to play in this mitigation effort, but it is only one element of a wider range of transport measures that are currently underway, including: developing a range of incentives to encourage a transition away from conventional fuels towards lower emitting alternatives, such as EVs; increasing the proportion of biofuels in fuel mix; improving efficiency standards for all EU vehicles; and of course the significantly enhanced funding I

am making available to support the development of new and improved public and sustainable transport infrastructure.

The National Development Plan outlines the €8.6 billion that will be invested in a range of projects such as:

- Maintenance and renewal of the heavy rail network;
- Improving PSO bus services and bus infrastructure in all major cities as part of the Bus-Connects programme;
- Electrifying the GDA commuter rail network and expanding services through the DART Expansion programme;
- Development of a new 26 kilometre metro service in Dublin under the MetroLink project;
- Enhanced LocalLink services in more rural areas; and
- An unprecedented level of investment in cycling and walking infrastructure across the State.

The investment planned under these various programmes will collectively enhance sustainable transport options for citizens across the State and encourage modal shift away from the private car. In 2018 alone approximately 19 million more journeys were taken on PSO-funded Public Transport nationally than in 2017, a rise of 7.5%. The Canal Cordon Count shows that the proportion of commuters who use public transport, cycling or walking to come into Dublin City during peak times has risen to approximately 70% (up from 59% in 2010). Modal shift is gathering momentum and the trend away from private car use is playing a key role in our mitigation response.

The Carbon Reduction Programme budget is intended for measures that are new, innovative and often associated with emerging technologies and research. Because such projects tend to take more time to develop, establish and gain acceptance, the programme used only €697,300 in 2018 as:

- Production delays deferred the delivery of nine hybrid buses until 2019;
- Procurement delays in facilitating a small scale pilot programme for alternatively fuelled rural buses. These costs will now arise in 2019 instead;
- Assessment of vehicle suitability by taxi drivers and the NTA meant that, as is often the case with the introduction of new grants, the Electric Small Public Service Vehicle (SPSV) grant payment rate early in the year was slow; however, the application rate increased as 2018 progressed and this improvement is expected to continue into 2019 as the Scheme becomes established in the sector; and finally
- For the EV Reduced Tolling Scheme cost drawdown only arises for four months of operation. Scheme invoices for November and December will not arise for payment until Q1 2019.

Considering the increased take-up and spend on the various schemes and projects in the later months of 2018, I expect a higher spend from the Carbon Reduction Programme in 2019 and I was delighted to be able to allocate €7 million in 2019 which will support five key areas:

1. Low Emission Bus Trials: The National Development Plan committed that from July 2019, no more diesel-only buses would be purchased for the urban bus fleet. In late 2018, my Department, together with the National Transport Authority and key urban operators, launched

a comprehensive set of bus trials with the objective of helping to further inform purchasing decisions for new buses over the coming years. The fuels and technologies to be tested include full electric, diesel-electric hybrids, hydrogen and compressed natural gas. The trials will assess CO2 emissions, impacts on air quality and the contribution potential towards sectoral renewable energy targets, as well as costs, vehicle availability and operational/infrastructural requirements. The trials are ongoing in Dublin and Cork, and it is expected that they will end in April 2019.

2. Electric Vehicle Reduced Tolling Scheme: The Electric Vehicle Reduced Tolling Scheme, launched in July 2018, allows drivers of EVs to apply for a discount in toll fares. Battery electric vehicles (BEV) are eligible for a 50% toll discount and plug-in hybrid electric vehicles (PHEV) are eligible for a 25% discount up to a maximum value of €500, with higher levels of discount available across certain toll roads during off-peak journeys.

3. Electric Small Public Service Vehicle (SPSV) Grant Scheme: The Electric SPSV Grant Scheme was launched in April 2018 and supports drivers in the taxi, hackney and limousine sector who wish to transition to an electric vehicle. Under this scheme, up to €7,000 or €3,500 towards the purchase of a BEV or PHEV respectively can be granted to a successful applicant.

4. Cost differential for purchasing low-emission vehicles for the public transport sector: Funding under the Carbon Reduction Programme is also available to support projects undertaken by PSO operators to support the transition towards deployment of low carbon technologies in public transport. It may be used to cover the price differential between a conventionally fuelled vehicle and an alternatively fuelled vehicle.

5. Research: Mitigation measures for transport emissions are constantly under review in a rapidly developing and technologically evolving sector, and new and innovative measures are always being considered. In support of evidence building DTTAS co-funds transport and climate research, with four projects currently underway (three with the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland and one with the Environmental Protection Agency) examining subjects such as behavioural change and the decarbonisation of the freight sector.

Road Projects

955. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the details on the work initiated for the delivery of the M20 motorway, Cork to Limerick; and the amount of money spent in the past 12 months. [1628/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the planning, design and construction of individual national roads is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Noting the above position, I have referred your question to TII for a direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Rural Transport Services Provision

956. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the details of night-time Rural Link services available; and the details of services which were re-

quested and are not available. [1629/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport.

The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for securing the provision of public passenger transport services nationally. It also has national responsibility for integrated local and rural transport, including management of the Rural Transport Programme (RTP) which now operates under the Local Link brand.

In light of the NTA's responsibilities in this matter I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Brexit Issues

957. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the contingency plans being put in place, planned or considered should there be a no-Brexit deal at the end of March 2019 in relation to goods and vehicles exiting and entering ports at Cork and Rosslare. [1630/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): A major impact on ports and airports that trade with the UK will be the additional customs, agriculture and health controls required to be in place within those locations once the UK leaves the EU.

Since last summer an interdepartmental group – including the Revenue Commissioners, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and the Department of Health, along with the Office of Public Works – has been meeting to prepare the measures required at ports and airports. The Group is now chaired by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

Following an initial assessment of the potential impacts of Brexit taking account of their trading levels with the UK, the group focused its work on the Ports of Dublin and Rosslare and Dublin airport. Other ports and airports, with less of a reliance on the UK market, are each reviewing and planning for Brexit as part of their ongoing internal operational planning. This includes the Port of Cork.

In relation to Rosslare Port, the work of the group has included identifying the staffing, IT, infrastructural and operational requirements at the port. The Government's contingency action plan published in December 2018 sets out the actions being undertaken to implement the measures required. Planning for both the central case and a no-deal case are taking place in parallel. In relation to the no-deal planning, the OPW and relevant Departments, including my Department, are liaising with Rosslare in order to ensure that the necessary staffing, ICT and site and infrastructure requirements are in place by 29 March 2019.

Road Toll Operators

958. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the volume of cars using the M3 Clonee to Kells route on a daily basis; the amount of money generated daily by tolls at junctions (details supplied); the operating profits of a company from the stretch of road in the past five years; the amount of State subsidies paid to the company regarding the

route in the past five years; the terms and conditions governing the payment of State subsidies to the company; the length of time such State subsidies are to be paid; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1632/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the planning, design and operation of individual roads is a matter for the relevant road authority in relation to local and regional roads, or for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) in conjunction with the local authorities concerned in relation to national roads.

Noting the above position, I have referred the question to TII for a direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Road Improvement Schemes

959. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when Transport Infrastructure Ireland plans to go to construction stage on the N73 at Annakisha and Waterdyke, County Cork. [1633/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the planning, design and construction of individual roads is a matter for the relevant road authority in relation to local and regional roads, or for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) in conjunction with the local authorities concerned in relation to national roads.

Noting the above position, I have referred your question to TII for a detailed, direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Public Transport Provision

960. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O’Mahony** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding the provision of wheelchair accessible public transport in west County Cork specifically the Bus Éireann service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1646/19]

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. I do not have responsibility for the day-to-day operations of public transport services.

The National Transport Authority has statutory responsibility for securing the provision of public passenger transport services nationally, as well as functional responsibility for promoting the development of an integrated, accessible public transport network.

However, as the Deputy in this instance is referring to a specific Bus Éireann service, I have forwarded her question to Bus Éireann for direct reply to her. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

Motor Insurance Costs

961. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the future motor insurance premiums charged for learner drivers, be they car owners or users in view of the recent additions of amendments to the Road Traffic Acts; and the steps he will take with insurance companies for a reduction of these premiums. [1649/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I presume that the recent changes to legislation relating to learner drivers, to which the Deputy is referring, are those included in the Road Traffic (Amendment) Act 2018 which were commenced before Christmas. These changes involve two measures. The first is a provision to hold accountable owners of vehicles who allow unaccompanied learners to drive their vehicles. The second extends the existing Garda power to detain vehicles in certain circumstances by adding the circumstance where the driver is an unaccompanied learner.

I do not see how either of these should negatively affect the cost of motor insurance. It is already a criminal offence for a learner to drive unaccompanied, and has been since 2007. The new measures in question are intended to increase Garda enforcement powers in this area and act as a deterrent to the highly dangerous practice of learners driving unaccompanied. As such, the new measures should make our roads safer.

Road Traffic Legislation

962. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 468 of 8 March 2018, if he will reconsider the issue. [1650/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As I outlined to the Deputy in response to his earlier question, the obstacle facing his proposal is that “over the counter” breathalyser kits are not necessarily reliable. These kits are not produced to the same exacting standards as the devices used by An Garda Síochána, which cost several hundred euro each and are carefully selected, tested and approved by the Medical Bureau of Road Safety.

As accuracy and reliability are paramount in the enforcement of drink driving limits, the Department’s position on this issue has not changed. Finally, it is important that there be no ambiguity on the fundamental principle: one should never ever drink and drive.

Driver Licences

963. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the processing time for exchanging a driver licence issued by authorities in the United Kingdom to an Irish driver licence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1652/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): On average, 98.5% of applications for the issue or renewal of a driving licence made to the National Driver Licence Service (NDLS) are processed within 3 days of receipt. Where an application is made for a foreign exchange, then the foreign licence must be validated before the exchange is made. In the majority of cases, the validation can be done instantly by checking the physical licence where the physical licence is submitted as part of the application or by checking the Driver Licensing Resper system (a European system where EU licences can be checked).

Road Traffic Legislation

964. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will address a matter (details supplied) with regard to new legislation on drink driving; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1681/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): It is the responsibility of every driver to educate themselves about the current drink driving limits. The Rules of the Road, a document with which every driver should be very familiar, clearly state that there is no reliable way to tell how much any given individual can drink before exceeding the legal limit as it varies depending on the specific circumstances as well individual biochemistry. This point has been repeatedly underlined by scientific experts in the field. In light of this, there are no concrete “facts” to be publicly circulated about how long it takes to process a standard drink, and it would be unhelpful and misleading of my Department or any arm of Government to attempt to do so. I am aware that drinkaware.ie, which is a national not-for-profit organisation funded by voluntary donations from supporters including producers and distributors of alcohol, does attempt to provide some guidance on this topic.

My Department, the Road Safety Authority and the Medical Bureau of Road Safety share a very clear position on this matter: the only guaranteed way to stay safely below the drink driving limit is to never ever drink and drive.

The Deputy refers to a specific company, which is licensed as a dispatch operator in Ireland and which, in other countries, provides a ridesharing service. As you know, the National Transport Authority (NTA) as Regulator of the small public service vehicle sector has regulatory oversight of the sector, 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 ridesharing services should also be determined in the context of these important objectives. My Department continues to keep abreast of emerging technologies and is open to considering innovative initiatives.

Bus Services

965. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if funding will be made available during the construction of the Lucan to city centre core bus corridor to provide a grade segregated intersection at the Kennelsfort Road intersection; if South Dublin County Council and the NTA will liaise to ensure this intersection is addressed during this project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1721/19]

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. In that regard the Deputy will be aware that, as stated in the National Development Plan, I have secured an indicative allocation of €2 billion to provide for the National Transport Authority’s (NTA) implementation of its BusConnects Dublin programme.

The NTA has published an emerging preferred route for the Lucan to City Centre Core Bus Corridor and those proposals are open for public consultation and I would encourage the Deputy to make his views known through that consultation process. I also understand a public consultation event on the proposals for this Corridor is scheduled for 16 January.

Noting the NTA’s responsibility in the matter, I have referred the Deputy’s question to the NTA for a more detailed reply. Please contact my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 days.

Road Improvement Schemes

966. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a matter (details supplied) will be referred to TII for its attention; if it can give a commitment to review the situation and implement measures to improve a road; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1726/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the construction, improvement and maintenance 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 direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Departmental Correspondence

967. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the customer complaints received by his Department in each of the years since 2016; if the complaints are grouped into categories; the nature of the complaints; the resolution of same; and the number progressed to the relevant Ombudsman in each of the years since 2016. [1879/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The information requested by the Deputy is currently being collated by my officials and will be forwarded to the Deputy within 10 working days.

Early Years Sector

968. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if a matter in relation to persons working in the early years childhood sector (details supplied) will be addressed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [54049/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I thank Deputy Healy-Rae for his question regarding the Early Learning and Care sector.

I have been unequivocal in my support for better pay and conditions for Early Learning and Care staff. Early Learning and Care practitioners play a critical role in supporting young children's early learning and development and providing a safe and caring environment. They deserve to be recognised, valued and respected for this.

While my Department funds a wide range of initiatives to support the quality, affordability and accessibility of early learning and care services, the State is not the employer of staff in this sector and cannot set wage levels. The large majority of Early Learning and Care settings are private businesses (74% according to the most recent figures from Pobal), with the remainder being independent community-based organisations (26%). This is an entirely different context to the situation regarding primary and post-primary educators. Given this context, there are limits to the actions my Department can take.

I have repeatedly called for the Early Learning and Care sector to pursue a Sectoral Em-

ployment Order, which offers a viable mechanism to establish appropriate wage levels. As the Deputy will be aware, neither I nor my officials can initiate a Sectoral Employment Order, but my Department will readily co-operate with such a process, if and when it is underway.

I have also supported a range of measures to improve pay and conditions using the tools available to me. In particular, DCYA has introduced additional capitation into funding programmes for early learning and care, including a 7% rise this September in the ECCE capitation rate, as well as Programme Support Payments to recognise the administrative roles that services play. I have also continued to provide a higher rate of capitation payment for graduate-led pre-school rooms, to encourage the attraction and retention of Early Learning and Care graduates. Last year I also introduced a pilot measure for funding services whose staff take part in continuing professional development, and I hope to build on this pilot over the years to come, following an evaluation.

I have encouraged services to use such additional funding to support the pay and conditions of the hard-working frontline staff that make such a lasting difference to children's lives. I was pleased to see that the most recent annual sector profile published by Pobal showed an increase in the average wage in the sector from €11.93 per hour in 2017 to €12.17 in 2018, but I acknowledge that there is a long way to go before staff have the wages and working conditions that reflect the importance of the work they do.

My Department has also commissioned an Independent Review of the Cost of Delivering Quality Childcare, which is examining the factors that impact on the cost of delivering quality childcare, including staff wages. When complete, this will inform policy development and funding decisions.

Following the publication of First Five, in which the Government committed to move to a graduate-led Early Learning and Care workforce by 2028, work will commence shortly on developing a Workforce Plan to achieve this commitment.

Departmental Schemes

969. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if consideration has been given to reopening the Pobal grant scheme for parent and toddler groups that missed the autumn deadline of 28 September 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1258/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The 2018 parent and toddler grant scheme has now been completed and all available funding allocated. Consequently there is no option or plan to reopen the scheme at this stage.

However, I have secured a similar level of funding to run the scheme again in 2019. Details of this scheme are currently the subject of discussion between my officials and Pobal and details will be announced as soon as these have been finalised.

Anyone wishing to apply in 2019 would need to contact their local County Childcare Committee regarding closing dates for applications.

Adoption Registration

970. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to a petition organised by an organisation (details supplied); her

plans to deal with the concerns of those affected by the illegal adoptions that took place here; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [54092/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I am aware of this petition and am committed to the process of notifying people who are affected by illegal registrations identified on the files of St. Patrick's Guild and providing these individuals with as much information as possible regarding their identity.

Tusla social workers are supporting these individuals as they deal with the news that they have been illegally registered at birth. 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.

Further to this, the Deputy will also be aware that 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 as was identified in the St. Patrick's Guild files. 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.

The Adoption (Information and Tracing) Bill 2016 is relevant to those affected by illegal registration and I am committed to bringing it to Committee Stage in the Seanad as soon as possible. People affected by illegal registration will be able to apply for an information and tracing service on the same basis as adoptees.

This is an important piece of legislation as it provides adopted people and other relevant people with statutory rights to information and to a tracing service. It will also protect relevant records by bringing them into the custody of the Adoption Authority of Ireland and it will create offences for the concealment, destruction, mutilation or falsification of such records.

However, there is a constitutional context and the Bill must seek to balance the rights to identity and to privacy, which sometimes compete with one another. However, the Bill operates on the basis of a presumption in favour of disclosing information in so far as is legally and constitutionally possible.

Departmental Expenditure

971. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the cost incurred by her Department in 2018 for the use of taxi services; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [54204/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The cost incurred by my Department for the use of taxi services in 2018 amounts to €11,192.08. This amounts to an average of €0.70 per person per week based on headcount in my Department.

My Department avails of a Public Service Framework for the Provision of Taxi Services in the Greater Dublin Area. This framework is expected to achieve significant cost reductions for the taxpayer over its lifetime by reference to regulated maximum fares and anticipated demand. In addition to using the framework agreement, the policy in my Department is that taxis should only be used where no suitable public transport is available. Public transport, including designated airport buses/trains, where conveniently available, should be favoured over travel

by taxis.

Domestic Violence

972. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of parents and children in domestic violence refuges nationally in each of the years 2016 to 2018; the number of parents and children ready to move out of the supported accommodation but awaiting appropriate housing in each of the years 2016 to 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [54239/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla, the Child and Family Agency has statutory responsibility for the care and protection of victims of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence. I have requested Tusla to respond directly to the Deputy on this matter.

Early Childhood Care and Education

973. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if a review will be carried out on a decision in relation to the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [54305/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) is a programme of supports designed to enable children with a disability to access and fully participate in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme. It was introduced in June 2016 and is administered by Pobal on behalf of my Department. AIM supports children with disabilities to attend mainstream pre-school where they can learn and socialise with their peers. AIM is a child-centred model, involving 7 levels of progressive support, moving from the universal to the targeted, based on the needs of the child in the context of the pre-school setting they are attending.

An application was made on behalf of the child in question for AIM Level 5 support. AIM Level 5 provides for access to specialised equipment, appliances, assistive technology and/or minor alterations capital grants for early learning and care settings where such equipment is critical to ensuring that a child with a disability can meaningfully participate in the ECCE programme.

Equipment that is also for use outside the pre-school setting and that can be transported from home to the pre-school is not eligible for funding through AIM. Items such as the weighted blanket and weighted lap pad, requested on behalf of this child, fall into this category. Requests for such items should be made through the HSE by the child's therapist, for use by the child both in the home and outside the home.

Pobal has advised me that, while the decision to refuse the equipment in this case was correctly made, there were errors in the wording used in emails issued by them to the child's parents, pre-school service and HSE therapist on 9/11/18 and 20/11/18. These emails incorrectly stated that the equipment was being refused because it was standard play equipment. They should instead have stated that the equipment was being refused because it can be transported from home. Pobal has apologised for these errors and has clarified the position with the relevant parties. There is no basis for a review of this decision as this type of equipment is not eligible for funding through AIM.

Child Protection

974. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of managers in private emergency accommodation, PEAs, hubs and hotels where children are accommodated that have and have not, respectively, already been trained to fulfil their role as mandated reporters under the Children First Act 2015; if training in the way in which to use the Tusla reporting portal or complete a child protection notice has been provided to each manager; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [54318/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): As the Deputy is aware, the provision of emergency accommodation to families experiencing homelessness is a matter for the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, the Housing Agencies and (in Dublin) the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive (DRHE).

My Department does not provide Children First Training for managers of emergency accommodation and is thus not in a position to answer the Deputy's question. The enactment of the Children First Act 2015 is predicated on the clear principle that child protection issues are the responsibility of all Departments in their respective sectors, and that they must be embedded in the policy considerations of all Departments. Training in relation to obligations under the Children First Act is thus not solely a matter for the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, but a matter for all Departments and agencies and indeed for any entity that has regular engagement with children.

Tusla has produced a range of resources to support the implementation of Children First. In particular a 90 minute e-learning module is universally available free of charge on its website. The module covers the recognising and reporting of child abuse, the role of mandated persons, and the safeguarding responsibilities of organisations working with children. The training module is available through the Tusla website www.tusla.ie.

Child and Family Agency

975. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the implementation actions as recommended under the implementation plan for Tusla actions arising from an audit (details supplied) that have been completed; the actions outstanding; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [54332/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I thank the Deputy for her question. I met with Dr. Shannon after the publication of his report to better understand the intent of the report recommendations and seek clarity on the measures that would be applied to assess the implementation of his recommendations. Following these discussions Dr, Shannon and I agreed to the measures outlined in the Action Plan.

I am pleased to report progress has been made on the recommendations. While many of the recommendations for Tusla are of an ongoing nature, I sought assurance at the start of this process that the issues identified are kept to the fore across child protection assessments and ongoing engagement with vulnerable families.

The ongoing implementation of Signs of Safety as the national approach to child protection provides an increased level of analysis and judgement, which will improve consistency in determining appropriate response pathways for children and families, ensuring they receive a proportionate and timely response.

Joint working between Tusla and An Garda Síochána has been enhanced on a number of levels. In relation to Tusla's engagement with An Garda Síochána, the Joint Working Protocol has been operational since Quarter 1, 2018. Work has now commenced on the joint auditing of its implementation.

The Tusla/An Garda Síochána Joint Data Sharing Agreement is expected to be signed off by Tusla's Interim CEO and the Garda Commissioner in Quarter 1, 2019.

The AGS has established the National Child Protection Unit which is now operational. In October 2018, Tusla assigned a senior staff member for secondment to this Unit with specific responsibility for the development of a joint working model. A draft Specialist Interviewing Protocol is under consultation, with a target launch date end of February 2019.

Progress has also been made on developing the out of hours social work service. A single national out of hours number went live on 3/12/18 and is available to members of An Garda Síochána, Out of Hours GP services and the Accident and Emergency service. This service provides access to an on-call social worker at regional /area level who can go the scene of an incident in specific cases of a serious nature.

You may also be interested to know that Dr. Shannon's findings on the way Section 12 events were managed by An Garda Síochána prompted me to request Tusla to commission research into how social workers made decisions when a child came into their custody, following the use by An Garda Síochána of Section 12 of the Child Care Act 1991. This research was undertaken by NUI Galway and a final report is expected early this year.

The focus of Dr. Shannon's audit of the application of Section 12 was An Garda Síochána, but the report also identified key areas for improvement in Tusla practice. The Action Plan I agreed with Dr. Shannon addressed these areas. While not all actions are not yet completed, I am confident that the changes that have been put in place are bringing about lasting improvements.

Foster Care

976. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the steps foster parents can take if they require information in relation to their work as a foster parent in view of the fact they are of the view they cannot contact their local office; if they can contact the head office in Dublin; if so, the person responsible for dealing with such queries; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [54342/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): If a foster carer does not have an allocated link social worker they should, in the first instance, make contact with their local foster care team leader or the duty team. Should the response or support needed be insufficient the foster carers may contact the principal social worker responsible for foster care. The line managers for the area including the the area and regional regional managers may also be contacted and their details are available on the Tusla website.

A foster carer may also direct queries to the Chief Operations Officer in Tusla, Mr Jim Gibson. Mr Gibson is based in the national office in Dublin and contact details for his office are available at www.tusla.ie/get-in-touch/management-team/.

Tusla is in the process of developing a 24 hr help line for foster carers, which will be phased in in 2019.

The Irish Foster Care Association provides a National Support Helpline, which offers callers information and support. Details for accessing the helpline are available on <http://www.ifca.ie/>.

Family Resource Centres

977. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the criteria used when deciding the location of a family resource centre; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [54346/18]

978. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the criteria used when deciding the funding allocation to a family resource centre; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [54347/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 977 and 978 together.

Tusla, the Child and Family Agency administers the Family Resource Centre Programme. At the end of 2017 there were 109 Family Resource Centres (FRCs) in receipt of funding from Tusla. My Department provided Tusla with additional funding of €3.0 m in 2018 to expand the programme with the inclusion of 11 additional centres, bringing the total number of Family Resource Centres to 120.

The methodology and criteria considered in selecting 11 new FRCs from the list of applicants included the size and make-up of the geographical area; the social and economic conditions of the specified area; and the overall population breakdown of the area that would be serviced by the centre. The criteria also considered the structure of the organisation(s) applying to the Programme; their objectives, targets, and current relationships with other organisations; and the inclusion of available research, community projects, and needs assessments with the application.

Decisions by Tusla in relation to the funding of individual FRCs have regard to the location, size and catchment area of each centre. The process aims to be equitable and transparent. All decisions are made to ensure that available resources are applied to improving outcomes for children and families nationally in the most efficient, effective, equitable, proportionate and sustainable way.

Tusla also considers Area Commissioning Plans, Children and Young People's Service Committee plans, and other available evidence, to ensure that the allocated funding targets those children and families that are most in need.

It is important that the needs of children and families are met in the best way possible, particularly in areas of disadvantage. I will continue to support the work of Family Resource Centres and family support services throughout the country.

Family Resource Centres

979. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her Department conducts yearly evaluations of the performance of family resource centres; and if so, the process for doing so. [54348/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla, the Child and Family Agency is responsible for the administration of the Family Resource Centre Pro-

gramme. My Department does not conduct yearly evaluations of the performance of Family Resource Centres.

Family Resource Centres

980. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of full-time equivalent staff in each family resource centre in tabular form. [54349/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla, the Child and Family Agency is responsible for the administration of the Family Resource Centre Programme. As the Deputy's question refers to an operational matter for Tusla, I have requested Tusla to respond directly to the Deputy.

Departmental Funding

981. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the amount of funding that has been allocated to the ABC programme for 2019. [54350/18]

985. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she is considering expanding the ABC programme. [54354/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 981 and 985 together.

The ABC Programme commenced in 2013 and was designed as a time-bound, co-funding agreement led by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) in conjunction with The Atlantic Philanthropies (Atlantic), originally in the amount of 29.7m for the period 2013-2017. In late 2016, my Department secured additional funding to ensure that all 13 existing ABC sites remained in contract to the end of December 2017. As at December 2017, the total funding provided to the ABC Programme was 32.76 million (rounded). Of this, DCYA provided 17.91m and Atlantic provided 14.85m.

With the closure of The Atlantic Philanthropies operations in Ireland, DCYA is now the sole funder of the ABC Programme. In last years budget, funding was secured to maintain the existing ABC Programme up to the end of 2018.

In November 2017, my Department initiated a process, in consultation with key ABC Programme stakeholders, to consider options for sustaining the work of the ABC Programme within a new vision for a community based prevention and early intervention programme from 2019 and beyond. Following the consultations with Tusla, and other key stakeholders, including representatives of the ABC Programme managers, the decision was taken to transfer the current ABC Programme to Tusla, from September 2018. My Department is working to ensure that we take full account of the learning from all the interventions across the 13 ABC sites, and the national evaluation, in order to inform the delivery of prevention and early intervention initiatives, and to achieve our shared goal of improving the lives of children and families throughout Ireland.

A working group has been established to identify how the existing ABC Programme will transition into a new national structure that can build on the achievements to date and strengthen a future community based programme's focus on addressing child poverty and measurably improving specific outcomes for children and young people.

The transition to Tusla will include the alignment of the programme with the agency's Prevention, Partnership and Family Support (PPFS) Programme, reinforcement and enhancement of Tusla's Prevention and Early Intervention work throughout Ireland, benefitting all communities, as well as create greater opportunities for mainstreaming effective and innovative programmes and interventions. A budget of 9.5m has been secured by my Department to continue the delivery of Tusla's PPFS programme, including the ABC Programme in 2019.

Child Poverty

982. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of the evaluation of the ABC programme. [54351/18]

983. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to publish a summary of the data collected as part of the evaluation of the ABC programme to date. [54352/18]

984. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the nature of data and factors being studied as part of the ABC programme evaluation process. [54353/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 982 to 984, inclusive, together.

The ABC Programme was established in 2013 in line with the commitment in the Programme for Government to adopt an area-based approach to tackling child poverty. It was designed as a time-bound, co-funding agreement led by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) in conjunction with The Atlantic Philanthropies (Atlantic), originally in the amount of €29.7m for the period 2013-2017. Additional funding was secured by DCYA to extend the programme in 2018. The ABC Programme is being delivered in 13 areas of disadvantage in Ireland, led by local consortia who co-ordinate the planning and delivery of programmes and services in their area. In each ABC area, a lead agency oversees the programme at a local level.

The aim of the ABC Programme was to test and evaluate prevention and early intervention approaches to improve outcomes for children and families in areas of disadvantage.

A national evaluation of the ABC Programme was undertaken by the Centre for Effective Services (CES). Data was collected locally, at the area-level in order to assess the effectiveness of the totality of the investment with regard to the main outcomes the programme aimed to address: Improved child health and development; Improved children's learning and Improved parenting. The evaluation also looked at the impact of the ABC Programme on local service delivery, and at the costs associated with the delivery of the programme.

Overall, the national evaluation found evidence that the ABC Programme made a positive contribution to:

1. Improved outcomes for children and families
2. Changes for practitioners and service managers participating in the Programme
3. Changes to service planning and delivery.

A range of qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analysed for the purposes of evaluation. These included outcomes data collected from the ABC areas, as well as data from surveys and interviews with practitioners, programme managers and other stakeholders. Given

the local nature of data collected, there are currently no plans to publish the data sets.

The national evaluation was completed in October 2018 and a full report and summary report has been produced and is available on my Department's website and the CES website. Local areas will also receive a poster and brochure set giving details of the outcome of the programme in their local area and the overall national findings.

My Department is working to ensure that we take full account of the learning from all the interventions across the 13 ABC sites, and from the national evaluation, in order to inform the delivery of prevention and early intervention initiatives and to achieve our shared goal of improving the lives of children and families throughout Ireland.

Question No. 985 answered with Question No. 981.

Child and Family Agency

986. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to the perceived breakdown of the complaints system in Tusla; if her attention has been further drawn to a person (details supplied) that requested an independent review of a complaint in January 2018; if the reason for the breakdown in the complaints system will be investigated; if the review process will be completed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [54371/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I have not been informed of any perceived breakdown of the complaints system in Tusla, the Child and Family Agency's. As the Deputy's question refers to an operational matter for Tusla, I have requested Tusla to respond directly to the Deputy.

Child and Family Agency Staff

987. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the proportion of Tusla social workers that have received specialist training in identifying signs of child sexual abuse. [54447/18]

988. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the proportion of Tusla social workers that have received specialist training in conducting forensic interviews in cases of child sexual abuse. [54448/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 987 and 988 together.

All social workers are trained in identifying signs of sexual abuse. This is undertaken as part of core social work training, which deals with signs and symptoms of abuse, including child sexual abuse.

Social workers are trained in the building of relationships, especially with parents and children in times of crisis. Tusla social workers have regular supervision of their cases with a team leader or Principal Social Worker, are provided with a Child Protection and Welfare practice handbook, and access to an internal hub holding information on child sexual abuse and a range of specialist articles on the subject.

When concerns of abuse are identified these are assessed and supports provided to families

to deal with the issues arising and ensure the child is no longer harmed. In the case of child sexual abuse, allegations can arise directly and a process of ongoing protection, support and therapy is required. Social workers will provide guidance and referral to specialist services as required. In other cases, where the initial concern is of neglect or other abuse, children may subsequently make disclosures of sexual abuse when they trust the adults looking after them.

I am advised by Tusla that specialist training in sexual abuse is organised on the basis of client need and social work role, and that many social workers who have developed an expertise in this area are working throughout the service.

Access to specialist social work, psychological and child psychiatric consultation is also available through dedicated services such as St. Clare's and St. Louise's based in Temple Street Children's Hospital and Crumlin Children's Hospital.

The development of specialist social work services has changed over the past number of years, with a move from verification of allegations to the provision of support and therapy. Where an allegation of sexual abuse is made, social workers notify An Garda Síochána (AGS) and strategy meetings, as set out in Children First, form an important link in the investigation of a potential crime by AGS and an assessment of a child's need for protection and support by Tusla.

I have been informed that at present, Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, has 12 trained Specialist Interviewers to join with a the AGS when they are interviewing a child forensic purposes with a view to undertaking a criminal prosecution. Tusla and An Garda Síochána have agreed a joint approach to managing and coordinating joint training in child protection. The approach involves the establishment of a Joint Training Oversight Committee, involving members of the Joint Working Project Team, Tusla Workforce Learning Development and Templemore Garda College.

Tusla is also working in partnership with An Garda Síochána to review the training for social workers of Specialist Interviewers to conduct interviews under the Joint Specialist Interview process under Section 16(1)(b) of the Criminal Evidence Act 1992. This is to ensure that information obtained during the interview will be available to be used subsequently to formulate safety and protection plans and formulate therapeutic interventions.

I have also established an interdepartmental group to put in place arrangements for cross-agency centres to support children and families who have suffered from child sexual abuse.

'One House' centres are intended to provide services for children and adolescents where there is a concern that sexual abuse may have occurred. The intention is that the centres will support children who have suffered sexual abuse while accessing care or health services, and engaging with the criminal justice system. The 'One House' will bring together the forensic, protection, health, therapeutic and policing services in a child centred way in order to minimise as far as possible any additional trauma for the child and their family. The centres should improve the efficiency and effectiveness of child sexual abuse services and develop specialist expertise, skills and knowledge in this complex area for the benefit of children who have suffered from sexual abuse.

Family Resource Centres

989. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the process for establishing a family resource centre. [54449/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Family Resource Centre Programme is administered by Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. At present there are 120 Family Resource Centres (FRCs) throughout the country. Funding to the Family Resource Centre Programme increased substantially in 2018. This allowed for the inclusion of 11 newly established Family Resource Centres within the Programme last year, as well as an increase in annual funding to existing FRCs.

The process for establishing a Family Resource Centre, under the Family Resource Centre Programme, is an operational matter. I have requested Tusla to respond directly to the Deputy.

Departmental Expenditure

990. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the budget and spend in her Department for marketing, media and social media in each of the years 2016 to 2018; the projected spend for 2019; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [54458/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The information requested in respect of the expenditure incurred by my Department on marketing, media and social media in the years 2016, 2017 and 2018 are set out in the following table:

	2016	2017	2018
Marketing	€0	€67,618	€12,236
Media	€50,523	€196,658	€194,062
Social Media	€0	€29,722	€78

The Deputy might note that the increase in spending on marketing and media from 2016 to 2017 arose directly from my Department's campaign to promote more affordable and accessible childcare for families. The measures were introduced in September 2017 and have been a considerable success, with over 60,000 children to date having benefited from them, 25,000 children from the universal and 36,000 children on the targeted. In 2018, a nationwide media campaign seeking expressions of interest in a Collaborative Forum of former residents of the Mother and Baby Homes and those with comparable experience in a County Home account for the majority of expenditure. I opened the inaugural meeting of the Collaborative Forum to facilitate dialogue and action on issues of concern to former residents of Mother and Baby Homes on 26 July 2018. The purpose of the Collaborative Forum is to build upon the process of engagement and consultation with former residents commenced through the facilitated meetings in 2017.

The Deputy might note that my Department does not have a dedicated budget for marketing and media purposes. In the circumstances, it is not possible to identify the projected spend for 2019 as such costs are only incurred when considered necessary and appropriate.

Departmental Staff Data

991. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of staff in her Department employed to work on marketing, media and social media in 2018. [54475/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): One of my appointed Special Advisors has special responsibility for communications.

In 2018 there were three civil servants in my Department who serviced the day-to-day press office requirements of my Department. The staff in question are remunerated at HEO, EO and CO level.

A dedicated communications specialist is assigned to the Early Years Unit of the Department to support the roll out of specific Early Years projects and this work continued in 2018.

Adoption Legislation

992. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her views on adoptees being given the right to access their personal file from Tusla and-or the Adoption Authority; her plans to implement this as part of the Adoption (Information and Tracing) Bill 2016; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1066/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): As the Deputy is aware, I am committed to the enactment of the Adoption (Information & Tracing) Bill 2016.

This important legislation will give adopted people, people who have been the subject of an illegal birth registration, birth parents and relevant guardians a statutory right to an information and tracing service. It also provides that relevant records will be maintained by the Adoption Authority of Ireland and Section 12 of the Bill sets out the criteria for a person to apply for access to these records.

It is my intention to work with members of the Dáil and Seanad to proceed as quickly as possible with the enactment of this important legislation.

Child and Family Agency Services

993. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the steps she will take to ensure that Tusla provides a response to representations related to the aftercare of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1135/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I wish to inform the Deputy that I am not in a position to comment on individual cases.

I have referred the matter to Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, drawing attention to the age of the individual concerned, and have requested confirmation that the matter is receiving the appropriate attention.

Departmental Agencies Funding

994. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent of the funding provided either directly or indirectly through agencies controlled by her Department for the provision of advocacy services during 2018; the proposed expenditure figures for 2019; the number of advocacy cases dealt with in 2018 by each of the advocacy organisations so funded; and the number of staff and volunteers in each advocacy organisation in December 2018. [1196/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): While my Department does not specifically or directly fund organisations solely to provide advocacy servic-

es, a key strategic objective for my Department is to ensure evidence-based policy is promoted and supported and that children and young people participate in decisions that effect their lives. As a result, a number of organisations funded by the Department and its agencies often involves elements of advocacy. Examples of such organisation are Comhairle na nÓg, Children's Rights Alliance, Early Childhood Ireland, Barnardos, the National Parents Council, Empowering People In Care, YAP Ireland and the Irish Foster Carers Association.

However, as funding is not provided solely for advocacy services, the detailed information requested is not readily available and would involve significant administrative burden on the organisations receiving funding from the Department and its agencies to produce it.

Domestic Violence

995. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if Tusla initiated and completed a review of emergency domestic violence services in the greater Dublin area; and when a report on the same will be published. [1461/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla, the Child and Family Agency has statutory responsibility for the provision of support services to victims of domestic, sexual and gender based violence.

Tusla provides funding to 59 organisations nationally which deliver front line services to victims of domestic and sexual violence. Twenty-two of these organisations provide specialist emergency accommodation to victims of domestic violence.

In 2018, as part of the planning processes to develop services for victims of domestic violence, Tusla commenced the process to review emergency domestic violence accommodation provision in the Dublin region. It will inform Tusla's project to review specialist domestic violence accommodation nationally.

Tusla has advised me that this project to review domestic violence in the Dublin region will be completed by Quarter 4, 2019. I expect Tusla to publish the report once it has considered it.

Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries

996. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she has employed an independent medical person to review medical files from mother and baby homes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1522/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department does not hold any medical files from these institutions. Consequently, I have no plans to employ an independent medical person to review such matters.

The Government established the statutory Commission of Investigation (Mother and Baby Homes and certain related Matters) to independently examine a broad range of concerns relating to the care and welfare arrangements for those who spent time in these institutions. The following matters are specifically being investigated:

- Living conditions and care arrangements in these institutions;
- Mortality among mothers and children to determine general causes, circumstances and rates;

- Post-mortem practices and procedures; the reporting of deaths, burial arrangements and the transfer of remains for anatomical examination;
- Compliance with relevant regulatory and ethical standards in relation to systemic vaccine trials identified by the Commission as being conducted on children in these homes;
- Entry arrangements and exit pathways for mothers and children, patterns of referral and relevant relationships with other entities; and
- The extent to which any group of residents may have been treated differently on any grounds, including race, disability and religion.

The Commission's detailed terms of reference are attached as a schedule to Statutory Instrument No. 57 of 2015. The Commission may directly appoint such experts as it considers necessary to assist it in its investigations.

Childcare Services

997. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the progress being made on her plans for a nationwide childcare scheme. [1592/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The new Affordable Childcare 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.

Positive progress continues to be made in the development of the legislative, administrative and ICT infrastructure for the scheme.

Under the auspices of the Childcare Support Act 2018, detailed secondary legislation and policy guidelines are being prepared. In December, I signed regulations to provide, for the first time, for the registration of school-age childcare services by Tusla. This will allow these services to participate in the new scheme from the start.

With regard to ICT, our IT development contractor, Codec, is busy working with officials from DCYA and Pobal to develop the 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.

Departmental Correspondence

998. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the customer complaints received by her Department in each of the years since 2016; if the complaints are grouped into categories; the nature of the complaints; the resolution of same; and the number progressed to the relevant Ombudsman in each of the years since 2016. [1866/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department's procedures for dealing with customer complaints are detailed in the Department's Customer Service Action Plan and Charter, which is available on my Department's website. If a

complaint is made by customer it is dealt with by the Unit of my Department responsible for the issue to which the complaint relates.

If the complaint is not resolved by the Unit to the satisfaction of the customer, they may contact the Department's Customer Services Officer who will liaise with the customer and the Unit involved, to resolve the matter if possible.

Under the Action Plan and Charter referred to above, a complaint is formally logged by the Department when a customer contacts the Customer Services Officer in relation to an unresolved complaint, and requests that Officer to intervene to resolve the matter.

In the years 2016 to 2018, no such requests were received by the Customer Services Officer of my Department, and as such no complaints were escalated to any of the relevant Offices of the Ombudsman.

Security of the Elderly

999. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if funding will be provided to allow the reinstatement of the community lighting programme for elderly persons previously funded through Pobal and administered by local community groups; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54056/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): My Department is responsible for the Seniors Alert Scheme which encourages community support for vulnerable older people in our communities through the provision of personal monitored alarms to enable them to live securely in their homes with confidence, independence and peace of mind. Funding is available under the scheme towards the purchase by a registered community-based organisation of a personal alarm or pendant.

Up to March 2012, grants were provided towards the cost of supplying and installing personal monitored alarm systems, monitored smoke & carbon monoxide detectors and other security related items. Due to increased demand, an examination of the scheme was conducted early in 2012 and funding was made available for personal monitored alarms only.

Following a review, a new version of the scheme came into effect on 1 November 2017. A number of changes were introduced under the new scheme including the provision of free monitoring for the first year and a revision of the living alone requirements. I am pleased to say that since the launch of the new Seniors Alert Scheme, the demand has been unprecedented. During 2017 over 12,600 applications were approved and more than 10,000 installations completed. During 2018, over 19,200 applications were approved, with 20,288 installations completed.

There are no proposals, at this stage, to include security lighting or other measures in the Seniors Alert Scheme. However, the matter will be kept under review.

Dormant Accounts Fund Administration

1000. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the organisations that received dormant accounts funding to purchase public service vehicles during 2017, 2018 and to date in 2019. [54083/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Seán Canney): While my Department has responsibility for the overall administration of the

Dormant Accounts Fund, individual Departments are responsible for the administration of their own measures.

With regard to my own Department, the relevant measure is the Social Enterprise measure which provides funding to increase the impact of social enterprises by enhancing their capacity to deliver services and generate traded income. The funding is used to cover capital costs such as machinery, specialised equipment, refurbishment costs and vehicles, and has enabled the following organisations to purchase Public Service Vehicles since 2017:

Year of approval	Organisation	Funding approved
2017	Community of Lough Arrow Social Project (Co. Sligo)	€21,600
2018	Galway Centre for Independent Living	€73,920
2018	Lucan Disability Action Group	€35,109
2018	Vantastic (Dublin)	€50,880

The 2018 projects were approved in December and their plans to purchase public service vehicles are subject to the finalisation of funding contracts.

Details of all projects funded under the 2018 Dormant Accounts Fund Social Enterprise measure are available on my Department's website at: <https://drcd.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/Copy-of-181214-Dormant-Accounts-Social-Enterprise-recipients.pdf>.

Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme

1001. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if a project (details supplied) will be approved for funding at an early date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54112/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I can confirm that the application referred to by the Deputy was successful under Measure 2 of the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme and was included as part of the funding allocations which I announced recently for that scheme.

Details of all successful projects under Measure 2 of the scheme are available on my Department's website at: <https://drcd.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/ORIS-M2-January-2019.pdf>.

The Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme is part of the Government's Action Plan for Rural Development and provides funding for the development of new outdoor recreational infrastructure or the necessary maintenance, enhancement or promotion of existing outdoor recreational infrastructure in Ireland. The continued development of our recreational infrastructure will support Ireland's developing rural tourism industry, and will also provide better recreational facilities for local people and families to enjoy.

Charities Regulation

1002. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if the way in which the Charities Regulator communicates with the public will be reviewed in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54189/18]

1003. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Develop-

ment if transparency within the office of the Charities Regulator has been reviewed; if a review will be carried out in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54190/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Seán Canney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1002 and 1003 together.

My Department has overall policy responsibility for the Charities Regulator. However, the Authority is fully independent in the performance of its statutory functions. Neither I nor my Department have any role in the decision making process of the Authority. My Department receives regular updates from the Charities Regulator on key performance indicators, under the terms of an oversight agreement.

I understand that the Charities Regulator undertakes extensive activities to engage and communicate with its stakeholders, which include charities and the public. During 2018 its website had 118,000 visitors who viewed almost 690,000 pages. It issued 35 press releases, published a number of inspectors' reports it commissioned into two charities, and launched of the Charities Governance Code.

In addition to this, the Charities Regulator communicates with the public through its social media platforms, with significant increases in the number of followers over the last 12 months. In 2018 it also commenced publishing an electronic newsletter which was issued four times during the year to approximately 20,000 people for each edition.

It organised a series of public meetings around the country during the year to address questions from charities and members of the public. In addition, it targeted charity trustees during Charity Trustees Week in November, with public meetings and a national advertising campaign.

During 2018 it produced and publicised four new guidance documents to assist charities in complying with their obligations under the Charities Act 2009. It also published a report it commissioned from Indecon into the social and economic impact of registered Irish charities.

The Charities Regulator also produces an annual report which provides detailed accounts of the work undertaken by the Regulator. This is placed in the Oireachtas library and is published on the Regulator's website.

However, there are elements of its work which the Charities Regulator does not comment publicly on, as to do so could undermine its ability to perform its functions. These areas include the on-going work of its compliance team and the work of the Charity Services Committee and the cases that are before it. It should be noted, however, that in August 2018, the Charities Regulator published a report on its compliance work for 2017, which included metrics of key compliance actions undertaken and an analysis of the common issues which emerged during the year.

CLÁR Programme

1004. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the type of eligible works which schools can apply for under the CLÁR programme; and the type of works not covered under the programme. [54201/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The CLÁR programme provides funding for small scale infrastructural projects in disadvantaged rural areas that have experienced significant levels of depopulation. The aim of the programme is to support the sustainable development of designated CLÁR areas, with the aim of encouraging

people to continue to live and work in those areas.

Since I reintroduced the CLÁR programme in 2016, funding has been provided for the development of new school or community play areas, and for the enhancement of existing play areas. Works applicable under this measure included the installation and enhancement of play equipment, soft-play surfaces, and associated works.

CLÁR has also provided support for interventions to make school or community facility environs healthier and safer for children attending the schools, and for children and adults using the community facilities. The nature of works eligible under this measure are set out on the following table.

Type of Intervention	Funding available
Purchase and replacement of Flashing Amber Safety Lights.	Max €7,000 per set
Purchase of Child safety signs	Max €1,000 per sign
Purchase of digital speed safety signs, indicating that cars are entering a particular zone.	Max €14,000 per set
Upgrade Road markings on approach roads to Schools/community facilities.	Max €1,000
Erect pedestrian crossings in small towns and villages at schools/community facilities.	Max €22,000
Construction and upgrading of access footpaths next to schools or community facilities.	Max €30,000
Car Parking facilities to access schools or community facilities.	Max €30,000
Provision of Bus Shelters	Max €25,000
Provision of Public Lighting	Max €30,000
Overall max per project if there are a number of elements above included in applications for a single location	Max €50,000

Applications under the measures referred to above are made to my Department via the Local Authorities.

Decisions regarding specific measures which will be supported under the CLÁR programme in 2019 will be made shortly.

Departmental Expenditure

1005. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the cost incurred by his Department in 2018 for the use of taxi services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54216/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): My Department operates an account for the use of taxi services in the Dublin area, which was arranged through a framework put in place by the Office of Government Procurement.

In 2018, the total amount spent by my Department on taxi services was €2,976.38.

1006. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of meetings held by the Atlantic Economic Corridor task force by date and location of each meeting in tabular form; the details of each sub-group established under the AEC; the meetings to date; and the annual funding allocation to the AEC task force in each of the years 2017 to 2018 and to date in 2019. [54279/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Seán Canney): The Programme for Partnership Government and the Action Plan for Rural Development both commit to progressing the Atlantic Economic Corridor initiative to support the development of the western part of the country, from Donegal to Kerry.

The objective of the AEC project is to maximise the assets along the western seaboard and combine the economic hubs, clusters and catchments of the region to attract investment, support job creation and contribute to an improved quality of life for people in the region. The National Planning Framework recognises the contribution which the AEC initiative can make to supporting the regional growth objectives of the NPF.

Minister Ring established the Atlantic Economic Corridor Taskforce in March 2017 to oversee and progress the initiative. I now chair the Taskforce which meets every quarter, with the most recent meeting taking place on the 10th of December 2018. To date, there have been eight meetings of the Atlantic Economic Corridor Taskforce, the details of which are below.

The Atlantic Economic Corridor Taskforce

Meeting Location	Date
Breaffy House Hotel, Castlebar, Co. Mayo	6/3/2017
University of Limerick	16/05/2017
NUIG Galway	25/7/2017
The Building Block, Sligo	6/11/2017
Limerick City and County Council Chambers	12/3/2018
NUIG, Galway	29/6/2018
Roscommon County Council	08/10/2018
Leitrim County Council Chambers	10/12/2018

Three subgroups have also been established to support the work of the Taskforce, focusing on the issues of infrastructure, enterprise space and communications and marketing. The details of these subgroups and the meetings held to date are as below.

AEC Communications Subgroup

Meeting location	Date
SCCUL Enterprise Centre, Ballybane, Galway	28/09/2018
SCCUL Enterprise Centre, Ballybane, Galway	25/10/2018
SCCUL Enterprise Centre, Ballybane, Galway	29/11/2018

AEC Enterprise Space Subgroup

Meeting location	Date
University of Limerick	16/05/2017
Boardroom Ireland West Airport Knock	19/06/2017
NUIG Galway	25/07/2017
The Building Block, Sligo	6/11/2017
Action Tuam Enterprise Centre, Tuam, Galway	7/12/2017

Meeting location	Date
Hodson Bay Hotel, Athlone	09/01/2018
Hodson Bay Hotel, Athlone	5/2/2018
Claremorris Municipal District Offices	19/2/2018
Claremorris Municipal District Offices	3/4/2018
Ennis, Co Clare	23/4/2018
Mayo County Council Offices, Claremorris	30/5/2018
SCCUL Enterprise Centre, Ballybane Galway	19/06/2018
SCCUL Enterprise Centre, Ballybane Galway	14/11/2018
Claremorris Municipal District Offices	7/12/2018

AEC Infrastructure Subgroup

Meeting location	Date
Claregalway	13/04/2017
Boardroom Ireland West Airport Knock	19/06/2017
The Hynes Boardroom, NUI Galway	25/07/2017
The Building Block, Sligo	6/11/2017
Action Tuam Enterprise Centre, Tuam, Galway	7/12/2017
IDA Offices, Finiskilin, Co. Sligo	26/2/2018
Galway County Council Chamber, Prospect Hill, Galway	25/09/2018
SCCUL Enterprise Centre, Ballybane Galway	14/11/2018

While there is no formal budgetary allocation for the Taskforce, my Department has provided funding of €474,783 to the relevant Local Authorities as a partial salary subvention towards the appointment of Atlantic Economic Corridor Officers in those Local Authorities. These officers provide a resource to support the work of the AEC Taskforce, and to promote the AEC concept across the region as a whole.

I have also provided additional funding of €500,000 to the Western Development Commission for 2018, part of which will be used to support the work of the Taskforce.

My Department has also provided smaller levels of funding for the production of some communications materials and general logistical support for the Taskforce.

Action Plan for Rural Development Implementation

1007. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the details of each local authority along the AEC that has and has not a designated AEC officer in tabular form; the amount of co-funding provided to each local authority along the AEC in each of the years 2017 to 2018 and to date in 2019; and amount expended in each local authority to date in 2019. [54280/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Seán Canney): The Programme for a Partnership Government and the Action Plan for Rural Development both commit to progressing the Atlantic Economic Corridor initiative to support the development of the western part of the country, from Donegal to Kerry.

The objective of the AEC project is to maximise the assets along the western seaboard and combine the economic hubs, clusters and catchments of the region to attract investment, support job creation and contribute to an improved quality of life for people in the region. The

National Planning Framework recognises the contribution which the AEC initiative can make to supporting the regional growth objectives of the NPF.

My Department provides co-funding for a dedicated AEC Officer in each of the Local Authorities along the Corridor. This AEC Officer network provides a resource to support the work of the AEC Taskforce which oversees the initiative, and to promote the AEC concept across the region as a whole.

At the present time, the majority of Local Authorities engaged in the AEC programme have appointed a dedicated AEC Officer, with a small number providing a staff member to the AEC Officer Network on an interim basis while they are actively engaged in an ongoing recruitment processes. The position is outlined on the following table:

Local Authority	Status of AEC Officer
Clare County Council	Appointed
Donegal County Council	Appointed
Galway City Council	Interim Basis
Galway County Council	Appointed
Kerry County Council	Appointed
Leitrim County Council	Appointed
Limerick City & County Council	Appointed
Mayo County Council	Appointed
Roscommon County Council	Appointed
Sligo County Council	Interim Basis

My Department provided funding in 2018 to the relevant Local Authorities as part of a commitment to support the work of the AEC Officers. This funding is based on a salary subvention of €30,000 on a full-year basis towards the cost of employing the AEC Officer.

The AEC Officers were appointed at different stages of the year by each Local Authority and a pro-rata subvention was provided in respect of 2018, based on their respective dates of appointment.

A subvention of €30,000 was paid to each Local Authority towards the end of last year towards the salary cost of the Officers for 2019. No other funding was provided for in 2017 or to date in 2019.

The amounts paid to each Local Authority are provided on the table below:

Local Authority	2018 salary subvention	2019 salary subvention
	€	€
Clare County Council	20,000	30,000
Donegal County Council	2,500	30,000
Galway City Council	15,000	30,000
Galway County Council	20,000	30,000
Kerry County Council	11,583	30,000
Leitrim County Council	20,000	30,000
Limerick City & County Council	20,000	30,000
Mayo County Council	25,000	30,000
Roscommon County Council	20,700	30,000
Sligo County Council	20,000	30,000

Telecommunications Services Provision

1008. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the progress to date for each of the 41 action points made in the mobile phone and broadband task force report published in December 2016 in which his Department has lead or joint responsibility for implementing; if each such action point has been completed, not completed or is ongoing, respectively; and the revised deadlines for action points not delivered by the original timeframes set out in tabular form. [54281/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Seán Canney): The Report of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce was published in December 2016 and included 40 actions to alleviate barriers to mobile phone reception and broadband access. An Implementation Group was established in early 2017 to oversee the delivery of the actions in the report.

An Implementation Review of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce report was published on 21 February 2017, and provides a comprehensive progress report on all 40 of the actions included in the original report.

The Review shows that 29 of the actions were completed or substantially completed by the end of 2017, and 11 actions were carried forward to the 2018 work programme of the Implementation Group for completion, with revised timelines for delivery.

Full details are in the Implementation Review which is available on my Department's website at: <https://drctd.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/Implementation-Review-2017-PDF-with-cover.pdf>.

Departmental Staff Data

1009. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of persons working in the regional telecommunications development unit of his Department on an annual basis in each year since established by grade in tabular form; and the annual funding allocation to the unit in 2018 and 2019. [54284/18]

1010. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of persons working in the broadband office support unit of his Department on an annual basis in each year since established in tabular form; and the annual funding allocation to the unit in 2018 and 2019. [54285/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1009 and 1010 together.

The Department of Rural and Community Development was established in July 2017. The Department does not have a Broadband Support Unit, however, I can confirm that the Regional Telecommunications Development Unit had a total of 7 staff in 2017, 6 staff in 2018, and has 6 staff for 2019 as outlined in the table.

	Principal Officer	Assistant Principal	Higher Executive Officer	Executive Officer	Clerical Officer
2017	1	1	3	1	1
2018	1	1	3	1	
2019	1	1	3	1	

In 2018, the annual funding allocated to the unit was : current funding of €1.7 million, and capital funding of €0.6 million.

In 2019 the annual funding allocated to the unit is: current funding of €1.7 million, and capital funding of €0.7 million.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

1011. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the detail of each local authority that has and has not completed a local digital strategy in tabular form. [54286/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Seán Canney): My Department recognises the value of each Local Authority having a local digital strategy in place in order to fully benefit from the roll-out of the National Broadband Plan. To this end, my Department has provided information and guidance to each Local Authority to develop local digital strategies, and has facilitated the provision of expert consultancy to assist with strategy development.

Digital Readiness Assessments, which act as a baseline against which each Local Authority can assess their digital maturity, have been completed for each Local Authority. Dedicated workshops for information sharing and strategy development were facilitated in the second quarter of 2018, with Guidelines for Strategy Development issued to Local Authorities in the third quarter of the year.

Notwithstanding the assistance provided by my Department, the development and publication of local digital strategies is a matter for each Local Authority.

However, from my Department's engagement with the Local Authorities, I understand that most, if not all, Local Authorities are expected to publish local digital strategies in the near future. Some have already done so. For example, Limerick, Clare and Tipperary County Councils have all published local digital strategies in the past year. In addition, Donegal County Council has published a dedicated Digital Action Plan and Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown, Fingal, Dublin City and South Dublin County Councils are active participants of the Smart Dublin Strategy.

My officials will continue to provide guidance and support to Local Authorities in 2019 in order to facilitate the development of local digital strategies.

Departmental Programmes

1012. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of applications made by each local authority to the digital innovation programme since established on an annual basis in tabular form; the number of applications made by each local authority to the programme that were approved and not approved by his Department; the amount of funding allocated to approved applications in each local authority annually; and the amount of approved funding that has been expended in each year. [54287/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Seán Canney): The Digital Innovation Programme was launched in 2018. The purpose of the programme is to encourage Local Authorities to support digital development in their areas. Projects must promote, support, or otherwise advance at least one of the pillars outlined in the scheme criteria and must show the potential for public benefit.

Applications are required to meet certain criteria that include evidence that the project will take an innovative approach, provide a public benefit and meet prescribed draw-down timescales. Applications that satisfy these criteria are deemed to be valid applications and are then assessed by an evaluation panel.

All Local Authorities were invited to apply for funding under two calls for proposals under the Digital Innovation Programme in 2018. This resulted in 36 valid applications progressing to evaluation stage, and 21 projects being approved for funding. In addition, a number of Local Authorities submitted applications that were not deemed valid in the context of the scheme criteria and, as a consequence, did not progress to the evaluation stage. Details of the valid applications received from each of the Local Authorities who submitted proposals, along with the number of applications approved and the funding awarded, are provided on Table 1 below.

Since its inception, €700,094 has been awarded under the Digital Innovation Programme. All of the funding awarded has been drawn down by the Local Authorities.

Further details of the projects funded by my Department through the Digital Innovation Programme can be found on the Department's website: www.drcd.gov.ie.

Table 1 - Digital Innovation Programme: Applications by Local Authority

	Local Authority	Valid applications received	Applications approved	Funding awarded
1	Tipperary	4	2	€14,000
2	Meath	1	0	-
3	Longford	2	0	-
4	Roscommon	2	0	-
5	Sligo	2	2	€105,000
6	Wicklow	4	2	€9,600
7	Mayo	2	2	€66,244
8	Westmeath	1	1	€53,000
9	Cork City	2	1	€8,000
10	Offaly	3	2	€80,000
11	Fingal	2	2	€112,000
12	Galway County	1	0	-
13	Galway City	1	1	€24,000
14	Donegal	2	2	€103,000
15	Dublin City	2	1	€24,000
16	Cavan	2	0	-
17	Clare	1	1	€28,000
18	Kildare	1	1	€41,250
19	Kerry	1	1	€32,000
		36	21	€700,094

Mobile Telephony Services

1013. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the details of each local authority that has and has not, respectively, mapped local mobile phone blackspots to date in tabular form; the number of blackspots identified by local authority; and the funding and guidance supports available by his Department to local authorities to map these blackspots. [54288/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Seán Canney): The Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce was established in July 2016 to examine broadband and mobile phone coverage deficits in Ireland and identify tangible actions to improve the quality of these services.

The Taskforce Report was published in December 2016, and included 40 actions to alleviate barriers to mobile phone reception and broadband access. An Implementation Group was established in 2017 to oversee the delivery of the actions in the Taskforce's report. Progress reports on the delivery of these actions are published on my Department's website on a quarterly basis.

With regard to the specific issue of mobile phone blackspots, my officials, in conjunction with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment, are actively engaged with Local Authorities and mobile phone operators to identify priority blackspots and take action to address this issue.

During 2017, officials of both Departments worked with a group of Local Authorities to identify the issues associated with mapping local blackspots. Building on this exercise, a call was issued to all Local Authorities in 2018 to map local blackspots and identify infrastructure that could potentially be used to improve telecommunications services.

Seventeen of the thirty one Local Authorities have provided data on blackspots. Table 1 below provides details of these seventeen Local Authorities and the number of blackspots they each identified.

The blackspot information provides indicative data on poor coverage in specific rural areas and along national and regional roads. However, it should be borne in mind that the number of blackspots changes as new telecommunications infrastructure is rolled out and upgraded.

The Department will continue to work with the telecommunications providers throughout 2019 to ensure that new infrastructure is targeted to the areas most in need. It should also be noted that the imminent publication of ComReg's national coverage map will give a more accurate reflection of mobile phone coverage throughout the country.

With regard to funding and support, my Department provided €35,000 to each Local Authority in 2018 to support the appointment of a Broadband Officer. Broadband Officers are tasked with co-ordinating broadband and telecommunications development in their Local Authority areas. Broadband Officer funding increased to €42,000 for 2019. My Department has also assigned liaison officers to support Local Authority Broadband Officers in this and other initiatives. At the implementation stage of the blackspot data collection exercise, a technical information document was provided to every Local Authority to guide them in their work.

My Department continues to support Local Authorities and communities across Ireland to deal with broadband and mobile phone service deficits. For example, my Department recently awarded a grant of €35,000 to erect a mobile phone mast in Malin Beg, Co. Donegal under the Digital Innovation Programme. This project is a partnership between the local community and a telecommunications provider that provides an opportunity to test a solution to mobile phone blackspots in a rural areas.

Table 1 - Local Authorities who provided data on Mobile Phone Blackspots

	Local Authority	Blackspots
1	Carlow	36
2	Donegal	6

	Local Authority	Blackspots
3 & 4	Galway City Council / Galway County Council	64
5	Kerry	56
6	Kildare	6
7	Leitrim	18
8	Limerick	36
9	Longford	84
10	Mayo	2
11	Meath	8
12	Roscommon	19
13	Sligo	4
14	Tipperary	29
15	Waterford	4
16	Westmeath	8
17	Wicklow	10

Local and Community Development Programme

1014. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development his plans to update the Framework Policy for Local and Community Development in Ireland published in 2015. [54289/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The *Framework Policy for Local and Community Development* was published by Government in January 2016. It sets out a high-level vision for the State's support for local development and community development and underpins all relevant policies, programmes and interventions for local development and community development.

My Department established a *Cross-Sectoral Group on Local and Community Development* in May 2017 to develop an implementation plan for the *Framework Policy*. The *Cross-Sectoral Group* is chaired by my Department and comprises members drawn from the relevant stakeholder sectors, including the community development, local development and community & voluntary sectors, as well as local and central government.

The implementation plan will serve as a *de facto* update of the *Framework Policy*. It will draw on the feedback received from the original consultation on the *Framework Policy* in 2015, outputs from the *National Forum on Local Development and Community Development* held in November 2016, outputs from a cross-sectoral workshop held by my Department in November 2017, and the recent deliberations of the *Cross-Sectoral Group*.

I expect a draft plan to be submitted for my consideration in Q1 2019 and I hope to bring it to Government for approval shortly thereafter.

Peace and Reconciliation Programme

1015. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the amount of funds allocated here over the 2014 to 2020 period and expended in each year to date in tabular form by Exchequer and EU funding to the PEACE IV 2014-2020 Programme for Peace and Reconciliation. [54290/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): PEACE IV is an EU funded cross-border programme which supports peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland, promoting social and economic stability particularly through actions promoting cohesion between communities. It is managed by the *Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB)*, one of the North-South Bodies established under the Good Friday Agreement. My Department is an *Accountable Department* for PEACE IV and provides funding under three of the four programme measures, namely *Shared Spaces and Services, Building Positive Relations, and Children and Young People*.

The total funding allocated to date under these measures is approx. €179m, with c.€38m and €141m allocated to applicants based in Ireland and Northern Ireland respectively. While certain applicants may be based in one or other jurisdiction, they may be supported by the PEACE programme to deliver services on a cross-border basis. Accordingly, funding approved for applicants in Northern Ireland may support services delivered in the border counties of Ireland and visa versa. It is not possible to disaggregate these allocations on a 'jurisdiction-by-jurisdiction' basis.

The PEACE IV programme was approved by the European Commission in November 2015. Expenditure commenced in 2017 and will continue until 2023. The total funding disbursed by the SEUPB to applicants in the border counties to date and the indicative annual allocation from 2019 to 2023 are set out in the table below.

Up to 85% will be reimbursed by the EU over the lifetime of the programme.

Spend 2017	Spend 2018	Indicative Allocation 2019	Indicative Allocation 2020	Indicative Allocation 2021	Indicative Allocation 2022	Indicative Allocation 2023
€0.17m	€1.2m	€6.76m	€10.21m	€10.59m	€6.32m	€3.15m

Voluntary Sector Funding

1016. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the volunteer centres in each county and local authority; the annual funding allocated to each over the period 2016 to 2018, in tabular form; the allocations for 2019; and the amount of funds expended in each year. [54291/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Seán Canney): My Department's Community and Voluntary Supports and Programmes provide a cohesive framework of support for the community and voluntary sector. This programme supports 21 Volunteer Centres, 8 Volunteer Information Services in areas which do not currently have a full-time Volunteer Centre, as well as a number of national organisations such as Volunteer Ireland and Young Social Innovators.

Details of the allocations and amounts paid to the Volunteer Centres are set out in the following table. These allocations are paid in two annual tranches. In addition, a specific allocation has been paid annually since 2016 to Volunteer Ireland to support the Volunteer Information Services in areas not served by Volunteer Centres. This allocation amounted to some €11,000 per Volunteer Information Service per annum.

Work is currently underway in relation to the 2019 allocations which will be notified to all Volunteer Centres shortly.

Questions - Written Answers

	2016	2017	2018
Carlow Volunteer Centre	€100,575	€110,600	€110,600
Clare Volunteer Centre	€80,000	€103,000	€103,000
Cork Volunteer Bureau	€112,603	€123,800	€123,800
Donegal Volunteer Project	€117,986	€129,800	€129,800
Dublin City Volunteer Centre	€256,758	€282,400	€282,400
Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown Volunteer Centre	€86,901	€103,000	€103,000
Fingal Volunteer Centre	€104,263	€114,700	€114,700
Galway Volunteer Centre	€121,148	€133,200	€133,200
Kerry Volunteer Bureau	€107,951	€118,800	€118,800
Kildare Volunteer Bureau	€110,000	€121,000	€121,000
Limerick Volunteer Centre	€133,312	€146,600	€146,600
Longford Volunteer Centre	€64,923	€90,000	€95,000
Louth Volunteer Centre	€103,730	€114,100	€114,100
Mayo Volunteer Bureau	€102,242	€112,500	€112,500
Meath Volunteer Centre	€100,552	€110,600	€110,600
Monaghan Volunteer Centre	€65,457	€90,000	€95,000
Sligo Volunteer Centre	€94,900	€106,400	€106,400
South Dublin Volunteer Centre	€155,528	€171,100	€171,100
Tipperary Volunteer Centre	€142,169	€156,400	€156,400
Westmeath Volunteer Centre	€104,741	€115,200	€115,200
Wicklow Volunteer Bureau	€117,096	€128,800	€128,800
Overall Total:	€2,382,835	€2,682,000	€2,692,000

Security of the Elderly

1017. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of applications received to the seniors alert scheme in each of the years 2016 to 2018, by county; the number of applications approved and not approved respectively, by county in tabular form; and the number of completed alarm installations. [54292/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): My Department is responsible for the Seniors Alert Scheme which encourages community support for vulnerable older people in our communities through the provision of personal monitored alarms to enable them to live securely in their homes with confidence, independence and peace of mind. Funding is available under the scheme towards the purchase by a registered community based-organisation of a personal alarm or pendant.

Following a review, I launched a new scheme which took effect on 1 November 2017. A media and information campaign was organised to support the launch.

I am pleased to say that since the launch of the new Seniors Alert Scheme, the demand has been unprecedented. During 2017 over 12,600 applications were approved and more than 10,000 installations completed. During 2018, over 19,200 applications were approved, with 20,288 installations completed.

Since September 2015, Pobal has operated the scheme on behalf of my Department. The table below provides information of approved participants and installations by county from September 2015 to the end of 2018. The number of 'not approved' applications amounts to 1,135 over that period. This number includes both unsuccessful applications and applications withdrawn by the applicant prior to approval for a variety of reasons. It is not available on a county basis at present. A further 3,076 approved applications were cancelled by participants prior to installations for a variety of reasons, including changes of circumstances of the applicant such as admission to hospital or residential care and other changes in living arrangements.

Approved participants by county by year, and completed installations by county:

County	2015	2016	2017	2018	Total Approved Participants to 31 December 2018	Completed Installations
Carlow	18	136	213	305	672	607
Cavan	14	79	119	256	468	465
Clare	92	319	482	480	1,373	1,321
Cork	146	1,070	1,434	2,246	4,896	4,484
Donegal	45	174	444	552	1,215	1,204
Dublin	181	1,165	2,650	4,744	8,740	8,295
Galway	81	538	872	1,410	2,901	2,885
Kerry	14	294	450	813	1,571	1,469
Kildare	69	247	383	562	1,261	1,194
Kilkenny	87	149	336	424	996	929
Laois	25	263	329	203	820	793
Leitrim	16	93	178	128	415	409
Limerick	82	375	666	993	2,116	2,001
Longford	14	58	143	157	372	356

County	2015	2016	2017	2018	Total Approved Participants to 31 December 2018	Completed Installations
Louth	35	317	438	187	977	970
Mayo	65	296	481	718	1,560	1,543
Meath	47	214	374	782	1,417	1,264
Monaghan	7	91	168	243	509	496
Offaly	37	135	299	371	842	824
Roscommon	19	134	204	233	590	572
Sligo	24	158	275	365	822	814
Tipperary	99	447	633	955	2,134	2,007
Waterford	28	134	221	471	854	758
Westmeath	12	124	245	320	701	664
Wexford	37	156	303	888	1,384	1,252
Wicklow	18	144	269	422	853	785
Total	1,312	7,310	12,609	19,228	40,459	38,361

Security of the Elderly

1018. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the amount of capital and current funding respectively, allocated to the seniors alert scheme in each of the years 2015 to 2018, in tabular form; the 2019 allocation; and the amount expended in each year to date. [54293/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): My Department is responsible for the Seniors Alerts Scheme which provides funding for personal monitored alarms for older people to enable them to live securely in their homes with confidence, independence and peace of mind. Following a review, I launched a new scheme which took effect on 1 November 2017. A media and information campaign was organised to support the launch. In addition to the provision of the alarm equipment, there were modifications to the qualifying conditions of the scheme, and the first year of monitoring is free to each new participant.

I am pleased to say that since the launch of the new Seniors Alert Scheme, the demand has been unprecedented. During 2017 over 12,600 applications were approved and more than 10,000 installations completed. During 2018, over 19,200 applications were approved, with 20,288 installations completed. With the huge increased demand for the scheme and the provision of one year free monitoring, expenditure in 2017 and 2018 exceeded the allocation available for the scheme. However, in both years savings were identified from other areas within my Department's allocation to ensure that all new applicants could be provided for. There is also provision under the Dormant Accounts Fund Action Plan 2018, which also covers 2019, for funding to meet the additional and exceptional demands of the Scheme.

As this is a demand led scheme, it is kept under continuous review by officials in my department to ensure adequate funding can be made available to meet the requirements of all qualifying applicants. I intend that this will also be the case during 2019.

Year	Allocation €,000	Spend €,000
2015	2,350	1,540
2016	2,300	1,800
2017	2,300	2,683
2018	2,300	6,984
2019	2,300	

Scheme to Support National Organisations

1019. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the amount of current and capital funding respectively, allocated to the scheme to support national organisations in each of the years 2015 to 2019, in tabular form; and the amount expended in each year to date. [54294/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Seán Canney): The Scheme to Support National Organisations (SSNO) has a primary focus on the provision of core funding to national organisations that demonstrate good governance and deliver services and supports that have a focus on one or more of the following: addressing poverty, social exclusion and promoting equality.

The scheme provides multiannual core funding to national organisations, and allocations are provided across the total period of each iteration of the scheme. The funding provided is all current, with no capital provision.

The last iteration of the scheme ran for a 24 month period from 1 July 2014 to 30 June 2016, with a fully expended allocation of €8,015,518.

The current scheme commenced on 1 July 2016 and will cease on 30 June 2019. Almost €16.7m was allocated to 71 national community and voluntary organisations over the three year period of the scheme.

A Review of the 2016-2019 Scheme was undertaken by the Department, in conjunction with Pobal, to formulate the next iteration of the scheme which was advertised in December 2018 and is due to commence in July 2019. It is expected that the 36 month funding allocation for the proposed scheme will be broadly in line with the current scheme.

Public Participation Networks

1020. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the amount of current and capital funding respectively, allocated to the public participation networks in each of the years 2015 to 2018, in tabular form; the 2019 allocation by local authority; and the amount expended in each year to date by local authority. [54295/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Seán Canney): Since 2015, current funding of up to €50,000 per annum has been allocated by my Department in respect of each PPN, provided this was supplemented by a minimum of €30,000 per annum from each local authority's own resources. This funding is to be used for the cost of the employment of a Resource Worker, and ongoing operational costs such as office accommodation and training. There is no capital funding available to PPNs.

Set out in the following table is the amount expended since 2015 by each PPN.

The expenditure shown for 2018 is made up of actual expenditure from January to the end of September, with an estimated expenditure figure in respect of October to end December 2018. A full account of expenditure for 2018 will be supplied by each PPN in early 2019.

PPN	2015	2016	2017	2018
Carlow	€43,851.08	€101,176.07	€80,485.68	€91,475.27
Cavan	€44,686.08	€73,304.64	€73,232.00	€73,332.00
Clare	€80,004.35	€86,283.86	€77,594.97	€84,693.73
Cork City	€37,569.00	€83,688.00	€76,764.28	€54,922.02
Cork County	€130,117.00	€89,568.00	€97,112.00	€96,135.00
Donegal	€52,644.71	€41,125.63	€76,395.35	€80,000.00
Dublin	€52,771.04	€60,927.12	€80,650.92	€83,000.00
Dun Laoghaire / Rathdown	€31,764.36	€32,995.33	€76,378.85	€79,947.90
Fingal	€76,415.00	€108,591.01	€89,740.40	€86,869.00
Galway City	€73,933.50	€80,200.74	€79,831.77	€80,000.00
Galway County	€35,197.95	€43,653.00	€70,596.79	€80,847.49
Kerry	€61,452.20	€86,434.42	€82,860.26	€88,003.92
Kildare	€88,549.39	€55,128.91	€42,358.44	€51,646.33
Kilkenny	€24,246.19	€69,528.43	€80,684.67	€73,002.33
Laois	€51,769.21	€76,256.00	€77,024.00	€80,000.00
Leitrim	€42,243.68	€83,823.04	€66,647.00	€80,000.00
Limerick	€78,490.00	€78,093.10	€80,901.70	€0.00
Longford	€27,936.00	€81,992.87	€81,611.93	€80,000.00
Louth	€54,957.58	€79,478.63	€85,427.83	€87,157.00
Mayo	€74,339.20	€80,500.29	€76,602.40	€80,002.00
Meath	€13,498.37	€83,906.16	€93,248.86	€80,000.00
Monaghan	€84,776.30	€80,936.63	€80,111.93	€80,000.00
Offaly	€13,457.79	€36,816.44	€69,618.44	€84,431.92
Roscommon	€38,789.91	€79,878.33	€80,531.24	€80,000.00
Sligo	€79,006.66	€77,055.57	€86,784.77	€80,000.00
South Dublin	€66,269.29	€83,044.53	€103,019.98	€33,455.42
Tipperary	€102,901.54	€86,402.06	€81,487.68	€80,500.00
Waterford	€82,042.00	€89,358.15	€82,972.11	€83,000.00
Westmeath	€80,228.24	€85,990.00	€100,597.95	€122,054.00
Wexford	€81,753.25	€81,603.49	€82,755.08	€82,819.89
Wicklow	€50,563.67	€74,317.07	€80,987.77	€85,994.00

As Limerick did not have a functioning PPN during 2018, there was no expenditure to record. My Department is continuing to work with Limerick City and County Council to ensure that Limerick PPN is re-established as soon as possible.

Work is currently underway in relation to the 2019 allocations, which will be notified to all PPNs shortly.

Charities Regulation

1021. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development

the amount of current and capital funding allocated to the Charities Regulatory Authority in each of the years 2014 to 2018, in tabular form; the 2019 allocation; and the amount expended in each year to date. [54296/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Seán Canney): The Charities Regulator was established on October 14, 2014. Audited financial statements for the first period were produced for the 14 months to December 2015, in accordance with Section 30(2) of the Charities Act 2009. Annual financial statements were produced thereafter. The accounts for 2018 are not yet available.

	2014	14 months to Dec 2015	12 months to Dec 2016	12 months to Dec 2017	12 months to Dec 2018	2019
Capital spend		€122,188	€130,933	€401,382	Not available	
Total current expenditure per audited accounts		€1,655,943	€2,675,854	€3,328,307	Not available	
Budget allocation	€300,000	€1,419,000	€2,665,000	€4,379,000	€4,446,000	€4,490,000

Charitable and Voluntary Organisations

1022. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of organisations on the Charities Register as at 31 December in each of the years 2014 to 2018, in tabular form; the number of organisations that were taken off the register as at 31 December in each year, in tabular form; the number of investigations carried out in each year in accordance with the Charities Act 2009; the number of imposed intermediate sanctions annually; the number of prosecutions annually in the period; the number of fines imposed annually; and the value of all penalties in each of the years 2014 to 2018. [54297/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Seán Canney): The Charities Regulatory Authority was established in October 2014 pursuant to the Charities Act 2009. The key functions of the Regulator are to establish and maintain a public register of charitable organisations operating in Ireland and ensure their compliance with the Charities Acts.

My Department has overall policy responsibility for the Charities Regulator. However, the Authority is fully independent in the performance of its statutory functions. Neither I nor my Department have any role in the decision making process of the Authority.

My Department receives regular updates from the Charities Regulator regarding the number of charities registered and de-registered. The numbers over the 2014-2018 period are as follows:

Year	Number of organisations on the Register of Charities as of 31 December of the relevant year	Number of organisations de-registered in the relevant year*
2014	8,450	0
2015	8,233	217
2016	8,003	314
2017	9,061	699
2018	9,799	579

*All organisations de-registered to date have been de-registered because they no longer have an entitlement to an exemption under section 207 or 208 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (charitable tax exemption - commonly referred to as a CHY number)

One of the functions of the Charities Regulator is to carry out investigations in accordance with the Charities Act 2009. Part 4 of the 2009 Act, which gives investigative and protective powers to the Charities Regulator, was commenced on 5 September 2016. Part 4 of the Act includes the powers to appoint inspectors to investigate the affairs of charitable organisations and to impose intermediate sanctions on charitable organisations in respect of which there is a contravention of provisions of the Act.

The number of charitable organisations in respect of which inspectors were appointed to investigate the affairs of the charitable organisations under Part 4 of the 2009 Act is as follows:

2016 - 1

2017 - 2

2018 - 1

The number of intermediate sanctions imposed on charitable organisations under Section 73 of the Charities Act 2009 is as follows:

2016 - 0

2017 - 1

2018 - 1

In 2017, the Charities Regulator secured one prosecution in respect of breaches of the provisions of the Charities Act.

The Charities Act 2009 does not provide the Charities Regulator with the power to impose fines or penalties. This is a matter for the courts.

Charities Regulation

1023. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of appeals made to the Charity Appeals Tribunal under section 45 of the Charities Act 2009 in each year since being established; the number of cases heard and adjudicated on; and the number of cases in which an appeal was successful and not successful in each year. [54298/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Seán Canney): Section 75 (1) of the Charities Act 2009 provides for the establishment of the Charities Appeal Tribunal. The role of the Charity Appeals Tribunal is to hear and adjudicate on appeals against certain decisions of the Charities Regulatory Authority (the ‘Charities Regulator’).

The Rules for the Charities Appeals Tribunal were made under the Charity Appeals Tribunal (Charities Act 2009) Rules 2018, SI No. 209 of 2018. The Rules came into force on 4 July 2018.

To date no appeals under Section 45 have been received by the Tribunal since its establishment.

Dormant Accounts Fund Grants

1024. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if a charity (details supplied) will be considered for funding under the dormant accounts fund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54359/18]

1025. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if an organisation (details supplied) will be considered for funding under the dormant accounts fund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54360/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Seán Canney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1024 and 1025 together.

The 2018 Dormant Accounts Action Plan, which was published in July, approved funding of up to €39.7 million for 45 different measures across ten different Government Departments.

In line with the provisions of the Dormant Accounts Acts, the measures identified in the Action Plan target social, economic and educational disadvantage; and people with a disability. The approved measures will support a wide range of projects and programmes relating to issues such as social inclusion, assisting migrants, support for carers, speech and language therapy, support for dementia sufferers and sports measures. The majority of measures will commence in 2019, subject to voted expenditure being available within each relevant Department.

With regard to the ways in which individual organisations can apply for funding, it is a matter for each relevant Department as to how they deliver their own measures. For example, my own Department recently granted capital funding to a range of social enterprises that are addressing disadvantage and disability through their work, following a process which was administered by Pobal.

With regard to the specific organisations referred to, I am aware that the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport administers Dormant Account measures through Sport Ireland, who periodically invite applications for possible projects and programmes from the National Governing Bodies, Local Sports Partnerships and other agencies directly involved with disadvantage and disability. Through these measures the Department of Transport has recently made Dormant Accounts Funding available to the Irish Wheelchair Association. I am also aware that Acquired Brain Injury Ireland was recently approved for Dormant Accounts Funding of €170,000 through a measure administered by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. This is to support the set up of a national support network for carers of people with an acquired brain injury.

LEADER Programmes

1026. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the grant options for a community centre seeking a new well water supply to its facility. [54432/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): Responsibility for the provision of water services lies with my colleague, the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government in conjunction with Irish Water and the Local Authorities.

However, within my own Department's remit, assistance may be available under the LEADER Programme for work of this nature, subject to certain conditions. Applications for LEADER funding are made directly to the Local Action Groups (LAGs) which deliver the programme in each LEADER sub-regional area. Contact details for all LAGs are available on my Department's website at: <https://drcd.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/180813-Update-Contact-Details-for-LEADER.pdf>.

Funding may also be available in certain circumstances under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme for the works described, depending on the nature of the project and its potential role in supporting town and village regeneration. The Town and Village Renewal Scheme is a key component of the Government's Action Plan for Rural Development and is part of a package of national and local support measures to revitalise rural towns and villages throughout Ireland.

I anticipate that the 2019 Town and Village Renewal Scheme will be open for new applications, via the Local Authorities, during the first quarter of the year.

Departmental Expenditure

1027. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the budget and spend in his Department for marketing, media and social media in each of the years 2016 to 2018; the projected spend for 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54470/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The details requested by the Deputy are set out in the table below. As my Department was established on 19th July 2017, the information provided commences on that date and includes the remainder of 2017 and total expenditure in 2018.

	2017	2018
Photography	€3,249	€6,040
Advertising	€12,712	€7,491.86
*National Ploughing Championships exhibit	€47,233	€143,433
Project Ireland 2040 Video Production	NIL	€6,297.92
Social media	Nil	Nil

*My Department hosted a joint exhibit with the Department of Culture, Heritage & the Gaeltacht at the Ploughing Championships in 2017 and 2018. In 2017 the Department of Culture, Heritage & the Gaeltacht was the lead exhibitor and therefore incurred the higher percentage of costs. In 2018, my Department was the lead exhibitor and incurred the higher percentage of costs.

In terms of projected spend in 2019, my Department is preparing a communications strategy which will govern our internal and external communications priorities for next year. Any decisions in relation to spending on media and other communication channels will be met within existing allocations.

Departmental Staff Data

1028. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of staff in his Department employed to work on marketing, media and social media in 2018. [54487/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I can confirm that apart from one Press Adviser my Department has no dedicated staff for media, marketing, social media etc. The Department has a Communications Unit, comprising five staff, which incorporates the Press Office, and which deals with elements of internal and external

communications, such as the website, staff information, press queries etc, as well as other corporate functions.

CLÁR Programme

1029. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the timeframe for the launch of CLÁR funding in 2019; when he expects this funding to be open to applications in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1270/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The CLÁR programme provides funding for small scale infrastructural projects in disadvantaged rural areas that have experienced significant levels of depopulation. The aim of CLÁR is to support the sustainable development of designated CLÁR areas with the aim of encouraging people to continue live and work in those areas. The funding provided under CLÁR works in conjunction with local funding and on the basis of locally identified priorities.

The CLÁR programme was closed for new applications in 2010. However, I re-launched the programme in the second half of 2016 and since then, over 1,200 projects have been approved for total funding of €25 million.

I anticipate that the 2019 CLÁR Programme will be opened for new applications in the first quarter of this year. Decisions regarding specific measures to be supported under the programme will be made shortly.

Community Services Programme Administration

1030. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development his plans to increase the hourly rate of funding under the community services programme administered by Pobal from €8.65 per hour to the minimum wage rate of €9.80 per hour in view of the fact that the organisations availing of the funding are finding it difficult to meet this shortfall; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1405/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Community Services Programme (CSP) supports more than 400 community organisations to provide local services through a social enterprise model. CSP funding is provided as a fixed annual contribution to the cost of a manager and an agreed number of full-time equivalent (FTE) positions, with €32,000 per annum provided for a manager and €19,033 per annum for each FTE position.

The CSP contribution is not aligned with the minimum wage, rather it is a fixed annual contribution that must be co-funded by the organisation concerned from other sources, for example, from income received from the public use of their facilities and services.

My Department will shortly commence a review of the CSP. The review will consider *inter alia* funding levels and funding structures, and how the programme fits with overall Government priorities and my Department's other community programmes and policy objectives. It is expected that the review will be completed by Q3 2019 and it will help inform decisions on the future shape and structure of the programme.

In the meantime, I am providing €1 million in 2019 to continue the CSP *Support Fund*, which will help alleviate the financial challenges faced by the smaller CSP supported organisations pending completion of the review. I am also increasing the amount of the additional

contribution per FTE paid under the fund from €350 in 2018 to €1,100 in 2019. Some 260 CSP supported organisations will qualify for support from the fund and I expect to make an announcement in this regard shortly.

Community Services Programme Data

1031. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if Pobal has statistics in relation to the number of staff employed in community centres nationally and the salary of each; and if same will be made available. [1523/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): Funding for staff in community centres is provided through a number of public-funded schemes, including my Department's Community Services Programme (CSP). The CSP supports more than 400 community organisations to provide local services through a social enterprise model. Funding is provided as a fixed annual contribution to the cost of a manager and an agreed number of full-time equivalent (FTE) positions, with €32,000 per annum provided for a manager and €19,033 per annum for each FTE position.

The CSP currently provides a contribution to the salary costs of an estimated 60 manager and 320 FTE posts in around 120 community centres. This contribution must be co-funded by the organisations concerned from other sources, for example, from income received from the public use of their facilities and services. Moreover, all internal operational matters, including general employment issues and salary levels relating to CSP supported posts are solely matters for the Boards of those organisations to manage as the respective employers. Accordingly, neither my Department nor Pobal can provide the information sought by the Deputy in relation to salaries.

Funding may also be provided for staffing in community centres through schemes supported by other Government Departments, for example, the Rural Social Scheme and the Community Employment Programme managed by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme

1032. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of projects in County Kildare considered for funding under the outdoor recreation infrastructure projects; the number of projects considered nationally; the number provided with funding in each county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1668/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): On 28th May last year, I launched the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme for 2018, under three separate measures:

- Measure 1: Small maintenance/promotion of existing infrastructure (maximum grant €20,000),

- Measure 2: Medium scale repair/upgrade and development of new small/medium infrastructure (maximum grant €200,000), and

- Measure 3: Repair/upgrade and development of larger more strategic projects (grant of between €200,001 and €500,000).

Each applicant was entitled to submit up to 10 applications under Measure 1, and up to 4 applications under Measure 2. Local Development Companies were invited to apply under Measure 1 and, in the case of some counties, more than one Local Development Company applied.

Measure 3 was targeted at larger-scale projects with a potential regional or national impact, which could be delivered collaboratively by Local Authorities and/or State Agencies. One proposal per applicant was allowed under Measure 3.

Kildare County Council submitted 1 application under Measure 1 of the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme in 2018, and 1 application under Measure 2.

The Measure 1 application was unsuccessful as it did not comply with the eligibility criteria indicated in the scheme guidelines. The Measure 2 application was approved for funding of €85,684 on the 8th January this year.

The table below provides details of the number of applications received by county and the number of projects approved under the 2018 scheme.

Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme 2018

County	Number of projects submitted	Number of projects approved
Carlow	9	5
Cavan	13	12
Clare	15	9
Cork	40	15
Donegal	14	3
Dublin	4	1
Galway	22	9
Kerry	26	22
Kildare	2	1
Kilkenny	11	6
Laois	10	3
Leitrim	14	5
Limerick	20	10
Longford	15	6
Louth	8	3
Mayo	16	16
Meath	12	10
Monaghan	17	11
Offaly	12	8
Roscommon	12	7
Sligo	15	15
Tipperary	19	8
Waterford	11	4
Westmeath	15	12
Wexford	18	13
Wicklow	15	10
Total	385	224

Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme

1033. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of projects in County Laois considered for funding under the outdoor recreation infrastructure projects fund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1669/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme is part of the Government's Action Plan for Rural Development and provides funding for the development of new outdoor recreation infrastructure or the necessary maintenance, enhancement or promotion of existing outdoor recreation infrastructure in Ireland.

On 28th May last year, I launched the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme for 2018, under three separate Measures:

- Measure 1: Small maintenance/promotion of existing infrastructure (maximum grant €20,000),

- Measure 2: Medium scale repair/upgrade and development of new small/medium infrastructure (maximum grant €200,000), and

- Measure 3: Repair/upgrade and development of larger more strategic projects (grant of between €200,001 and €500,000).

Each applicant was entitled to submit up to 10 applications under Measure 1, and up to 4 applications under Measure 2. Local Development Companies were invited to apply under Measure 1, while Local Authorities were applicants under Measure 2.

Measure 3 was targeted at larger-scale projects with a potential regional or national impact, which could be delivered collaboratively by Local Authorities and/or State Agencies. One proposal per applicant was allowed under Measure 3.

Laois Local Development Company submitted 9 applications for funding under Measure 1, and of those, 3 applications were approved for funding.

Laois County Council submitted 1 application under Measure 2. This application was assessed under Measure 3, as the level of funding sought was in excess of the maximum allowable under Measure 2. However, the application was not successful as it did not comply with the eligibility criteria indicated in the scheme guidelines.

In total, more than 220 projects were approved for funding to a value of €21 million across all three Measures of the 2018 Outdoor Infrastructure Scheme. The continued development of our recreational infrastructure will support Ireland's developing rural tourism industry, and will also provide better recreational facilities for local people and families to enjoy.

Departmental Correspondence

1034. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the customer complaints received by his Department in each of the years since 2016; if the complaints are grouped into categories; the nature of the complaints; the resolution of same; and the number progressed to the relevant ombudsman in each of the years since 2016. [1878/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): My Depart-

ment was established on 19 July 2017. It has received one complaint under formal complaints procedures since then. The complaint arose on the 27 August 2018 when a member of the public who corresponded with the Department in Irish was responded to in English, in error.

The aggrieved member of the public also contacted the Coimisinéir Teanga in relation to the matter. Following an investigation into the matter by my officials, both the person concerned and the Coimisinéir Teanga fully accepted my Department's apology in August 2018, and the matter was closed.

Back to Education Allowance Payments

1035. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to increase the €198 back-to-education allowance in view of the fact that it is perceived as not being sufficient; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [54152/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The back to education allowance scheme (BTEA) is designed to support second chance education. It enables eligible persons to pursue education and to continue to receive income support, in line with their qualifying scheme rates, for the duration of a course of study. The objective of the scheme is to raise the educational and skill levels to enable jobseekers better access to the emerging needs of the labour market in line with Government activation strategy.

The BTEA is not intended as an alternative form of funding for people entering or re-entering the third-level education system. The Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) Grant, payable by the Department of Education and Skills, represents the primary support for persons pursuing education. The eligibility rules that govern the payment of a student maintenance grant are a matter for that Department.

The appropriate rate of payment for all social welfare schemes, including the BTEA scheme, is considered by Government in the context of the Budget and the availability of resources. The rate for BTEA is linked to the persons' underlying payment, for example jobseekers allowance, and my Department will provide a further €5 increase in the weekly rate from March 2019 (building on similar increases in March 2017 and 2018). This will increase the weekly maximum personal rate from €198 to €203.

From the 2017/2018 academic year my Department reintroduced the annual Cost of Education Grant. This grant is €500 and is payable to BTEA participants with a child on their BTEA payment.

Overall, the Deputy should note that some €78.5 million was paid by my Department in 2018 to meet the cost of BTEA and the cost of Education Grant. This represents a considerable investment in supporting in excess of 10,000 customers in the past year to acquire the necessary education and skills to re-enter the labour market.

I trust this clarifies the position.

Commencement of Legislation

1036. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason Parts 2, 3 and 9 of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 have not been commenced; when these Parts will be commenced; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [54229/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I am aware of the pressing need to make technical amendments to the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 including those sections in Part 9 that provide for the registration and re-registration of the birth of a donor-conceived child and, in particular, make possible the registration of details of “Parent”, as well as “Mother” and “Father”, where required.

I want to make these necessary amendments at the earliest possible opportunity.

As I stated to this House on the 19th of December last, it is my intention to bring these amendments forward in a stand-alone Bill early this year. To this end, the Government have approved the preparation of the Civil Registration Bill 2019, which will include these provisions, and will be brought forward as a matter of priority.

Commencement of these amendments is also dependent on commencement of Parts 2 and 3 of the 2015 Act, which is the responsibility of the Minister for Health. There are important administrative and operational arrangements to be put in place to facilitate the implementation of Parts 2 and 3, including the establishment of the National Donor-Conceived Person Register and the appointment of authorised persons under the Act. I understand that it is the Minister for Health’s intention that these provisions will be commenced as soon as possible.

Officials from my Department are working with the General Register Office (GRO) and the Department of Health to ensure that the appropriate legislative, regulatory, and operational mechanisms are in place to allow for the earliest possible commencement of all of the relevant legislation that will allow for birth registrations of donor-conceived children.

Registration of Births

1037. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the steps she will take to amend the laws surrounding presumed legitimacy to simplify the process for women seeking a divorce and attempting to register the birth of a child whose father is not their husband from whom they are seeking a divorce; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1537/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Provisions for registration of births in cases where the parents are not married to each other are set out in section 22 of the Civil Registration Act 2004. In particular, where the mother is still legally married to a person other than the father of the child, the provisions in section 22(3) apply. In these circumstances the father’s name may be registered on foot of:

- A statutory declaration by the woman’s husband that he is not the father of the child, or
- A statutory declaration by the woman that she has been living apart from her husband during the period of 10 months ending immediately before the birth of the child by virtue of a decree of divorce, a decree of divorce a mensa et thoro, a decree of nullity or a deed of separation.

Alternatively, it is open to either the mother or father to apply for a Court Order under Section 45 of the Status of Children Act 1987 naming the person other than her 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).

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 the HSE to the delivery of training to staff of the Civil Registration Service, who are employees of the HSE.

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 also intend to bring forward measures in the Civil Registration Bill 2019 that will make it less onerous for a woman in these circumstances to rebut the automatic assumption of paternity of her husband. This will better align civil registration legislation with current presumption of paternity provisions set out in section 46 of the Status of Children Act 1987, following commencement of section 88 of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 in early 2016. Implementation of these new measures will also be dependent on training of registrars in the HSE.

Disability Allowance Appeals

1038. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an appeal by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [54045/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The person concerned has been awarded disability allowance with effect from 28 March 2018, as a result of further medical evidence which she submitted to the Department. The first payment will be made by her chosen payment method on 16 January 2019.

Arrears of payment due will issue as soon as possible.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Back to Education Allowance Payments

1039. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason a back-to-education allowance for a person (details supplied) has been suspended since 4 December 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [54048/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned was in receipt of Jobseekers Allowance from the 23rd June 2018. They disclosed to the Department on the 5th December 2018 that they were attending a full-time course of study since September 2018. Under Section 148(1) of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005, as amended, a person shall be disqualified from receipt of Jobseekers Allowance while attending a course of study.

Notice of the decision to suspend the Jobseekers Allowance claim issued to the customer on 11th December 2018.

An application for Back To Education Allowance was received on 10th December 2018. Section 10.3 of the Back To Education Allowance guidelines states that applications received more than 30 days after commencement of a course of study are deemed to be late and therefore cannot be considered for the scheme.

Notice of the decision to refuse the Back to Education Allowance application issued to the

person on 11th December 2018.

Should the person concerned be experiencing financial difficulty he should contact his local Intreo Centre to discuss his situation.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Proposed Legislation

1040. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the Attorney General is satisfied with the defined benefit pensions provisions in the Social Welfare, Pensions and Civil Registration Bill 2017; and if the Bill can now proceed to Committee Stage. [54070/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): As the Deputy is aware, the General Scheme of the Social Welfare and Pensions Bill 2017 (now the Social Welfare, Pensions and Civil Registration Bill 2017) was published in May 2017 and contained a number of key measures relating to DB pension schemes. It is intended that these measures will act to support existing provisions in the Pensions Act by providing for further protection for scheme members' benefits and enhancing employer responsibilities for their schemes.

In July 2018, Government approval was obtained to draft additional provisions to be included in the Bill on Committee Stage including provisions relating to defined benefit schemes.

In developing these provisions, it is essential to be cognisant of the current pension landscape in Ireland so that a balanced, proportionate approach is developed and that unintended negative consequences do not arise.

Under existing pensions law, there is no legislative obligation on the employer to make contributions to a scheme. However, the provisions of this Bill will introduce a new regime into the Pensions Act 1990 which, amongst other things, will ensure that an employer cannot "walk away" at short notice from the pension scheme it is supporting by providing for a 12-month notification period, and will enable the Pensions Authority to make a funding obligation direction specifying payments to be made by a sponsoring employer to the pension scheme where no agreement is reached, within a specified time period, to resolve a funding deficit.

The defined benefit pension provisions are very technical and involve complex policy issues. In order to achieve a resilient solution it has been necessary to consult in detail with other Government Departments and obtain numerous legal advices from the Office of the Attorney General on various aspects of the provisions. When these matters have been resolved and amendments approved by Government, an early date for Committee Stage will be requested.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Legislative Measures

1041. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if consideration will be given to introducing a stand-alone amending Bill to provide for the necessary technical amendments of Part 9 of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015. [54071/18]

1057. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when she plans to commence Part 9 of the Children and Families Relationships Act 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [54225/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1041 and 1057 together.

The Government has approved the preparation of the Civil Registration Bill 2019, which will provide for the necessary technical amendments to Part 9 of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015.

The Bill will also include provisions for:

- a role for a next of kin in providing a Coroner with additional details in relation to a deceased person’s particulars;

- sharing of General Register Office data and records with a body such as the National Library or National Archives; and

- collection of additional details in respect of deceased persons in order that the CSO can comply with obligations under EU Regulations.

The Bill will be brought forward as a matter of priority.

Commencement of the amendments to Part 9 of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 is also dependent on commencement of Parts 2 and 3 of the 2015 Act, which is the responsibility of the Minister for Health. There are important administrative and operational arrangements to be put in place to facilitate the implementation of Parts 2 and 3, including the establishment of the National Donor-Conceived Person Register and the appointment of authorised persons under the Act. I understand that it is the Minister for Health’s intention that these provisions will be commenced as soon as possible.

Officials from my Department are working with the General Register Office and the Department of Health to ensure that the appropriate legislative, regulatory, and operational mechanisms are in place to allow for the earliest possible commencement of all of the relevant legislation that will allow for birth registrations of donor-conceived children.

Working Family Payment Applications

1042. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when an application by a person (details supplied) for a working family payment will be decided upon; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [54080/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Working Family Payment (WFP) is a weekly in-work payment which provides additional income support to employees on low earnings with children.

An application was received from the person concerned on 12 October 2018.

The applicant was awarded WFP on 19 December 2018 and was notified in writing of this decision.

However, they have requested a review of the decision of 19 December 2018. Following their request for a review, the Department wrote to the person concerned on 4 January 2019 and

has requested additional employment-related information.

On receipt of the requested information from the person concerned, the decision of 19 December 2018 will be reviewed without delay and they will be notified of the outcome.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Appeals

1043. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an illness benefit appeal by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [54089/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned was in receipt of Illness Benefit from July 2011 until December 2012, at which point they submitted a final certificate and the claim was closed. There is no appeal registered for an Illness Benefit claim in respect of this customer and no further application for illness benefit has been received.

I trust this clarifies matters for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Payments

1044. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason an illness benefit payment for a person (details supplied) has ceased; when payment will recommence; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [54096/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Illness Benefit claim for the person concerned is paid up to date and any arrears due have been issued.

If the person concerned remains ill and unfit for work, a further medical certificate should be submitted to the Department in order for further payments to issue.

I trust this clarifies matters for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Applications

1045. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason her Department repeatedly supplied incorrect information to a person (details supplied); and the steps she will take to ensure the person is compensated for this period and that officials are fully briefed on the agreement in question. [54108/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): An application was received from the person concerned on the 15th February 2018 claiming Illness Benefit from the 1st September 2015.

Under the Social Welfare (Bilateral Agreement with the United Kingdom and Social Security) Order 2007 the regulations state that the country in which a person was last insurably employed is responsible for the claim.

15 January 2019

As the person concerned was last insurably employed in Jersey in 2015 prior to this claim, the claim is proper to Jersey and my Department's EU Records section has forwarded the claim to the appropriate authorities there.

The person concerned also claimed Illness Benefit from the 15th January 2018 to the 19th June 2018. This claim was processed and paid in full by this Department as the person concerned was insurably employed in Ireland in 2018 prior to that claim.

I trust this clarifies matters for the Deputy.

One-Parent Family Payment Payments

1046. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a one-parent family allowance payment will be made available in the case of a person (details supplied); if a basic or emergency payment will issue in the interim; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [54117/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): There is no record of receipt of an application for a One Parent Family payment from the person concerned.

An application form has issued to her directly. When the completed application form is received, a decision on her entitlement will be made as quickly as possible.

It is also open to the customer to apply for a basic or emergency payment at her local Intreo Centre.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits Payments

1047. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when basic payment, one-parent family payment and-or child benefit will issue in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [54120/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned made an application for One-Parent Family Payment (OPFP) on 11th December 2018 and this claim is being processed by my Department.

Pending finalisation of her OPFP claim the person concerned made a claim for a Basic Supplementary Welfare Payment on 13th December 2018 and she is receiving a weekly payment of €177.80 on this scheme.

The person concerned is in receipt of a monthly Child Benefit payment of €140.00 and this payment commenced on the 1st July 2018.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension Payments

1048. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social

Protection when payment will issue in respect of an invalidity pension in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [54123/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The lady referred to has been awarded invalidity pension with effect from 30 November 2017. Payment will issue to her nominated bank account on 24 January 2019. Arrears due from 30 November 2017 to 23 January 2019 (less any overlapping social welfare payment) will issue as soon as possible.

The lady in question was notified of this decision on 08 January 2019.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Supplementary Welfare Allowance Eligibility

1049. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 642 of 4 December 2018, if a case (details supplied) will be examined with a view to early payment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [54125/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned has met with a Community Welfare Officer (CWO). Due to a change in their circumstances, they have made a new application for Basic Supplementary Welfare Allowance (SWA). The CWO has received a letter from Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) confirming the person concerned is not eligible for a student grant.

The CWO has advised the person concerned to reapply for Jobseekers Allowance (JA) and this claim will be processed when it is received.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits Applications

1050. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if both a carer's allowance payment and a domiciliary care allowance will be awarded to a person (details supplied) following an appeal. [54144/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that the carer's allowance appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 6 July 2018 and the domiciliary care allowance appeal was registered on 14 June 2018. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant papers and comments by or on behalf of the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. The carer's allowance papers were received in the Social Welfare Appeals Office on 26 October 2018 and the domiciliary care allowance papers were received on 19 November 2018. The cases have been referred together to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Appeals

1051. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a carer's allowance appeal by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [54150/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was referred on 27th November 2018 to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Eligibility

1052. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a matter raised in correspondence (details supplied) regarding the alternate options available to persons if they do not have the required 13 paid contributions in the relevant tax year but do have them in the current tax year will be addressed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [54170/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Department administers the Illness Benefit scheme to those customers who cannot work because they are sick or ill, provided they are covered by the appropriate class of social insurance (PRSI) and satisfy the PRSI conditions.

The person concerned was advised by letter dated 9th January 2019 that he was not entitled to payment of Illness Benefit as he does not satisfy all of the contribution conditions.

Although the person concerned satisfied the first PRSI contribution qualifying condition, he unfortunately does not satisfy the second PRSI qualifying condition, which is as follows:

- 39 weeks of PRSI contributions paid or credited in the relevant tax year, of which 13 must be **paid contributions**. If a person does not have 13 paid contributions in the relevant tax year, then 13 paid contributions in *one* of the following tax years can be used instead:

- Either of the two tax years before the relevant tax year
- The last complete tax year (before the year in which your claim for Illness Benefit begins)
- The current tax year

or

26 weeks of PRSI contributions paid in the relevant tax year, **and** 26 weeks of PRSI contributions paid in the tax year immediately before the relevant tax year.

The relevant tax year is the second-last complete tax year before the year in which your claim for Illness Benefit begins.

The person concerned has no contributions in 2016 and 4 contributions in 2017, meaning he does not have enough contributions in the **relevant tax years** to qualify for payment.

It is open to the person concerned to apply for Disability Allowance if he has an incapacity that is likely to last for at least one year. Disability Allowance is a means-tested scheme. If the person concerned has an urgent financial need he can apply for assistance under the Supplementary Welfare Allowance scheme at his local Intreo centre.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Payments

1053. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when arrears in respect of a disability allowance application by a person (details supplied) will issue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [54184/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): This lady was awarded disability allowance with effect from 27 September 2017.

Arrears of payment due for the period 27 September 2017 to 11 December 2018 issued to this lady’s bank account on 7 January 2019.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Payments

1054. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason a payment has not issued to a person (details supplied) in the past two weeks of December 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [54188/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Illness Benefit claim for the person concerned is in payment and all arrears owing to them have been issued.

The claim is both medically certified and paid up to date.

If the person concerned remains ill and unfit for work, a further medical certificate should be submitted to the Department as soon as possible in order for further payments to issue.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Departmental Expenditure

1055. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the cost incurred by her Department in 2018 for the use of taxi services; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [54209/18]

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

cost incurred on taxi services by my Department in 2018 are outlined in the following table. These costs are provisional and subject to audit by the Comptroller and Auditor General.

Year	2018
Taxi Services	€27,580

Taxi costs are paid wholly and exclusively in the course of a person's duties in carrying out Departmental business.

Disability Allowance Applications

1056. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if an application for a disability allowance by a person (details supplied) will be expedited. [54222/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The person concerned submitted an application for disability allowance (DA) on 10 September 2018.

Their application, based upon all the evidence submitted, was disallowed on the grounds that they do not satisfy the medical conditions for disability allowance and they are not habitually resident in this state.

The person concerned was notified in writing of this decision on 3 January 2019 and was also notified of their right to request a review of this decision or to appeal it to the independent Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO).

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Question No. 1057 answered with Question No. 1041.

Exceptional Needs Payment Data

1058. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of applications for the exceptional needs payment each month in 2018; the number granted, refused and appealed, respectively, by month; the number, if appealed, that were successful; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [54241/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Under the supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) scheme, the Department may make a single exceptional needs payment (ENP) to help meet essential, once-off expenditure which a person could not reasonably be expected to meet out of their weekly income. The Government has provided €38.8 million for ENPs and UNPs in 2019. An urgent needs payment (UNP) may be made to persons who may not normally qualify for SWA but who have an urgent need which they cannot meet from their own resources or an alternative is not available at that time.

Reviews of ENP decisions are carried out by review officers within the community welfare service. Statistics are maintained relating to payments under the ENP and UNP schemes; however, they are not maintained on the number of applications, the outcome of those applications, the number of reviews or the outcomes of those reviews.

The tabular statement below shows the number of ENP and UNP payments that issued each month in 2018.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Tabular Statement: Number of ENP and UNP payments made in 2018

Month	Number of Payments
Jan	8,379
Feb	8,390
Mar	8,250
Apr	8,290
May	9,191
Jun	8,047
Jul	8,976
Aug	9,918
Sep	8,992
Oct	13,335
Nov	11,510
Dec	9,236
Total	112,514

Carer's Allowance Eligibility

1059. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the progress to date in the determination of eligibility for a carer's allowance in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [54259/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): An application for carer's allowance (CA) was received from the person concerned on 9 August 2018.

It is a condition for receipt of a CA that the person being cared for must have such 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 himself or herself and likely to require that level of care for at least twelve months.

The evidence submitted in support of the application was examined and the deciding officer decided that this evidence did not indicate that the requirement for full-time care was satisfied.

The person concerned was notified on 7 November 2018 of this decision, the reason for it and of his right of review and appeal.

The person concerned requested a review of this decision on 18 December 2018 and submitted additional evidence in support of his application.

This additional information is currently being considered by a Deciding Officer of my Department.

Once this review is complete, the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

1060. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application for a carer's allowance by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [54306/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Following an Appeals Officer's decision, carer's allowance (CA) was awarded to the person concerned on 14 December 2018 with effect from 12 October 2017. Their first payment, along with their 2018 carer's support grant, issued to their nominated post office on 20 December 2018.

Arrears of CA for the period 12 October 2017 to 19 December 2018 also issued via cheque dated 14 December 2018.

The person concerned was notified of the outcome on 14 December 2018.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Appeals

1061. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a matter regarding the case of a person (details supplied) will be addressed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [54307/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an Appeals Officer, having fully considered all of the available evidence, decided to disallow the appeal of the person concerned by way of a summary decision on 1 November 2018. Under Social Welfare legislation, the decision of the Appeals Officer is final and conclusive and may only be reviewed by an Appeals Officer in the light of new evidence or new facts, or where there has been a change of circumstances which has come to notice since the date of the Appeals Officer's original decision.

I am advised that the person concerned has now submitted additional evidence and that the Appeals Officer has agreed to review the case. The person concerned will be contacted when the review of her appeal has been finalised.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension Payments

1062. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason an invalidity pension payment has not issued to a person (details supplied) despite the person being notified of the awarding of a pension; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [54309/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned is currently in receipt of Partial Capacity Benefit (PCB).

The Partial Capacity Benefit section received correspondence from the person concerned on the 22 October 2018 stating that she would like to opt out of PCB and receive Invalidity Pension instead.

The PCB section sent a letter to the person concerned on the 6th November 2018 requesting confirmation from her employer of the date she finished working. No reply was received and a further letter issued to the person concerned on 10 January 2019 seeking this information. When this information is received her PCB claim will be closed. Invalidity Pension will then be reinstated and any arrears due to her at that time will issue.

I trust this clarifies matters for the Deputy.

Public Services Card

1063. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of valid public services cards issued. [54322/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): To date, over 3.64 million Public Services Cards (PSCs) have issued. Over 2.983 million people are now SAFE registered.

As the PSCs are valid for seven years, the majority of the people who are now SAFE-registered and who are still alive have a valid card.

I trust this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

State Pension (Contributory)

1064. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when the new system of calculating PRSI contributions for the State pension (contributory) will be in place; and if years in which a person was unable to work outside of the home due to childcare responsibilities will be credited. [54337/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Since the end of September 2018, my Department has been examining the social insurance records of pensioners born on or after 1 September 1946 who were awarded state pension (contributory) on reduced post-Budget 2012 rate bands. Information letters were issued to all pensioners explaining that my Department will contact them again to either inform them about the outcome of their review or to request further information in order to complete their review. All of the claims involved will be individually examined, starting with those aged 71 or over. The process will take a number of months to complete.

Where possible, my Department will use information already held to assist in these reviews. For example, a deciding officer will consider awarding HomeCaring Periods where a person's gap in employment coincides directly with a period for which they received a social welfare payment such as Child Benefit (for a child up to age 12) or Carers Allowance or Benefit. Additional information will be requested in writing from pensioners in relation to unexplained gaps in their social insurance record if required to complete their review. Information requests will also explain how to access my Department's online service to provide the relevant information. On receipt of the requested information, the person's state pension (contributory) will be reviewed and they will be informed of the outcome in writing.

It is expected that the first review outcomes will be notified during Quarter 1 2019. Regardless of when a review is completed, where a pensioner qualifies for an increase, the increase will be paid with their next due payment and arrears backdated to March 2018, or their 66th birthday if later, will be paid. If a pensioner does not qualify for an increase, they will continue to receive their existing rate of payment. No personal pension entitlement rates will be reduced as a result of this review.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits

1065. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the financial supports available for non-medical costs for families of sick children; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [54403/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Domiciliary care allowance is payable in respect of children with a severe disability who require care and attention substantially in excess of that required by children of a similar age without their disability, providing this additional care is likely to last for at least 12 months.

This allowance and the related annual carers support grant are not provided for a specific purpose and can be used as required by the recipient.

Additional costs resulting from a child's illness may be covered under the exceptional needs payment scheme operated by the Department. Payment is discretionary and based on the individual circumstances of each application.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

1066. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason an application by a person (details supplied) for a hearing aid was refused; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [54406/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Qualification for medical appliance benefit is based on satisfying certain PRSI conditions, including having paid the required total number of contributions since first starting work, along with having the required number of contributions paid or credited in the relevant tax year on which the claim is based.

The person concerned made an application for medical appliance benefit in December 2018. This application was refused as she did not have the required total number of contributions recorded.

However, following a further examination of her record an older insurance record has been found and the contributions paid under that number can be counted for qualification purposes. As a result, she now has the required number of contributions to qualify for the benefit. She will receive a letter within the next few days advising her of the position and confirming her eligibility for medical appliance (hearing aid) benefit.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Inspections

1067. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to the practice of some social welfare inspectors working on an investigation and also acting as a community welfare officer and dealing with an application for assistance from a person or family that is the subject of the investigation; her views on whether there is a potential conflict of interest in these instances; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [54430/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The allocation of roles and duties of staff in an area are within the remit of the local Divisional management team and are determined by the business needs of that area. Staff may work both in the role of a social welfare inspector and community welfare officer as required depending on the ongoing operational needs of the area in question.

I am advised by my Department that there is no conflict of interest in these instances as each scheme application is dealt with by the officer in accordance with the guidelines for that particular scheme. An officer working in the role of a social welfare inspector may carry out an investigation on a case and may also act as a community welfare officer if the same customer applied for supplementary welfare allowance on an interim basis pending the outcome of the original scheme investigation.

In this situation the inspector makes the decision on the supplementary welfare allowance claim and the original scheme claim is decided by a deciding officer based on the reports completed by the social welfare inspector.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Brexit Issues

1068. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans in place regarding the continued payment of social security payments from the United Kingdom to persons living here in the case of a no-deal Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [54435/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Government and the EU remain committed to securing a negotiated Brexit outcome. We have been planning for all Brexit scenarios but in light of uncertainties in London and the Brexit deadline of 29 March, the Government decided at its meeting of 11 December that immediate priority must now be given to preparations for a no-deal Brexit and that Government Departments and state agencies should urgently take forward work on that basis.

The Contingency Action Plan which the Government published on 19 December sets out in comprehensive terms the challenges to be faced and the actions taken and planned by the Government across key sectors in the event of a no-deal Brexit scenario.

My key area of interest is the impact of Brexit on the current reciprocal arrangements for social insurance schemes, social assistance schemes and child benefit between Ireland and the UK, including Northern Ireland. I met with the then UK Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the Right Honourable Esther McVey, on 23 April 2018. We agreed on our objective in

ensuring that the reciprocity of social welfare rights and entitlements, which currently exist for Irish and UK citizens moving within Ireland and between Ireland and Britain under the Common Travel Area, are safeguarded and maintained.

Departmental Expenditure

1069. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the budget and spend in her Department for marketing, media and social media in each of the years 2016 to 2018, inclusive; the projected spend for 2019; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [54463/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): For the purpose of this response, I interpret the “spend in her Department for marketing and media and social media” as media buying costs incurred from public information campaigns across all media, senior management vacancy notices, and other announcements. The budget figure listed for each year is the total budget allocation for customer communications and advertising.

My Department is committed to ensuring that members of the public are aware of the welfare supports and services that are available to them and that they are notified of any scheme changes which may affect them. Public information campaigns are targeted carefully, using the best mix of media formats, to ensure that the Department’s messages reach members of the public effectively.

The Department’s public information campaigns span national and regional print media, radio, outdoor formats, and social media and digital advertising channels. Expenditure on these channels will vary from year to year depending on the range and number of new initiatives or required messaging. As such, it is not possible to supply a figure for projected spend in 2019.

All advertising expenditure undertaken by the Department is tendered for in accordance with Government and EU procurement guidelines, including use of framework agreements from the Office of Government Procurement.

Total advertising expenditure in 2016, 2017 and 2018 are set out in the following table.

Year	Total Advertising Expenditure (VAT Inclusive)	Total Communications and Advertising Budget
2016	€87,643	€370,000
2017	€839,103	€1.335m
2018	€416,585	€1.35m

Departmental Staff Data

1070. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of staff in her Department employed to work on marketing, media and social media in 2018. [54480/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Staff in the Communications and Customer Service Unit of my Department perform a number of different roles which may change depending on the business needs of the Department. Staff are divided between the following teams within the Unit:

- Communication (7 staff): The communications team are responsible for all planned ex-

ternal communications and public information campaigns, as well as supporting internal communications, developing and designing reports / documents / posters and other visual material for use by the Department in its engagements with customers, stakeholders and staff. The team is also responsible for developing useful customer content including explainer videos and information in a range of accessible formats including Plain English, Irish Sign Language and braille, where required.

- The Press Office Team (3 staff): The press office team communicates the messages of the Minister and the Department to the media, manages key media events for the Department and provides timely responses to media enquiries. The team also manages the Department's official Twitter account in respect of press/public information.

- The Information Team (14 staff): The team operates a general information contact centre and email enquiry account on behalf of the Department, which provide general information to customers on the schemes and services of the Department. The team also represent the Department at various customers and stakeholder events and provide general information talks on aspects of the Department's work to various organisations (e.g. pensions/other entitlements). They also assist other areas with the logistics associated with representing the Department at events, including the provision of corporate materials for such events. They also manage the provision of an information leaflet despatch service on behalf of the Department. The team also manages the Department's official Twitter account in respect of general public enquiries/information requests.

- Customer Service Policy Team (5 staff): The team is responsible for developing Customer Services Policy on behalf of the Department. The team also coordinates the Department's Comments Complaints and Compliments system which is the formal feedback system from customers on their experiences of interacting with the Department. It manages and coordinates the Customer Charter and Action Plan, manages quarterly stakeholder fora on behalf of DEASP and produces the quarterly staff magazine, Social Affairs.

- Website, Forms Design Team (7 staff): The team manage and update the Department's website on a daily basis to ensure timely and relevant customer and stakeholder information is available and presented in an accessible and user-friendly way. This includes scheme updates, important changes in the Department, crisis communications and service / office related updates. The team also manages the Department's official Twitter account for the purpose of customer information / customer service. The forms design team develop and update primary customer application forms for all schemes administered by the Department.

Social Insurance

1071. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the legal basis by which different groups that are listed within the various subsections of Part 2 of Schedule 1 to the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 (as amended) can result in groups having differing statutory PRSI classification outcomes; the persons to which the same legislative provisions apply; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [54522/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Schedule 1, Part 2, Section 1 of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 lists a number of employments which are excepted from the definition of employment for the purposes of social insurance coverage. Spouses of self-employed contributors are specifically one category excepted from PRSI liability in respect of their working activity with their spouse. Family members who work together are generally not insurable under the Social Welfare Acts. Other

relatives, such as sons, daughters and grandchildren, are also usually exempted.

However, depending on the nature of the employment relationship, there are some circumstances where such employments are insurable. For spouses, there is scope within the provisions of social welfare legislation to enable spouses who are partners in an enterprise, or who work together in a legally incorporated business, to be insurable and to accrue entitlement to certain benefits and pensions.

Current social welfare legislation reflects the reality that family members regularly support each other without having any intention of entering into formal contractual arrangements. Employment under a contract of service as an employee or as a contract for services as a self-employed person is, by its very nature and necessity, a formal agreement between two or more parties. All contracts bring with them rights and responsibilities that, in this instance, include compliance with legislation relating to PRSI, taxes and employment rights.

Section 12 of the act defines an employed contributor and also excludes those employments listed in Part 2 of Schedule 1 from insurability as it states:

“Subject to this Act—

(a) subject to paragraph (b), every person who, being over the age of 16 years and under pensionable age, is employed in any of the employments specified in Part 1 of Schedule 1, not being an employment specified in Part 2 of that Schedule, shall be an employed contributor for the purposes of this Act”

The categories of excepted employments are listed in Part 2 of Schedule 1 as:

1. Employment in the service of the spouse or civil partner of the employed person.
2. Employment of a casual nature otherwise than for the purposes of the employer’s trade or business, and otherwise than for the purposes of any game or recreation where the persons employed are engaged or paid through a club.
3. Employment by a prescribed relative of the employed person, being either employment in the common home of the employer and the employed person or employment specified by regulations as corresponding to employment in the common home of the employer and the employed person.
4. Employment specified in regulations as being of such a nature that it is ordinarily adopted as subsidiary employment only and not as the principal means of livelihood.
5. Employment specified in regulations as being of inconsiderable extent.
6. Employment under a scheme provided by the Minister and known as Community Employment where that employment began before 6 April 1996.
7. Employment in the State in a company under a written or an oral contract of service, whether expressed or implied, where the employed person is-
 - (a) the beneficial owner of that company, or
 - (b) able to control 50 per cent or more of the ordinary share capital of that company, either directly or through the medium of other companies or by any indirect means.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

1072. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a person (detail supplied) will receive a decision on an application for a carer's allowance. [54547/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I confirm that my department received an application for carer's allowance (CA) from the spouse of the person concerned on 6 July 2018.

A request for additional information issued to the carer on 23 November 2018.

When the information was received the claim was processed without delay.

As the carer was in receipt of another social welfare payment at a higher rate than CA, the allowance was awarded from a current date with effect from 13 December 2018.

First payment issued on 27 December 2018 to the post office nominated by the carer.

Arrears of allowance due from 13 December to 26 December 2018 also issued on 27 December 2018.

The carer was notified on 18 December 2018 of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Appeals

1073. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason there was a delay in receiving files from the domiciliary care allowance, DCA, section and for the appeal to be expedited in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1006/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): An application for domiciliary care allowance (DCA) was received from this lady on the 16th July 2015. This application satisfied the qualifying conditions for the allowance and a letter issued on the 16th October 2015 advising of the decision to award the allowance from the 1st August 2015, the month following receipt of the application, as provided for under the relevant legislation.

The person concerned requested a review of the date of award on three occasions; in November 2015, October 2016 and again in May 2017. In order for backdating to be considered, it is required that good cause can be demonstrated for the delay in submitting an application. If good cause is demonstrated the application can be backdated by a maximum of 6 months. As no new evidence was submitted for consideration on any of these review requests the decision remained unchanged and she was notified in writing of this on each occasion.

An appeal of the date of award of the allowance was registered by the Social Welfare Appeals Office on the 21st August 2018. As part of the appeals process the decision was again reviewed by a deciding officer. The deciding officer found that no new evidence was submitted in relation to the delay in submitting the original application. As a result the decision remained unchanged and the person concerned was notified in writing of this decision on the 4th December 2018. An appeal submission was subsequently prepared and forwarded to the Social

Welfare Appeals Office on the 20th December 2018.

Reviews associated with an appeal currently take twelve weeks to process and are dealt with in date of receipt order. Where a review is unsuccessful, a file is then prepared for transmission to the Social Welfare Appeals Office.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pension (Contributory) Eligibility

1074. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the pension rights based on the total contributions approach of a person (details supplied) will be investigated; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1019/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Since the end of September 2018, my Department has been examining the social insurance records of pensioners born on or after 1 September 1946 who were awarded state pension (contributory) on reduced post Budget 2012 rate bands. Information letters were issued to these pensioners explaining that my Department will contact them again to either inform them about the outcome of their review or to request further information in order to complete the review. All of the claims involved will be individually examined, starting with those aged 71 or over. The process will take a number of months to complete.

As the person concerned is in the current target group and has unexplained gaps in their social insurance record, they will shortly receive a request for further information. The letter will explain how to access my Department's on-line service to quickly and easily provide the requested information.

On receipt of the requested information, the person's state pension (contributory) pension will be reviewed and they will be informed of the outcome in writing. If an increase is due, it will be backdated to 30 March 2018. If no increase is due, the person concerned will continue to receive their current weekly rate of pension.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Appeals

1075. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a domiciliary care allowance claim by a person (details supplied) can be backdated; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1032/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): An application for domiciliary care allowance (DCA) was received from the person concerned on 9th July 2018. This application satisfied the qualifying conditions for the allowance and a letter issued on the 21st September 2018 advising of the decision to award the allowance from 1st August 2018, the month following receipt of the application, as provided for under the relevant legislation.

An appeal of the date of award of the allowance was requested and subsequently registered by the Social Welfare Appeals Office on the 8th October 2018. As part of the appeals process the decision has been reviewed by a deciding officer and she has now been notified in a letter dated 7th January 2019 that this DCA claim has been backdated and awarded from the 1st Feb-

ruary 2018. This includes a backdating of payment for the maximum six months allowable in respect of the months February to July 2018. Arrears due for this period will be available with the person's January 2019 payment.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Payments

1076. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if outstanding illness benefit payments, including arrears due, will be paid to a person (details supplied); if these payments can be made to their bank account as previously requested; if cheques issued can be cancelled in view of the fact that the person did not receive some of them and cannot cash them in Poland; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1034/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Illness Benefit payments for the person concerned are currently being made to her nominated bank account. Some payment by cheque have not been received by the person concerned and this matter is being followed up with her whereby a Form of Indemnity has issued to her for completion. When this is received back in the Department it will allow the cheques not received to be replaced.

I trust this clarifies matters for the Deputy.

Legislative Reviews

1077. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 620 of 23 October 2018, if she will report on the implementation of the review of the Gender Recognition Act 2015 and the proposed legislative changes envisaged in that report; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1042/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The current position is that officials from my Department are still considering the recommendations of the report of the Review Group, and how they can best be progressed, in conjunction with relevant Government Departments.

I intend to come back to Government early this year seeking approval to legislate, based on the outcome of these discussions and consultation with the Attorney General; and to lay my own report on the review before the Houses of the Oireachtas.

Working Family Payment Applications

1078. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a decision will be made in relation to an application for a working family payment by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1046/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Working Family Payment (WFP) is an in-work payment which provides additional income support to employees on low earnings with children.

An application for WFP was received from the person concerned on 5 November 2018.

15 January 2019

In order to process their WFP application, further details are required in respect of their current employment.

The Department has written to the person concerned on 7 January 2019 and has requested 2 current payslips.

On receipt of the requested documents from the applicant, their WFP application will be processed without delay and they will be notified of the decision.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Appeals

1079. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a domiciliary care allowance appeal by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1049/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that the appeal from the person concerned was referred to an Appeals Officer who decided to hold an oral hearing in this case on the 9th October 2018.

However, the Social Welfare Appeals Office was informed by the person concerned that she was unable to attend the hearing as she was going on holiday at that time. The Appeal Officer agreed to postpone the hearing.

The Appeals Officer dealing with this case has re-scheduled the oral hearing for the 6th February 2019. The person concerned will shortly be notified of the arrangements for the hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Labour Activation Measures

1080. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the workers of a company (details supplied) will have the relevant State supports for upskilling and securing new jobs as a matter of priority for the number of employees which is approximately 25 persons; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1056/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): To date my Department has had no official communication from the company concerned. I can confirm that Jobseeker payments have been processed for all former employees who have engaged with the Department.

These individuals are currently participating in the Department's activation process which provides the person on a jobseeker payment with structured, case managed support back into employment. The activation process will proactively help former employees to access the many opportunities available for employment along with supports such as education and training where appropriate.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Payments

1081. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when arrears of a disability allowance application by a person (details supplied) will be awarded; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1063/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): This gentleman was awarded Disability Allowance with effect from 11 October 2017.

Arrears of payment due for the period 11 October 2017 to 13 November 2018 have issued to this gentleman’s bank account and will be paid on 9 January 2019.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy

Illness Benefit Payments

1082. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason a person (details supplied) did not receive all of their illness benefit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1122/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Department received a medical certificate (MC1) for a single week dated from the 22 October to the 29 October but has not received an application form (IB1) for illness benefit.

An application form (IB1) for Illness Benefit was issued to the person concerned for completion in order to clarify the details of his claim. When that is completed and returned the claim will be processed.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Working Family Payment Payments

1083. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application for a working family payment by a person (details supplied); and when they can expect a decision on their case. [1123/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Working Family Payment (WFP) is an in-work weekly payment which provides additional income support to employees on low earnings with children.

An application for WFP was received from the person concerned on 28 December 2018.

In order to process their WFP application, further information is required in respect of their current employment.

The Department has written to the applicant on 7 January 2019 and has requested 2 current payslips.

On receipt of the requested documents from the person concerned, their WFP application

will be processed without delay and they will be notified of the decision.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Appeals Status

1084. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an appeal by a person (details supplied) who was refused DC but has appealed it; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1150/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 2 January 2019. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought. When these papers have been received from the Department the case in question will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral appeal hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension Payments

1085. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the progress to date in the determination of an application for invalidity pension in the case of a person (details supplied); if an interim payment can be arranged in view of the length of time taken to process the application and the hardship being caused in this instance as a result thereof; when the application is likely to conclude in view of the clear medical evidence in this case; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1163/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The gentleman referred to has been awarded invalidity pension with effect from 30 August 2018. Payment will issue to his nominated bank account on 24 January 2019. Any arrears due from 30 August 2018 to 23 January 2019 will issue as soon as possible. The gentleman in question was notified of this decision on the 10 January 2019.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Departmental Staff Training

1086. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if all Intreo staff have received disability awareness training; the cost of training staff that have not undergone such training to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1164/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection fully recognises the need to support

staff and promote disability awareness and has been very proactive in the provision of training and support in this area in recent years, with a very proactive response from staff.

The Department supports its staff by offering a suite of disability awareness training, including Mental Health and Deaf Awareness, Dealing with Blind Customers as well as general Disability Awareness. The Department also offers courses to staff in Suicide Awareness via Safe Talk, Suicide Prevention via Assist along with courses in Personal Resilience. These courses are available to all staff in the Department, including staff in Intreo Centres. Since 2013, over 2,900 staff have attended training courses in these areas. In addition, e-learning courses developed for front line public servants by the National Disability Authority (NDA) and the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) are freely available to all staff via the Department's Staff Development Unit's intranet site. Bespoke, ad hoc training can also be procured where required.

In conjunction with the Mental Health Ireland (MHI) and the Civil Service Employee Assistance Service (CSEAS), Mental Health Awareness Workshops have been held in a variety of locations. These workshops provide tools and strategies to enhance mental health and well-being, increase awareness and understanding and promote the range of formal and informal supports and resources available.

My Department has a dedicated Disability Liaison Officer to support staff with disabilities along with their managers. The Officer offers support and promotes awareness of disability issues and services amongst staff while also facilitating the Department's active participation in the Irish Association for Supported Employment's Job Shadow Initiative and AHEAD's Willing Able Mentoring Programme. The Department also provides translation, interpretive and Irish Sign Language services as required and is committed to the provision of information in alternative formats where feasible, as outlined in the Department's Customer Charter.

Induction and Orientation information training for newly appointed staff outlines the range of Departmental supports and grant-aid available to both staff and clients with disabilities. These include employment supports for jobseekers with disabilities such as the Wage Subsidy Scheme, Employability Services and the Reasonable Accommodation Fund, in addition to the Civil Service Employee Assistance Service.

Ongoing liaison with the national Disability Authority and the Disability Federation of Ireland ensures that information on relevant events and seminars is communicated to Departmental staff.

The Department continues with its extensive training, development and awareness in this area. It is estimated that the cost of providing disability awareness training to all staff in Intreo Centres is approximately €90,000.

Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities

1087. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the supports and activation schemes available to support persons with a disability into employment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1165/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): In line with the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for people with disabilities, my Department is committed to helping more people with disabilities take up and remain in employment where there is a capacity and desire to do so.

To this end, the Department provides a range of employment related supports. These supports include the following:

- The Employability service, delivered under a contract arrangement in 23 locations around the country on behalf of the Department. It specialises in providing support to persons with a disability and works with the Department's Intreo service. It includes the provision of a dedicated job coach support as well as both pre-employment and in employment supports and assistance.

- The Wage Subsidy Scheme, which is targeted at private sector employers and encourages the employment of people with disabilities through the provision of financial incentives.

- The 'Ability' programme, which provides funding (via Pobal) to 27 organizations being funded to support young people (aged 15-29) with disabilities to move closer to the labour market through the provision of a range of person-centered supports. The programme will see some 2,600 young people with disabilities being supported over the next three years.

- A range of employment support grants for people with disabilities are also provided, under the Reasonable Accommodation Fund. The fund is a demand-led scheme and is comprised of the Workplace Equipment Adaptation Grant, the Personal Reader Grant, the Job Interview Interpreter Grant and the Employee Retention Grant.

- The Department also funds two AHEAD (Association for Higher Education Access and Disability) programmes comprising the Willing Able Mentoring (WAM) programme and the 'Get Ahead' programme both of which are designed as employment support programmes for graduates with disabilities.

- The Department also provides the Partial Capacity Benefit payment for those with a reduced capacity to work.

My Department also operates a number of general schemes which persons with a disability can avail of, namely:

- The Community Employment (CE) programme enhances employability by providing work experience and training opportunities for people within their communities.

- The Youth Employment Support Scheme (YESS) is open to persons in receipt of Disability Allowance and Blind Pension. This scheme was launched in October 2018.

- The Rural Social Scheme (RSS) provides farmers and fishermen with income support while they also make a contribution to their communities. The scheme is open to people in receipt of Disability Allowance.

Finally, under the Comprehensive Employment Strategy, my Department is progressively developing and improving its Intreo service for people with disabilities who wish to avail of the service on a voluntary basis. Training has been delivered to over 60 Intreo case officers to provide specialised support to people with disabilities presenting at DEASP Intreo Centres. The Jobseeker (person with a disability) who seeks support from their local Intreo Centre will have a meeting arranged with a case officer with a view to agreeing a suitable personal progression plan and in order to access the full range of supports available.

Partial Capacity Benefit Scheme Eligibility

1088. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protec-

tion if consideration has been given to extending the partial capacity benefit to those in receipt of the wage subsidy scheme; the estimated full year cost of same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1166/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): While both the wage subsidy scheme (WSS) and the partial capacity benefit (PCB) schemes seek to improve employment outcomes for persons with disabilities, they operate in different ways and with different qualifying conditions. In particular, the WSS is a support to employers while the PCB is a support provided to individuals.

The partial capacity benefit (PCB) scheme is designed for people who are on illness benefit, for at least six months, or on invalidity pension and who have retained some capacity for work and wish to work. If awarded, PCB will allow them to continue to receive, in addition to their earnings from employment, a percentage of their illness benefit or invalidity pension payment while working. The personal rate of payment of PCB is based on a medical assessment of a person's restriction, regarding their capacity for work, whether the person was in receipt of Illness Benefit or Invalidity Pension and their current rate of payment. After the medical assessment, if a person's disability is rated as moderate, severe or profound their previous payment continues at 50, 75 or 100 per cent, respectively.

The wage subsidy scheme (WSS) is an employment support which provides financial incentives to private sector employers to employ people with a disability for between 21 and 39 hours employment per week under a minimum 12 month contract of employment.

The PCB is intended to provide support to a person returning to employment or self-employment and is not intended for those currently in employment which is one of the qualifying conditions of the WSS. Even if this changed, it is not possible to anticipate how individual PCB medical assessments would apply to persons currently employed, where their employer is receiving a subsidy under the WSS. It should, for example, be noted that if the restriction on a person's capacity for work is medically assessed as mild, they would not qualify for a PCB payment.

For illustrative purposes, if it was to be assumed that all persons, whose employment is being subsidised by way of the WSS, would become eligible for a PCB payment at the current average PCB payment, the cost would be around €20 million a year.

My Department has looked in the past at the cost of extending eligibility for the WSS to employers who employ people in receipt of PCB. This is currently estimated to cost about €3 million in a full year if such employment was at 21 hours per week. This would rise to around €5 million where employment was at the maximum of 39 hours per week.

It is important to note, that the costing here assumes new PCB participants only, as a WSS payment can only be made where an individual is entering a new job or is in that job for less than 12 months. Under current rules, employers would not be able to apply for those currently in receipt of PCB. Furthermore, additional spending might arise if the numbers of employees at individual employer level were high enough to imply additional spending under strands 2 and 3 of the WSS.

The department continually reviews its supports and schemes however it is not intended to change the criteria for the above supports.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Support Services Funding

1089. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the expenditure on the reasonable accommodation fund in each of the years 2016 to 2018, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1167/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The reasonable accommodation fund assists employers to take appropriate measures to enable a person with a disability/impairment to have obtain or retain employment by providing a range of grants. These grants and supports include the workplace equipment adaptation grant, the personal reader grant, the job interview interpreter grant and the employee retention grant.

The purpose of the scheme is to assist unemployed people with disabilities to gain access to the open labour market by providing grants for “reasonable accommodations” in the private sector and to support private sector employers in the employment of people with disabilities.

The reasonable accommodation fund is a demand-led scheme in that expenditure arises in response to applications received. The actual expenditure on the components is set out in the table below:

Table: Expenditure on the Reasonable Accommodation Fund for People with Disabilities

Year	2016	2017	2018
Workplace equipment and adaptation grant	€54,041	€69,254	€100,023
Personal reader grant	€16,537	€31,619	€12,338
Job interview interpreter grant	€7,244	€5,714	€6,361
Employee retention grant	€0	€0	€1,900
Total	€77,822	€106,587	€120,622

I hope this clarifies the issue for the Deputy.

Occupational Injuries Benefit Payments

1090. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1170/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Occupational Injury Benefit claim for the person concerned has been processed and any arrears due have been issued.

The claim is medically certified up to the 15th January 2019 and paid up to the 12th January 2019.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Redundancy Payments

1091. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the way in which a person (details supplied) can advance an issue in view of the fact her Department has advised them to contact the WRC which has stated they must contact the Employment Appeals Tribunal, which has now advised them to contact her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1175/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): It is the employer's responsibility to pay statutory redundancy and other wage related entitlements to all eligible employees. In the event that an employer is unable to pay these entitlements due to financial difficulties, the Department can step in to make a payment from the Social Insurance Fund, as part of the redundancy and insolvency payments schemes.

In the event that there is a dispute between the employer and employee, the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) formally the Employment Appeals Tribunal (EAT) can make a determination in the case.

In relation to the above claimant the Employment Appeals Tribunal (now the WRC) made an award against her employer under the Redundancy Payments Acts, as amended and Minimum Notice and Terms of Employment Acts, as amended.

In order to qualify for statutory redundancy under the Redundancy Payment Scheme, the EAT (WRC) decision must be submitted to my Department within 12 months of the date of the award while under the Insolvency Payment Scheme a claim must be submitted by the relevant office (i.e. liquidator/receiver) within 18 months prior to the date of insolvency. It is noted from documentation received from the liquidator in October 2018 that the EAT decision for redundancy payment was made in February 2015 while the EAT decision in respect of minimum notice was awarded on 14th May 2015. In the circumstances both EAT decisions fall outside the relevant period under the Redundancy and Insolvency schemes.

My officials have asked the liquidator to formally submit applications to the Department. In the likely event that these applications are disallowed, as they are outside the time limit, the claimant could then appeal the disallowance to the Workplace Relations Commission.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Departmental Agencies Data

1092. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the extent of the funding provided either directly or indirectly through agencies controlled by her Department for the provision of advocacy services during 2018; the proposed expenditure figures for 2019; the number of advocacy cases dealt with in 2018 by each of the advocacy organisations so funded; and the number of staff and volunteers in each advocacy organisation in December 2018. [1198/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The statutory bodies operating under the aegis of my Department are the Citizens Information Board, the Pensions Authority, the Pensions Council, the Low Pay Commission and the Social Welfare Tribunal.

The Citizens Information Board (CIB) is the statutory body responsible for supporting the provision of information, advice (including money and budgeting advice) and advocacy services to citizens on a wide range of public and social services. The nationwide network of Citizens Information Services (CIS), funded and supported by CIB, provides free and impartial

information to the public on a range of social and public services. The CIS also supports clients, including those who may have a disability, to act on their own behalf wherever possible (self-advocacy). CIS staff also advocate directly on behalf of clients, where required. The CIS has an overall staffing of approximately 300. The network is also supported by employment scheme workers and volunteers who are not assigned to advocacy casework. The CIS dealt with over 600,000 people in 2018. Of these, representative advocacy was delivered in approximately 2,600 cases, and almost 7,000 others required once-off advocacy intervention. In 2018, the overall allocation to cover services provided by the CIS was €14.9 million.

The CIB also funds and supports the National Advocacy Service for People with Disabilities (NAS), which provides an independent confidential and free advocacy service that works exclusively for adults with disabilities. In 2018, the NAS dealt with a total of 3,915* cases, of which 914 required full representative advocacy casework and 3,001 who received information, advice and once-off interventions. The budget allocation to the NAS was €3.1million in 2018 and the allocation for 2019 is €3.25million.

The other organisations under the aegis of my Department - namely the Pensions Authority, the Pensions Council, the Low Pay Commission and the Social Welfare Tribunal do not have a statutory advocacy role.

**provisional figure, annual statistics not yet finalised.*

Jobseeker's Allowance Payments

1093. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason a primary payment, jobseeker's allowance was ceased in the case of a person (detail supplied); when payment will be reinstated; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1238/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): A commencement of employment (COE1) form was automatically issued on 23/11/18 in which the person concerned was asked to sign and return the document to the Newbridge Intreo Centre within 14 days. As the document was not returned within the required timeframe the primary payment was automatically suspended. However all documentation has now been received and the primary payment, a jobseeker's allowance, reinstated. This matter has been resolved and all payments due to the person concerned have issued to date.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Job Initiatives

1094. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 538 of 19 December 2018, if her attention has been drawn to the fact that talks for the agreement of a new contract have broken down and as such a company (details supplied) will not be the sponsor organisation in 2019; if her attention has been further drawn to an application from another potential sponsor organisation to secure a contract for the provision of job club services in County Sligo to her Department; if other applicant sponsor organisations will be considered to ensure the provision of continued job club services in County Sligo in 2019; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1263/19]

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

company concerned has operated a Job Club service in Co Sligo for a number of years under a 12-month fixed term contract which was renewed annually with the Department.

Towards the end of 2018, the company submitted proposals to the Department to enter into a new contract for the provision of this service in 2019. Officials of my Department have met with the company to see if there was a basis for agreement on the matter, namely to allow the company to continue to operate the Job Club service, initially until the end of January 2019, on the same terms and conditions which applied in 2018. However, the company was unable to accept this offer. Despite intensive discussions, it has not been possible for both parties to agree terms which would enable the Job Club to operate in 2019 and the company felt it had no option but to withdraw from operating the service.

No application for the provision of a Job Club service in Co Sligo has been received from another sponsor organisation. However, in order to ensure that jobseekers are fully supported in their efforts to find employment, Department officials are due to meet shortly with management of the local Education and Training Board who have previously indicated that they can provide a broadly similar type service in 2019.

The Department has no plans at this time to invite other organisations to submit proposals to operate the service.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Back to Education Allowance Applications

1095. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 271 of 6 December 2018, if the information provided or lack of appropriate information can be clarified with a view to the applicant providing the relevant and appropriate information; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1264/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): In September 2018 the person concerned attended a meeting with their Case Officer to discuss an application which they had made for Back To Education Allowance (BTEA).

Subsequent to the meeting with the Case Officer, a Deciding Officer in October 2018 informed the person concerned that their BTEA application was unsuccessful. The person concerned requested a review of this decision and a review was then conducted by another officer.

The review of the decision was unsuccessful as the reviewing officer agreed with the original decision which was made in October 2018.

The information attached to Parliamentary Question 51448/18 was reviewed in December 2018 by the original Case Officer who considered the application in the first instance from the person concerned. After careful consideration the Officer found no new grounds to recommend a change to the decision. There is no outstanding information required.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Review

1096. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social

Protection the progress to date in the determination of eligibility for a domiciliary carers allowance following a review request in the case of a person (details supplied); when the review is likely to be concluded; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1265/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): An application for domiciliary care allowance was received from this lady on the 27th August 2018. The application was not allowed as the child was not considered to satisfy the qualifying conditions for the allowance. A letter issued on the 16th November 2018 setting out the decision of the deciding officer to refuse the allowance.

A review of this decision was requested on the 3rd December 2018. The claim will be re-examined by a deciding officer and a revised decision will be made if warranted. The person concerned will be notified of the outcome of the deciding officer's review as soon as possible.

Reviews are currently taking approximately 12 weeks to process.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance

1097. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated full year cost of increasing disability allowance, disability benefit, blind pension, invalidity pension, carer's allowance and carer's benefit by €5, €10, €15, €20 and €25 respectively taking into account increases already committed to in Budget 2019; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1266/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The estimated full year cost of increasing the weekly rates of payment of disability allowance, illness benefit (formerly disability benefit), blind pension, invalidity pension, carer's allowance and carer's benefit by €5, €10, €15, €20 and €25 respectively is set out in the following table.

-	€5	€10	€15	€20	€25
Disability Allowance	€39.57m	€79.13m	€118.78m	€158.34m	€197.91m
Illness Benefit	€13.72m	€27.48m	€41.24m	€54.97m	€68.70m
Blind Pension	€0.33m	€0.67m	€1.00m	€1.33m	€1.66m
Invalidity Pension	€16.28m	€32.52m	€48.80m	€65.08m	€81.36m
Carer's Allowance	€16.32m	€32.64m	€48.96m	€65.28m	€81.60m
Carer's Benefit	€0.72m	€1.44m	€2.15m	€2.87m	€3.59m

The costs above include proportionate increases for qualified adults and those on reduced rates of payment. It should be noted that these costs are based on the estimated number of recipients in 2019 and are subject to change in the context of emerging trends and associated revision of the estimated numbers of recipients.

Child Benefit Eligibility

1098. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to extend the payment of child benefit to include those children that have reached 18 years of age but are still in full-time secondary school education (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1287/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Child Benefit is a monthly payment made to families with children in respect of all qualified children up to the age of 16 years. The payment continues to be paid in respect of children up to their 18th birthday who are in full-time education, or who have a disability. Child Benefit is currently paid to almost 622,871 families in respect of almost 1.2 million children, with an estimated expenditure of more than €2 billion in 2018.

Given the universality of Child Benefit, extending entitlement to parents of full-time students in second level education who are over 18 years of age would not be a targeted approach. The adoption of such a proposal would have significant cost implications and would have to be considered in an overall budgetary context.

Families on low incomes can avail of a number of social welfare schemes that support children in full-time education until the age of 22, including:

- Increase for a Qualified Child (IQCs) with primary social welfare payments;
- the Working Family Payment (formerly Family Income Supplement) for low-paid employees with children;
- the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance for low income families (paid at the full-time second-level education rate).

These schemes provide targeted assistance that is directly linked to household income and thereby support low-income families with older children participating in full-time education.

Any changes to the eligibility for Child Benefit to those children over 18 years of age that are still in full time secondary education would have to be considered in the overall budgetary context.

Invalidity Pension Applications

1099. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if an application for invalidity pension will be expedited in the case of a person (details supplied). [1289/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Invalidity pension (IP) is a payment for people who are permanently incapable of work because of illness or incapacity and who satisfy the pay related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions.

The department received a claim for IP from the lady referred to on 05 December 2018.

This application was disallowed on the grounds that the medical conditions for the scheme were not satisfied. This lady was notified on the 09 January 2019 of this decision, the reasons for it and of her right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Partial Capacity Benefit Scheme Payments

1100. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when the full rate of payment of invalidity pension over the Christmas 2018 period and subsequent reduced payment of partial capacity benefit will issue in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1301/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Partial Capacity Benefit (PCB) allows a person who has been in receipt of Invalidity Pension and who may not have full capacity for work, to return to employment and continue to receive a partial or full payment from the Department.

The Person concerned is currently in receipt of Partial Capacity Benefit and was assessed with a “moderate” level of work incapacity meaning that they receive 50% of their personal rate of Invalidity Pension

They are currently paid up to date and any arrears including the Christmas Bonus owing to them have issued.

I trust this clarifies matters for the deputy.

Jobseeker’s Allowance Payments

1101. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when jobseeker’s allowance will issue in the case of a person (details supplied); the documentation outstanding on their claim; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1302/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned withdrew an application for Jobseekers Allowance (JA) in favour of an application for Jobseekers Benefit (JB) therefore there is no outstanding documentation on the JA claim. The JB claim was awarded from the 30th October 2018 and the person has been informed.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Working Family Payment Payments

1102. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1303/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Working Family Payment (formerly Family Income Supplement) is a weekly in-work payment which provides additional income support to employees on low earnings with children.

An application for Working Family Payment (WFP) was received from the person concerned on 03 October 2018.

Their application was referred to a local Social Welfare Inspector (SWI) for further clarification on 14 December 2018. The relevant SWI office was contacted on 08 January 2019 in relation to this application and it has been confirmed that this case will be prioritised.

On receipt of the completed report from the SWI, their WFP application will be processed without delay and the person concerned will be notified of the decision.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Payments

1103. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the new automated system for illness benefit payments is fully functioning and working without issues with payments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1391/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department transferred administration of the Illness Benefit (IB) scheme to its core IT platform in August 2018. Although the system change has worked effectively for over 80% of IB customers, significant difficulties arose following implementation for a number of customers.

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

Payment levels are now maintained at the expected norm, for the past two months. People who are due a payment and whose certificates and claims are in order now receive their payment entitlement promptly. In stating this it is important to note that there are always cases, and were always such cases under the old system, where people's payments are legitimately stopped or paused for a variety of reasons.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Payments

1104. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to use the same new automated system recently put in place for illness benefit for other social welfare payments; the payments in this regard; when this is planned for; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1392/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Department has acknowledged that difficulties arose in delivery of Illness Benefit payments in Autumn 2018, when the Department transferred administration of the Illness Benefit scheme from an old ICT system to its strategic ICT platform on 4 August 2018.

The difficulties that arose were limited to the operation of Illness Benefit and have been addressed by the Department as a matter of priority. Other schemes supported by the same platform continued to operate as normal throughout the Autumn.

This ICT platform already manages most of the Department's scheme payments and it processes approximately 1.3 million of the Department's 1.6 million weekly scheme payments.

The Department continues to engage in an on-going programme of business process and ICT service delivery modernisation with the aim of improving both customer service and operational efficiency.

Disability Allowance Payments

1105. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a person (details supplied) will receive arrears of disability allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1395/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The person concerned has been awarded disability allowance with effect from 8 August 2018. The first payment was made by her chosen payment method on 7 November 2018.

Arrears of payment due have issued to the person concerned on 10 January 2019.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Public Services Card

1106. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the steps she will take to allow the public services card to be used as identification for customers of credit unions who have no other means of identification. [1416/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Under current legislation, a Public Services Card (PSC) cannot be requested by any public or private body or person that is not designated as a specified body in Schedule 5 of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 (as amended). The PSC can only be used by public bodies specified in this legislation when conducting a public transaction with the person concerned.

One of the provisions set out in Section 5 of the Social Welfare, Pensions, and Civil Registration Bill 2017 would, if enacted, enable citizens to volunteer their PSC where they wish to use it as a form of proof of identity and/or age. However, it is important to note that a non-specified body could not request or demand the production of a PSC. It simply gives individuals the option to use their PSC if they wish, as proof of identity and/or age, in transactions with non-specified bodies.

For the sake of clarity, therefore, the Deputy should note that this proposal in no way allows nor can a private sector body access the customer data on the card or on any Government database. It simply provides for the card be accepted as a form of identity verification by a private sector organisation or non-specified body - but only at the sole discretion of the card holder. It is believed that this approach gives power to the individual to control access to and use of their PSC.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Insurance Data

1107. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons born in 1998, 1999, 2000 and 2001 that had reckonable earnings for social insurance purposes within gross income groups (details supplied) based on P35 returns for 2017. [1502/19]

1108. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons born in 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2000 that had reckonable earnings for

social insurance purposes within gross income groups (details supplied) based on P35 returns for 2016. [1503/19]

1109. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons born in 1996, 1997, 1998, and 1999 that had reckonable earnings for social insurance purposes within gross income groups (details supplied) based on P35 returns for 2015. [1504/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1107, 1108 and 1109 together.

The following tables show the number of persons who had reckonable earnings for Social insurance purposes only within the bands requested by the Deputy. Reckonable earnings generally refers to income derived from insurable employment (i.e. employment income) which is taxed under PAYE. Those paying PRSI on reckonable earnings are referred to as employed contributors. PRSI contributions paid on reckonable earnings are recorded under one of the employment Classes A, B, C, D, E, H and J. The Department does not hold information on gross income.

2015 Reckonable Earnings

	People	.01-5,000	5,001 - 10,000	10,001 - 15,000	15,001 - 20,000	20,001 and higher
1996	38,907	20,953	10,994	4,553	1,716	691
1997	28,320	20,546	5,787	1,402	411	174
1998	17,143	13,981	2,473	457	160	72
1999	7,828	6,763	843	140	54	28
Total	92,198	62,243	20,097	6,552	2,341	965

2016 Reckonable Earnings

	People	.01-5,000	5,001 - 10,000	10,001 - 15,000	15,001 - 20,000	20,001 and higher
1997	43,691	21,828	12,552	5,925	2,406	980
1998	31,945	22,624	6,707	1,778	593	243
1999	19,848	16,071	2,992	532	162	91
2000	8,582	7,403	933	173	50	23
Total	104,066	67,926	23,184	8,408	3,211	1,337

2017 Reckonable Earnings

	People	.01-5,000	5,001 - 10,000	10,001 - 15,000	15,001 - 20,000	20,001 and higher
1998	46,532	22,076	13,747	6,661	2,821	1,227
1999	34,137	23,636	7,603	2,016	600	282
2000	21,374	17,120	3,367	626	188	73
2001	9,276	8,063	953	175	65	20
Total	111,319	70,895	25,670	9,478	3,674	1,602

2017 figures are based on the most up to date information provided by the Office of the Revenue Commissioners.

Parental Leave

1110. **Deputy Seán Barrett** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when she expects the Parental Leave (Amendment) Bill 2017 to be presented in Dáil Éireann following its passing through Seanad Éireann; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1506/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I am not in a position to provide an update on the progress of the Bill referred to by the Deputy which is a Private Members Bill on Parental Leave. The Deputy is advised that policy for Parental Leave is the responsibility of my colleague the Minister for Justice and Equality.

Carer's Allowance Applications

1111. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if an application by a person (details supplied) will be expedited; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1525/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I confirm that my department received an application for carer's allowance (CA) from the person concerned on 8 October 2018.

The application was referred to a local social welfare inspector (SWI) on 9 January 2019 to assess the level of care being provided, assess means and confirm that all the conditions for receipt of carer's allowance are satisfied.

Once the SWI has reported, a decision will be made and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

One-Parent Family Payment Applications

1112. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the progress to date in the determination of an application for one parent family payment in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1533/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned has applied for One Parent Family Payment and her claim was referred to a Social Welfare Inspector (SWI) for investigation.

The SWI has concluded their enquiries and will be submitting a recommendation to a Deciding Officer within the next 7 working days. When a decision has been made by the Deciding Officer the person concerned will be informed of the outcome. My Department does not anticipate any undue delay with the decisions process.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Appeals Data

1113. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number and percentage of appeals that were upheld on re-examination by the social welfare appeals office in 2017 and 2018 for all payments and benefits under her remit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1535/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The following tables provide details of the outcome of all appeals by scheme for the years 2017 and 2018.

The figures provided for appeals which had a favourable outcome for the appellant relate to appeals which were either allowed in full or in part by an Appeals Officer, or were resolved by way of a revised decision in favour of the appellant by a Deciding Officer/Designated Person.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

There are a number of reasons why a decision which was refused at first instance might be successful on appeal and it is not necessarily the case that the first decision was incorrect. It is often the case that new evidence is provided with an appeal and that, as a result, the original decision may be revised by the Deciding Officer or Designated Person. This was the case in 37.6% of favourable appeal outcomes in 2017 and 31.5% of favourable appeal outcomes in 2018.

Where the decision was not revised by the Department in light of the appeal contentions, further evidence is often provided by the appellant as the appeal process proceeds and in addition, the Appeals Officer may gain insights when they meet the appellant in person at oral hearing which may influence the outcome of the appeal.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Outcome of Appeals by Category 2017

	Allowed By Appeals Officers	Partially Allowed By Appeals Officers	Revised DO/DP Decision	Disallowed By Appeals Officers	Withdrawn	Total
State Pension (Non-Contributory)	7521.9%	349.9%	7822.7%	12837.3%	288.2%	343
State Pension (Contributory)	359.9%	123.4%	7621.5%	21861.6%	133.7%	354
State Pension (Transition)	133.3%	-	-	266.7%	-	3
Widow's/Widower's Pension (Contributory)	825.8%	-	722.6%	15 48.4%	13.2%	31
Death Benefit	-	-	-	1100.0%	-	1
Bereavement Grant	1100.0%	-	-	-	-	1
Jobseeker's Allowance - Payments	34922.2%	664.2%	30919.6%	66542.3%	184 11.7%	1,573
Jobseeker's Transitional	1027.0%	410.8%	1027.0%	616.2%	718.9%	37
Jobseeker's Allowance -Means	18712.9%	825.6%	26418.2%	70848.7%	212 14.6%	1,453

	Allowed By Appeals Officers	Partially Allowed By Appeals Officers	Revised DO/DP Decision	Disallowed By Appeals Officers	Withdrawn	Total
One Parent Family Payment	6726.1%	197.4%	5421.0%	6726.1%	5019.5%	257
Widow's/Widower's Pension (Non-Contributory)	730.4%	417.4%	313.0%	939.1%	-	23
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	30422.5%	342.5%	22917.0%	60244.6%	18013.3%	1,349
Farm Assist	2215.5%	1812.7%	2819.7%	6042.3%	149.9%	142
Pre-Retirement Allowance	-	-	1100.0%	-	-	1
Jobseeker's Benefit	8317.3%	214.4%	11724.4%	20643.0%	5210.9%	479
Deserted Wife's Benefit	240.0%	120.0%	-	240.0%	-	5
Maternity Benefit	1014.1%	34.2%	811.3%	4969.0%	11.4%	71
Paternity Benefit	112.5%	-	337.5%	337.5%	112.5%	8
Adoptive Benefit	-	-	-	2100.0%	-	2
Treatment Benefits	-	-	-	1100.0%	-	1
Partial Capacity Benefit	1533.3%	12.2%	1124.4%	1431.1%	48.9%	45
Disability Allowance	2,97560.3%	701.4%	56311.4%	1,21124.5%	1152.3%	4,934
Blind Pension	16.7%	16.7%	320.0%	746.7%	320.0%	15
Carer's Allowance	1,20435.2%	1614.7%	78022.8%	1,19935.1%	722.1%	3,416
Domiciliary Care Allowance	29737.1%	101.2%	34342.8%	13516.9%	162.0%	801
Carer's Support Grant	3522.6%	21.3%	4529.0%	7246.5%	10.6%	155
Illness Benefit	11823.0%	81.6%	14027.2%	18936.8%	5911.5%	514
Injury Benefit	37.9%	-	25.3%	2771.1%	615.8%	38
Invalidity Pension	36527.1%	70.5%	69151.3%	26219.4%	231.7%	1,348
Disablement Benefit	8634.4%	197.6%	3012.0%	10943.6%	62.4%	250
Incapacity Supplement	330.0%	110.0%	330.0%	330.0%	-	10
Medical Care	-	-	150.0%	150.0%	-	2
Carer's Benefit	2322.1%	21.9%	3937.5%	3735.6%	32.9%	104
Child Benefit	6815.5%	235.3%	15435.2%	17840.6%	153.4%	438
Family Income Supplement	7615.1%	153.0%	26753.1%	13025.8%	153.0%	503
Back To Work Family Dividend	717.1%	-	49.8%	2561.0%	512.2%	41
Guardian's Payment (Non-Contributory)	533.3%	16.7%	213.3%	746.7%	-	15
Guardian's Payment (Contributory)	1339.4%	26.1%	412.1%	1442.4%	-	33

Questions - Written Answers

	Allowed By Appeals Officers	Partially Allowed By Appeals Officers	Revised DO/DP Decision	Disallowed By Appeals Officers	Withdrawn	Total
Widowed Parent Grant	-	-	-	2 100.0%	-	2
Insurability	3424.5%	4 2.9%	117.9%	3726.6%	53 38.1%	139
Liabile Relatives	-	423.5%	-	1164.7%	2 11.8%	17
Recoverable Benefits & Assistance	311.5%	-	311.5%	2076.9%	-	26
TOTAL APPEALS	6,49334.2%	6293.3%	4,28322.6%	6,43433.9%	1,1416.0%	18,980

Outcome of Appeals by Category 2018

	Allowed By Appeals Officers	Partially Allowed By Appeals Officers	Revised DO/DP Decision	Disallowed By Appeals Officers	Withdrawn	Total
State Pension (Non-Contributory)	8523.4%	298.0%	7019.3%	14439.7%	359.6%	363
State Pension (Contributory)	359.5%	92.5%	6417.4%	24466.5%	154.1%	367
Widow's/Widower's Pension (Contributory)	1845.0%	-	2 5.0%	14 35.0%	615.0%	40
Death Benefit	-	-	-	1100.0%	-	1
Bereavement Grant	-	-	-	1100.0%	-	1
Jobseeker's Allowance - Payments	28018.0%	996.4%	25116.1%	78550.4%	141 9.1%	1,556
Jobseeker's Transitional	919.1%	510.6%	919.1%	1838.3%	612.8%	47
Jobseeker's Allowance -Means	15010.4%	835.8%	19413.5%	83658.1%	176 12.2%	1,439
One Parent Family Payment	4720.4%	135.7%	4620.0%	8336.1%	4117.8%	230
Widow's/Widower's Pension (Non-Contributory)	423.5%	2 11.8%	-	1058.8%	15.9%	17
Deserted Wife's Allowance	1100.0%	-	-	-	-	1
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	25824.6%	292.8%	17917.1%	46744.6%	11410.9%	1,047
Farm Assist	1411.7%	11 9.2%	1815.0%	6251.7%	1512.5%	120
Pre-Retirement Allowance	1 50.0%	150.0%	-	-	-	2
Jobseeker's Benefit	10918.3%	335.5%	12921.6%	27045.3%	55 9.2%	596
Deserted Wife's Benefit	350.0%	-	-	350.0%	-	6
Maternity Benefit	611.1%	-	1324.1%	3463.0%	11.9%	54

	Allowed By Appeals Officers	Partially Allowed By Appeals Officers	Revised DO/ DP Decision	Disallowed By Appeals Officers	Withdrawn	Total
Paternity Benefit	1 6.3%	1 6.3%	-	1487.5%	-	16
Treatment Benefits	-	-	-		2100.0%	2
Partial Capacity Benefit	1650.0%	-	2 6.3%	1340.6%	1 3.1%	32
Disability Allowance	3,11262.2%	992.0%	462 9.2%	1,25625.1%	771.5%	5,006
Blind Pension	214.3%	214.3%	321.4%	642.9%	1 7.1%	14
Carer's Allowance	1,04738.6%	1445.3%	44016.2%	98936.5%	903.3%	2,710
Domiciliary Care Allowance	68643.6%	130.8%	59037.5%	25816.4%	251.6%	1,572
Carer's Support Grant	2820.0%	53.6%	3525.0%	6848.6%	42.9%	140
Illness Benefit	11122.4%	112.2%	16433.1%	18236.8%	27 5.5%	495
Injury Benefit	1021.3%	-	612.8%	2961.7%	2 4.3%	47
Invalidity Pension	45841.9%	80.7%	32229.4%	27325.0%	333.0%	1,094
Disablement Benefit	11635.3%	185.5%	32 9.7%	15848.0%	51.5%	329
Incapacity Supplement	4 80.0%	-	-	1 20.0%	-	5
Medical Care	-	-	-	1100.0%	-	1
Carer's Benefit	3223.4%	42.9%	5238.0%	4633.6%	32.2%	137
Child Benefit	6214.6%	184.2%	14634.3%	17942.0%	214.9%	426
Working Family Payment*	5915.3%	184.7%	17344.8%	11630.1%	205.2%	386
Back To Work Family Dividend	4 8.5%	-	1225.5%	2655.3%	5 10.6%	47
Guardian's Payment (Non-Contributory)	111.1%	1 11.1%	222.2%	555.6%	-	9
Guardian's Payment (Contributory)	729.2%	14.2%	2 8.3%	1458.3%	-	24
Widowed Parent Grant	-	-	1 20.0%	4 80.0%	-	5
Insurability	2526.3%	3 3.2%	33.2%	5153.7%	13 13.7%	95
Liable Relatives	-	-	1 20.0%	240.0%	2 40.0%	5
Recoverable Benefits & Assistance	1 4.3%	2 8.7%	2 8.7%	1878.3%	-	23
TOTAL AP-PEALS	6,80236.8%	6623.6%	3,42518.5%	6,68136.1%	9375.1%	18,507

* Previously known as Family Income Supplement

State Pensions Payments

1114. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the pension entitlements of a person (details supplied) under the new total contributions approach will be investigated; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1634/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The measures announced by Government in January 2018, to provide for a new rate calculation method and new HomeCaring Periods, apply to pensioners born on or after 1 September 1946, who were awarded on reduced post Budget 2012 rate bands.

The person concerned is currently the beneficiary of an increase for qualified adult payment on their spouse's pension and there is no record of the person having made a claim for state pension (contributory) in their own right. The person concerned should complete an application form for pension in the first instance.

It should be noted that the new HomeCaring Periods, where awarded, are aimed at helping pensioners improve their rates of payment and cannot be used to satisfy the qualifying conditions for state pension (contributory).

Following receipt of a completed application for pension, the person's entitlement to pension will be assessed and they will be notified of the outcome in writing. If the person qualifies for state pension (contributory), as their date of birth is after 1 September 1946, they will be entitled to claim HomeCaring Periods for time spent out of the workforce caring for their son.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Eligibility

1115. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the progress to date in the determination of a request for a review of eligibility for a disability allowance in the case of a person (details supplied); when the review is likely to be concluded; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1636/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Based on the evidence supplied in support of this person's application, her application for disability allowance (DA) was disallowed on the grounds that the medical qualifying condition was not satisfied. The person in question was notified in writing of this decision on 26 September 2018 and was also notified of their right to request a review of this decision or to appeal it to the independent Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO).

Further medical evidence was received and a review of this decision was carried out. The original decision was upheld and the person concerned was notified in writing on 10 January 2019. She was also advised of her right to appeal this decision to the independent social welfare appeals office.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Appeals

1116. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a decision has been made on a carer's allowance appeal by a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1660/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on the 28th November 2018. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by the Deciding Officer on the

grounds of appeal be sought. When these papers have been received from the Department, the case in question will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral appeal hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

JobPath Programme

1117. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans for JobPath once the current contract expires at the end of 2019; if she will re-tender for the service; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1727/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The JobPath employment service commenced in July 2015 and the contracts are for six years comprising two consecutive phases: phase one entails four years' of client referrals, while phase two entails a 'run off' period during which time no additional clients will be referred. Therefore client referrals will cease on 31st December 2019 and the contracts will terminate in 2021. It is important to note that, services will be delivered to completion for those clients referred during phase one.

The contracts include options to extend phase one for further periods up to a maximum of 24 months at my Department's discretion. While proposals to extend the contracts are not currently under consideration, my Department will keep the situation under review. At present, a full econometric evaluation of the service is being conducted in conjunction with the OECD. The results of this econometric evaluation will inform my Department's consideration of any future developments in this area.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Applications

1118. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application for an illness benefit by a person (details supplied). [1745/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Department administers the Illness Benefit scheme to those customers who cannot work because they are sick or ill provided they are covered by the appropriate class of social insurance (PRSI) and satisfy the PRSI conditions.

The person concerned does not satisfy the PRSI qualifying conditions for a payment of Illness Benefit. However she is receiving credited contributions in respect of a claim for Illness Benefit from February 2018. It is open to the person concerned to apply for Invalidity Pension if she is suffering from an incapacity that is likely to last for at least one year. If the person concerned has an urgent financial need she can apply for assistance under the Supplementary Welfare Allowance scheme at her local Intreo centre.

I trust this clarifies matters for the deputy.

Departmental Correspondence

1119. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the customer complaints received by her Department in each of the years since 2016; if the complaints are grouped into categories; the nature of the complaints; the resolution of same; and the number progressed to the relevant Ombudsman in each of the years since 2016. [1871/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department aims to provide the best possible service at all times. The scale of the Department is very significant; it deals with over 70 separate schemes and services and processed a total of 82.2 million individual payments in 2017, with 1.6 million weekly social welfare payments being made every single week. The Department is committed to providing an excellent service to those we engage with and provide services to. Complaints are categorized by complaint location and nature of complaint. The Department does not have data on the number of complaints which are progressed to the Office of the Ombudsman.

We have a dedicated Customer Service Unit that receives and processes a wide range of feedback from customers on their experiences with the Department. Our Customer Charter and Customer Action Plan sets out the commitments and standard of service that customers can expect in their dealings with the Department.

Where customers are dissatisfied with the standard of service that they have received, in the first instance, they are advised to convey their concerns to the staff member or section of the Department with which they have been dealing for resolution. If the issue is not resolved to their satisfaction, customers can then submit a formal complaint. They can do so in a number of different ways, such as by letter, by email, or online using a *Customer Feedback Form*, which can be accessed on my Department's website: <https://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/secure/Submit-a-comment-or-compliment.aspx>. Alternatively, customers can make contact by phone or they can speak face to face to a member of staff in any of our Intreo centres around the country.

If the customer is dissatisfied with the response received they can request to have their complaint reviewed by another independent officer, not previously involved in the original complaint investigation. If customers are not satisfied with the response to the review, they are advised that they can contact the Office of the Ombudsman to have their complaint examined by that office.

Number of Complaints received

2016	1,112
2017	1,045
2018	1,808

Water Abstraction Regulation

1120. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will reconsider plans to extract a large supply of water from Lough Ree at Killinure, Athlone, County Westmeath; the surveys that have been carried out to date to assess the effect

this planned extraction will have on water levels in the area; if further surveys have been carried out to assess the long-term effects of this project on wildlife, boating and other water based activities in the area; and if consideration is being given to other possible sources for this supply of water. [1281/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I have no statutory role in this matter as proposals to abstract water for the purpose of public supply are a matter for Irish Water under the provisions of the Water Supplies Act 1942 and any required planning permission is a matter for the relevant local authority. Environmental and other considerations are taken into account as a normal part of the planning process.

However, my Department is currently developing new legislation governing the abstraction of water. In July 2018 the Government approved the General Scheme of the Water Environment (Abstractions) Bill, which will fulfil Ireland's obligations under the Water Framework Directive to establish a system of registration and control over the abstraction of water. Proposals in this regard were laid out in *Ireland's River Basin Management Plan 2018-2021*, which I published in April 2018.

The legislation is currently under preparation in my Department and it is intended that it will be enacted by the end of 2019.

Local Authority Management

1121. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the next competitions for chief executive officer of Dublin City Council and chief executive of Fingal County Council will be held; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54057/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Section 147 of the Local Government Act 2001 as amended by section 54 of the Local Government Act 2014 provides that a person is appointed to the position of Chief Executive for a term of 7 years with the potential for an extension of that term by a further 3 years.

Chief Executives are recruited through a competitive process organised by the Public Appointment Services and when either the position of Chief Executive of Dublin City Council or Chief Executive of Fingal County Council falls vacant they will be advertised nationally.

Local Government Reform

1122. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the decision to exclude the four Dublin local authorities from the process of plebiscites on direct elections on mayors in the Local Government Bill 2018 will be reconsidered in view of the necessity for directly elected leadership of the Dublin region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54058/18]

1123. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if legislation will be brought forward to create an elected mayor and assembly for the Dublin region in line with the municipal and regional government systems in major urban areas in the UK, EU and USA; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54059/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1122 and 1123 together.

The Local Government Bill 2018 provides inter alia for the holding of plebiscites on directly elected mayors with executive functions for Cork City Council, Limerick City and County Council and Waterford City and County Council. These plebiscites are expected to be held at the same time as the local government elections in May 2019. While the Bill has been passed in the Dáil and Seanad Éireann, it will return shortly to the Dáil to deal with Seanad amendments.

In view of the complexities of local government in County Dublin and the Dublin Metropolitan Area, which is defined in the National Planning Framework, it was deemed appropriate by the Government to allow space for detailed and informed public discourse on the matter of directly elected mayors for Dublin.

For that reason, the Government decided at its meeting of 27 September, 2018 that the issue of directly elected mayors for Dublin would be referred to a Dublin Citizens' Assembly to be convened in 2019. This would be an appropriate forum to consider the matter in the context of practices in the governance of other major cities internationally.

Tenant Purchase Scheme Review

1124. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the review of the tenant incremental purchase scheme will be published without delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54061/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): In line with the commitment given in Rebuilding Ireland, a review of the first 12 months of the Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme's operation has been undertaken. The review is now complete and a full report has been prepared setting out findings and recommendations.

I hope to be in a position to publish the review shortly, following completion of consideration of a number of implementation issues arising.

Social and Affordable Housing Eligibility

1125. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the review of social housing support household means policy will be expedited; the steps he will take as part of this review to examine the situation of the working homeless that are debarred from accessing council housing and the housing assistance payment (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54075/18]

1144. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if an applicant may be removed by a local authority from the social housing list if a temporary maternity benefit payment renders them in excess of the income threshold requirement; if so, if this situation will be reviewed; and if a previous time spent on the housing waiting list by a person will be lost in the event that a temporary maternity benefit payment leads to their removal from the list. [54559/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1125 and 1144 together.

The Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011 prescribe maximum net income limits for each local authority, in different bands according to the area, with income being defined and assessed according to a standard Household Means Policy.

Under the Household Means Policy, local authorities have discretion to disregard income that is once-off, temporary or short-term in nature and which is outside the regular pattern of a person's annual income.

The day-to-day operation of the social housing system is a matter for the relevant local authority and local authorities are by law (Section 63(1) of the Local Government Act 2001) independent in the performance of their functions. As Minister, I am precluded by housing legislation from intervening in relation to the decisions made by local authorities in the provision of social housing support in relation to any individual application.

At present, the Household Means Policy is being reviewed as part of the broader social housing reform agenda, and I expect an updated version to issue to local authorities later this year.

Homeless Persons Supports

1126. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of a service (details supplied) in County Westmeath; his views on recent reports that the six-bed service will close with funding going to a new 12-bed unit in County Offaly; and if assurances will be provided on the service. [54154/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department's role in relation to homelessness involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of housing authorities in addressing homelessness at local level. Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of accommodation and associated services for homeless persons rests with individual housing authorities.

The matter raised by the Deputy is an operational issue. Decisions on the organisation and range of accommodation services to be provided in a particular region are a matter for the individual housing authorities in consultation with the Statutory Management Group in that region, in this case the Midlands region.

Pyrite Issues

1127. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 290 and 291 of 14 November 2018, his plans to expand the scheme to support homeowners beyond counties Donegal and Mayo in view of the fact that an organisation (details supplied) alerted its members to pyrite contamination in blocks in north Leinster in 2014 indicating that contamination is not confined to those two counties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54176/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): As I understand it, the matter referred to by the Deputy, relating to pyrite contamination in concrete blocks in 2014, was resolved by the contracting parties at that time. Furthermore, the issue was dealt with by the relevant market surveillance authority under the European Union (Construction Products) Regulations 2013 and by building control authorities under the Building Control Acts 1990 – 2014 in the affected region.

Separately, in 2013, the issue of external walls of dwellings displaying significant cracking in Donegal was raised with my Department. The nature of the problem related to the crumbling of the concrete blockwork in the external walls of affected dwellings, thereby compromising

their structural integrity and giving rise to considerable personal distress to the many homeowners involved. At that time, several hundred homes were suspected to be affected in north Donegal. The presence of muscovite mica in abundant quantities in the aggregate constituent of the concrete blocks was suggested as being one of the main factors contributing to the deterioration of the concrete blocks.

By the end of 2013, similar problems had also come to light in both public and private dwellings located in west Mayo and Mayo County Council submitted a report to my Department on problems that had been identified with the concrete blockwork in their social housing stock. In this instance, it was the presence of pyrite in the aggregate constituent of the concrete block that was suggested as being one of the main factors contributing to the deterioration of the concrete blocks. The emergence of similar problems among private households located in County Mayo was also reported in 2013.

An Expert Panel on Concrete Blocks was established by my Department in 2016 and its terms of reference were limited to the investigation of the problems that have emerged in the concrete blockwork of certain dwellings in Counties Donegal and Mayo.

Under Budget 2019, the Government approved in principle the development of a grant scheme of financial assistance to support affected homeowners in the two counties to carry out the necessary remediation works to dwellings that have been damaged due to defective concrete blocks.

The putting in place of such a scheme is now a key priority for the Department and work is well underway on the development of such a scheme, including discussions with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in relation to funding. It is intended to revert to Government with proposals for the scheme as soon as possible with a view to publishing details of the scheme thereafter. It should be noted that this scheme will only apply to affected homeowners in Donegal and Mayo.

A standardised protocol was published by the National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI) on 13 November 2018 and is available at www.nsai.ie. This standard can be used by homeowners anywhere in the country to assess and categorise the damage in properties where the concrete blocks are suspected to contain the minerals mica or pyrite and it will inform the course of action in relation to remedial works for all such affected properties.

Departmental Expenditure

1128. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the cost incurred by his Department in 2018 for the use of taxi services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54213/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Expenditure on taxis for my Department for the year 2018 came to €10,573.36.

In the context of official travel, it is the policy of my Department that public transport should be used wherever possible, where it is deemed necessary to travel for business purposes. Staff are permitted to hire taxis or use their cars for official purposes only where no suitable public transport is available, where public transport is available only at equal or greater expense or where the use of public transport would result in the loss of official time which it is necessary to avoid.

Commercial Rates

1129. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he has satisfied himself that the Valuation Office is reverting to business proprietors who lodge appeals against drastic increases to their commercial rates in an efficient and timely manner; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54244/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): The processes and procedures underpinning the valuation of property for rating purposes are set out in detail in the Valuation Acts 2001 to 2015. Such valuations are a matter for the Commissioner of Valuation, who is the head of the Valuation Office, in the first instance. The Commissioner is independent in the exercise of his functions. I have no role in such matters.

The Valuation Acts 2001-2015 provide several avenues of redress for the occupiers of property and for a number of other categories of persons listed in the legislation who are dissatisfied with a determination of value under the provisions of the legislation.

Firstly, there is a statutory right for the occupier of a property to make representations within 40 days to the Valuation Office in relation to the proposed valuation to be placed on their property. Since the statutory mandate of the Valuation Office is to ensure that valuations of all rateable property are correct, equitable and uniform, relative to each other, consideration of representations made to the Office in respect of an individual property may result in a decrease, increase or no change in the valuation of that property. I am informed by the Commissioner that the outcome is based on the evidence provided to, and otherwise available to, the Valuation Office. This outcome may be the subject of a subsequent appeal to the statutorily independent Valuation Tribunal. Finally, there is a right of appeal to the Higher Courts on a point of law.

In determining an appeal, the Valuation Tribunal may, under Section 37 of the Valuation Act 2001, as amended by the Valuation (Amendment) Act 2015, decrease or increase a valuation or determine that no change is warranted.

In reaching its decisions, the statutory duty of the members of the Valuation Tribunal is to ensure that valuations are (insofar as is reasonably practicable) correct, equitable and uniform, relative to each other. Appeals to the Tribunal are dealt with in a comprehensive manner involving the consideration, on a quasi-judicial basis, of detailed, formal written documentation submitted to it. The Tribunal can hold hearings as provided for in the legislation, which allows for the taking of oral evidence and the receipt and consideration of written submissions made to it by and on behalf of all parties to the appeal concerned, including any person appearing to the Tribunal to have an interest in or likely to be affected by the determination of the appeal. When issuing its decisions, the Valuation Tribunal issues formal, written judgments which provide clear and cogent reasons for its decisions and these judgments are available to the public on the Tribunal's website, www.valuationtribunal.ie.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

1130. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the steps he is taking to provide a greater number of one-bed social housing units nationally in view of the increased demand for the units; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54246/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):

The delivery of social housing at a local level, whether by local authorities themselves or in partnership with Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs), is a matter for the local authorities and that local ownership includes responsibility to match supply with demand, in terms of the size of new social housing units provided. However, my Department also influences this activity, through its engagement with local authorities and AHBs and, specifically, in its role in approving funding for new social housing build projects.

The assessment by my Department of proposals for new social housing includes a comparison of the proposed size and scale of the housing units with the social housing needs for the area and family composition of the waiting list. For example, my Department might approve funding on condition that smaller property types are included in a new social housing proposal, to meet the identified housing need.

Acquisitions of existing properties can also be an opportunity for local authorities and AHBs to target smaller housing units where these better match housing need.

My Department is also working with Dublin City Council on the establishment of a Design Build Contractor Framework to deliver residential developments through the use of volumetric construction methods. This framework will shortly be available to all local authorities and will open up additional opportunities to deliver volumetric/rapid delivery apartments for social housing use.

Rental Sector Strategy

1131. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the progress he has made on providing cost rental housing units; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54247/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): It is acknowledged that renters in Dublin and other urban centres are currently facing significant access and affordability challenges. Therefore, the Government is committed to the introduction of a not-for-profit, cost rental sector in Ireland which will be targeted at households earning low to moderate incomes up to a maximum annual income of €50,000 for single applicants and €75,000 for dual applicants.

Under the cost rental model, rents are set to recoup development and maintenance costs with a minimum amount of retained earnings. Minimising retained earnings, land and other delivery costs, while securing competitive low-cost financing, means that affordable rents can be achieved. The final rents, for any given project, will be set after all associated costs are determined, following on from the competitive construction and management tender processes. However, in its appraisal of initial cost rental projects the National Development Finance Agency (NDFA) estimate that rents of between 15-25% below market could be achieved.

Together with delivering more affordable and predictable rents, cost rental will make a sustainable impact on national competitiveness and the attractiveness of our main urban centres as places to live and work.

Cost rental is new to Ireland and, in order to drive delivery, a number of important early mover projects are being advanced, delivering important lessons in terms of cost rental in an Irish setting. There are two pilot cost rental schemes being advanced: one at Enniskerry Road, in Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown, and one at Emmet Road in Inchicore.

It is expected that 50 cost rental homes (33% of the total) will be made available on the En-

niskerry Road site. The tenders are currently being assessed for this project, and it is anticipated that construction will commence later in the first quarter of 2019.

The current tenure mix for Emmet Road, as agreed with my Department, is 30% social and 70% cost rental, which equates to 330 cost rental homes. While this project is at an earlier stage of development, Dublin City Council has appointed a dedicated project manager and a project team to drive the project forward. In addition to pre-existing consultative arrangements, the Council is also facilitating a special Consultative Forum specifically for this project. It is expected that the procurement process will get underway later in quarter 1 of 2019.

Cost rental will initially be managed on an administrative basis, and my Department is preparing a draft administrative cost rental framework in collaboration with the Housing Agency and the local authorities involved in these pilot projects. The invaluable learning from these pathfinder projects will inform further cost rental projects to be rolled out across other suitable sites. My Department is also working with the European Investment Bank to leverage its advisory and research capacity so that broader international lessons on the operation of cost rental can inform Ireland's approach.

My Department is also engaging with the new Land Development Agency to examine the optimum funding and delivery options to support cost rental delivery at scale.

County Development Plans

1132. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the reason Naas, County Kildare, identified as a key growth town in the regional spatial and economic strategy, will be inhibited from availing of the full potential of the existing capital asset base such as infrastructure, schools and community facilities on which an estimated €283 million has been expended to date on the assumption that Naas would grow to 50,000 inhabitants based on previous county development plan policies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54301/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): According to CSO figures, the population of Naas was approximately 21,000 people in 2016. Naas is one of two key towns identified in County Kildare in the draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Eastern and Midlands Regional Assembly (EMRA) which is currently subject to public consultation.

Once finalised, the strategy is intended to further develop strategic planning policies contained in the National Planning Framework, for the period to 2031. The population of Naas will grow further during this time and the extent of such growth, and how it will be planned for, will be a matter for Kildare County Council to determine, in the context of the County as a whole, subject to final determination of the RSES for the EMRA area.

The current projection underpinning the draft RSES for the EMRA area for County Kildare to 2026, i.e. over the next six-year County Development Plan period, is for an additional 31,500 people above 2016 levels. This is comparable to adding the equivalent of 3-4 entire large towns combined, to the County over a 10-year period. The County Development Plan review process must also ensure that there is capacity for up to a further 25% of the projected population target to 2026, or an additional 8,000 people in Kildare, to accommodate further growth into the future.

This means that the next six-year Kildare County Development Plan must make provision to accommodate almost 40,000 additional people over 2016 levels. This is considered to be a

sustainable level of development taking all of the relevant demographic, economic and planning factors into account in a balanced way across all the local authority areas and will allow the provision of infrastructure and services in line with housing development and the achievement of the strategic planning aims of Project Ireland 2040 in securing more compact urban development, including in Kildare in general and Naas town in particular.

There is no evidence to suggest that Naas is being inhibited from availing of the full potential of its existing capital asset base. In determining how best to accommodate a significant level of projected future population growth that takes account of wider national, regional and local drivers, Kildare County Council will take into consideration factors such as employment, transport, infrastructure and services like schools, parks, community and recreational facilities including childcare and healthcare, having regard to the needs of both the existing population and projected future populations.

The Draft RSES for the EMRA area, which includes County Kildare, was published on 5 November 2018 and is available to view online at the following link: www.emra.ie/draft-rses-public-consultation.

The consultation period on the Draft RSES will run until 23 January 2019, by which date it is open to any interested party to make a submission in writing to the Regional Assembly. Following the consultation period, the EMRA will take all submissions received into account in the formulation of the final RSES, adoption of which will require approval by Assembly Members.

Social and Affordable Housing

1133. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if consideration has been given to relocating the Maynooth, Celbridge and Leixlip housing unit allocations to the rest of the County Kildare region; if Maynooth, Leixlip and Celbridge are now considered part of the greater Dublin area allocation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54302/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The allocation of social housing under section 22 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009, is a matter for the relevant local authority concerned. In terms of social housing allocations, Maynooth, Leixlip and Celbridge are part of County Kildare. Therefore, the allocation of vacant social housing units in these areas is currently the responsibility of Kildare County Council and there are no plans to change this.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

1134. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if three houses (details supplied) are currently under the ownership of Galway County Council; if so, the reason the properties have not been made available to families on the social housing list in view of the level of homelessness in Galway city and county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54343/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Responsibility for the allocation and tenanting of social housing homes in the ownership of the 31 local authorities, including the ownership and management of Council properties, are matters for the local authorities themselves and information on specific properties would ordinarily be available directly from those authorities.

In the case of the properties referred to, Galway County Council has advised my Department that they do not own these and they are not part of their social housing stock.

Home Loan Scheme

1135. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the policy of the Housing Agency on the requirement for a mortgage applicant to have demonstrated a pattern of saving; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that applicants that have the required deposit are being refused mortgage approval due to the lack of a savings record even though they are paying a substantial rent; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54383/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan is designed to enable credit worthy first-time buyers, who are unable to access a mortgage from a commercial lender to obtain sustainable mortgage lending to purchase a new or second-hand property. The low rate of fixed interest associated with the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan provides first-time buyers with access to mortgage finance that they may not otherwise have been able to afford at a higher interest rate.

To support prudential lending and consistency of treatment for borrowers, a Loan to Value ratio of 90% applies to the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan as per the Central Bank's prudential lending guidelines. Therefore, in order to avail of the loan, applicants must have a deposit equivalent to 10% of the market value of the property.

Under the statutory Credit Policy under which all applications must be assessed, applicants must provide bank or similar statements (such as post office, credit union, etc.) for a 12-month period immediately prior to making an application, clearly showing a credible and consistent track record of savings. The cash savings should be no less than 3% of the market value of the property. Gifts are permissible up to 7% of the market value, where their source is verified.

Exceptions to the above can be made where an applicant/applicants can clearly demonstrate a consistent and credible record of savings or rent payment through their bank account which at a minimum is equal to -

- In the case of a fixed rate loan, the proposed monthly loan repayment or
- In the case of a variable rate loan, the proposed stress tested monthly loan repayment.

Given the need to administer the loan in a financially prudent manner, in order to protect the financial position of both the borrower and local authorities, I have no plans to reduce these deposit requirements.

For prospective purchasers of newly-built properties, the availability, through the Revenue Commissioners, of the Help to Buy Initiative for first-time buyers may provide additional assistance to help prospective applicants for the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan secure the required level of deposit.

Homeless Persons Supports

1136. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the steps taken to ensure each person had a roof over their head during the Christmas 2018 period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54444/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Supporting individuals and families experiencing homelessness is an absolute priority for this Government. Budget 2019 provided for an increase in the budget for homeless services, with the total budget available to local authorities now €146m, a 26% increase on the provision for 2018. Budget 2019 also provided €60m in additional capital funding for the provision of emergency accommodation in 2018.

In Dublin, where the rough sleeping problem is most pronounced, the Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE) is delivering over 200 additional permanent beds this winter. All of these beds are supported temporary accommodation (STA) where single individuals and couples receive the accommodation and health supports that they need. Furthermore, over 150 temporary beds were also introduced as part of the cold weather initiative for the Dublin region. The DRHE have confirmed that sufficient bed capacity existed at all stages over the Christmas period.

Many individuals in long-term emergency accommodation or sleeping rough also require other supports to exit homelessness into an independent tenancy. The National Implementation Plan for Housing First, published in September 2018, is designed to provide this response, by delivering permanent housing solutions for rough sleepers and long-term users of emergency accommodation. The plan contains targets for each local authority, with an overall national target of 663 tenancies to be delivered by 2021.

Departmental Expenditure

1137. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the budget and spend in his Department for marketing, media and social media in each of the years 2016 to 2018; the projected spend for 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54467/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Press and public relations functions are generally undertaken by my Department's Press Office. The engagement of external expertise is only considered where the issues involved require expert skills or capabilities that are not readily available within my Department.

The details requested for the years 2016 onward have previously been provided in reply to Questions No. 825 of 11 July 2017, 744 of 14 December 2017 and 625 of 2 October 2018. Details of 2018 expenditure were provided in response to Questions No. 667 of 20 November 2018 and 586 of 19 December 2018. There has been no further expenditure to date.

While it is not possible to project total expenditure for 2019, it is anticipated that there will be expenditure in respect of public information campaigns on the European and local elections, referendums, consultations on the Electoral Commission and Electoral Register Reform and the annual register awareness campaign; €250,000 has been budgeted for this expenditure. In addition, the expected approximate spend on general advertising on fire safety issues is €110,000, with the cost of my Department's annual Fire Safety Campaign not yet available. It could be expected that there may be other expenditure during the course of the year also.

Departmental Staff Data

1138. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of staff in his Department employed to work on marketing, media and social

media in 2018. [54484/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): There are no staff involved in marketing in my Department. There are three staff in my Department's Press Office who have a wide range of responsibilities including dealing with media queries and other standard press office duties, including social media. In addition, a further two staff, as part of their role, support various communications functions, including public and stakeholder engagement and consultations.

Question No. 1139 answered with Question No. 89.

Rental Sector

1140. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the position regarding persons struggling to lease properties at a low price while also paying tax within the higher bracket; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54523/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): There are upward pressures on the private rental market, due to our strong economic and demographic growth and the restricted supply available. However, the range of wider policies to increase supply, such as providing more flexible planning standards as well as improving supports and services for the rented sector, will help to increase the number and types of properties available for rent, particularly in city centre areas.

The solution to the acute pressures are supply related - increasing the supply of houses/apartments for sale and rent will in turn reduce the pressure on rents and provide a wider choice for our citizens.

While the supply side actions are beginning to bear fruit, the Government's intervention in the rental market have been positive in moderating the rate of increase of rents through Rent Pressure Zones (RPZs) and in providing more security of tenure for tenants. Rent Pressure Zones are designated Local Electoral Areas or administrative areas of local authorities in which rent increases are restricted to a maximum of 4% per annum.

Section 24A of the Residential Tenancies Act 2004, as amended, provides that the Housing Agency, in consultation with housing authorities, may make a proposal to the Minister that an area should be considered as a Rent Pressure Zone. Following receipt of such a proposal, the Minister requests the Director of the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) to conduct an assessment of the area to establish whether or not it meets the criteria for designation and to report to the Minister on whether the area should be designated as a Rent Pressure Zone. For the purpose of the Act, 'area' is defined as either the administrative area of a housing authority or a local electoral area within the meaning of section 2 of the Local Government Act 2001.

For an area to be designated as a Rent Pressure Zone, it must satisfy the following criteria set out in section 24A(4) of the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 (as inserted by section 36 of the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016):

(i) The annual rate of rent inflation in the area must have been 7% or more in four of the last six quarters; and

(ii) The average rent for tenancies registered in the area with the RTB in the last quarter must be above the average national rent.

The RTB Rent Index Report includes a summary in Table 9 of the data used to establish whether each Local Electoral Area fulfils the criteria for designation as a Rent Pressure Zone. This ensures transparency in relation to the position of individual areas in terms of average rent levels and increases.

Further information on Rent Pressure Zones and designations is available on my Department's website at: <https://www.housing.gov.ie/PUBLICATIONS>, by searching 'rent pressure zones - information'.

On 11 December 2018, the Government gave its approval to publish the Residential Tenancies (Amendment) (No. 2) Bill 2018, which includes powers for the RTB to investigate and sanction landlords who engage in improper conduct such as non-compliance with the rent increase restriction in Rent Pressure Zones. The Bill will make it a criminal offence for landlords to, inter alia, implement rent increases that contravene the law or fail to cooperate with an investigation or to register and update tenancies with the RTB. It will allow the RTB to initiate an investigation without the need for a complaint to be made.

These key measures and reforms are designed to enhance enforcement powers for the RTB, provide greater security of tenure for tenants and further underpin the operation of the RPZ arrangements, and will not only protect those who are renting but will also deliver greater stability and transparency to the rental sector.

The issue of taxation is a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Finance.

Wind Energy Guidelines

1141. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the revision of the wind energy development guidelines; and the time-frame for completion of the revision. [54542/18]

1181. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the extent to which progress has been made in the setting of planning guidelines in respect of wind or solar farms; if and when the result of discussions are likely to be announced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1501/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1141 and 1181 together.

My Department is currently undertaking a focused review of the 2006 Wind Energy Development Guidelines. As part of the overall review, a strategic environmental assessment (SEA) is being undertaken on the revised Guidelines before they come into effect, in accordance with the requirements of EU Directive 2001/24/EC on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment, otherwise known as the SEA Directive.

SEA is a process by which environmental considerations are required to be fully integrated into the preparation of plans and programmes which act as frameworks for development consent, prior to their final adoption, with public consultation as part of that process. It is expected that a public consultation on the revised draft Guidelines, together with the comprehensive environmental report under the SEA process, will be commenced in early 2019, with the aim of issuing the finalised Guidelines, following detailed analysis and consideration of the submissions and views received during the consultation phase, in mid-2019.

When finalised, the revised Guidelines will be issued under section 28 of the Planning and

Development Act 2000. Planning authorities and, where applicable, An Bord Pleanála must have regard to guidelines issued under section 28 in the performance of their functions generally under the Planning Acts. In the meantime, the current 2006 Wind Energy Development Guidelines remain in force.

In relation to solar farms, as is the case with the large majority of development types, there are currently no specific planning guidelines in place in respect of solar farms. Proposals for individual solar farm developments are subject to the statutory requirements of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, in the same manner as other proposed developments, with planning applications made to the relevant local planning authority and with a right of appeal to An Bord Pleanála. Within the wider national and local planning context, planning authorities must make their decisions, based on the specific merits or otherwise of individual planning applications.

While I am satisfied that the planning code is sufficiently robust to facilitate the assessment of individual planning applications for solar farm developments, the matter is being kept under review, in consultation with the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and the Environment, who leads on renewable energy policy. Our two Departments are presently exploring the potential for enhancing national planning guidance on solar energy, taking account of solar energy projects being assessed by planning authorities and the scope for future development of the sector in the context of the ongoing development of renewable energy policy.

On foot of this on-going engagement between the two Departments, where the need for specific planning guidance for solar farms is identified, my Department will develop such guidance as appropriate.

Question No. 1142 answered with Question No. 53.

Question No. 1143 answered with Question No. 81.

Question No. 1144 answered with Question No. 1125.

Mortgage to Rent Scheme

1145. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to revise the mortgage-to-rent income criteria to exclude overtime worked; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1016/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Mortgage to Rent (MTR) scheme introduced in 2012 is targeted at those households in mortgage arrears who are eligible for social housing support whose mortgage is unsustainable and who have very limited options, if any, to meet their long-term housing needs themselves. One of the main criteria underpinning the MTR scheme is that it is a social housing option and therefore is targeted at those borrowers in arrears who qualify for social housing support as prescribed by the Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011.

It is a matter for individual housing authorities to assess a household's income for social housing support eligibility in accordance with the Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011, which prescribe maximum net income limits for each housing authority, in different bands according to the area, with income being defined and assessed according to a standard Household Means Policy.

The income bands and the authority area assigned to each band are 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. As part of the broader social housing reform agenda, a review of income eligibility for social housing supports 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 obviously 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.

Rental Accommodation Scheme Data

1146. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of RAS tenancies active on 1 January 2019, by local authority area. [1017/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The latest data in relation to the Rental Accommodation Scheme reflects the position at end October 2018, when there were a total of 19,062 tenancies supported under the scheme, details of which, broken down by local authority, are set out in the table below.

Number of RAS Tenancies by Local Authority @ 31 October 2018

Local Authority	Total RAS
Carlow CC	516
Cavan CC	564
Clare CC	374
Cork City Cl.	841
Cork CC	873
Donegal CC	543
Dublin City Cl.	1828
Dublin South CC	1343
Dun-Rathdown CC	525
Fingal CC	673
Galway City Cl.	427
Galway Co. Cl.	323
Kerry CC	906
Kildare CC	609
Kilkenny CC	913
Laois CC	223
Leitrim CC	113
Limerick Ct & Co.	1109
Longford CC	206
Louth CC	116
Mayo CC	825
Meath CC	425
Monaghan CC	207
Offaly CC	131
Roscommon CC	416

Local Authority	Total RAS
Sligo CC	553
Tipperary	1110
Waterford City & Co.	681
Westmeath CC	601
Wexford CC	651
Wicklow CC	437
Total	19,062

Housing Assistance Payment Data

1147. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of HAP tenancies active on 1 January 2019, by local authority area. [1018/19]

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 available to all eligible households throughout the State. Data to end 2018 is not yet available. However, at the end of Quarter 3 2018, there were 40,837 active tenancies in receipt of HAP support. These are broken down by local authority area as follows:

Local Authority	Total Active HAP Tenancies at end Q3 2018
Carlow County Council	701
Cavan County Council	240
Clare County Council	1299
Cork City Council	1931
Cork County Council	3207
Donegal County Council	1730
Dublin City Council	1946
Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council	331
Fingal County Council	1103
Galway City Council	1254
Galway County Council	925
Kerry County Council	776
Kildare County Council	1785
Kilkenny County Council	872
Laois County Council	604
Leitrim County Council	188
Limerick City & County Council	2160
Longford County Council	250
Louth County Council	2515
Mayo County Council	1039
Meath County Council	1612
Monaghan County Council	516
Offaly County Council	807
Roscommon County Council	318
Sligo County Council	615

Local Authority	Total Active HAP Tenancies at end Q3 2018
South Dublin County Council	2516
Tipperary County Council	1760
Waterford City & County Council	1817
Westmeath County Council	581
Wexford County Council	919
Wicklow County Council	797
Dublin Regional Homeless Executive	3723
Total	40837

My Department continues to keep the operation of the HAP scheme under review. In general, I am satisfied with the operation of the scheme and I consider it to be a key vehicle for meeting housing need and fulfilling the ambitious programme outlined under the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan.

Derelict Sites Data

1148. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of sites in a towns (details supplied) that have been levied with the derelict sites levy. [1020/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Derelict Sites Act 1990 imposes a general duty on every owner and occupier of land to take all reasonable steps to ensure that the land does not become, or continue to be, a derelict site. The Act also imposes a duty on local authorities to take all reasonable steps, including the exercise of appropriate statutory powers, to ensure that any land within their functional area does not become, or continue to be, a derelict site. To this end, local authorities have been given substantial powers under the Act in relation to any such sites, including powers to require that owners or occupiers take appropriate measures on derelict sites, to acquire derelict sites by agreement, or compulsorily, and to apply a derelict sites levy on the registered owners of derelict sites.

It is open to any person to contact a local authority in relation to a particular site which may be considered a derelict site for the purposes of the Act. Under the Act, local authorities are required to maintain a register of any land which, in the opinion of the local authority, is a derelict site. Under section 8(5) of the Act, a copy of the register for any local authority area can be inspected at the offices of the relevant authority. It is a matter for local authorities to determine the most appropriate use of the legislation within their respective functional areas.

My Department collects derelict sites data at the local authority level and accordingly the information requested regarding the number of derelict sites levied in specified towns in Cork County Council's administrative area is not readily available in my Department. According to the most recent information held by my Department, which relates to 2017, there were 197 derelict sites listed on the register of Cork County Council at 31 December 2017. Of these, 19 sites were subject to the levy in 2017 and the Council has confirmed that none of these sites were located in the specified towns. Instead the Council is seeking to positively engage with the majority of the owners of registered derelict sites through mechanisms other than the levy, such as the promotion of initiatives including the Repair and Lease Scheme and the Buy and Renew Scheme with a view to bringing the properties concerned back into productive use for social housing purposes.

Fire Service

1149. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the location of the proposed new fire service facility in Dunleer, County Louth; the status of the project which was announced in February 2016 as part of a €40 million investment programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1024/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The provision of a fire service in its functional area, including the establishment and maintenance of a fire brigade, the assessment of fire cover needs and the provision of fire station premises, is a statutory function of individual fire authorities under the Fire Service Act, 1981. My Department supports the fire authorities through setting general policy, providing a central training programme, issuing guidance on operational and other related matters and providing capital funding for priority infrastructural projects.

In February 2016, my Department announced a five-year Fire Services Capital Programme with an allocation of €40 million, based on an annual €8 million allocation, to be used for the purchase of fire appliances and specialist equipment, building or upgrading of prioritised Fire Stations, an upgrade of the Communications and Mobilisation system and improvements to Training Centres.

A new fire station at Dunleer is included in the Capital Programme, with an estimated commencement date of 2020. Identification of potential sites, determination of suitability of sites for a fire station and acquisition of an optimal site will be undertaken by Louth County Council. My Department will work with the Council to progress this project in accordance with the schedule set out in the Capital Programme.

Question No. 1150 answered with Question No. 53.

Emergency Accommodation Provision

1151. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the emergency accommodation supports available to persons returning here having left alleged domestic violence in another country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54380/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department’s role in relation to homelessness involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of housing authorities in addressing homelessness at local level. Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of accommodation and related services for homeless persons rests with individual housing authorities. Responsibility for the provision, funding and oversight of services to support victims of domestic violence, including refuges, rests with Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, under the aegis of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

In line with commitments made under Rebuilding Ireland, my Department issued guidance in January 2017 to all local authorities in relation to assisting victims of domestic violence with emergency and long-term accommodation needs. The guidance is also a useful reference for service providers working in the domestic violence services sector, highlighting where they can be of greatest assistance to their clients, covering a range of scenarios that may arise for victims of domestic violence in seeking social housing supports. These include provisions around the use of the Housing Assistance Payment scheme, or the Rental Accommodation Scheme, where

a victim has a joint interest in the family home, or ownership of alternative accommodation, but would otherwise qualify for social housing support.

Housing Data

1152. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of social housing construction completions in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1107/19]

1198. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of houses made available to the various local authorities in the past 12 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1735/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1152 and 1198 together.

The latest data in relation to social housing delivery to end Q3 2018 is published on my Department's website at the following link:

<https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision> .

Data in relation to Q4 2018 outputs is currently being compiled and will be published shortly.

Question No. 1153 answered with Question No. 78.

Social and Affordable Housing Data

1154. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the details of all cost benefit analyses relating to housing developments on public land sent to his Department from Dublin City Council; and the detail of all correspondence between the council and his Department relating to these cost benefit analyses for each of the years 2014 to 2018. [1120/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Under the Public Spending Code, where a capital project exceeds €20m, the Sponsoring Agency (the local authority) is required to submit a Cost Benefit Analysis (CBA) or a Cost Effectiveness Analysis (CEA) prior to receiving Departmental Approval in Principle.

My Department has received CBAs in relation to the following housing schemes from Dublin City Council (DCC) since 2014:

- Dominick St;
- St. Theresa's Gardens;
- Croke Villas/Sackville Avenue;
- O'Devaney Gardens;
- Cornamona Court;
- Bunratty Road;

- Cromcastle Court;
- Dunne Street;
- Matt Talbot Street;
- Lissadel/Rafters Lane;
- Constitution Hill; and
- Dorset Street.

There is an on-going process of engagement between my Department, DCC and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in relation to the examination of each CBA. This process, together with my Departments approval process means that all of the available options are fully appraised and evaluated and the best approach is followed from a value for money and housing and sustainable communities viewpoint.

Planning Issues

1155. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the progress on legislation to put in place statutory timeframes for planning compliance decisions for residential development permission conditions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1124/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Section 34(5) of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, currently provides that subsequent to the granting of planning permission, planning authorities may reach agreement on supplementary points of detail relating to a development (such as the colour of roof tile to be used) - also known as compliance conditions - with persons undertaking development.

Section 23(4) of the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2018, which is not yet commenced, amended this section to include a range of statutory timelines. When this Section is commenced, planning authorities will be obliged to reach agreement on the points within eight weeks of proposals being submitted by the relevant person (or such longer period as may be agreed between the two parties) and if agreement cannot be reached, advise the person accordingly, who may then refer the matter to An Bord Pleanála for a determination within four weeks. Alternatively, the planning authority may refer the matter direct to An Bord Pleanála for its determination on the matter.

Where agreement cannot be reached within eight weeks or such longer period as may be agreed, and where the planning authority has not advised the person accordingly or referred the matter to the Board for a determination, the points of detail submitted shall, by default, be deemed to have been agreed.

The intention behind these new provisions is to enable developers to proceed with the necessary works relating to supplementary points of detail in reasonable time and without undue delay, thereby providing greater certainty in relation to the progression of development works subsequent to the granting of planning permission.

As this new provision is a significant change from existing procedures and practices, and presents potential resource implications for local authorities, my Department is liaising with the local authority sector to ensure that appropriate procedures and resources are put in place to allow for the earliest possible commencement of section 23(4) of the 2018 Act. It is my intention

to commence this new provision once these matters have been finalised and agreed.

Local Authority Housing Mortgages

1156. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of Rebuilding Ireland home loan applications by local authority; the number of such loans approved by each local authority; and the number of loans drawn down by each local authority in 2018, in tabular form. [1154/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department publishes information on the overall number and value of (i) local authority loan approvals and (ii) local authority loan drawdowns. Information up to Q3 2018, including in relation to number and value of mortgage drawdowns, is available on the Department's website at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/house-prices-loans-and-profile-borrowers/local-authority-loan-activity>, and this information will be updated on a quarterly basis as additional data is compiled.

In addition, the Housing Agency provides a central support service which assesses loan applications that are made to the local authorities and makes recommendations to the authorities as to whether loans should be offered to applicants. I have asked the Agency to centrally compile figures on the numbers of applications that it has assessed and recommended for approval. The most recent figures, as at the end of December 2018, indicate that the Agency had recommended a total of 1,550 applications for approval since the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme launched, as set out in the table below:

Local Authority	Applications Assessed	Recommended to Approve
Carlow County Council	46	16
Cavan County Council	12	7
Clare County Council	48	19
Cork City Council	101	53
Cork County Council	222	133
Donegal County Council	29	18
Dublin City Council	339	215
Dún Laoghaire - Rathdown County Council	72	45
Fingal County Council	410	229
Galway City Council	62	30
Galway County Council	102	41
Kerry County Council	78	40
Kildare County Council	171	87
Kilkenny County Council	25	15
Laois County Council	70	36
Leitrim County Council	9	2
Limerick City & County Council	76	46
Longford County Council	29	15
Louth County Council	67	31
Mayo County Council	40	18

Local Authority	Applications Assessed	Recommended to Approve
Meath County Council	185	124
Monaghan County Council	17	6
Offaly County Council	35	14
Roscommon County Council	26	13
Sligo County Council	36	20
South Dublin County Council	206	112
Tipperary County Council	76	29
Waterford City & County Council	32	14
Westmeath County Council	21	17
Wexford County Council	80	43
Wicklow County Council	128	62
Total	3,036	1,550

Each local authority must have in place a credit committee and it is a matter for the committee to make the decision on applications for loans, in accordance with the regulations, having regard to the recommendations made by the Housing Agency.

Traveller Accommodation

1157. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when a decision will be made on the request made by Galway City Council for the replacement of mobile homes and caravans on city Traveller halting sites and the need for the upgrading of accommodation on all halting sites in Galway city on health and safety grounds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1159/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): In accordance with the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998, housing authorities have statutory responsibility for the assessment of the accommodation needs of Travellers and the preparation, adoption and implementation of multi-annual Traveller Accommodation Programmes (TAPs) in their areas. My Department's role is to ensure that there are adequate structures and supports in place to assist the authorities in providing such accommodation, including a national framework of policy, legislation and funding. The management of the programme locally, and the selection, prioritisation and submission of individual projects, is a matter for each local authority, in this case, Galway City Council.

As part of the capital funding supports provided by my Department, funding of 50% is provided to housing authorities for the purchase of 'Emergency Replacement Mobiles'. An emergency in this respect is an unanticipated event, such as storm damage, that would render a caravan/mobile uninhabitable or dangerous to live in.

My Department has not received a formal request for the replacement of mobile homes and caravans on Traveller halting sites from Galway City Council. Upon receipt, any such submission will be considered by my Department.

Rural Development Policy

1158. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Gov-

ernment the status of the working group set up to consider the 2013 European Court of Justice ruling in the Flemish decree case; the status of his Department's engagements with the European Commission in relation to the matter; if the working group completed its work by the end of 2018 as indicated in reply to Parliamentary Question No. 1176 of 6 November 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1162/19]

1203. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the action he will take to facilitate the indigenous rural population by way of planning permission to rehouse themselves in their own area thus alleviating the burden on local authorities in view of the prevailing housing crisis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1740/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1158 and 1203 together.

Under the current 2005 Guidelines on Sustainable Rural Housing, planning authorities are required to frame the planning policies in their development plans in a balanced and measured way that ensures the housing needs of rural communities are met, while avoiding excessive urban-generated housing and haphazard development, particularly in those areas near cities and towns that are under pressure from urban generated development.

Following engagement between the European Commission and my Department regarding the European Court of Justice ruling in the "Flemish Decree" case, a working group was established to review and, where necessary, recommend changes to the 2005 Planning Guidelines on Sustainable Rural Housing, issued under section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended. The working group comprises senior officials from the Planning Division of my Department and senior officials from the Planning Divisions of local authorities, nominated by the local government sector.

The objective is to ensure that rural housing policies and objectives contained in local authority development plans comply with the relevant provisions of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

The National Planning Framework (the NPF) also provides an important context for the finalisation of the revisions to the 2005 Rural Housing Guidelines. National Policy Objective 15 of the NPF fully supports the concept of the sustainable development of rural areas by encouraging growth and arresting decline in areas that have experienced low population growth or decline in recent decades, while simultaneously indicating the need to manage certain areas around cities and towns that are under strong urban influence and under pressure from uncoordinated and ribbon-type development, in order to avoid over-development of those areas. Accordingly, the NPF objectives are aligned with the approach already expected of planning authorities under the current Guidelines.

Taking account of the engagement with the European Commission on the matter and subject to the completion of the ongoing deliberations by the working group, I expect to be in a position to shortly finalise and issue to planning authorities revisions to the 2005 Rural Housing Guidelines that take account of the relevant ECJ judgment.

Question No. 1159 answered with Question No. 67.

Housing Policy

1160. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local

Government if his attention has been drawn to the precarious position of private tenants who have been given termination notices with regards to sourcing local authority homes; and his plans to address the uncertainty faced by renters in this predicament by establishing a preventative homeless scheme with adequate resources. [1186/19]

1204. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the extent to which a specific plan can be put into operation with a view to urgently addressing the homeless situation with particular reference to families that have been on the list in some cases for several years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1741/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1160 and 1204 together.

Rebuilding Ireland, the Government's Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness, is designed to increase the delivery of housing across all tenures to help individuals and families meet their housing need and to help those who are currently housed to remain in their homes or to be provided with alternative options of emergency accommodation. The plan focuses on increasing the delivery of social housing, with a target of delivering 50,000 social housing homes in the period to 2021, while also making the best use of existing stock and laying the foundations for a more vibrant housing sector.

Households experiencing homelessness are supported by the local authorities and their service delivery partners to exit homelessness into an independent tenancy, whether it be in a local authority property or a HAP supported tenancy in the private rental sector. In 2018, the HAP Placefinder service was made available to all local authorities to support households to identify and secure a tenancy.

The allocation of social housing support is a matter for the relevant local authority in accordance with the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 and associated regulations. Section 22 of the 2009 Act requires all local authorities to make an allocation scheme determining the order of priority to be accorded in the allocation of dwellings to households qualified for social housing support and to households approved for a transfer, the allocation of which would, in the opinion of the authority, meet the accommodation needs and requirements of the households.

To strengthen further the rights of tenants in the private rented sector, building on initiatives already taken, I published the Residential Tenancies (Amendment)(No. 2) Bill 2018 in December 2018. Among the key provisions of the Bill are measures to empower the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) to investigate and sanction landlords who engage in improper conduct including non-compliance with rent increase restrictions in Rent Pressure Zones (RPZs); the creation of criminal offences for landlords connected with non-compliance with rent increase restrictions in RPZs; and increasing notice periods for tenancy terminations by landlords.

Constitutional Amendments

1161. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to progress with the proposal to extend voting rights to those over 16 years of age; when he plans to hold a referendum to give effect to same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1192/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): At its meeting on 4 December 2018, the Government reviewed the progress on Bills to amend the Constitution. The Government noted that further consider-

ation will be given to the timing of a referendum on reducing the voting age to 16 although it is not proposed that this referendum be held in 2019.

Legislative Process

1162. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if a reply will issue regarding the concerns of a person (details supplied) in relation to the Local Government (Water Pollution)(Amendment) Bill 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1199/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department will issue a reply within a week to the individual concerned who has raised issues in relation to the Local Government (Water Pollution)(Amendment) Bill 2018, a Private Member's Bill which concluded Dáil Second Stage in November 2018.

Social and Affordable Housing Data

1163. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of social housing units built and purchased by Limerick City and County Council in 2017 and 2018, in tabular form. [1206/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Data in relation to social housing delivery for all local authority areas, including Limerick City & County Council, for the period 2009 to end Quarter 3 of 2018, is available on my Department's website at the following link: <https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision>.

Data in relation to Q4 2018 is currently being compiled and will be made available as soon as possible.

NAMA Social Housing Provision

1164. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of dwellings offered by NAMA to Limerick City and County Council and approved housing bodies in Limerick in 2017 and 2018; the number of these that were accepted; and the number of these that are now in use. [1207/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I refer to the reply to Question No. 657 of 18 December 2018, which sets out the position on this matter.

Housing Assistance Payment Data

1165. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount local authorities (details supplied) have paid out to estate agents in finder's fees in order to locate social housing under the housing assistance scheme for 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1246/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):

The Homeless HAP Place Finder Service, which all local authorities can, if required, provide in their area, is a targeted support for homeless households who are finding it difficult to secure HAP tenancies. The Place Finder Service has been successfully utilised by the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive (DRHE) across the Dublin local authorities since February 2015, with more than 4,300 households being supported by the Homeless HAP scheme at end Q3 2018.

The Place Finder Service can assist households in emergency accommodation primarily by providing access to deposits and advance rental payments. Local authorities, including the DRHE, are promoting the scheme locally, and engaging with letting agents and landlords who might be interested in entering into a HAP tenancy.

The DRHE, in conjunction with my Department, has put in place an incentive for estate agents whereby, should they make suitable properties exclusively available to homeless families through the Place Finders team within the DRHE, and not advertise them on letting websites or elsewhere, or should they hold reserved viewings for homeless families in emergency accommodation, then, after five properties have been secured in this manner, a payment will be made to the agent, following the submission of the appropriate paperwork.

While my Department is working with the DRHE in relation to estate agents and finders fees, this arrangement has not been extended by my Department to any other local authority outside of the DRHE.

Where a local authority decides to enhance the Homeless HAP service beyond the financial assistance provided by my Department, the arrangement, management and oversight of the Homeless HAP Place Finder Service, including any contractual matters that may arise with relevant third parties, is a matter for each individual local authority.

Water Abstraction Regulation

1166. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will provide information on provisional orders issued by An Bord Pleanála; the powers such orders carry; and if they are subject to a maximum duration period for works to be carried out. [1259/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Provisional orders for the abstraction of water are made under the Water Supplies Act 1942. Originally such orders were made by the Minister for Local Government and Public Health, but that power transferred to An Bord Pleanála under section 214 of the Planning and Development Act 2000.

If objections are made to a proposal to abstract water under the 1942 Act, an application for a provisional order must be made to An Bord Pleanála within six weeks of the first objection.

Under section 9 of the 1942 Act, An Bord Pleanála may refuse a provisional order or place restrictions or conditions on it. If the Board decides in favour of the order, further public notice is required. A provisional order may be confirmed by An Bord Pleanála, the Circuit Court or the High Court (on appeal) and under section 11 of the Act, the proposal must be brought into force by public notice before it becomes lawful for water to be abstracted. Under section 13 of the Act, once it is lawful to abstract water, the power may be exercised notwithstanding any right of any person to prevent or restrict the exercise of such powers. There is no provision in legislation for the expiration of such an order.

Compulsory Purchase Orders

1167. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of properties and amount of land acquired by each local authority in the past two years to date using compulsory purchase orders, by local authority and location of the property and-or lands, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1294/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The information requested by the Deputy is not collected by my Department, as the approval or confirmation of proposals for the compulsory purchase of land or property by statutory authorities is a matter for An Bord Pleanála.

In this regard, the 2017 Annual Report of the Board, which is the latest report available, outlines that there was an increase in 2017 in the number of compulsory acquisition cases to come before the Board, including acquisitions for housing purposes. Much of this increase is attributable to the increased use of compulsory purchase order powers by local authorities to acquire individual vacant or derelict houses for social housing purposes, which is a positive development.

Local authorities are encouraged to adopt a proactive approach in utilising their available legislative powers for compulsory purchase, where necessary, with the aim of bringing the greatest number of recoverable long term vacant dwellings back into the livable housing stock. In many cases, however, the use of CPO powers is not necessary as agreement to purchase can be reached between the local authority and the property owner. To assist local authorities in pursuing vacant properties, my Department introduced the Buy & Renew Scheme to facilitate them in acquiring and remediating vacant properties that may be suitable for social housing. Through this support mechanism, local authorities have delivered over 250 social housing units to date and I am keen to see further delivery in this way.

As with standard acquisitions, local authorities have delegated responsibility to utilise the Buy & Renew Scheme, as part of the blend of property acquisitions, as appropriate to their area, given housing need and the availability of properties of different types.

In the event that the Deputy wishes to obtain further information on CPOs from An Bord Pleanála, arrangements have been put in place by each Agency under the remit of my Department, including An Bord Pleanála, to facilitate the provision of information by State Bodies directly to members of the Oireachtas. The contact email address for An Bord Pleanála is oireachtasqueries@pleanala.ie.

Local Authority Staff

1168. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the recruitment of vacant property officers by local authorities and the dedicated vacant homes unit to be set up to co-ordinate their work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1297/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): In August 2017, I requested all local authorities to designate vacant home officers to co-ordinate local actions to address vacancy in their functional areas. Vacant Homes Officers are intended to act as a central point of contact to provide information and advice for owners of vacant homes and also to deal with queries from members of the public in respect of private residential

vacant properties in their administrative area.

Funding has been made available to each local authority (€50,000 per annum for 2018 and 2019) to support the work of their officers in the area of vacancy. The provision of central funding allows for focus to be given to the role of those officers in ensuring a coordinated approach to the implementation of local authority Vacant Homes Action Plans and engagement with my Department's Vacant Homes Unit.

All 31 local authorities have designated vacant homes officers within their respective functional areas and a list of those officers is available on my Department's website at <https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/home-ownership/vacant-homes/vacant-homes-officer-contacts> .

In tandem with requesting local authorities to designate vacant homes officers, a Vacant Homes Unit (VHU) was set up in my own Department in 2017 and this Unit leads on the implementation of actions under the National Vacant Housing Reuse Strategy 2018 to 2021. The VHU supports local authority Vacant Homes Officers through information and guidance and facilitated a Vacant Homes Officer seminar in October 2018. Further information on the work of the VHU is available on my Department's website at <https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/home-ownership/vacant-homes/vacant-homes>.

Urban Renewal Schemes

1169. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the projects funded by the social intervention fund in County Limerick in each of the years 2008 to 2018; the amount of funding awarded to each project in these years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1305/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The information requested is being compiled and will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Social and Affordable Housing Data

1172. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the estimated cost of building affordable houses for each of the four Dublin local authorities in tabular form. [1355/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): In order to support the affordable housing programmes of local authorities, the Government has committed €310 million, over the three years 2019 to 2021, under the Serviced Sites Fund (SSF) announced as part of Budget 2019. The funding is available for key facilitating infrastructure, on public lands, to support the provision of affordable homes to purchase or rent. I envisage a maximum amount of SSF funding of €50,000 per affordable home and on this basis at least 6,200 affordable homes could be facilitated.

On 11 December 2018, I issued approval in principle for ten infrastructure projects across five local authority areas, in Dublin and Cork, under the first SSF call for proposals. This first tranche of funding of €43 million will enable the delivery of 1,400 affordable homes on local authority lands. I expect infrastructure works on these projects to begin as soon as possible and delivery of affordable homes from early 2020 onwards. Details of these projects are set out in the table below. There are five further projects under active consideration by my Department,

with the potential to facilitate the delivery of an additional 230 affordable homes. A second call for proposals will issue early this year.

Table 1: List of projects that have received approval in principle under the SSF first call for proposals

Local Authority	Project/Location	Total Provisional Cost of Proposal€	Provisional Exchequer Grant Amount €	Provisional Local Authority Contribution€	Affordable-Housing Potential
Cork County	Glanmire	€1,500,000	€1,335,000	€165,000	20
Cork City	Boherboy Road	€4,968,366	€4,421,846	€546,520	103
Cork City	Kilmore Road, Churchfield	€1,410,551	€1,255,390	€155,160	21
Dublin City	Cherry Orchard	€7,645,415	€6,804,419	€840,996	183
Dublin City	Balbutcher, Ballymun	€4,135,351	€3,680,462	€454,889	74
Dublin City	Sillogue, Ballymun	€3,975,000	€3,537,750	€437,250	83
DLR	Enniskerry Road	€4,537,576	€4,038,443	€499,133	50
Fingal	Church Fields, Mulhuddart	€11,000,000	€9,790,000	€1,210,000	753
Fingal	Dun Emer, Lusk	€1,500,000	€1,335,000	€165,000	74
Fingal	Hackettstown, Skerries	€2,198,667	€1,956,814	€241,853	49
Total		€42,870,926	€38,155,124	€4,715,801	1410

The cost of constructing new affordable homes is dependent on a range of variables, such as the location, the scale of the development and the size and type of the homes involved. However, in preparing their bids for funding under the SSF, local authorities were advised to be guided by the Unit Cost Ceilings (UCCs) for social housing in determining the cost of the affordable homes to be delivered under this programme.

These UCCs are based on the analysis of returned data from tendered social housing schemes over an extended period, and market tender index information. Construction cost is reflective of building costs (including VAT) and also includes normal site works and site development. All-in cost includes cost of construction, land cost, professional fees, utility connections, site investigations/surveys, archaeology where appropriate, VAT and contribution to public art. Abnormal costs are excluded from these figures.

The relevant UCC data for the Dublin local authorities is set out in the tables below.

An important factor in the allocation of funding under the SSF is the capacity to translate that funding into a discount on the affordable homes. In addition, local authorities must consider the market price of similar homes on sale in the equivalent private market and the level

of discount on market price envisaged, which will be required under the Affordable Purchase Scheme terms. The objective is to maximise the benefits from public money by funding the best value for money proposals possible.

Table 2: Houses, average costs (2017 Unit Cost Ceilings)

	1 bed	1 bed	2 bed (1 storey)	2 bed (1 storey)	2 bed (2 storey)	2 bed (2 storey)	3 bed	3 bed	4 bed	4 bed
	Con-struct	All-in	Con-struct	All-in	Con-struct	All-in	Con-struct	All-in	Con-struct	All-in
DCC	216,800	275,900	223,200	283,600	232,200	293,800	242,300	305,300	252,800	316,900
DLR	182,000	234,500	187,800	240,300	195,900	249,600	205,300	260,100	214,600	270,600
Fingal	166,800	217,000	172,600	224,000	180,800	232,100	190,100	242,600	199,500	253,200
SDCC	182,000	234,500	187,800	240,300	195,900	249,600	205,300	260,100	214,600	270,600

Table 3: Apartments, average costs (2017 Unit Cost Ceilings)

	1 bed	1 bed	2 bed	2 bed	3 bed	3 bed
	Construct	All-in	Construct	All-in	Construct	All-in
DCC	227,700	289,600	234,400	297,800	256,100	324,000
DLR	191,100	246,200	197,200	252,300	216,000	275,200
Fingal	175,100	227,800	181,200	235,200	199,300	255,900
SDCC	191,100	246,200	197,200	252,300	216,000	275,200

Planning Issues

1173. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of applications being made for the change of use from vacant commercial to residential units following the introduction of the Planning and Development (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2018, SI No. 30 of 2018, which provide an exemption, for a period of time, for the change of use and related works of vacant commercial premises for residential purposes; the number of buildings that have had their use changed; the number of applications that have been refused; his views on whether the aim of this change to regulations is being met successfully; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1369/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Planning and Development (Amendment) (No.2) Regulations 2018, which were signed and brought into operation on 8 February 2018, provide for an exemption in respect of the change of use of certain vacant commercial premises, including vacant areas above ground floor premises, to residential use from the requirement to obtain planning permission.

This measure is aimed at facilitating the increased use of existing resources by enabling the productive re-use of qualifying vacant commercial buildings as homes, while also facilitating urban renewal and the bringing on stream of increased housing supply.

While there is no planning application required, as such works are exempted development, the Regulations contain a notification requirement whereby a person intending to avail of the exemption is required to notify the local planning authority in writing at least 2 weeks prior to the commencement of the proposed change of use and related works. Such notifications must also indicate details of the number of housing units being provided under the exemption.

Planning authorities are required to maintain records of such notifications received and to report annually to my Department in respect of the notifications received in previous calendar year. As 2018 was the first year that this exemption provision was in operation, planning au-

thorities should now be collating the relevant information for the purpose of submitting their first annual return to my Department. My Department has recently issued a reminder notice to planning authorities in this regard.

Social and Affordable Housing Applications Data

1174. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of wheelchair users as opposed to persons with physical disabilities that are on the waiting list for social housing by local authority; the number that were on the waiting list five years ago; the number that were housed in the past five years; the number of mainstream social housing units that are planned over the next five years that will be designed in such a way that they can accommodate the specific needs of wheelchair users by local authority in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1376/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Local authorities are responsible for the provision of social housing in their areas, and, as such, decide on the number and specific types of dwellings to provide in their developments, based on identified need.

The information requested on the application form for social housing requests the applicant to categorise their disability under a number of different headings, including that of physical disability. They are not asked for more specific information, such as whether they are a ‘wheelchair user’. It is not possible, therefore, to say how many wheelchair users are on the housing waiting list currently or how many have been allocated housing in previous years. These applicants are assessed as people with a physical disability but, in so doing, the local authority takes account of their individual needs, including the use of wheelchairs.

My Department, in close collaboration with the local authority sector, keeps the categorisation of housing need under continuous review. In this context consideration can be given to creating more defined categories of need, such as for example ‘wheelchair user’, if this was determined to be useful in terms of the strategic targeting of social housing delivery and allocation. However, this would need to be balanced with other considerations including the impact on the efficiency of the administration process surrounding assessment and allocations.

One of the key initiatives under the National Housing Strategy for People with a Disability (NHSPWD), which has been extended to 2020, was the establishment of Housing and Disability Steering Groups (HDSGs) in all housing authority areas, to achieve a coordinated and integrated approach to meeting the housing needs of people with a disability at local level. These are chaired by Directors of Housing in each authority and include HSE and disability representative organisations.

Each HDSG has prepared a local Strategic Plan for its own City/County area, to develop specific local strategies to meet identified and emerging need over the next five years. These Plans, the majority of which are now available on the relevant local authority websites, along with the annual Summary of Social Housing Assessments (SSHA), will allow local authorities to plan more strategically for the housing needs of people with a disability and will support the delivery of accommodation using all appropriate housing supply mechanisms.

Preliminary local authority figures in respect of 2017 indicate that the number of housing allocations to persons with a physical disability increased by 18% on 2016.

Repair and Leasing Scheme

1175. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will provide a report on the repair and leasing scheme by county; the take-up of this scheme by landlords; the amount paid out; the number of units brought back into use; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1393/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Repair and Leasing Scheme (RLS) has been developed to assist private property owners and local authorities or Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) to harness the accommodation potential that exists in certain vacant properties across Ireland. The scheme is targeted at owners of vacant properties who cannot afford or access the funding needed to bring their properties up to the required standard for rental property. Subject to the suitability of the property for social housing, and the agreement of the property owner, the cost of the necessary repairs is met upfront by the local authority or an Approved Housing Body (AHB). This allows for the property owner to sign-up to a lease arrangement for a length that is linked to the value of the repairs, subject to a minimum of 5 years. The value of the repairs is then offset incrementally against the agreed rental payment over a defined period within the lease.

A property owner can either choose to arrange for a contractor to carry out the repairs themselves, or the local authority or AHB can arrange this instead. The relevant local authority determines eligibility for the scheme, having regard to the location and the suitability of the property for social housing and also taking into consideration the extent of the repairs that may be required. The maximum costs of repairs allowable under this initiative is €40,000 (€50,000 for former bedsits) and the property must be vacant for a period of not less than 12 months.

At the end of Q3 2018, a total of 1,214 applications had been received under the scheme; 122 agreements for lease had been signed and 48 homes had been delivered and tenanted. A detailed breakdown of the RLS scheme data by local authority up to end Q3 2018 is available on my Department's website at the following link:

<http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision> .

Total capital expenditure under the scheme for 2017 and up to end Q3 2018 is set out in Tables 1 and 2. Data for the RLS scheme for Q4 2018 is currently being collected and will be published shortly.

Table 1: RLS Capital Expenditure 2017

Local Authority	Spend for 2017
Dun Laoghaire - Rathdown County Council	€4,987
Waterford City & County Council	€191,398
Total Spend	€196,385

Table 2: RLS Capital Expenditure to end Q3 2018

Local Authority	Spend for 2018 at end Q3
Carlow County Council	€67,983
Limerick City & County Council	€75,000
Meath County Council	€8,698
Monaghan County Council	€25,000

Local Authority	Spend for 2018 at end Q3
Waterford City & County Council	€391,931
Total Spend	€568,612

Compulsory Purchase Orders

1176. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of properties compulsorily purchased or in which the CPO process has been initiated by the local authorities to provide social housing by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1394/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The information requested by the Deputy is not collected by my Department, as the approval or confirmation of proposals for the compulsory purchase of land or property by statutory authorities is a matter for An Bord Pleanála.

In this regard, the 2017 Annual Report of the Board, which is the latest report available, outlines that there was an increase in 2017 in the number of compulsory acquisition cases to come before the Board, including acquisitions for housing purposes. Much of this increase is attributable to the increased use of compulsory purchase order powers by local authorities to acquire individual vacant or derelict houses for social housing purposes, which is a positive development.

Local authorities are encouraged to adopt a proactive approach in utilising their available legislative powers for compulsory purchase, where necessary, with the aim of bringing the greatest number of recoverable long term vacant dwellings back into the livable housing stock. In many cases, however, the use of CPO powers is not necessary as agreement to purchase can be reached between the local authority and the property owner. To assist local authorities in pursuing vacant properties, my Department introduced the Buy & Renew Scheme to facilitate them in acquiring and remediating vacant properties that may be suitable for social housing. Through this support mechanism, local authorities have delivered over 250 social housing units to date and I am keen to see further delivery in this way.

As with standard acquisitions, local authorities have delegated responsibility to utilise the Buy & Renew Scheme, as part of the blend of property acquisitions, as appropriate to their area, given housing need and the availability of properties of different types.

In the event that the Deputy wishes to obtain further information on CPOs from An Bord Pleanála, arrangements have been put in place by each Agency under the remit of my Department, including An Bord Pleanála, to facilitate the provision of information by State Bodies directly to members of the Oireachtas. The contact email address for An Bord Pleanála is oireachtasqueries@pleanala.ie.

Commercial Rates Valuation Process

1177. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if it is planned to amend the legislation in relation to rateable valuations to ensure that in circumstances in which a certain class of business is of the view that its members are being overrated, they can appeal as a group rather than going through the cost of individual appeals on the valuation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1452/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): The Valuation Acts 2001 to 2015 provide for the valuation of all commercial and industrial property for rating purposes. The Commissioner of Valuation is independent in the performance of his functions under the Acts and the making of valuations for rating is his sole responsibility and neither the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government nor I have any function in decisions in this regard.

Under Irish law, there is a distinct separation of function between the valuation of rateable property and the setting and collection of commercial rates. The amount of rates payable in any calendar year is a product of the valuation set by the Commissioner of Valuation, multiplied by the Annual Rate on Valuation (ARV) decided annually by the elected members of each local authority.

Having a modern valuation base is very important for the levying of commercial rates on a fair and equitable basis across all economic sectors. The Valuation Acts provide for the revaluation of all rateable property within a rating authority area so as to reflect changes in value due to economic factors such as business turnover, differential movements in property values or other external factors and changes in the local business environment.

A valuation for commercial rates purposes is arrived at by estimating the *Net Annual Value* (NAV) of the property in question, at a specified valuation date. The term “net annual value” has a legal definition and is set out in section 48 of the Valuation Act 2001 as “the rent for which, one year with another, the property might, in its actual state, be reasonably expected to let from year to year, on the assumption that the probable average annual cost of repairs, insurance and other expenses (if any) that would be necessary to maintain the property in that state, and all rates and other taxes payable in respect of the property, are borne by the tenant”. This definition of Net Annual Value is applied to all rateable properties and classes of business on a nationwide basis.

Estimating the NAV of a rateable property is an evidence-based exercise. During a revaluation, the Valuation Office analyses relevant market rental transactions for all rateable properties, in accordance with the legislation, best practice internationally as set out in published Practice Guidance Notes, well-established valuation principles and case law arising from the independent Valuation Tribunal and the higher Courts. The conclusions drawn from that analysis is applied to similarly circumstanced property using the “comparative” method of valuation which, as the name implies, employs direct comparison with other similar properties.

There are a number of avenues of redress for an occupier of rateable property who is dissatisfied with a determination of valuation made under the provisions of the Valuation Acts, 2001-2015. Firstly, before a determination is made, there is a right to make representations to the Valuation Office in relation to a proposed valuation. Later in the process, if the occupier is still dissatisfied with the determination, there is a right of appeal to the Valuation Tribunal which is an independent body set up for the purpose of hearing appeals against determinations of the Valuation Office. There is also a right of appeal to the Higher Courts on a point of law. Appeals are made on an individual case basis, having regard to the particular circumstances of the property under appeal. However, the decision in one case can have relevance in other similar cases.

There is no provision in the legislation for taking a “class” or group appeal before the Tribunal, as each case is considered on its individual merits and by reference to the specific circumstances of the property. For these reasons, I have no plans to introduce legislative proposals along the lines indicated in the Deputy’s question. However, I am advised that individual appellants can make arguments to the Valuation Tribunal in relation to their concerns about the overall valuation methodology adopted by the Valuation Office for a specific category of rate-

able property, should they wish to do so.

Notwithstanding this, I am informed that, as a practical measure, it is possible for a Test case to be heard by the Valuation Tribunal. In order to proceed with a Test case, both parties involved, the appellant and the respondent, must agree that such an approach is appropriate. In addition, such a process must be entered into on the clear understanding on how precisely the determination of the Valuation Tribunal in the Test case would be applied to the other cases under appeal identified as being part of the test case series. All cases involved must be similarly circumstanced. A Test case is identified and nominated through mutual agreement between appellants, their representatives or agents and the Valuation Office and this is notified to the Valuation Tribunal. The nominated case would then be heard by the Valuation Tribunal in the normal course.

The Valuation Tribunal is advised of the details of the other appeals to which the outcome of the Test case appeal will apply and the agreed terms of how specifically the outcome of the Test case is to be applied to the other cases in the Test case series. The right of appeal to the Higher Courts on a point of law for either the appellant or respondent still applies in a Test case situation.

Housing Policy

1178. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans for his Department, local authorities or an agency under the remit of his Department to become directly involved in the development of retirement villages or to support the private sector in the development of such villages; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1480/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department, in conjunction with the Department of Health, is currently exploring policy options including supporting housing/housing with care so that older people have a wider range of housing options and choices available to them.

There are a number of key principles underpinning Government policy on housing for older people and on which our policy framework will be constructed. These include putting in place measures to ensure that sustainable housing is provided in the right location to enable people to age in the community; to design housing and the environment in accordance with the principles of sustainable lifetime housing; to promote the use of assistive technology to support people to live independently; to give adequate consideration to the need for social connectedness in devising policy; and to work collaboratively with all stakeholders to achieve the policy objectives.

An Expert Conference on Housing for Older People was held in Farmleigh on 20 November 2018 hosted by my Department and the Department of Health. A number of experts in the field outlined how the above principles can be brought to fruition in imaginative and practical ways, which bring about tangible benefits for the older person.

Following on from the conference, my Department will be publishing the policy framework on housing options for older people later in Q1 2019, representing a further step in the broader process of seeking to ensure that older people are provided with appropriate accommodation options that are suited to their needs. The policy statement will set out a framework by which the Government can facilitate housing, including housing with care, for older people having regard to current demographics and looking at best practice models. The aim is to ensure that people can grow old and live in a community of their choosing, with dignity and independence.

At this time, no discussions have taken place between my Department and the Department of Health and Local Authorities in relation to plans to provide State funded retirement villages.

Marine Plan Implementation

1179. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of his plans for the extension of marine protected areas; and the timeline for the implantation of these areas. [51158/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): As I have stated in previous responses on this matter, I am committed to developing primary legislation to provide for the creation of a network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in accordance with the requirements of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. Work on this will commence in earnest when legislation to prohibit certain products containing plastic microbeads is sufficiently advanced. Government approved the General Scheme of the Microbeads Bill in October 2018 and the work on drafting that Bill is being progressed.

It is also my intention to establish an expert advisory group in the first half of 2019 to help identify candidate marine protected areas.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

1180. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the extent to which his Department may examine a suitable process to encourage the provision of affordable local authority housing by way of a 25 or 30 year lease, at which point properties so constructed would revert to the ownership of local authorities, thus avoiding the need for such expenditure to appear on the national balance sheet; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49181/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): A range of housing options are necessary to ensure a supply of accommodation to meet different types of housing need. Harnessing the off-balance sheet potential of private investment in social housing is an important contributor to meeting this objective and the social housing targets set out in Rebuilding Ireland over the period to 2021 reflect the ambition in that regard. Of the 50,000 social housing homes to be delivered under Rebuilding Ireland, 10,000 will be leased by local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) under leasing arrangements from a range of different sources and funded under my Department's Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme (SHCEP). High quality secure properties which represent value for money and are available on a long-term basis are being targeted by local authorities around the country to accommodate people on local authority waiting lists.

The new Enhanced Long Term Social Housing Leasing Scheme has been developed by my Department, together with the National Development Finance Agency (NDFA), the Housing Agency and local authorities, in order to harness the potential of private sector interest in social housing delivery in a new set of long-term leasing arrangements, in a manner designed to leverage off-balance sheet funding opportunities in accordance with Rebuilding Ireland objectives. The Scheme is targeted at new build or new to the market properties to be delivered at scale and will complement the existing long-term leasing arrangements, which will continue to be available.

The scheme is governed by my Department and operated by local authorities. The Housing

Agency manages and administers the scheme on behalf of my Department and acts as a national co-ordinator. The rollout of this scheme will result in no additional costs to the Exchequer, with costs being met from existing budgetary allocations for Rebuilding Ireland. The lease term available to private investors can be up to a maximum of 25 years, with the asset remaining with the proposer at the end of that term.

The new Enhanced Lease and related technical documents have been developed and tested to ensure there is no negative impact arising from how they are viewed and treated in respect of the State's General Government Balance Sheet. In order to ensure that the Scheme remains "off-Balance Sheet" the CSO has advised that the lessor should be responsible for management and maintenance and that the lessor must be free to decide whether to continue to rent the homes or to sell them to whomever they wish at the end of the term of the lease. The automatic reversion of the asset to the lessee (i.e. the local authority) may have a detrimental impact on this classification. My Department has also made changes to the existing standard Long Term Leasing arrangements in order to provide for a lease term of up to 25 years.

With respect to the delivery of affordable housing, I have commenced the relevant provisions of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009, the effect of which is to place a new scheme for affordable purchase on a statutory footing. It is intended that the income thresholds will be the same as for the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan, and other criteria will be set out in regulations. The elected members of each local authority will be responsible for determining the order of priority to be accorded to eligible households, in line with the framework of the national scheme.

In order to deliver affordable housing in the areas of the country most affected by a lack of affordable housing supply, a three-pronged, targeted approach is being pursued. The Government has committed €310 million to support this programme of work, under the Serviced Sites Fund (SSF), as part of Budget 2019. The Exchequer contribution is €275 million with €35 million to be contributed by local authorities. In 2019 funding of €100 million will be available under the Fund with a further €142 million in 2020 and €68 million in 2021. The funding is available for key facilitating infrastructure on local authority sites to support the provision of affordable homes to purchase or rent.

I envisage a maximum amount of SSF funding of €50,000 per affordable home and on this basis some 6,200 affordable homes could be facilitated.

In terms of the type of affordable housing that will be delivered on local authority sites it may be affordable housing for purchase, under recently commenced provisions of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009, or cost rental, which is being advanced on a number of pilot sites before being rolled out more generally. Under the 2009 Act, the maximum discount is 40% of the market value of the home and the local authority takes a charge, equivalent to the discount, against the property. The scheme applies to new homes, and is targeted at single applicants earning up to €50,000 per annum or €75,000 for dual applicants.

Acknowledging that renters in Dublin and other urban centres are currently facing significant access and affordability challenges, the Government is committed to the introduction of a not-for-profit, cost rental sector in Ireland. Together with delivering more affordable and predictable rents, cost rental will make a sustainable impact on national competitiveness and the attractiveness of our main urban centres as places to live and work.

Under the cost rental model, minimising retained earnings, land and other delivery costs, while securing very competitive European Investment Bank (EIB) financing, means that affordable rents can be achieved. The final rents, for any given project, will be set after all associated costs are determined, following on from the competitive construction and management tender

processes. Cost rental homes will be targeted at households earning up to €50,000 for single applicants and €75,000 for dual applicants.

Cost rental is new to Ireland and in order to drive delivery, a number of important early mover projects are being advanced, delivering important lessons in terms of cost rental in an Irish setting. There are two pilot cost rental schemes being advanced: one at Enniskerry Road, in Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown, and one at St Michaels Estate in Inchicore. It is expected that 50 cost rental units and 105 social homes will be made available on the Enniskerry Road site. While the final tenure-mix on the Inchicore site will be decided by Dublin City Council, informed by the detailed site development process, it will likely include 140 social housing homes, with the remaining 330 homes predominantly provided by the City Council under cost rental arrangements.

My Department is also engaging with the National Development Finance Agency and the new Land Development Agency to examine the optimum funding and delivery options to support cost rental delivery at scale.

Question No. 1181 answered with Question No. 1141.

Local Authority Housing Mortgages

1182. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when a revised credit policy will be issued from the Housing Agency to local authorities for considering council mortgage applications; if a revised credit policy will include a provision to give persons who have gone through bankruptcy the opportunity to apply for a council mortgage rather than being deemed ineligible in view of the fact they are not a first-time buyer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1507/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan scheme was launched last year to replace the existing House Purchase and the Home Choice Loan schemes. It has been established under the Housing (Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan) Regulations 2018, which also provide for the issuance of a statutory Credit Policy. The purpose of the Credit Policy is to set out in more detail the eligibility criteria for obtaining a loan and procedures to be followed by local authorities in considering loan applications.

In order to assist the on-going administration of the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan, I have asked my Department to undertake a review of its operation to date. This is due to be finalised shortly, and will have regard to the views from local authorities, the Housing Agency, and the Housing Finance Agency, and will also take account of issues raised by public representatives since the scheme's commencement.

This review will incorporate an examination of queries that have been raised concerning the Credit Policy and the corresponding eligibility criteria. However, in making any recommendations in relation to the operation of the scheme, it must also take account of the need to ensure that lending issued under it is provided on a prudential basis, so as to protect the financial interests of the borrowers and the local authorities.

Applicants for the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan must be of good credit standing and have a satisfactory credit record. A person who has been discharged from bankruptcy and who meets the other eligibility criteria, including being a first-time buyer, may apply for a Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan, and will be subject to the same credit assessment process that applies to all applicants.

As with the previous local authority home loan offerings, the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan is available to first time buyers only. There is no change in this regard. This is to ensure the effective targeting of limited resources.

Legislative Measures

1183. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of ballots undertaken under section 48 of the Environment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2011 since its commencement; the number of ballots that have been passed in circumstances in which the ballots have occurred; the number rejected; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1514/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Section 48 of the Environment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2011 has not been commenced. It is intended to commence section 48 at the same time as the commencement of a related provision within the Local Government Bill 2018, following the enactment of that Bill.

An Bord Pleanála

1184. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the steps he is taking to ameliorate the long delays with planning appeals to be decided by An Bord Pleanála, in particular the need for the ongoing staffing shortage to be dealt with; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1540/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Under section 126 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, An Bord Pleanála (the Board) has a statutory objective to determine planning appeals within 18 weeks. Where the Board does not consider it possible or appropriate to reach a decision within 18 weeks (e.g. because of the particular complexities of a case or the requirement to hold an oral hearing), it will inform the parties of the reasons for this, and will indicate when it intends to make its decision.

It is acknowledged that there has been a reduction in the Board's compliance rate with the statutory objective period over the past year due to a number of factors, including an increase in the number of cases it has received. At end November 2018, the compliance rate for determining normal planning appeals within the statutory objective period stood at 35%, and for all planning cases, the rate stood at 41%.

A range of measures have been taken to address the situation, including the appointment of additional Board members and additional resources. While current staff resources are lower than at the peak in 2008, the caseload levels, though now increasing, are still at lower levels than at the peak. Staffing levels are similar to levels in 2010 when the caseload was comparable, though on-going and planned recruitment processes will see staffing increase further in the months ahead.

I am satisfied, taking account also of the increased Exchequer grant of €18.5m for the Board in 2019, a 7% increase on 2018, that the measures involved will enable the Board to significantly improve its compliance rate over the coming months. Indeed, the number of cases decided by the Board in the 11 months to end November 2018 was up 29% on the corresponding period in 2017 and the Board's output is now at circa 250 cases per month.

The Board has a complement of 11 members, including a new Chairperson who took up

duty on 30 October 2018, and an extra Board member engaged in June 2018 to supplement the normal complement of 10 members. While two vacancies have recently arisen on the Board within that complement, these are due to be filled shortly. The Board also employs over 150 staff members including 10 additional dedicated staff engaged in 2017 to support the Strategic Housing Division. My Department will continue to liaise closely with the Board to ensure that it has appropriate resources to support it in the performance of its functions.

Question No. 1185 answered with Question No. 89.

Local Authority Housing Data

1186. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number and location of houses acquired and purchased by Galway City Council in each of the years 2011 to 2018 and to date in 2019; the number and location of houses constructed by the city council for each of those years; the number, location and completion date of houses under construction; the number planned for construction by the city council in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1558/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Statistics on the number of social housing properties constructed, purchased and leased by local authorities, including Galway City Council, are published on my Department's website and are available at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision>. These statistics are updated on a quarterly basis and data for Q4 2018 is now being validated and will be published as soon as possible, with data for each successive quarter of 2019 made available over the course of the year.

The acquisition of properties for social housing purposes is a function that is largely delegated to the local authorities and, accordingly, the precise locations of the properties purchased by Galway City Council should be available from the Council itself.

A detailed breakdown of the construction programme for new social housing build is set out in the Social Housing Construction Status Report which is published on a quarterly basis. This report provides information on the construction programme underway for each local authority area. The report covering the period up to end Quarter 3 of 2018 is available on the Rebuilding Ireland website at the following link: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-publishes-quarter-3-social-housing-construction-report/> .

The report reflects the activity of Galway City Council on the construction of new social housing, including those schemes already on site and under construction, in addition to those at the final pre-construction stage and those progressing through the various stages of planning, design and procurement. These schemes will form the bulk of social housing starts and completions over the course of 2019 and beyond, although further projects will continue to be added to the pipeline on an ongoing basis.

I will be publishing social housing targets for 2019 for all local authorities, including Galway City Council, in the near future and the progress of each authority against these targets on a quarterly basis, will also be published on my Department's website. This transparency allows all stakeholders to view the targets and the progress of each local authority in delivering social housing for their areas.

Urban Development

1187. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the position regarding progress towards the resumption of development at the Naas town centre site; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1605/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): As I have indicated in previous parliamentary responses on this issue, the management of the stalled Naas Town Centre development is a matter for Kildare County Council in the first instance and is one in which I do not have any function. Under section 30 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, I am precluded from exercising any power or control in relation to any particular case with which a planning authority or An Bord Pleanála is or may be involved, except in very specific circumstances which do not apply in this case.

Social and Affordable Housing

1188. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to introduce affordable housing schemes in 2019; when and the locations in which they will be available; the persons who will qualify; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1625/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): A multi-stranded approach is being taken to the targeted delivery of affordable housing. In particular, for those households earning annual gross incomes up to €50,000 for single applicants and €75,000 for dual applicants.

In terms of affordable purchase, I commenced the relevant provisions of Part 5 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 on 18 June 2018, to provide a statutory basis for the delivery of affordable housing for purchase. Part 5 contains significant detail on the procedures and operation of the new Affordable Purchase Scheme. The primary legislation will be supported by associated regulations, which are currently being finalised, following extensive consultation between my Department, the Housing Agency and local authorities. The regulations, once finalised, together with guidance, will issue to local authorities.

In order to support the affordable housing programmes of local authorities, the Government has committed €310 million, over the three years 2019 to 2021, under the Serviced Sites Fund (SSF) announced as part of Budget 2019. The funding is available for key facilitating infrastructure, on public lands, to support the provision of affordable homes to purchase or rent. I envisage a maximum amount of SSF funding of €50,000 per affordable home and on this basis at least 6,200 affordable homes could be facilitated.

On 11 December 2018, I issued approval in principle for ten infrastructure projects across five local authority areas, in Dublin and Cork, under the first SSF call for proposals. This first tranche of funding of €43 million will enable the delivery of 1,400 affordable homes on local authority lands. I expect infrastructure works on these projects to begin as soon as possible and delivery of affordable homes from early 2020 onwards. Details of these projects are set out in the table below. There are five further projects under active consideration by my Department, with the potential to facilitate the delivery of an additional 230 affordable homes.

More broadly, all local authorities have been asked to carry out economic assessments of the requirement for affordable housing in their areas and the viability to deliver such affordable housing from their sites. A second call for proposals under the Fund will be made shortly. The scope of that call will be influenced by the information received from local authorities, as part of the aforementioned assessments, which are currently being examined in my Department.

The Government is also committed to the introduction of a not-for-profit, cost rental sector in Ireland. Together with delivering more affordable and predictable rents, cost rental will make a sustainable impact on national competitiveness and the attractiveness of our main urban centres as places to live and work. Like affordable purchase, cost rental homes will be targeted at households earning incomes up to a maximum of €50,000 for single applicants and €75,000 for dual applicants.

As cost rental is a new housing model to Ireland and in order to drive delivery, a number of important early mover projects are being advanced, delivering important lessons in terms of cost rental in an Irish setting. These cost rental pilot schemes are at Enniskerry Road, in Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown, and Emmet Road in Inchicore, respectively.

It is expected that 50 cost rental units and 105 social homes will be made available on the Enniskerry Road site. The tenders for the project are currently being assessed, and it is anticipated that construction will commence later in the first quarter of 2019.

Dublin City Council has appointed a dedicated project manager and a project team to drive the Emmet Road project forward. While the final tenure-mix on the site will be decided by the Council, informed by the detailed site development process, it will likely include 140 social housing homes, with the remaining 330 homes predominantly provided under cost rental arrangements.

These initiatives complement other Government actions which help first-time buyers to buy a home, such as the Help to Buy Scheme and the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan.

Table: List of projects that have received approval in principle under the SSF first call for proposals

LA	Project/ Location	Total Provisional Cost of Proposal €	Provisional Exchequer Grant Amount €	Provisional LA Contribution €	Affordable Housing Potential
Cork County	Glanmire	€1,500,000	€1,335,000	€165,000	20
Cork City	Boherboy Road	€4,968,366	€4,421,846	€546,520	103
Cork City	Kilmore Road, Churchfield	€1,410,551	€1,255,390	€155,160	21
Dublin City	Cherry Orchard	€7,645,415	€6,804,419	€840,996	183
Dublin City	Balbutcher, Ballymun	€4,135,351	€3,680,462	€454,889	74
Dublin City	Silloogue, Ballymun	€3,975,000	€3,537,750	€437,250	83
DLR	Enniskerry Road	€4,537,576	€4,038,443	€499,133	50
Fingal	Church Fields, Mulhuddart	€11,000,000	€9,790,000	€1,210,000	753
Fingal	Dun Emer, Lusk	€1,500,000	€1,335,000	€165,000	74
Fingal	Hackettstown, Skerries	€2,198,667	€1,956,814	€241,853	49
Total		€42,870,926	€38,155,124	€4,715,801	1410

Housing Assistance Payment Administration

1189. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if local authorities are entitled to charge for an assessment (details supplied); if this is

protocol; if his attention has been drawn to same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1658/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) supported tenancies are agreed between the landlord and the tenant; the local authority is not a party to the tenancy and has no role in its agreement.

Minimum standards for rental accommodation are prescribed in the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2017. All landlords, including those in receipt of Housing Assistance Payment (HAP), have a legal obligation to ensure that their rented properties comply with these regulations and responsibility for the enforcement of the regulations rests with the relevant local authority.

Local authorities are required to commence the inspection process within 8 months of the commencement of HAP support being provided in relation to a particular dwelling if not already inspected within the previous 12 months

Local authorities do not charge a fee for the assessment of HAP applications or the inspection of dwellings.

Local Authority Funding

1190. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the budget for each local authority in 2019, outlining expenditure in the categories of housing, roads, water, environmental services, recreation and amenity development management and staffing. [1671/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Local Government Act 2001, as amended by the Local Government Reform Act 2014, provides the legislative basis for the local authority budget process. It is a matter for each local authority to determine its own spending priorities in the context of the annual budgetary process having regard to both locally identified needs and available resources.

The provision of detailed information on income and expenditure is a matter for each individual local authority. Local authority budget documents and other information on the cost of their services are generally available on local authority websites.

My Department compiles and publishes consolidated local authority annual data based on the statutory revenue budgets adopted by each local authority. Material in respect of previous years, up to 2018, is available at the following link;

<https://www.housing.gov.ie/search/archived/archived/archived/current/type/publications?query=Local%20Authority%20Budgets> .

Data in respect of local authority budgets for 2019 is being compiled and will be published in due course.

Elected Office Requirements

1191. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the steps he is taking to ensure access to elected office for persons with disabilities; and the funding schemes available in this regard. [1725/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): Electoral law provides that ‘a person of unsound mind’ is disqualified from seeking election to the Dáil or European Parliament and, from membership of the Seanad. However this provision is to be repealed by the Disability (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2016, which is currently at Committee Stage in Dáil Éireann.

There are no other barriers in electoral law to persons with a disability seeking elected office. The Department does not provide a funding scheme in this regard.

Housing Policy

1192. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if consideration has been given to setting up housing co-operatives with a view to bringing housing costs within the reach of those on the average industrial wage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1729/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The approved housing body sector includes a number of housing co-operatives whose objectives are to provide social and affordable housing. These bodies are supported through a range of schemes for both social and affordable housing which are funded by the State through the local authorities. As part of the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan, approved housing bodies have been given the task of delivering up to a third of the 50,000 social housing homes targeted in the Plan over the period 2016 to 2021 and are being supported in their work in this regard by a range of actions by local authorities, including the provision of public land for housing developments.

There have been instances where local authorities have facilitated housing developments through supporting co-operatives to deliver housing under the low cost sites scheme. In the future, the main method of delivery of affordable housing will be directly by local authorities and through approved housing bodies. With the introduction of a new affordable purchase housing scheme, coupled with the Serviced Sites Fund, there will be further opportunities for approved housing bodies, including co-operatives, to provide affordable housing, provided they can demonstrate the capacity to deliver housing and are in compliance with the priorities for affordable housing set out by the relevant local authority.

Local Authority Housing Data

1193. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of direct build local authority housing starts scheduled for 2019 with particular reference to those local authorities with long housing waiting lists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1730/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): All local authorities are being funded to significantly increase their delivery of social housing as part of Rebuilding Ireland and a strong social housing construction pipeline is in place for local authorities and AHBs.

A detailed breakdown of the construction programme of new social housing build is set out in the Social Housing Construction Status Report which is published on a quarterly basis. These reports provide information on the construction programme underway for each local authority area. The report covering the period up to end Quarter 3 of 2018 is available on the Rebuild-

ing Ireland website at the following link: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-publishes-quarter-3-social-housing-construction-report/>. The report reflects an increase in the scale of the social housing build programme, with 1,173 schemes (or phases of schemes) in place, delivering 17,536 homes. Of this total, 4,173 units have already been delivered during 2016, 2017 and up to Q3 2018, while a further 4,933 are on site and under construction.

Some 2,700 homes are at the final pre-construction stage of preparation and the remainder are progressing through the various stages of planning, design and procurement. These schemes and those already on site will form the bulk of the housing starts and delivery over the course of 2019, although further projects will continue to be added to the pipeline on an ongoing basis. The aim is to deliver over 6,200 new build social homes nationally in 2019. Specifically, local authorities will contract the delivery of over 3,000 of these newly constructed social homes, while around 600 more are expected to be added to the stock of local authorities via Part V new construction.

The delivery of new local authority housing remains the largest element of the Rebuilding Ireland social housing programme and I am pleased to see the progress being made in this area, as well as in projects that AHBs are implementing in partnership with the local authorities. I am keen that all local authorities further accelerate their programmes and I have assured them that the necessary funding is available to support their work in this regard.

Local Authority Housing Provision

1194. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the extent to which the annual housing requirements for local authority houses have been identified on a county basis with a view to putting in place a structure sufficient to meet this demand annually; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1731/19]

1196. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of new local authority housing applicants registered with each local authority in the course of the past 12 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1733/19]

1197. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the degree to which his Department remains in contact with each local authority in order to monitor the extent of the evolving local authority housing needs in their administrative areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1734/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1194, 1196 and 1197 together.

Details on the number of households qualified for social housing support in each local authority area are provided in the statutory Summary of Social Housing Assessments (SSHA), which has been carried out on an annual basis since 2016.

The 2018 assessment shows that 71,858 households were assessed as qualified and being in need of social housing support. This represents a decrease of 13,941 households or 16.2% on the last assessment in June 2017. Indeed, since the Government's Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan was launched in 2016, the numbers have decreased from 91,600 to 71,858, a reduction of 22%.

It should be noted that the SSHA is a point in time exercise and does not necessarily reflect the dynamic nature of entry to and exit from the list. It is also important to note that social

housing is a demand led service and for that reason it is difficult to predict the degree to which housing lists will decrease or increase over the next 12 months. The number of homes delivered by local authorities in a given time period does not necessarily equate to the 'net need' for social housing support reducing by an equivalent number. The nature of the list is dynamic in that, as households are added to it, the needs of others are met and further households will leave the list for various reasons including the households themselves indicating that they no longer require State support.

I have set delivery targets for all local authorities out to 2021, based on current housing need. It is acknowledged that future annualised assessments may see individual local authorities housing need numbers rising, or falling, for a variety of reasons. The targets have been set in such a way as to be able to respond to such an eventuality over the course of the period covered by Rebuilding Ireland.

Over the six years of Rebuilding Ireland, the Government is committed to meeting the housing needs of over 137,000 households through the provision of social housing supports. The implementation of the Government's Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan is well underway and significant progress has been made. Annual delivery targets were exceeded in 2016 and again in 2017. By end September 2018, over 63,700 additional social housing solutions have already been provided under the plan.

The latest data in relation to social housing delivery to end Q3 2018 is published on my Department's website at the following link:

<https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision> .

Data in relation to Q4 2018 outputs is currently being compiled and will be published shortly.

The importance of aligning social housing delivery with housing need has been a consistent theme of the three housing summits I have held with local authority Chief Executives during 2017 and 2018. Following on from these summits and the commitments given and objectives set there, my Department engages with all local authorities on a regular basis regarding the delivery of social housing. I am confident that the actions, targets and resources available to all local authorities under Rebuilding Ireland provide a strong platform for meeting our challenges in the housing sector and continuing to reduce the number of households on waiting lists.

Local Authority Housing Mortgages

1195. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of Rebuilding Ireland loans approved each of the local authorities throughout 2018; the extent to which newer and more ambitious targets have been set for 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1732/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department publishes information on the overall number and value of (i) local authority loan approvals and (ii) local authority loan drawdowns. Information up to Q3 2018, including in relation to number and value of mortgage drawdowns, is available on the Department's website at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/house-prices-loans-and-profile-borrowers/local-authority-loan-activity>, and this information will be updated on a quarterly basis as additional data is compiled.

Questions - Written Answers

In addition, the Housing Agency provides a central support service which assesses loan applications that are made to the local authorities and makes recommendations to the authorities as to whether loans should be offered to applicants. I have asked the Agency to centrally compile figures on the numbers of applications that it has assessed and recommended for approval, the most recent figures, as at the end of December 2018, indicate that the Agency had recommended a total of 1,550 applications for approval since the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme launched, as set out in the following table:

Local Authority	Recommended to Approve
Carlow County Council	16
Cavan County Council	7
Clare County Council	19
Cork City Council	53
Cork County Council	133
Donegal County Council	18
Dublin City Council	215
Dún Laoghaire - Rathdown County Council	45
Fingal County Council	229
Galway City Council	30
Galway County Council	41
Kerry County Council	40
Kildare County Council	87
Kilkenny County Council	15
Laois County Council	36
Leitrim County Council	2
Limerick City & County Council	46
Longford County Council	15
Louth County Council	31
Mayo County Council	18
Meath County Council	124
Monaghan County Council	6
Offaly County Council	14
Roscommon County Council	13
Sligo County Council	20
South Dublin County Council	112
Tipperary County Council	29
Waterford City & County Council	14
Westmeath County Council	17
Wexford County Council	43
Wicklow County Council	62
Total	1,550

Each local authority must have in place a credit committee and it is a matter for the committee to make the decision on applications for loans, in accordance with the regulations, having regard to the recommendations made by the Housing Agency.

In relation to the Deputy's query concerning targets for the scheme for 2019, as the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan is a mortgage product that is available to all eligible applicants, it is

by its nature a demand-led scheme. As such there are no targets set for its uptake on an annual basis.

Questions No. 1196 and 1197 answered with Question No. 1194.

Question No. 1198 answered with Question No. 1152.

Local Authority Assets

1199. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the availability of building lands in the ownership of each local authority nationally; the extent to which these lands are serviceable and available for utilisation as serviced sites for eligible applicants or direct build local authority houses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1736/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I refer to my reply to Question No. 49 on today's Order Paper which broadly sets out the position in relation to this matter.

Moreover, while the development of residential land in local authority ownership is in the first instance a matter for the individual authority concerned, including its elected members, I am determined to ensure that new social and affordable homes are delivered from the public land bank without delay, with particular emphasis on prioritising those sites with the greatest potential to deliver housing at scale, in the short to medium term.

Given the priority of the strategic development of the local authority land bank, all local authority residential sites were mapped on the Rebuilding Ireland land map, which is available at the following link on the Rebuilding Ireland website, <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/rebuilding-ireland-land-map/>. The map includes details of over 700 local authority and Housing Agency owned sites amounting to some 1,700 hectares, and local authorities have been requested to update the map on a quarterly basis.

The active management of these lands and the wider publicly owned land bank is one of a range of complementary actions being progressed under Rebuilding Ireland and the recently established Land Development Agency will increasingly play an important role in this regard.

All local authorities are being funded to significantly increase their delivery of social housing as part of the Rebuilding Ireland programme and a strong social housing construction pipeline is already in place for local authorities and approved housing bodies. A detailed breakdown of the social housing construction programme is set out in the Social Housing Construction Status Report which is published on a quarterly basis. These reports provide information on the construction programme underway for each local authority area. The report covering the period up to end Quarter 3 2018 is available on the Rebuilding Ireland website at the following link: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-publishes-quarter-3-social-housing-construction-report/>. The report for Q4 2018 is currently being prepared.

In terms of affordable housing, a targeted approach is being pursued to support local authorities. To this end, I have provided additional funding for enabling infrastructure via the Serviced Sites Fund. Under Budget 2019, a total of €310 million will be provided for this purpose over the course of 2019 to 2021. I approved the first tranche of funding under the Fund on 11 December 2018, through which some €43 million in funding is being provided to facilitate the delivery of some 1,400 affordable homes in Dublin and Cork. A second call for proposals will issue shortly.

The combination of this Fund and the significantly increased funding for the social housing programme will open up more significant opportunities for larger mixed-tenure developments and my Department will continue to engage proactively with local authorities to accelerate the delivery of these projects.

Housing Adaptation Grant Funding

1200. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the extent to which adequate resources remain available to each local authority for the purpose of DPG or housing adaptation grants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1737/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Government is committed to helping to meet the specific housing needs of people with disabilities and older people. There is a recognised quality of life benefit in terms of facilitating the continued independent living by older people and people with a disability in their own homes. To this end, my Department continues to support local authorities with schemes such as the Disabled Persons Grants scheme (DPGs) and the Housing Adaptation Grant Scheme. This is also recognised in the Programme for a Partnership Government and funding for these schemes has been prioritised and increased year on year since 2014.

Under the DPGs scheme, my Department provides local authorities with capital funding for adaptations and extensions to existing social housing stock to meet the needs of local authority tenants. The scheme applies to adaptations that are necessary to address the needs of older people or people with a disability who may require stair-lifts; grab-rails; showers; wet-rooms and ramps etc. It also provides funding for extensions such as the installation of a downstairs bedroom or bathroom or in the case of overcrowding.

Under the DPG scheme, funding is also provided to local authorities for Improvement Works In Lieu (IWIL's) to enable them to repair, improve or extend privately owned houses that are occupied by approved housing applicants as an alternative to the provision of local authority housing.

Funding recouped to local authorities by my Department has steadily increased in recent years. In 2018, €15.4m was recouped under the DPG scheme. In order to ensure that there are no delays, for priority and urgent cases, local authorities may undertake works of up to 65% of their 2018 allocation in advance of the notification of their 2019 funding. In this regard, a circular will issue to local authorities shortly.

My Department also provides funding under the suite of Housing Adaptation Grant Schemes for Older People and People with a Disability, in respect of private housing. The schemes are 80% funded by my Department, with a 20% contribution from the local authority. For 2019, a total of €71.25 million will be provided for the schemes, which represents an 8% increase on the funding provided in 2018.

Further consideration will be given to increasing this funding over the coming years in the context of the range of housing supports and provision being made under Rebuilding Ireland.

Construction Industry

1201. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local

Government the extent to which reliable structural guarantee schemes are available to protect homeowners; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1738/19]

1202. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the extent to which the construction industry, the local authorities and a structural guarantee scheme can be combined to assist persons affected by poor construction, non-compliance with planning permission or other structural defects impacting negatively or likely to so do on the homeowner; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1739/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1201 and 1202 together.

In general, building defects are matters for resolution between the contracting parties involved: the homeowner, the builder, the developer and/or their respective insurers, structural guarantee or warranty scheme.

Under the Building Control Acts 1990 to 2014, primary responsibility for compliance of works with the requirements of the Building Regulations rests with the owners, designers and builders of buildings. Enforcement of the Building Regulations is a matter for the 31 local building control authorities who have extensive powers of inspection and enforcement under the Acts and who are independent in the use of their statutory powers.

Policy responsibility in relation to insurance is a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Finance, with the insurance sector being subject to regulation by the Central Bank of Ireland.

In response to the defects that have come to light in relation residential buildings built during the 2000's, the Government's focus has primarily been on ensuring strong and effective regulation in the building control system and the construction industry and on improving compliance with the Building Regulations. This reduces the risk and the incidence of defective buildings and has provided insurance underwriters with sufficient confidence to introduce new latent defect type products in Ireland, despite a general retrenchment and conservatism in the wider insurance industry. These new products are first party insurance policies which cover damage and non-damage (breaches of buildings) claims, to varying degrees. This means that the purchaser does not have to make a claim through the builder but can submit a claim directly to the insurer. This would be of particular benefit to a homeowner in circumstances where the builder or developer has ceased trading. It is critical that consumers, house purchasers and the public are aware of the various insurance products available and the scope of such policies.

Under planning legislation, enforcement of planning control is a matter for the relevant planning authority which can take action if a development does not have the required permission or where the terms of a permission have not been met. Planning authorities have substantial enforcement powers in this regard. A planning authority may issue an enforcement notice in connection with an unauthorised development, requiring such steps as the authority considers necessary to be taken within a specified period. If an enforcement notice is not complied with, the planning authority may itself take the specified steps and recover the expense incurred in doing so. A planning authority may also seek a court order under section 160 of the Planning and Development Act requiring any particular action to be done or not to be done. Indeed, section 160 of the Act provides that anyone may seek a court order in relation to unauthorised development; such action is not restricted to planning authorities.

Question No. 1203 answered with Question No. 1158.

Question No. 1204 answered with Question No. 1160.

Homeless Accommodation Provision

1205. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of homeless persons in County Kildare who have been offered and have received accommodation from the local authority in the past 12 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1742/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department publishes reports on a monthly basis regarding the number of individuals in emergency accommodation. These reports include a county breakdown of the homeless adult population and are available on my Department's website at: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/homelessness/other/homelessness-data>.

The administration of homeless services is organised on a regional basis as this approach is considered more effective, bringing a strategic perspective to bear on action to address homelessness. In this regard, Kildare County Council is included in the Mid-East Region along Meath County Council and Wicklow County Council. As part of the funding arrangements in place, each region provides my Department with a quarterly performance report which includes details of the number of individuals exiting homelessness in that quarter. The most recently submitted reports to my Department indicate that at the end of September 2018, 116 adults in the Mid-East region were supported by the housing authorities to exit from homelessness into independent tenancies during the first 9 months of 2018.

Departmental Correspondence

1206. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the customer complaints received by his Department in each of the years since 2016; if the complaints are grouped into categories; the nature of the complaints; the resolution of same; and the number progressed to the relevant Ombudsman in each of the years since 2016. [1875/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The information requested is currently being collated within my Department and will be forwarded to the Deputy in accordance with Standing Orders.

Údarás na Gaeltachta Data

1207. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the level of Údarás na Gaeltachta supported jobs at 31 December in each of the years 2016 to 2018, by county in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [54278/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Seán Kyne): The information requested by the Deputy in respect of the years 2016 and 2017 is outlined in tabular format below. In relation to 2018, I understand from Údarás na Gaeltachta that this information will be available shortly.

County	Year ending 31/12/2016	Year ending 31/12/2017
Dún na nGall	2,090	2,193
Maigh Eo	640	648
Gaillimh	2,932	2,933

County	Year ending 31/12/2016	Year ending 31/12/2017
An Mhí	211	219
Ciarraí	671	688
Corcaigh	675	684
Port Láirge	129	138
Total	7,348	7,503

Special Areas of Conservation Appeals

1208. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht further to Parliamentary Question No. 239 of 15 November 2018, the number of appeals regarding SAC designations lodged in each of the years 2000 to 2013 in County Galway; the number of these appeals that were 100% successful; the number that were partially successful, by percentage; if landowners were officially informed that their land was designated as a SAC; the average time to wait for appeals of a SAC designation to take place; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [54064/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): When lands are being proposed for inclusion within a special area of conservation, special protection area or natural heritage area, each landowner is notified in writing of the proposed designation and is sent an information pack on the relevant site. The information pack explains the scientific reasons for the proposed designation, sets out the activities requiring my prior consent, as Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, and includes information on how to appeal against the proposed designation. A map showing the boundaries and extent of the site is also sent to landowners to help them to determine whether or not their land is located within the site proposed for designation.

Notice of the proposed designation is also:

1. published in at least one newspaper with circulation covering the area in which the site is located, in one national newspaper and on the website of the National Parks and Wildlife Service of my Department;
2. broadcast on a radio channel generally available in the area in which the site is located; and
3. provided for display in local Garda stations, local authority offices, public libraries, local offices of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection and offices of Teagasc.

My Department also notifies the relevant Ministers and public authorities of the proposed designation of a site.

Landowners are also notified of the final formal designation of a site, which takes effect with the signing by me, as Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, of a Statutory Instrument.

Once a site is proposed for designation, a landowner may appeal against the proposed inclusion of the land in question within the site by submission of an appeal in writing within three months of the notification of the proposal to designate the site.

While in most cases appeals are to remove land from a site proposed for designation, a small number of appeals have been received to have lands included within the site.

There were 320 appeals submitted to my Department, in relation to sites proposed for designation as special areas of conservation in County Galway, during the years 2000-2013, of which 60 were successful and 72 were partially successful (the number of appeals submitted includes four appeals to have land included within the site proposed for designation). Details of this information per year are outlined in the table below.

Year	No. of appeals submitted	No. of successful appeals	Percentage of appeals submitted that were successful	No. of partially successful appeals	Percentage of appeals submitted that were partially successful
2000	27	8	29.6%	9	33.3%
2001	16	4	25.0%	2	12.5%
2002	22	2	9.1%	1	4.5%
2003	11	5	45.5%	3	27.3%
2004	12	5	41.7%	4	33.3%
2005	12	3	25.0%	3	25.0%
2006	14	4	28.6%	4	28.6%
2007	179	23	12.8%	44	24.6%
2008	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2009	12	2	16.7%	2	16.7%
2010	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2011	5	4	80.0%	0	0
2012	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2013	10	0	0	0	0
Total	320	60	18.8%	72	22.5%

Based on the information available, the average time taken to process an appeal, from the date of submission of an appeal to the date the appeal was closed, was 20.4 months. For some of these appeals the landowners were notified of the outcome but the appeal was not marked as closed within the Department until some time later. This brings up the figure for the average time taken to process an appeal.

In the reply to Parliamentary Question No. 239 of 15 November 2018 it was set out that the number of appeals, in relation to sites proposed for designation as special areas of conservation, submitted to my Department in 2013 was 1. Due to an administrative error in the compilation of this information in the short time available marine site appeals were inadvertently excluded and the figure should have been 55.

Census of Population Publication

1209. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if the 1926 census can be viewed before its release in 2026 (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [54098/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): I am aware that the 1926 Census is the next full set of Census records available to the State following the 1911 returns. The 1926 Census was the first undertaken by the independent State, just four years after the Treaty was signed and three years after the Civil War. I understand that this is a historic collection of great value and interest for historians, researchers, the general public and the Diaspora.

Census collection and census records are provided for in the Statistics Act 1993. Responsibility for this legislation falls under the aegis of the Department of the Taoiseach. Under sections 33 and 35 of that Act, information gathered by the Census which relates either directly or indirectly to an identifiable person cannot be released until 100 years after the date of the relevant census.

I have been informed that making the 1926 Census available to the public will require a significant volume of work which will involve both the conservation and the digitisation of the data in the individual 1926 Census forms. This will take several years. Nevertheless, I hope that it will be ready for public release at the end of the statute period in 2026.

I am pleased to advise that my Departments website, *www.irishgenealogy.ie* contains Civil Records of Births over 100 years old, Marriages over 75 years old and Deaths over 50 years old. It is also possible to search for death records from that period on *www.irishgenealogy.ie*. There is also a feedback mechanism on the website along with plenty of useful advice and tips to assist in carrying out searches on the website.

Departmental Expenditure

1210. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the cost incurred by her Department in 2018 for the use of taxi services; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [54206/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): I am advised that expenditure by my Department on taxi services in 2018 was €7,556.

In general, taxi services may be hired by officers while on Departmental business where public transport is not available or suitable. Officers are instructed that, when travelling to and from the same destination, shared taxis should be availed of, where possible.

Hare Coursing

1211. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if course trials are held simply to familiarise hares with the venue as the licence stipulates (details supplied); the reason greyhound owners are expected to pay €30 each just to observe the alleged familiarising process; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [54251/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): My Department issued the Irish Coursing Club with licences in August 2018 on behalf of its affiliated clubs to capture and tag hares for the 2018/19 coursing season which included conditions relating to the reporting of coursing trials.

It is my understanding that it is normal practice for some coursing clubs to “trial” or familiarise hares with the course in advance of coursing meetings. This involves releasing the hares from the same location from which they will be released at the actual coursing meeting with the intention that they would become familiar with the route to the escape in a live coursing scenario.

Where resources allow, local National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) conservation rangers and other staff attend coursing meetings to conduct on the spot-checks and to monitor compliance with licences issued to the Irish Coursing Club and its affiliated clubs. I have no role in relation to the payment of any fees relating to these trials.

Caiteachas Ranna

1212. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Dara Calleary** den an Aire Cultúir, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta cé mhéad airgid breise atá curtha ar fáil don Ghaeilge agus don Ghaeltacht ó bunaíodh an Rialtas seo; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [54276/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Seán Kyne): Tugtar briseadh síos sa tábla thíos ar an méad airgid breise atá curtha ar fáil don Ghaeilge agus don Ghaeltacht ó bunaíodh an Rialtas seo:

2016	2017	2018	2019
€64.407m [1]	€60.602m	€62.595 [2]	€69.095

[1] San áireamh i bhfigiúr 2016, bhí allúntas aon-uaire de €6m le h-íoc as fhorbairt chéanna farantóireachta ar na hoileáin.

[2] Is é seo an figiúr a foilsíodh sna Meastachain Athbhreithnithe i leith 2018. Cuirfear figiúr deimhnithe ar fáil sa Chuntas Leithreasaithe a bheidh iniúchta ag an C&AG.

Is ionann iomlán an mhaoinithe don Ghaeilge, don Ghaeltacht agus do na hOileáin don bhliain 2019 agus €55.772m. Nuair a chuirtear leithdháileadh an Fhorais Teanga san áireamh, is ionann an maoiniú iomlán agus €69.095m - méadú de €6.5m ar ar an allúntas don earnáil i Meastachain Athbhreithnithe 2018. San áireamh i leithdháileadh 2019 tá:

- €0.6m sa bhreis chun tacú le cur i bhfeidhm an Phróisis Pleanála Teanga dá ndéantar foráil in Acht na Gaeltachta 2012;

- €2.7m breise d'Údarás na Gaeltachta chun infheistíocht a dhéanamh i gothabháil agus i gcruthú post i gceantair Ghaeltachta, rud a fhágann gurb é €9.7m an leithdháileadh iomlán caipitil don eagraíocht, €0.7m atá tugtha ar aghaidh ó 2018 san áireamh. ;

- €0.5m sa bhreis i maoiniú reatha d'Údarás na Gaeltachta chun tacú le comharchumainn agus eagraíochtaí forbartha pobail sa Ghaeltacht den chuid is mó;

- Leithdháileadh breise de €1.18m do Scéimeanna Tacaíochta Gaeltachta mo Roinne chun tacú tuilleadh le Próiseas Pleanála Teanga na Gaeltachta;

- Leithdháileadh breise de €0.75m do Scéimeanna Tacaíochta Teanga na Roinne lasmuigh den Ghaeltacht chun scoláireachtaí Gaeltachta a chur ar fáil do dhaltaí ó scoileanna DEIS agus chun dul chun cinn a dhéanamh i ndáil le gréasán d'Ionaid Gaeilge agus Cultúir a fhorbairt ar fud na tíre;

- Leithdháileadh breise de €1m chun forbairt a dhéanamh ar infreastruchtúr calafoirt a fhreastalaíonn ar na hOileáin Árainn agus ar Thoraigh; agus,

- Leithdháileadh breise de €0.433m chun seirbhísí riachtanacha iompair a sholáthar chuig na hoileáin.

Rachaidh an infheistíocht mhéadaithe seo don Ghaeilge, don Ghaeltacht agus do na hOileáin in 2019 i bhfeidhm go mór ar phobail Ghaeltachta, go háirithe, mar go bhfuil an chuid is mó den leithdháileadh á tabhairt do chruthú post, forbairt pobail agus pleanáil teanga sa Ghaeltacht, agus, chomh maith leis sin, d'fhorbairt na gcalafort agus na seirbhísí iompair a bhaineann leis na hoileáin.

Is fiú a nótáil chomh maith go mbeidh maoiniú caipitil de €2.8m á chur ar fáil faoin gCiste um Athghiniúint agus Forbairt Tuaithe do thograí de chuid Údarás na Gaeltachta i nGaeltachtaí

Dhún na nGall, Mhaigh Eo agus na Gaillimhe. Tá an maoiniú ceadaithe do thrí thogra rathúil de chuid Údarás na Gaeltachta mar seo leanas:

- €1.5m ceadaithe chun an t-urlár bairr neamhfhorbartha de gteic @Gaoth Dobhair ar Pháirc Ghnó Gaoth Dobhair a fhorbairt agus 1,725 sq.m de spás oibre/oifigí nua a chur ar fáil;

- €548,000 chun Ionad Nuálaíochta agus Mol Digiteach gteic @An Spidéal a fhorbairt i gConamara; agus,

- €795,000 chun 8 nIonad Nuálaíochta/Moil Dhigiteacha/Láthair Barrfeabhais a fhorbairt i nGaeltacht Mhaigh Eo ag áireamh Béal an Mhuirthead, An Eachléim, Gaoth Sáile, Acaill agus Tuar Mhic Éadaigh.

Ní miste a rá gur soláthar breise é seo d'Údarás na Gaeltachta anuas ar an soláthar méadaithe de €9.7m atá curtha ar fáil ag mo Roinn don eagraíocht do 2019.

Táim sásta, mar sin, go bhfuil neart dul chun cinn déanta ag an Rialtas mar a bhaineann sé leis an réimse cúraimí atá orm i mBuiséad 2019.

Maoiniú Údarás na Gaeltachta

1213. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Dara Calleary** den an Aire Cultúir, Oidhreachta agus Gaeltachta cén soláthar airgid a cuireadh ar fáil i meastacháin 2018 agus i meastacháin 2019 d'Údarás na Gaeltachta, agus an méid sin briste síos idir soláthar caipitil agus reatha; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [54277/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Seán Kyne): Léiríonn an tábla thíos an soláthar airgid a cuireadh ar fáil don Údarás in 2018 agus an soláthar do 2019:

Údarás na Gaeltachta	2018 Reatha €000	2018 Caipitil €000	2019 Reatha €000	2019 Caipitil €000
C6 - Reatha Riarachán	€9,637*		€9,442	
C7 - Reatha (Teangabhunaithe)	€3,350		€3,850	
C8 – Caipiteal		€7,638**		€9,700***
Iomlán	€12,987	€7,638	€13,292	€9,700

* **C6 2018** - Fuarthas ciste reatha breise de €0.4m don Údarás in 2018 mar thoradh ar shábháiltí in áiteanna eile i Vóta na Roinne agus tá sé san áireamh sa bhfigiúr thuas.

** **C8 2018** Fuarthas leithdháileadh caipitil breise de €0.638m don Údarás in 2018, mar thoradh ar shábháiltí in áiteanna eile i Vóta na Roinne agus tá sé san áireamh sa bhfigiúr thuas.

*** **C8 2019** Maidir leis an soláthar caipitil do 2019, tá suim de €0.7m nár chaith an Roinn in 2018 tugtha ar aghaidh go 2019 a chuirfear ar fáil do bhuiséad caipitil an Údaráis. Ciallaíonn sé seo go mbeidh buiséad iomlán caipitil de €9.7m á chur ar fáil ag mo Roinn don Údarás in 2019 le caitheamh ar chlár forbartha fiontraíochta agus fostaíochta na heagraíochta agus tá sé seo san áireamh sa bhfigiúr thuasluaite.

Is figiúirí sealadacha iad cinn 2018 a dheimhneofar i gCuntas Leithreasaithe na Roinne faoi réir iniúchadh an Ard-Reachtair Cuntas agus Ciste.

Departmental Expenditure

1214. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the budget and spend in her Department for marketing, media and social media in each of the years 2016 to 2018; the projected spend for 2019; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [54460/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): I refer the Deputy to the reply given to Parliamentary Question Number 596 and 597 of 18th December 2018 which sets out the up-to-date position in relation to these matters.

Departmental Staff Data

1215. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of staff in her Department employed to work on marketing, media and social media in 2018. [54477/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): I am advised that there are three members of staff in my Department in 2018 employed to work on marketing, media and social media as part of their Press Office duties.

Waterways Issues

1216. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the extent to which she expects to achieve an amicable resolution of issues between Waterways Ireland and traditional dwellers and recreational users of the Grand Canal, County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1027/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): Waterways Ireland continues to work closely with boat owners using the canals, adjacent land owners and local committees. Meetings are also held with the key stakeholder interest groups, the Royal Canal Amenity Group, Inland Waterways Association of Ireland (IWAI) and the Heritage Boat Association (HBA).

In addition, Waterways Ireland works alongside the Friends of the Grand Canal and Royal Canal Clean-Up Group in Dublin and the newly established Grand Canal Dock Group, who like many of the communities throughout the waterways support the maintenance of our waterways. Waterways Ireland Operational staff, lockkeepers and waterway patrollers meet canal users on a daily basis and provide a wide range of services to all our recreational users.

Inspectorate staff manage boat use on the canals in accordance with the 1988 Canal Bye-laws. In this regard, Waterways Ireland continues to concentrate on boats which consistently remain in breach of the Bye-laws. Where a boat owner fails to respond to requests to comply, after notification by letters, telephone calls and formal notice, a programme of boat removal continues.

The Heritage Act 2018 was signed into law by the President on 18 July 2018 and Waterways Ireland will consult with its stakeholders in the drafting of additional Byelaws to ensure proper regulation of craft on the waterways.

Film Industry Promotion

1217. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if funding is available to promote an Irish-made film in North America; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1059/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): Screen Ireland (formerly the Irish Film Board) is the national development agency for Irish film making and the Irish film, television and animation industry. Its statutory remit is to assist and encourage the making of film in the State and the development of a film industry in Ireland. Screen Ireland has a vision for a vibrant, creative and sustainable Irish film, television and animation industry, with diverse voices, talent and opportunities which speaks to and connects Irish film culture with audiences at home and abroad. In Budget 2019, an additional €2 million was allocated to Screen Ireland to build on its vital work in supporting Irish film, television drama, documentary and animation. This increases its annual budget by 11% overall to €20 million.

Screen Ireland has a presence at a number of A-list international festivals & markets including a number in North America where it promotes Irish film and Irish animation as well as promoting Ireland as a location for internationally mobile film production. Screen Ireland liaises with IDA Ireland and Tourism Ireland to maximise opportunities for the promotion of Ireland as a location for film productions as well as a tourism destination. Further information on its funding scheme is available on its website at the following links: <https://www.screenireland.ie/promoting>; <https://www.screenireland.ie/promoting/international-festivals>

Hare Coursing Regulation

1218. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the reason open coursing clubs that hold meetings are not subject to hare netting licence conditions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1118/19]

1219. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of open coursing meetings which have been monitored by National Parks rangers in the past ten years. [1119/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1218 and 1219 together.

My Department issued the Irish Coursing Club (ICC) with licences in August 2018 on behalf of its affiliated clubs to capture and tag hares for the 2018/19 coursing season. The majority of coursing meetings organised by the ICC relate to regular coursing where hares are captured under licence, are kept in a hare park, are released to course over a designated track and then re-released back into the wild. It is my understanding that in open coursing hares are not captured but are already present in the countryside, and therefore a netting licence would not arise.

Where resources allow, local National Parks and Wildlife Service conservation rangers and other staff attend coursing meetings to conduct on-the-spot checks and to monitor compliance with licences issued to the Irish Coursing Club and its affiliated clubs. My Department has concentrated its efforts on monitoring regular coursing meetings, including more recently on monitoring coursing trials. My Department is actively re-evaluating its approach to open coursing events.

Commemorative Events

1220. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her plans to promote the importance of a person (details supplied); if funding will be made available locally to acknowledge their life; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1356/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): Last week I published the guidance of the Expert Advisory Group on Centenary Commemorations, which sets out a series of principles on which the remainder of the decade of centenaries might be approached (available here: <https://www.chg.gov.ie/app/uploads/2019/01/guidance-from-the-expert-advisory-group-on-commemorations-over-the-remainder-of-the-decade-of-centenaries-eng-1.pdf>).

There is a particular focus on the role of Local Authorities and communities in the Guidance, and Local authorities will continue to have a key role in developing appropriate commemorative initiatives over the remainder of the Decade of Centenaries and in supporting meaningful, respectful and authentic engagement by local communities.

In 2018, I approved a funding allocation of €5,000 for each local authority under the Decade of Centenaries programme to support the development of inclusive, appropriate and citizen-focused initiatives to encourage people of all ages to explore significant aspects of the political historical social and cultural context of the period. Funding allocations for local authorities in 2019 will be announced shortly.

While my Department has no specific plans to commemorate the life and legacy of the person to whom the Deputy refers, it is open to the relevant local authority - in this case Sligo County Council - to consider an appropriate commemorative initiative.

Special Areas of Conservation Designation

1221. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her plans to reintroduce compensation which was previously paid to farmers affected by the designation and the associated restrictions up to 2012 regarding agricultural losses incurred in respect of the permanent designation of special areas of conservation and special protected areas under the national farm plan scheme; and when she envisages its implementation. [1562/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): The Farm Plan Scheme, administered by the National Parks and Wildlife Service of this Department, is currently operational albeit on a limited basis, for farmers whose management of designated areas incurs costs or requires actions over and above payments received through other schemes. It is not compensation for designation as such, but it addresses costs or losses which might arise.

It continues to be my intention to increase the scope of the Scheme on a targeted and prioritised basis as funding permits. The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) is also operating many targeted schemes for farmers in designated areas. The DAFM GLAS scheme has provided prioritised entry into GLAS and elevated GLAS payments in certain designated areas. It is important that the Farm Plan Scheme is coherent with these schemes and the Basic Payment Scheme.

Funding for the Natura 2000 network is currently available from existing financial instru-

ments, as foreseen in Article 8 of the Habitats Directive. This includes, but is not limited to, CAP funding. My Department has access only to national exchequer funding and at present this funding is limited.

My Department has recently commenced an in-depth, site-by-site analysis of the measures required to achieve good status for the habitats and species that we collectively are protecting in SACs. This will include a review of measures currently operating through GLAS, the NPWS farm plan scheme, LIFE etc. This process will take a number of months but will enable us to set priorities for action and to seek funding for such actions through the budgetary process.

National Orchestras

1222. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if the oversight group and the working group that have been established to address issues in the transfer of the National Symphony Orchestra from the remit of RTÉ to the remit of the National Concert Hall have orchestra musicians and workers represented on both groups; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1570/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): The overall aim of the Government decision in relation to the proposed transfer of the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra (NSO) is to enable the orchestra to be established as a world class orchestra which would, with the NCH, provide a creative and imaginative programme strategy that would greatly enhance the offering of the combined organisation to the public.

An Oversight Group and Working Group have been established with formal terms of reference, with a view to identifying and addressing the relevant issues to be addressed to enable the successful transfer of the NSO from the remit of RTÉ to the remit of the NCH.

The terms of reference of the Oversight Group provide that the Group will be chaired by the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and will be made up of representatives from:

- Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht
- Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment
- RTÉ
- National Concert Hall

The terms of reference of the Working Group provide that the membership of the Group may vary depending on the nature of the issue being discussed and that the Working Group will report to the Oversight Group.

The Oversight Group has already met on a number of occasions and has agreed that it is very important that there should be a proper communication process between the Oversight and Working Group and representatives, members and support staff of the NSO to ensure that the orchestra is informed on a timely basis about all aspects of the proposed transfer process. In this regard, it is intended that a meeting will be arranged shortly between the Working Group and Union representatives of the NSO.

Culture Ireland Grant Scheme

1223. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the funding streams available to assist professional photographers who travel to war-torn countries and so on to document the scenes and provide exhibitions of their works; and her plans to introduce such a scheme is none is available at present. [1701/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): Culture Ireland offers support to Irish professional artists, arts organisations and international presenters to present work by Irish artists at significant international venues and festivals. Culture Ireland considers applications for all forms of the arts, including photography, as defined in the Arts Act 2003:

“arts means any creative or interpretative expression (whether traditional or contemporary) in whatever form, and includes, in particular, visual arts, theatre, literature, music, dance, opera, film, circus and architecture, and includes any medium when used for those purposes”.

Only international events are supported (i.e. outside the island of Ireland), the event / exhibition must be accessible to an open public audience and fees must be payable to the artist or arts organisation.

Applications deemed eligible are firstly assessed on the artistic quality of work which could be defined as work that is ambitious, excellent and original, connects to audiences and has been presented nationally to critical acclaim. The assessment of the artistic quality of the proposed work is made using knowledge, experience and specialist advice. Other criteria for assessment include the track record of the artist or arts organisation; the financial and operational viability of the event and proven capacity of the applicant, artist or arts organisation to present work internationally; the profile of the international venue/festival and the wider promotional and the media impact anticipated.

In supporting an event, Culture Ireland offers grant funding towards costs which relate to the international presentation of the event (costs such as transport, accommodation and subsistence) rather than the creation of the art work. As such photographers can apply for Culture Ireland support in relation to the presentation of their work to international audiences, subject to other eligibility criteria. However, due to the competitive nature of each grant round and limited funding, eligibility and compliance with criteria for assessment alone do not guarantee that an applicant will receive grant funding.

Scéimeanna Teanga

1224. D’fhiafraigh **Deputy Catherine Connolly** den an Aire Cultúir, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta an méid scéimeanna teangacha atá á chur i bhfeidhm sa Ghaeltacht faoi láthair; an caiteachas a bheidh i gceist leis na scéimeanna teanga i mbliana; and méid atá ceadaithe do gach scéim teanga don bhliain 2019; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [1749/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Seán Kyne): Ag glacadh leis gur pleananna teanga atá i gceist ag an Teachta seachas scéimeanna teanga, tá ullmhú nó feidhmiú Pleananna Teanga idir lámha i gcás gach ceann den 26 Limistéar Pleanála Teanga (LPT) Gaeltachta atá aitheanta faoi Acht na Gaeltachta 2012. Tá pleananna ceadaithe faoin bpróiseas go dáta i leith 13 den 26 LPT eadhon:

- Cois Fharraige;

- Gaoth Dobhair, Rann na Feirste, Anagaire & Loch an Iúir;

15 January 2019

- Cloch Chionnaola, Gort an Choirce, An Fál Carrach & Machaire Rabhartaigh;
- Na Déise;
- Múscraí;
- Ciarraí Theas;
- Dúiche Sheoigheach & Tuar Mhic Éadaigh;
- Ciarraí Thiar;
- Maigh Eo Thuaidh;
- Árainn Mhór;
- An Cheathrú Rua;
- Ráth Chairn & Baile Ghib;
- Conamara Láir.

Tá dhá phlean eile curtha faoi bhráid na Roinne agus iad á mheas faoi láthair:

- Ceantar na nOileán;
- Dún na nGall Theas.

Tá cistíocht faoi leith ar fiú €3.2m in iomlán curtha ar fáil faoi Bhuiséad 2019 ón Státhiste chun freastal a dhéanamh ar fheidhmiú rathúil an phróisis pleanála teanga, idir phleananna a ullmhú, fheidhmiú pleananna agus bhearta tacaíochta eile don phróiseas pleanála teanga i gcoitinne. Ina theannta sin, ar ndóigh, bainfear leas as an gciste ardaithe atá curtha ar fail in 2019 faoin gClár Tacaíochtaí Pobail agus Teanga atá á riar ag mo Roinn, chun tacú tuilleadh le feidhmiú rathúil an phróisis.

Bainfear leas as sciar den chistíocht seo chun go mbeidh Údarás na Gaeltachta in ann leanúint ar aghaidh ag tacú le hullmhú agus le feidhmiú pleananna teanga mar a bhaineann sé leis na ceantair Ghaeltachta uile, i gcomhréir leis na dualgais atá sannta don Údarás faoi Acht na Gaeltachta 2012.

Mar a ndéantar gach bliain scrúdófar na héilimh faoi leith a bheidh á ndéanamh go luath ag an Údarás agus ag bhForas na Gaeilge faoi seach ar chistíocht 2019 nuair a fhaightear iad.

I gcomhréir leis an socrú a rinneadh in 2017, cuirfear ciste bliantúil ar fáil do cheanneagraíochtaí pleanála teanga ar fiú idir €100,000 agus €150,000, ag brath ar chritéir cháilithe faoi leith, chun tús a chur le feidhmiú pleananna atá faofa faoin Acht.

Seo a leanas an dáileadh airgid atá i gceist don 13 limistéar a bhfuil pleananna ceadaithe ina leith go dtí seo faoin bpróiseas:

LPT	Allúntas bliantúil d'fheidhmiú Pleananna Teanga
Cois Fharraige	€ 150,000
Gaoth Dobhair, Rann na Feirste, Anagaire & Loch an Iúir	€ 140,000 Bliain 1, €150,000 Bliain 2 ar aghaidh

LPT	Allúntas bliantúil d'fheidhmiú Pleananna Teanga
Cloich Chionnaola, Gort an Choirce, An Fál Carrach agus Machaire Rabhairtaigh	€ 100,000
Ciarraí Thiar	€ 150,000
Ciarraí Theas	€ 100,000
Na Déise	€ 100,000
Árainn Mhór	€ 100,000
Múscraí	€ 100,000
Dúiche Sheoigheach & Tuar Mhic Éadaigh	€ 100,000
Maigh Eo Thuaidh	€ 100,000
An Cheathrú Rua	€ 100,000
Ráth Chairn & Baile Ghib	€ 100,000
Conamara Láir	€ 150,000
Iomlán	€ 1,490,000

Ní call a rá go leanfar ag faire amach i gcaitheamh an ama ar na bealaí is fearr chun an ciste suntasach airgid atá sannta don phróiseas a chur chun fónaimh ar an gcaoi is éifeachtaí is féidir.

City of Culture Initiative

1225. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number and positions of vacancies among the staff and board of Galway 2020; when it is expected that the positions will be filled; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1750/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): Having regard to the vacancies among the staff, Galway 2020 is currently advertising for an Irish Language Communications Officer, with a closing date for applications of 18 January. It is hoped that an appointment will be made soon after.

Furthermore, the process to fill the cultural leadership vacancy is at an advanced stage and it is expected that Galway 2020 will be in a position to make a formal announcement on the matter in the very near future.

Having regard to vacancies on the Board, on 21 December last, the Chair of Galway 2020, Ms Aideen McGinley, notified the Board of her intention to step down as Chair. Ms McGinley will remain in the position until a new appointment is made and will continue to actively support the project as a strategic advisor to the Board. The Board of Galway 2020 is currently considering the needs of the project and the best qualified candidates to drive the delivery phase of the project. The Board held its first meeting of the year last Friday and I understand that the role of the Chair was discussed at the meeting.

The Board currently comprises 16 members, including the role of Chair. Board members are drawn from a wide variety of expertise at international, European and local level. The membership includes three new members who joined the Board at the end of 2018 and attended their first meeting last week.

The new members are:

- Andrew Lappin, a leading film and theatre producer with over 30 years' experience in the

industry;

- Finbarr Brady, a fluent Irish speaker, who is an author and former professor of finance at DCU, currently teaching at UCD Smurfit Business School; and,

- Ivonka Kwiek, an anthropologist and culture manager, living and working in Galway.

With the three new additions to the Board, it is considered that there is an adequate number of members and range of skills on the Board at this time.

Waterways Ireland Funding

1226. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the specific funding allocation in 2019 towards the restoration of the Ulster Canal; the particular works that will be undertaken with this funding; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1778/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): In July 2007, the North South Ministerial Council agreed to a proposal to restore a 13 km section of the Ulster Canal from Upper Lough Erne to Clones. This project is hugely important for the border region with potential to stimulate economic activity, giving a much needed boost to job creation and with the growth in water based tourism helping to attract significant numbers of visitors to the area. This is increasingly significant in the context of Brexit.

Government approval for Phase 1 of this project, to restore a 2.5 km stretch of the Ulster Canal from Upper Lough Erne in County Fermanagh to the International Scout Centre at Castle Saunderson near Belturbet in Co. Cavan, was secured in February 2015.

The works to complete this first phase have recently been concluded. A new 250 m bypass canal and new road bridge to provide navigation around the existing road bridge serving Derrykerrib Island, which had insufficient head height for navigation, have now been constructed. Waterways Ireland continues to work with Cavan County Council to develop recreational amenities at Castle Saunderson including public moorings.

Waterways Ireland anticipates expenditure of c. €154,000 in 2019 to complete payment for works at Derrykerrib and for construction works for Castle Saunderson public moorings.

In May 2018, this Government approved Phase 2, the development of a 13 km section of the Ulster Canal from Upper Lough Erne to Clones as a water sports and leisure amenity, and re-committed to developing this cross-border stretch under the Project Ireland 2040 plan, in the category of *Investing in our Culture, Language and Heritage*.

An application has been submitted by Waterways Ireland and partners Monaghan County Council, Cavan County Council and Fermanagh and Omagh District Council to the Department of Rural and Community Development for further funding under the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund for this second phase of development.

Waterways Ireland is also continuing work with partners Monaghan County Council, Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council, East Border Region Ltd. and Mid Ulster District Council to develop 22 km of Ulster Canal towpath between Smithborough, Co. Monaghan and Middletown, Co. Armagh funded through successful application to the Interreg VA sustainable transport measure. The group have also completed development proposals for a Greenway strategy exploring how the Ulster Canal Greenway could form the spine of a network

of off road greenways across this rural border region.

Departmental Expenditure

1227. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the current and capital funding allocation for each item (details supplied) on an annual basis over the 2016 to 2018 period; and the funding allocations for 2019 following the completion of the 2019 estimates in tabular form. [1783/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Seán Kyne): The information sought by the Deputy is set out in tabular form below:

	2016 Expenditure	2016 Expenditure	2017 Expenditure	2017 Expenditure	2018 Expenditure	2018 Expenditure	2019 Budget	2019 Budget
	Current €	Capital €	Current €	Capital €	Current €	Capital €	Current €	Capital €
An Foras Teanga Total	13,249,410	-	13,507,471	-	13,325,105	-	13,323,000	-
Údarás na Gaeltachta Total	11,823,000	9,087,000	12,208,000	8,957,000	12,987,000	7,638,000	13,292,000	9,700,000 [1]
Gaeltacht co-operatives and community development organisations	1,668,039	-	1,955,460	-	1,949,500	-	[2]	[2]
Comhar Naíonraí na Gaeltachta	535,000	-	535,000	-	535,000	-	[2]	[2]
Ealaín na Gaeltachta	320,000	-	342,432	-	341,500	-	[2]	[2]
Gnóthai Óige	237,500	375,000	231,500	375,000	231,000	375,000	[2]	[2]
Tuismitheoirí na Gaeltachta	495	-	1,010	-	1,366	-	[2]	[2]
Gaeltacht Support Schemes - Community and Language Supports Programme (Current)	7,369,622	-	6,565,000	-	6,866,254	-	€7,370,000	-
Gaeltacht Support Schemes - Community and Language Supports Programme (Capital)	-	€921,895	-	€1,900,000	-	1,313,703	-	€2,522,000
Tuismitheoirí na Gaeltachta	40,000	-	50,000	-	-	-	-	-
Islands								
Infrastructure for islands	-	6,643,187	-	1,357,448	-	1,053,453	-	1,644,000
Current Expenditure for the islands including essential transport services	6,630,886	-	6,606,602	-	7,157,995	-	7,064,000	-
20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language/Language Planning Process Total [3]	999,277	-	1,250,000	-	2,005,000	-	3,200,000	-
Language Planning Process	340,125	-	816,553	-	1,607,311	-	[2]	

	2016 Ex- penditure	2016 Expendi- ture	2017 Ex- penditure	2017 Ex- penditure	2018 Ex- penditure	2018 Ex- penditure	2019 Budget	2019 Budget
	Current €	Capital €	Current €	Capital €	Current €	Capital €	Current €	Capital €
Programmes and other projects mainly in support of the process and 20-Year Strategy	659,152	-	613,000	-	-	-	-	-
Comhar Naionraí na Gaeltachta	-	-	-	-	163,408	-	626,592	-
Tuismitheoirí na Gaeltachta	-	-	-	-	83,200	-	518,310	-
Ealaín na Gaeltachta	-	-	-	-	133,790	-	325,000	-
Office of the Language Commissioner	638,784	-	730,000	-	746,697	-	810,000	-
Irish language Support Schemes – outside the Gaeltacht	3,499,037	94,551	3,997,000	17,000	4,165,638	30,628	4,650,000	682,000

The figures for 2018 expenditure are provisional outturn figures and will be finalised in the Department's Appropriation Account and subject to audit by the C&AG.

[1] Figure includes a capital carryover of €700,000.

[2] Allocation of 2019 funding to be decided.

[3] Funding outlined includes direct support of the language planning process (via Údarás na Gaeltachta and Foras na Gaeilge) as well a number of measures funded directly by the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht in support of the language planning process and, by extension, the 20-Year Strategy.

Údarás na Gaeltachta Data

1228. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the estimated average cost of one job created or supported by Údarás na Gaeltachta; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1793/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Seán Kyne): I have been informed by Údarás na Gaeltachta that the grant cost per job for 2017 was €5,500 and that the average cost per job over the past five years was €5,084. The cost per job reflects grant payments towards capital, employment, research and development and specific training paid to client companies but excludes FIFG (Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance) and Research/Development/Innovation funding.

The figure in respect of 2018 is not available at present.

Údarás na Gaeltachta Data

1229. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of jobs supported by Údarás na Gaeltachta in 2017 and 2018; the number of

new jobs created in 2017 and 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1794/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Seán Kyne): The information requested by the Deputy in respect of 2017 is outlined in tabular format. I understand from Údarás na Gaeltachta that the information in respect of the year ending 31 December 2018 is not yet to hand but will be available shortly.

Year	Full-time jobs supported	Part- time jobs supported	Total jobs supported @ 31/12/2017	Number of full-time jobs created in 2017
2017	7,503	606	8,109	630

Departmental Funding

1230. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the amount in grants awarded to businesses in 2017 and 2018; the average grant given; the number of businesses that received grants in 2017 and 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1795/19]

1231. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the businesses that received grants in excess of €100,000 in 2018; the location of the company; the grant amount awarded in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1796/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1230 and 1231 together.

As the Deputy will appreciate my Department operates a wide range of funding schemes across all areas of the Departments' remit.

In view of this and because of the wide range of my Department's schemes and programmes, and the large volumes of payments and grants involved, it is not possible to provide the information sought in the format requested by the Deputy. However, if the Deputy has specific queries relating to a particular programme or grant, I will arrange to provide him with relevant information in that regard.

Details of funding allocations and awards are published on my Department's website at www.chg.gov.ie from time to time. In common with all Government Departments, details of annual expenditure are also included in the annual Appropriation Accounts.

For the Deputy's convenience a summary of the various funding areas and the links to detailed information in respect of funding available from my Department is set out in the following table.

Programme Area	Details available at:
Arts Film and Investment	http://www.chg.gov.ie/about/information-requests/freedom-of-information/foi-publications-scheme/services-provided-by-the-department/arts-unit/#grantfunding

Programme Area	Details available at:
Cultural Policy and Institutions	http://www.chg.gov.ie/about/information-requests/%20freedom-of-information/foi-publications-scheme/services-%20provided-by-the-department/cultural-policy-and-institutions-unit/#grantfunding
Culture Ireland	http://www.cultureireland.ie/funding
Creative Ireland	https://www.chg.gov.ie/arts/creative-arts/creative-ireland-programme/
Built Heritage & Architectural Policy	http://www.chg.gov.ie/about/information-requests/%20freedom-of-information/foi-publications-scheme/%20services-provided-by-the-department/built-heritage-%20and-architectural-policy-unit/#grantfunding
National Monuments Service	http://www.chg.gov.ie/about/information-requests/freedom-of-information/foi-publications-scheme/services-provided-by-the-department/national-monuments-service/#grantfunding
Gaeltacht Support Schemes	https://www.chg.gov.ie/gaeltacht/the-gaeltacht/language-support-schemes-programmes/
Irish Language Support Schemes	https://www.chg.gov.ie/gaeltacht/the-irish-language/language-support-schemes/

Údarás na Gaeltachta Data

1232. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of Údarás na Gaeltachta properties located in each Gaeltacht area; if each is occupied; the length of time each property has been vacant in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1797/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Seán Kyne): The information requested by the Deputy, given its complex nature, could not be provided in the timeframe available. A complete reply will be issued to the Deputy in accordance with Standing Orders.

Údarás na Gaeltachta Expenditure

1233. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the status of the polyethylene terephthalate pellet extrusion project in the Baile Ghib Gaeltacht; the financial support awarded to the project to date by Údarás na Gaeltachta; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1798/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Seán Kyne): I have been informed by Údarás na Gaeltachta that the current status of the project referred to by the Deputy is that preparatory building works have been completed on the facility in Baile Ghib and that the organisation is currently preparing tender documents to hire a contractor to refurbish the facility.

The board of Údarás na Gaeltachta approved a support package for the project in 2018 that will create up to 20 jobs in Baile Ghib in the coming years. The aforementioned capital works

will result in an investment of €1.2 million in the building, which will bring it to advance-factory standard. The package also includes an equity investment in the company to enable them to develop the business and the company has received the first instalment of investment from Údarás na Gaeltachta - in line with the required match funding by private investors. This investment has enabled the company to commence ordering plant and equipment for the venture.

It is envisaged that the refurbishment works to the Baile Ghib facility will be completed and that it will be ready to be leased to the project promoter at the beginning of quarter three 2019.

Údarás na Gaeltachta Data

1234. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of companies Údarás na Gaeltachta initiated proceedings against to revoke grants in each of the years 2016 to 2018; the number of these that were successful; the value of grants that were revoked in these years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1799/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Seán Kyne): The information requested by the Deputy in respect of the years 2016 to 2018 is outlined in tabular format:

Year	Number of Proceedings Initiated
2016	5
2017	2
2018	4
Total	11

I have also been informed by Údarás na Gaeltachta that they have received repayment in respect of one company. A number of other companies are currently in the process of being liquidated. The combined value of the total grants revoked in the period in question - 2016 to 2018 - amounted to €1,196,866.80.

Departmental Correspondence

1235. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the customer complaints received by her Department in each of the years since 2016; if the complaints are grouped into categories; the nature of the complaints; the resolution of same; and the number progressed to the relevant Ombudsman in each of the years since 2016. [1868/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): I am advised that my Department received two customer complaints in 2016, two in 2017 and three in 2018 in relation to the Department's operations. Three of these were subsequently referred to the Office of the Ombudsman. I am advised that in each case, the matters raised have been addressed and brought to a conclusion.

My Department remains committed to advancing the principles of Quality Customer Service, and achieving ongoing improvement in the delivery of its services.