

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 4, inclusive, answered orally.

National Broadband Plan Administration

5. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the qualification and requalification process required for bidders and-or component parties to a bidding consortium for the national broadband plan; if component parties and-or bidding consortia were required to requalify each time the structure of the consortium changed; the process involved in such requalification; the timeline for such requalification; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3605/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The formal procurement for the NBP State intervention was launched with the publication of the Pre-qualification Questionnaire, or PQQ, and Project Information Memorandum (PIM) in the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU). The PQQ assisted the Department in evaluating the eligibility, economic and financial standing and technical and professional capability of each bidder to provide the services required under the NBP. Only those bidders that could demonstrate they had the necessary economic and financial standing, together with the required technical and professional capability, were allowed to participate in the procurement process.

The procurement documentation issued to all bidders at the beginning of the process set out a mechanism for the Department to assess and approve or reject changes to the membership of any of the bidders, as would be appropriate in a procurement of this scale and duration.

As part of the assessment of a change, any bidder in the process was required to demonstrate that it continued to meet the economic and financial standing, and technical and professional capability, set out in the original rigorous pre-qualification criteria. The Department could not have approved a change in Bidder composition unless it met those criteria. The criteria were designed to ensure that Bidders who passed had the ability from a financial robustness and technical ability, to build, operate and maintain the NBP network.

The bidder which submitted its Final Tender to the Department met these relevant thresholds, as did the other bidders invited to participate in the process.

My Department has received a final tender submission from the bidder and I intend to bring a recommendation to Government regarding this submission in the coming weeks.

Question No. 6 answered orally.

Ministerial Meetings

7. Deputy Sean Sherlock asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the meetings he has held with the Taoiseach on the national broadband plan. [3374/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The National Broadband Plan aims to ensure access to a future proofed, high speed broadband service to every premises in Ireland. The plan involves a mix of commercial investment and a State-led intervention. It has acted as a catalyst in encouraging a significant level of investment in high-speed broadband infrastructure by commercial operators and is a key priority for Government. As Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, I have had a number of conversations with the Taoiseach and other members of Government on the areas within my remit, including the National Broadband Plan. These meetings have included discussions on the progress of the ongoing procurement process to appoint a company to deploy the State Led Intervention network.

The NBP has also been the subject of formal Government consideration at key milestones in the procurement. Notably, the Government approved the launch of procurement in December 2015. Government also approved the proposed ownership model in July 2016. In addition, Government was provided with updates to the process for their information, such as the Commitment Agreement signed between the Department and eir in April 2017 to provide access to high speed broadband to 300,000 premises mostly in rural Ireland.

The bidder for the State led intervention procurement process submitted its final tender in September 2018. My Department's assessment of this bid is now progressed to its concluding stages. My priority is to bring the process to a fair and impartial conclusion as quickly as possible and it is intended to bring a recommendation to Government in the coming weeks.

Questions Nos. 8 to 14, inclusive, answered orally.

North-South Interconnector

15. Deputy Niamh Smyth asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the North-South Interconnector project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3405/19]

20. Deputy Thomas Byrne asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the North-South Interconnector. [3248/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 15 and 20 together.

The North South Interconnector project will provide a second high-capacity electricity interconnector between the two transmission systems of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Following a rigorous planning process which included an eleven week oral hearing, the section of the project in Ireland was granted planning permission by An Bord Pleanála in December 2016. This decision was subsequently appealed to the Supreme Court and judgement is expected in the coming weeks.

The section of the project in Northern Ireland was also granted planning permission. A Judicial Review of this decision was commenced in Northern Ireland and I understand that this is expected to conclude later this year.

Following motions passed in Dáil and Seanad Éireann in early 2017 calling for further independent examination of the project, two studies were commissioned by my predecessor and were published on 2 October 2018 following consideration by Government. The study conducted by an International Expert Commission determined that from a techno-economic point of view, an Alternating Current overhead line is the most beneficial way of meeting the need for enhanced power transfer capability between Ireland and Northern Ireland.

There are currently a number of on-going procurements in relation to the project being undertaken and managed by ESB Networks, such as tower design. However no critical procurement contracts such as construction will be concluded until all legal proceedings are resolved. The earliest possible date for construction is early 2020.

Climate Change Adaptation Plans

16. Deputy Tony McLoughlin asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the role which projects announced under the climate action fund will play in supporting decarbonisation in the agricultural sector. [3185/19]

65. Deputy Clare Daly asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his consultation with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine officials regarding the Government's response to climate change include discussions on transitioning focus from meat and dairy farming to more environmentally sustainable farming. [3303/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 16 and 65 together.

On 28 November 2018, I announced the seven successful projects from the first Call for Applications under the Climate Action Fund. The projects span a range of sectors including agriculture, transport, district heating, and public lighting.

In the Agriculture sector, Gas Networks Ireland will be supported to deliver a facility that will allow renewable gas produced from the anaerobic digestion of wastes, including agriculture wastes such as slurry, to be injected into the national gas grid. The project will also support the use of this renewable gas in the transport sector through the development of two compressed natural gas fuelling stations and grant support for 74 vehicles.

Having completed that assessment stage, the seven projects must now undergo the project validation process. The validation process will include more detailed examination of the projects, agreement of project outputs and payment timelines.

The scope, structure and timeframe of future calls for applications have not yet been determined. To assist development of future calls, my Department plans to hold a workshop with all those who applied under the first call. This workshop, which will be held this month, will provide the opportunity to provide feedback to applicants and also to inform the next call.

In July 2018 a new pilot scheme to support micro generation was introduced, initially targeting domestic self-consumption through a grant scheme for solar PV installation and battery storage. A review of the pilot scheme will inform potential future phases of support for micro generation including broadening the scheme to include other groups and other technologies. As I outlined in the Dáil on 27 November last, in response to the Micro Generation Support Scheme Bill, I am supportive in principle of providing a route to market for citizens and communities to generate their own renewable energy and receive a fair and efficient price for doing so. This very much aligns with Ireland's energy policy as set out in the Energy White Paper

2015 and wider EU energy policy goals.

My Department is working closely with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine in relation to the preparation of a new All of Government Plan to Address Climate Disruption, emphasising the need for agriculture to make a significant and positive contribution to climate mitigation. These discussions have focused on existing, scaled-up and new measures to cover regulatory enhancement, targeted supports, capital supports, and afforestation and wood mobilisation. As well as carbon abatement and sequestration, measures that result in energy displacement (i.e. substituting fossil fuels with renewable energy and renewable materials) have also been a focus of discussions. Reforms to the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) post-2020, which will likely incentivise particular farming practices and processes, will clearly play a significant role in determining the overall shape and configuration of the Irish agri-food sector in the next decade, and the European Commission's current CAP proposals - which place a welcome focus on sustainability criteria, including carbon emissions -- will play a critical role in the transition to more environmentally sustainable farming processes and activities.

Question No. 17 answered orally.

Question No. 18 answered with Question No. 10.

Energy Schemes

19. Deputy Aindrias Moynihan asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the measures he will take to ensure a greater uptake in SEAI grants in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3402/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The energy efficiency grants administered by the SEAI are funded by my Department. Grants are available to homeowners for insulation, heating controls, heat pumps and solar thermal hot water heating systems. Grants are also available for solar PV systems, electric vehicles and electric vehicle charging. Grants are also available for businesses to improve their energy efficiency. The majority of the home energy 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. Grants are administered through a range of schemes:

- The Better Energy Homes scheme 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.

- The Deep Retrofit Pilot Programme is available to homeowners who want to upgrade their house to an A BER while availing of grant support of up to 50%. 4 homeowners in Cork availed of this grant in 2018.

- The Better Energy Communities scheme 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. In 2018 12 of these projects included homes and community buildings in County Cork.

- The Sustainable Energy Communities scheme supports and funds communities to build capacity and develop plans to upgrade the energy efficiency of their local area. 24 communities in Co Cork are signed up to the network.

In 2018 €5,251,691 was invested in improving the efficiency of homes in Co Cork. This was an increase of almost €1.7m on the investment made in 2017 in Co Cork, reflecting the increased investment overall by Government in energy efficiency. Fewer homes were upgraded however, reflecting the shift to deeper, more expensive measures that also result in more carbon savings.

A number of actions are already underway to encourage investment in energy efficiency and further uptake of home energy grants by homeowners across the country. 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. In addition, the Better Energy Warmer Homes was also expanded in 2018 to include internal and external wall insulation which allows more people to avail of the scheme and also increases the energy savings and emissions reductions from the investment made. More information can be found on the website of the SEAI.

Question No. 20 answered with Question No. 15.

Environmental Policy

21. Deputy Thomas P. Broughan asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the actions he will undertake by the end of 2019 to curb single use plastic goods; the measurable targets for each quarter of 2019 in relation to same; the discussions he is having with other Departments in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3140/19]

52. Deputy Tom Neville asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the steps he is taking to reduce or end the use of single use plastics in State bodies; and the steps he will take generally to reduce the use of plastics and increase the rate of plastic recycling. [3184/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 21 and 52 together.

On 3 January, the Government decided that Government Departments would no longer purchase, directly or indirectly, single use plastic beverage cups, cutlery or straws. From 1 March 2019, this policy will also apply to all public bodies.

The Government Decision also requires Departments to publish Resource Efficiency Action Plans to improve how public bodies manage water, energy and material resources. Each public body must report to its respective Minister by end-November on the measures it is taking. My department is currently rolling out supports for public bodies to ensure their compliance with the Government Decision.

The decision on single use plastic items pre-empts a more wide-ranging EU legislative proposal, which is expected to be agreed shortly. The draft EU Directive proposes to target the 10 most prevalent single use plastic items found in Europe's marine environment, as well as lost and abandoned fishing gear. The proposed Directive includes:

- banning certain single use plastic products;
- introducing national consumption reduction targets for other single use plastics; and,
- obliging single use plastic producers to fund waste management and litter clean ups.

Increasing public awareness plays a major role in reducing use of single use plastics and plastics generally. With support from my Department, the Regional Waste Management Offices have designed the website www.mywaste.ie to provide consumers with a single information resource on managing household waste with particular focus on the importance of waste prevention and recycling.

My Department is also working closely with Repak on this issue. Repak members can sign up to a pledge to reduce plastic packaging waste by:

- minimising avoidable single use packaging and promoting reuse where possible; and
- supporting plastic recycling targets of 50% of all plastic packaging by 2025 and 55% of all plastic packaging by 2030.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

22. Deputy Bríd Smith asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the way in which Ireland's climate goals and ambition to be a world leader on climate change can be helped by potential approval for drilling off the coast for oil or gas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3307/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Canney): The challenge to reduce greenhouse gas emissions is well understood by Government and is reflected in national climate action and energy policy which seeks to balance the competing aspects of sustainability, competitiveness and security of supply. Ireland will, within the EU and UN climate frameworks, pursue and achieve a transition to a low-carbon, climate-resilient and environmentally sustainable economy, underpinned by a secure and competitive energy supply in the period to 2050. In recognition of this challenge, Minister Bruton is currently preparing an All of Government Plan which will set out the actions that must be taken to make Ireland a leader in responding to climate change. It will have a strong focus on implementation, including clear timelines and steps needed to achieve each action, assigning clear lines of responsibility for delivery. This Plan will develop new initiatives across electricity, transport, heat, agriculture and other relevant sectors, building on the previous actions taken by Government, including in the National Mitigation Plan and the National Development Plan, and is to be completed early this year. The Government has made a clear commitment and plan to decarbonise as outlined in both the National Mitigation Plan and the Energy White Paper "Ireland's Transition to a Low Carbon Energy Future 2015-2030". Prohibition of exploration for petroleum will do nothing to decrease greenhouse gas emissions and will make Ireland 100% dependent on imports for our fossil fuel needs in the future, when we know that Ireland's indigenous production at Corrib will decline and Kinsale is approaching its end of life. In a European context, the UK, Norway, and Denmark, as well as Ireland, continue to explore and produce natural gas and oil to help meet a part of Europe's future energy needs, and reduce Europe's energy imports from Russia and the Middle East, while Europe plays a leading role globally in the transition to a low carbon future.

Legislative Process

23. Deputy Aindrias Moynihan asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on the expediting of the Planning and Development (Rapid Broadband) Bill 2017, through the Houses of the Oireachtas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3401/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The National Broadband Plan aims to provide access to high speed broadband to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location, via a combination of commercial investment and a State intervention. I understand that the Bill referred to in the Question was initiated in 2017. The scheduling of debate on the Bill is a matter for the Dail.

Building Energy Rating Administration

24. Deputy Bríd Smith asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to extend the funding available for retrofitting of homes in order to reduce the energy usage needed in the housing stock thus reducing CO2 emissions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3311/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): Funding for residential energy efficiency programmes is provided from within the overall capital funding envelope of €142m for the Energy Programme in the 2019 Revised Estimates for Public Services. I have allocated €85m to the residential retrofit schemes this year. The National Development Plan demonstrates the Government's commitment to meeting Ireland's infrastructure and investment needs over the next ten years, to 2027. The Plan indicates resourcing of €21.8bn for climate and low carbon related actions of which €3bn is for funding residential energy efficiency schemes.

My Department funds the Deep Retrofit Pilot Programme, which is administered by the SEAI. The Programme is investigating the challenges and opportunities of Deep Retrofit, including how to fund it. New Building Regulations will require at least a B2 rating to be achieved where major renovations take place and the NDP commits to upgrading 45,000 homes per year to a B2 rating.

The Deep Retrofit Programme is providing insight on the potential costs of upgrading the building stock, as a greater range of building archetypes are upgraded under the scheme. Development of economies of scale in the market though the aggregation required by the programme will also inform cost.

What is clear is that the Exchequer will not be able to fund the scale of deep retrofit that needs to happen in order for Ireland to meet its climate targets. Alternative financing options, including using EU financial instruments to lower the interest rates for loans for energy efficiency works, have to be a part of Ireland's strategy to decarbonise our buildings.

Climate Change Adaptation Plans

25. Deputy Sean Sherlock asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he is in receipt of local adaptation plans under the national climate change adaptation framework from all local authorities; and if his attention has been drawn to the proposals by local authorities. [3373/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard

Bruton: Ireland's first statutory National Adaptation Framework (NAF), published in January 2018, sets out the context to ensure local authorities, regions and key sectors can assess the key risks and vulnerabilities of climate change, implement climate resilience actions and ensure climate adaptation considerations are mainstreamed into policy making. In January 2018, my Department also entered into a funding commitment of €10m over 5 years to establish four Climate Action Regional Offices. This recognises the significant obligation which has been placed on local government to develop and implement its own climate action measures – both in terms of mitigation and adaptation.

A key work item for the Climate Action Regional Offices in 2019 will be to support the local authorities within their region to develop their local adaptation strategies and ensure they align with national adaptation priorities. The development and approval of the strategies themselves will however be the responsibility of each individual local authority.

Under the National Adaptation Framework, each local authority is required to develop a local adaptation strategy in line with "Local Authority Adaptation Strategy Development Guidelines" which were published by Minister of State Canney on 1 December 2018. Local authorities have been set a deadline for the completion of local strategies of 30 September 2019.

My Department will monitor progress on the development of local adaptation strategies via the National Adaptation Steering Committee, the Climate Action High Level Steering Group as well as through the various governance structures established for the Climate Action Regional Offices.

Recycling Data

26. Deputy Joe Carey asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if progress is being made in increasing the proportion of bottles being recycled; and if he will set a new target for bottle recycling. [3188/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The EPA is the competent authority for the collation of national waste statistics and it reports annually on our performance against Ireland's recycling and recovery targets set out in the EU Packaging and Waste Packaging Directive. However, there are currently no specific targets set for plastic bottles within the Directive and, therefore, data relating to plastic bottles is compiled within data for all other plastic packaging items. The European Commission's "Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the reduction of the impact of certain plastic products on the environment", which is expected to be agreed shortly at European level, contains a number of specific proposals relating to plastic bottles, including measures to ensure that all plastic bottles have tethered lids and that from 2030 all Polyethylene Terephthalate (PET) bottles contain at least 30% recycled plastic. The proposal also sets specific targets for the separate collection and recycling of plastic bottles and states that, by 2025, Member States shall take the necessary measures to collect 77% of plastic bottles separately for recycling, with that figure rising to 90% by 2029. My Department is currently assessing how best to meet these new targets with a number of options under consideration, including a national study into the impact of potentially introducing a Deposit and Return Scheme.

With regard to glass bottles, statistics relating specifically to glass bottles are not collated. However, glass recycling in Ireland is currently at 88%, well ahead of the current EU target of 60%, which is due to increase to 70% by 2025 and 75% by 2030.

North-South Interconnector

27. Deputy Brendan Smith asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the outcome of recent discussions he has had with EirGrid in relation to the concerns of communities in counties Monaghan, Cavan and Meath in relation to the proposal to have the transmission cables for the proposed North-South Interconnector overground; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3406/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The North South Interconnector project will provide a second high-capacity electricity interconnector between the two transmission systems of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Following a rigorous planning process which included an eleven week oral hearing, the section of the project in Ireland was granted planning permission by An Bord Pleanála in December 2016. This decision was subsequently appealed to the Supreme Court and judgement is expected in the coming weeks. The section of the project in Northern Ireland was also granted planning permission. A Judicial Review of this decision was commenced in Northern Ireland and I understand that this is expected to conclude later this year.

Following motions passed in Dáil and Seanad Éireann in early 2017 calling for further independent examination of the project, two studies were commissioned by my predecessor and were published on 2 October 2018 following consideration by Government. The study conducted by an International Expert Commission determined that from a techno-economic point of view, an Alternating Current overhead line is the most beneficial way of meeting the need for enhanced power transfer capability between Ireland and Northern Ireland. This is consistent with previous studies on the matter.

I understand that EirGrid are continuing with landowner and community engagement programmes in areas of Meath, Cavan and Monaghan in order to address the concerns of the local communities, including the deployment of Agricultural and Community Liaison Officers on the ground.

There are currently a number of on-going procurements in relation to the project being undertaken and managed by ESB Networks, such as tower design. However no critical procurement contracts such as construction will be concluded until all legal proceedings have been resolved.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

28. Deputy Bobby Aylward asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the timeline for the commencement of works on the ground under the national broadband plan; the measures contained within same to ensure rapid roll out of broadband services for rural areas, rural communities and regional towns; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3148/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to ensure high speed broadband access to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location. 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.

Questions - Written Answers

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.

With regard to the completion of the build of infrastructure, should a contract be awarded and signed, deployment will commence at the earliest possible opportunity, with activity across all counties in the first year of deployment. Deployment is likely to take several years.

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. 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.

National Broadband Plan

29. Deputy Bríd Smith asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when the decision on the awarding of the national broadband plan will be decided; the estimated cost of the plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3309/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to ensure high speed broadband access (minimum 30 megabits per second) to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location. This is being achieved via a combination of commercial investment and a State led intervention. Commercial operators have invested over €2.75 billion in upgrading and modernising their networks over the past 5 years, bringing high speed broadband to thousands of homes across Ireland on a commercial basis. 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.

The level of subsidy required to bring high speed broadband services to the premises in the NBP State intervention area will be determined through the procurement process. A final tender submission from the remaining bidder has been received by my Department. 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 the coming weeks.

As the Deputy will appreciate, I am not in a position to discuss cost at this point.

Recycling Policy

30. Deputy Peter Burke asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to increase the level of plastic recycling and to reduce the use of non-recyclable plastics in particular. [3175/19]

46. Deputy Pat Deering asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the steps being taken to end the use of non-recyclable plastics. [3182/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 30 and 46 together.

Increasing the level of plastic recycling and ultimately eliminating the use of non-recyclable plastics is a priority for me.

I recently secured Government approval to prohibit Government Departments and State Agencies from purchasing non-recyclable single use plastic cups and cutlery in offices. This is an initial step. To that end, I am working on the implementation of the European Strategy for Plastics in the Circular Economy, which was published in January 2018 by the European Commission. This strategy focuses on plastic production and use and sets a goal of ensuring all plastic placed on the EU market will be recyclable by 2030.

One of the first key legislative proposals to emerge on foot of the EU Plastics Strategy is the “Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the reduction of the impact of certain plastic products on the environment”. The proposed Directive was published by the European Commission on 28 May 2018. This draft legislation proposes new EU-wide rules to target the 10 most prevalent single-use plastic products found on Europe’s beaches and seas, as well as lost and abandoned fishing gear.

The proposed Directive includes:

- bans on certain single-use plastic products;
- obligations on Member States to reduce the use of certain single-use plastics and for the collection of others; and
- obligations on producers of single-use plastic items to cover the costs of waste management and clean up through the establishment of extended producer responsibility schemes.

Ireland has worked closely with other Member States and the EU Commission in progressing this Directive. I expect it to be finalised shortly and I am committed to transposing it into Irish law at the earliest possible date.

Climate Change Policy

31. Deputy Catherine Connolly asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the climate mitigation policy developments on foot of the 2019 climate change performance index which ranked Ireland as the worst performing country in Europe for action on climate change for a second consecutive year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3398/19]

40. Deputy Tom Neville asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the steps he is taking to respond to climate disruption; and the steps he is taking to develop an all of government plan. [3183/19]

59. Deputy Alan Farrell asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on whether enough is being done by Ireland to tackle climate disruption; if sectoral targets will be set to reduce emissions; and his plans to tackle climate disruption. [3173/19]

245. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the extent to which he continues to liaise with other Departments with a view to co-ordinating efforts to reduce emissions in line with international agreements and to protect

industry and agriculture in view of the availability of measures to do so while still meeting the targets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3667/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 31, 40, 59 and 245 together.

I have recently received a mandate from Government to develop on the All of Government Plan to bring about a step change in our climate ambition over the next decade, and beyond. I intend that this new Plan will set out the actions which must be taken to make Ireland a leader in responding to climate change. It will have a strong focus on implementation, including actions with timelines and steps needed to achieve each action, assigning clear lines of responsibility for delivery. I am currently working with my colleagues in Government to prepare proposals for inclusion in the new Plan. The setting of appropriate targets to drive ambition within relevant sectors is a key focus of my work to develop the Plan.

To inform the development of the Plan, I hosted a High Level Consultative Forum on Friday 18 January. This forum was attended by almost 200 people, and included representatives from all of the key sectors responsible for greenhouse gas emissions in Ireland as well as a strong representation from civil society.

I intend that actions to deliver the significant investment priorities identified for funding through the National Development Plan will be included in the new Plan, as well as additional actions that will look to taxation, regulation and behavioural change measures to further enhance Ireland's climate mitigation policies. I intend that the Plan will also recognise, and seek to take advantage of, the economic opportunities that the low carbon transition presents for Ireland.

The Plan will build on existing policy and will be organised around six themes that focus action across Government in all sectors of the economy that contribute to greenhouse gas emissions:

- regulatory framework;
- adoption of known technologies;
- addressing market failure;
- driving change in business models;
- the public sector leading by example; and
- engaging with citizens and communities.

In developing this Plan, I am also looking forward to receiving shortly the final report and recommendations of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action which has, over the last number of months, been considering the report of the Citizens Assembly in relation to climate change.

Waste Management

32. Deputy Brian Stanley asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if consideration has been given to examining the franchise model for household waste collection to replace the side by side competition model. [3355/19]

34. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the development of an independent waste regulator; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3368/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 32 and 34 together.

A review of “*A Resource Opportunity - Waste Management Policy in Ireland*” will be initiated 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.

Illegal Dumping

33. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the steps he is taking to help county councils deal with incidents of illegal dumping and fly tipping; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3407/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): Illegal dumping is a matter of individual responsibility and compliance with the law. While enforcement action in this area is a matter 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. A 2019 anti-dumping initiative will be introduced to work in partnership with local authorities 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 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.

The National Waste Enforcement Steering Committee has identified dealing with sites containing illegally deposited waste as a national waste enforcement priority for 2019. Accordingly, my Department has instructed local authorities to detect such sites and to initiate appropriate enforcement responses. I am prepared to provide assistance both in terms of enforcement costs and site solutions to local authorities who identify and address these sites in 2019.

In recognition of the particular difficulties border counties have experienced in dealing with diesel laundering waste dumping, my Department continues to reimburse the clean-up costs associated with this criminal activity.

Question No. 34 answered with Question No. 32.

Waste Disposal Charges

35. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when a waiver will be issued for persons with disabilities and incontinence issues in regard to waste bills. [3375/19]

38. Deputy John Brady asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when the annual support of €75 for persons with long-term and lifelong medical incontinence under the new waste collection charges announced in June 2017 will be introduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3399/19]

232. Deputy John Brady asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of plans to introduce the promised annual support of €75 for persons with long-term and lifelong medical incontinence under the new waste collection charges announced in June 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53330/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 35, 38 and 232 together.

My Department is continuing the work of developing a mechanism to provide a 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.

National Mitigation Plan Implementation

36. Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the Shannon LNG project and its impact on Ireland's efforts to reduce fossil fuels over time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3189/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The National Mitigation Plan, published in July 2017, restates the Government's commitment to move from a fossil fuel-based electricity system to a low-carbon power system. Investment in further renewable generation will be incentivised. The new Renewable Electricity Support Scheme, approved by government in July 2018, will provide for a renewable electricity ambition of 55% by 2030. Currently, 30% of our electricity is generated from renewables.

I have secured Government approval to develop an all of Government plan which will set out the actions which must be taken to make Ireland a leader in responding to climate change. This Plan will include the steps which we must take in order to reach this target. I will work with colleagues across Government to develop new initiatives across electricity, transport and heat, as well as a range of other sectors.

In all projected transitions to a low carbon economy by 2050, gas will continue to play a role. It plays an important role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the power generation, industrial and commercial, residential and transport sectors by replacing more Co2-intensive fossil fuels. In Ireland gas powered generation also provides an important back-up for intermittent renewable wind generation.

So while gas usage will reduce significantly in the years ahead, Ireland will still need secure sources of gas. At present this is provided by both gas piped on shore from Irish gas fields and imports through gas pipelines from the UK.

The development of an LNG facility could further enhance Ireland's gas security of supply by increasing import route diversity and would be compatible with the State's commitments to

tackle climate change.

Ireland's energy policy is fully aligned with the EU's climate and energy objectives on the transition to decarbonisation, which includes continuous and on-going review of policies to reduce harmful emissions, improve energy efficiency, incentivise efficient and sustainable infrastructure investment, integrate markets, and promote research and innovation while ensuring our energy security of supply is maintained and enhanced.

The project to which the Deputy refers is a private commercial project. Final investment decisions for the project and compliance with any legal and regulatory requirements in relation to consents or permits are the responsibility of the project promoter.

In relation to the production, sourcing, buying and selling of natural gas produced outside this jurisdiction, this is an operational matter for the undertakings involved. Any undertaking would be required to comply with EU law in this area.

Brexit Issues

37. Deputy Sean Sherlock asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the engagement he has had with his counterparts in the United Kingdom Government, the Scottish Government and the Welsh Assembly on environmental issues since his appointment in the context of Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3376/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): Ireland continues to work on preparedness and contingency planning as part of the EU27 with the full support of the European Commission and other Member States. Many of the actions aimed at mitigating the effects of a no deal outcome will be taken at the EU level, as they involve sectors regulated by EU law. The Government's Contingency Action Plan is the culmination of many months of work in this context and gives an overview of the comprehensive, cross-Government preparations that have been in place since even before the Brexit vote. This work continues at both a national and EU level and further updates on no deal preparedness will follow throughout January and February.

In December 2018, on the margins of the EU Environment Council of Ministers, I met with Ms Thérèse Coffey MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the Environment at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to discuss environmental matters generally. Brexit was among the matters raised. I have had no engagement to date on Brexit matters with the other two administrations.

My Department, however, engages with these administrations on an ongoing basis through the British-Irish Council, set up under the Good Friday Agreement. The Council meets in different formats, including summits involving Heads of Government/Administrations and sectoral meetings at Ministerial and official level. The Council provides a forum for discussion on areas of common interest and member administrations exchange information, consult and endeavour to reach agreement on co-operation on matters of mutual interest within the competence of the relevant administrations.

Question No. 38 answered with Question No. 35.

Energy Infrastructure

39. Deputy Alan Farrell asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and En-

vironment his plans to roll out smart meters; and his views on whether smart meters can be a tool to address Ireland's climate commitments. [3174/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Smart Meter Upgrade is being coordinated by the Commission for Regulation of Utilities, and ESB Networks are responsible for rolling out smart electricity meters. This is a significant energy infrastructure project, involving the installation of new meters to over 2 million customers nationwide. The rollout will occur in a phased basis, commencing with an initial delivery of 250,000 meters across the latter half of 2019 and 2020 and approximately 500,000 meters in each of the four subsequent years. By 2020 almost three quarters of a million of existing meters will be more than 40 years old and in need of replacement.

Last week's announcement by ESB Networks lays out the details of three procurement processes related to the Smart Meter Upgrade – the smart meters themselves, their deployment and the communications technology they will use. The announcement of the awards of contracts followed a rigorous tendering process carried out by ESB Networks in 2018.

The national installation of smart meters is a key enabler of Ireland's transition to a low carbon energy system that will help deliver on our climate action goals. There will be no need for estimated bills with smart meters. Accurate energy usage information across the day will enable consumers to be more efficient in their use of electricity and save money (e.g. by using appliances off peak). This will, in turn, reduce the need for less efficient and more costly generation at peak times and support the increase in renewable power on the electricity system. Smart meters will also support greater uptake of electric vehicles and micro-generation.

Question No. 40 answered with Question No. 31.

Renewable Energy Generation

41. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the extent to which the electricity generating capacity reliance on fossil fuels has been reduced in the past five years; the degree to which clean energy alternatives have been developed in the same period; the current and expected capacity in this regard in the foreseeable future with particular reference to the development of realistic and reliable alternatives to conventional fuels with a view to meeting carbon target reductions and avoidance of internationally set penalties or fines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3378/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): EirGrid have estimated that renewable electricity as a percentage of demand has risen from 23.5% in 2014 to approximately 35% in 2018. Details in relation to All-Island electricity system demand and fuel mix are publicly available on the EirGrid website at www.eirgridgroup.com/. This includes information on the number, type and generating capacity of plants on the system. EirGrid's recent "All-Island Generation Capacity Statement" published in 2018 also gives further details of the electricity fuel mix (2017) from different energy sources for both Ireland and Northern Ireland. The total amount of renewable generation connected to the electricity grid at November 2018 was 3,938 Mega Watts (MW), of which wind generation was approximately 3,610 MW, hydro was 238 MW and biomass was 91 MW. EirGrid estimates that a total of between 3,900 MW and 4,300 MW of onshore renewable generation capacity will be required to allow Ireland to achieve 40% renewable electricity by 2020.

The Energy in Ireland 2018 Report (Table 11, page 34) from the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) published in December 2018 shows the degree to which electricity pro-

duction from renewable energy sources has increased over the last five years. Looking forward to the projected renewable electricity capacity needed to meet Ireland's energy and climate ambitions, EirGrid's "Tomorrow's Energy Scenarios 2017 (July 2017) maps out possible four future scenarios covering the years 2020 to 2040.

Renewable Energy Generation Targets

42. Deputy Peter Burke asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the steps he is taking to increase the amount of electricity being generated from renewable sources; and the steps he is taking to develop micro generation. [3176/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): In achieving our renewable energy targets under the EU Renewable Energy Directive 2009, Ireland has set a national sub target of meeting 40% electricity requirements from renewable sources by 2020. Ireland is committed to achieving this and the latest data from the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) indicate that 30.1% of our electricity came from renewable sources in 2017. The Government has adopted a range of policy measures and schemes to incentivise the use of renewable electricity including the Renewable Energy Feed-In-Tariff (REFIT) schemes. In addition, my Department is developing the new Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS), which will be designed to assist Ireland in meeting its renewable electricity ambition of 55% out to 2030. In July 2018 a new pilot scheme to support micro generation was introduced, initially targeting domestic self-consumption through a grant scheme for solar PV installation and battery storage. A review of the pilot scheme will inform potential future phases of support for micro generation. As I outlined in the Dáil on 27 November last, in response to the Micro Generation Support Scheme Bill, I am supportive in principle of providing a route to market for citizens and communities to generate their own renewable energy and receive a fair and efficient price for doing so. This very much aligns with Ireland's energy policy as set out in the Energy White Paper 2015 and wider EU energy policy goals.

Electric Vehicles

43. Deputy Pat Deering asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the steps he is taking to develop a modern EV charging network; and the location of new EV chargers being funded by the climate action fund. [3181/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The majority of the existing publicly accessible electric vehicle infrastructure was rolled out by the ESB through its eCars programme. This network includes 77 fast chargers, mainly on national routes. A map showing the charge points, including the status and availability of the charge points, is available on the ESB's website at www.esb.ie/ecars. Under the Climate Action Fund, I approved funding of up to €10 million to a project from ESB eCars that will develop a nationwide, state-of-the-art electric vehicle fast charging network capable of facilitating large-scale electric vehicle uptake over the next decade. The project successfully completed the assessment stage and is now going through the validation stage. On completion of this stage further detail on the project, including information in relation to the location of chargers, will be set out.

Funding for public charging in local communities is also available through the Better Energy Communities Scheme. The scheme, which is administered by the SEAI, supports community based partnerships to improve the energy efficiency of homes, businesses and community

facilities in a local area.

In addition, my Department, in conjunction with the SEAI, is working on how best to support the provision of greater levels of on-street public charging.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

44. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the position regarding the roll out of the national broadband plan with specific reference to County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3144/19]

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 the country, and a State intervention in those areas where commercial operators acting alone are unlikely to invest. There are approximately 82,407 premises in County Wexford. Since December 2015, the number of premises with access to high speed broadband in Wexford has increased by 17,289, a 10% increase. In total, the number of premises in Wexford with access to high speech broadband is 58,379, or 71% of total premises in the county. Another 2,306 will be served by eir under that company's ongoing rural deployment.

The remaining 21,722 homes, schools and businesses in Wexford will be connected under the government's NBP 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 or Eircode.

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 the coming weeks.

Climate Change Policy

45. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if a further call for applications for the climate action fund will be made in the future in view of the announcement of the first successful projects in late November 2018. [3179/19]

53. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if the development of the climate action fund will be prioritised to include community based projects. [3178/19]

57. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the role which local authorities nationally will play as applicants or project partners in the seven projects recently announced under the climate action fund. [3186/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 45, 53 and 57 together.

The Local Authorities have been major players in the recent competition for support from the Climate Action Fund. Among the seven successful projects, two Local Authorities are the lead applicants and, in respect of another, 27 different Local Authorities are participating as project partners.

Local Authorities have also been involved in a number of the 90 applicant projects which were not successful on this occasion.

The two District Heating projects, that are led by Local Authorities, have the potential to heat the equivalent of up to 60,000 homes and deliver major improvements in energy efficiency and carbon emissions.

The 27 Local Authorities are participating in a public lighting efficiency project to retrofit all remaining 326,000 non-LED public lights in their areas which could save in excess of 300 thousand tonnes of carbon emissions over a ten year period.

The scope, structure and timeframe of future calls for applications have not yet been determined. To assist development of future calls, my Department plans to hold a workshop with all those who applied under the first call. This workshop, which will be held at the end of this month, will provide the opportunity to provide feedback to applicants and also to inform the next call.

Question No. 46 answered with Question No. 30.

Broadband Service Provision

47. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the position regarding progress in the provision of high speed, high quality broadband in all areas nationally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3379/19]

48. Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the progress to date with the approval of the national broadband scheme; when it is likely a contract will be awarded; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3146/19]

54. Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the progress made to date in the roll out of rural broadband by a company (details supplied) which is subject to a contract with his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3147/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 47, 48 and 54 together.

The National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to ensure high speed broadband access to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location. 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.

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:

- The AMBER area represents the parts of the country where commercial operators have no plans to build high speed broadband networks. Premises in the AMBER area will be provided with high Speed Broadband through a State Intervention.

- The BLUE area represents those areas where commercial providers are either currently delivering or have plans to deliver high speed broadband services.

- The LIGHT BLUE area represents eir's commercial rural deployment plans to rollout high speed broadband to 300,000 premises as part of a Commitment Agreement signed with my Department in April 2017.

Information on categories of specific premises can be accessed on my Department's website, www.broadband.gov.ie, by entering the relevant Eircode into the High Speed Broadband Map. For those premises which fall within eir's commercial deployment to 300,000 premises further detail is provided on that company's website, www.fibrerollout.ie.

Under a Commitment Agreement signed with my Department in April 2017, eir is in the process of passing 300,000 predominantly rural homes with high speed broadband. According to information submitted by eir to my Department, as of Quarter 4 2018 the company has passed some 225,000 premises nationwide as part of its ongoing deployment. This is in the process of verification by officials in my Department.

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. 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.

Broadcasting Sector

49. Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he has considered the recommendations of an organisation (details supplied) and the need for support for Irish independent productions through television licence fee reforms. [3190/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am aware of Screen Producers Ireland's role as the representative body for independent producers. Both Public Service Broadcasters spend millions of euro each year on independently produced programming. This is vital in supporting a vibrant independent sector, including in the regions. Section 116 of the Broadcasting Act 2009 provides that RTÉ make specific

amounts available each year for the commissioning of television and radio programmes from the independent production sector. In 2017, RTE spent €39.7m on independent productions. TG4 commissions the majority of its Irish language programmes from independent production companies throughout Ireland. In 2017, the broadcaster spent over €21.6m on independent productions, which was 88% of its annual programme budget for that year.

In addition, the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland is responsible for the administration of the Broadcasting Fund which includes the Sound and Vision Scheme. This scheme, which is financed from the TV Licence fee, provides funding in support of high quality programmes on Irish culture, heritage and experience, programmes to improve adult literacy, and archiving of programme material. Revenue from this fund can be applied for by independent producers and broadcasters for specific projects of a public service nature. In 2017, €12m in funding supported 63 television and 176 radio projects.

The Joint Oireachtas Committee on Communications, Climate Action and Environment examined the longer term issue of the future funding of public service media. The Committee published their report at the end of November 2017.

Following consideration of the recommendations made in that report, Government approval was received in July 2018 to establish a Working Group on the Future Funding of Public Service Broadcasting. The Working Group, which is chaired by my Department, is currently deliberating on a number of options for the reform of the TV Licence Fee and its collection. It is due to report to me by the end of March.

Better Energy Communities Programme

50. Deputy Fergus O'Dowd asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the schemes available for homes and business to reduce carbon emitted through buildings; and the number that have benefitted to date. [3180/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) is funded by my Department to administer energy efficiency grant schemes for both homes and businesses. Details of these grants are provided below and further information is available on SEAI's website <https://www.seai.ie/>. Homes:

- A range of grants are available to householders to suit their circumstances and scale of work they wish to undertake.
- 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.
- 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 encourages and supports community based partnerships to carry out energy efficiency upgrades to mixed projects of homes, community facilities and businesses within a local community.

- The Warmth and Wellbeing Pilot 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 is available to homeowners who want to upgrade their house to an A BER while availing of grant support of up to 50%.

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.

Businesses:

- The Excellence in Energy Efficient Design (EXEED) Certified Program focuses on lifecycle energy performance in the industrial, commercial and public sectors. It works by using grant offers to incentivise businesses or organisations to look at projects from the design stage, and consider the most efficient process when commissioning or designing a new project, process or asset. This scheme is applicable to any sector or organisation, and to projects of any scale or complexity. The EXEED Grant Scheme can provide grant support of up to €500,000. In 2018 56 projects have received grant funding through this program.

- The SEAI SME Programmes supports businesses to tackle their energy costs. SEAI have worked with over 3,000 businesses of all sizes and types, and delivered savings of up to 30% for participants through the programmes. Two pilot schemes operated in 2017 and 2018:

- Dairy Farm Grant Scheme provided in collaboration with Teagasc offered grants of 40% to support the installation of efficient vacuum and milk pump technology which can significantly reduce energy and costs to farmers – with 116 benefiting from this scheme.

- The Smart Lighting Pilot Scheme encourages and supports businesses to upgrade their lighting by providing grants of up to 30% which enables businesses to permanently reduce their future energy use and spend on lighting. To date 256 SMEs have availed of this scheme.

Gas Exploration Licences

51. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the policy in relation to the facilitation of new LNG facilities. [3263/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): Natural Gas, the lowest carbon-emitting fossil fuel, is an important transition fuel on the pathway to decarbonisation. The International Energy Agency's World Energy Outlook 2017 recognises the role which gas will play in the transition to 2050. In Ireland, gas powered electricity generation provides an important back-up for intermittent renewable wind generation. Natural Gas has the potential to play an important role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the power generation, industrial and commercial, residential and transport sectors by replacing more CO₂-intensive fossil fuels.

The potential for LNG was examined as part of a study carried out by Gas Networks Ireland and EirGrid, on Ireland's resilience to a long-term gas disruption. While the study found that Ireland's gas network is largely resilient to cope with a long duration gas disruption, it recommended, subject to a detailed cost benefit analysis, a floating LNG terminal may be the most appropriate option to further enhance Ireland's security of gas supply.

There have been a number of announcements of private sector commercial proposals to build LNG facilities in Ireland. These are commercial projects and the location, development

and final investment decisions for these projects are ultimately the responsibility of the project promoters. It is the responsibility of the respective project promoters to comply with any legal and regulatory requirements, including requirements for planning permission, consents, permits and related environmental impact assessments.

Question No. 52 answered with Question No. 21.

Question No. 53 answered with Question No. 45.

Question No. 54 answered with Question No. 47.

Bioenergy Strategy

55. Deputy Brian Stanley asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if consideration has been given to the manner in which indigenous biomass supply can be grown to maintain security of energy supply and used to replace peat in peat electricity power plants. [3356/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The three peat-fired electricity generating stations in Ireland, one owned by Bord na Móna and two by ESB, were awarded support for biomass combustion under the REFIT3 Scheme for up to 30% of the installed capacity up to 2030. Bord na Móna commenced co-firing at its Edenderry Plant with biomass in 2008, and it is expected that ESB will commence co-firing at its 2 peat fired plants with biomass in 2020. ESB is in the process of seeking planning permission for the phased transition of its stations to biomass by the end of 2027. Bord na Móna currently has planning permission to co-fire with up to 30% biomass.

In relation to the supply of biomass, Bord na Móna's BioEnergy division sources sustainable biomass that is used at the Edenderry power station and I am advised that up to 80% of the biomass used in the Edenderry power station is from domestic sources. However, in the event that all three peat-fired plants have planning permission to co-fire with biomass, it is unlikely that the amount of biomass required will be supplied from indigenous sources. It is likely that the supply deficit would be met by imports.

In addition to the three power stations, there is demand for biomass for use in industry and in residential heating, and the Government's Support Scheme for Renewable Heat will also create a demand for biomass supplies in the coming years.

As pointed out by Coford in its recent reports on Wood Supply and Demand to 2025, and Mobilising Ireland's Forest Resource, the key challenge is to ensure a balanced approach to the development of wood resource to best meet demand. Mobilising the private supply of indigenous resources is a key factor. As the supply of indigenous biomass increases, supported by the forestry programme and other measures, imported biomass will be displaced.

Broadband Service Provision

56. Deputy Brendan Smith asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the progress expected in 2019 in the delivery of the national broadband plan to counties Cavan and Monaghan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3377/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): As set out in the reply of PQ 857 of 15 January, 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. 57 answered with Question No. 45.

Climate Change Policy

58. Deputy Mick Wallace asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if the findings of a study commissioned by a publication (details supplied) have been reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3403/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions arise from a number of different sources, with agriculture representing the largest share at 33.3% of total emissions in 2017. Agriculture emissions increased by 2.9% in 2017 following an increase in 2016 of 2.7%. The most significant drivers for the increased emissions in 2017 are higher dairy cow numbers, with an increase in milk production of 9.2%. In the last 5 years, dairy cow numbers have increased by 26.1% and corresponding milk production by 38.8%. This reflects national plans to expand milk production under Food Wise 2025 and the removal of the milk quota in 2015. I have recently received a mandate from Government to begin the preparation of a new All of Government Plan to bring about a step change in our climate ambition over the next decade, and beyond. My vision is that this new Plan will set out the actions which must be taken to make Ireland a leader in responding to climate change. In developing this Plan, all proposals which can inform and lead to significant greenhouse gas emission reductions are being considered.

Over the longer term, it is clear that climate change presents a long-term challenge across the whole of the economy and that all sectors are going to have to play their part if we are to achieve the deep decarbonisation to meet the objectives of the 2014 National Policy Position on Climate Action and Low Carbon Development.

Matters relating to agriculture and food policy are, in the first instance, a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

Question No. 59 answered with Question No. 31.

Broadband Service Provision

60. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he is satisfied with the level of broadband coverage in County Meath. [3249/19]

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 the country, and a State intervention in those areas where commercial operators acting alone are unlikely to invest. There are approximately 85,300 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 speech broadband is 62,934, or 74% of total premises in the county. Another 2,468 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 National Broadband Plan.

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 or Eircode.

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 the coming weeks.

National Mitigation Plan

61. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his attention has been drawn to a report (details supplied); if he is considering a similar policy approach as part of the national mitigation plan, national energy and climate plan and the all of Government plan for climate disruption; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3264/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): Greenhouse gas emissions and removals associated with land use, land use change and forestry (LULUCF), as reported in Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions inventory, include activities associated with afforestation and forestry harvesting, grassland and cropland management with agricultural use, managed and unmanaged wetlands, and other land-use categories (including settlements). While such emissions are not currently accounted for in relation to

the calculation of compliance with Ireland's emissions targets in the period to 2020, from 2021 onwards these emissions will be integrated into the EU framework for compliance with national emissions targets. It is, therefore, essential that Ireland has robust policies in place to manage emissions and enhance removals from relevant LULUCF sectoral categories.

In relation to the report referred to, the need to achieve deep reductions in greenhouse gas emissions over the coming decades will pose significant long-term challenges to our existing approach to land use. This is already anticipated in the 2014 National Policy Position which sets out a long-term vision of low carbon transition based, inter alia, on an approach to carbon neutrality in the agriculture and land-use sector, including forestry, which does not compromise capacity for sustainable food production.

Matters relating to land use policy concerning land under agricultural and forestry production are, in the first instance, a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

Broadband Service Provision

62. Deputy John Brady asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the reason a school (details supplied) was not included in plans to bring broadband to an area; if the school will be facilitated to access broadband; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3400/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The premises referenced 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. I note that there is some deployment of infrastructure by eir in the area of the school premises. This is part of that company's ongoing rural fibre rollout.

eir's rural investment in high speed broadband is an entirely commercial undertaking, and not part of the planned State Intervention network. Although the deployment is monitored under the terms of a Commitment Agreement signed between the company and my Department, it is not funded by the State and it is not planned, designed or directed by my Department in any capacity.

The selection of what premises are to be served under eir's deployment is an internal and commercial decision for that company. My Department has no statutory authority or function to intervene in the company's commercial decisions, nor in any decisions relating to the roll out and siting of infrastructure throughout Ireland by service providers operating in a liberalised market.

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.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

63. Deputy Catherine Connolly asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Ac-

tion and Environment the percentage range by sector by which Ireland is likely to miss 2020 greenhouse gas emissions targets to reduce emissions to 20% below 2005 levels; the estimated annual fines Ireland is likely to face as a consequence; the steps being taken to address these shortfalls; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3397/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): Under the 2009 Effort Sharing Decision, which put in place binding annual emissions targets for each year between 2013 and 2020 for sectors outside the EU Emissions Trading System, Ireland must achieve a reduction of 20% relative to 2005 levels of emissions. The latest projections, published in May 2018 by the EPA, indicate that emissions from those sectors of the economy covered by the Effort Sharing Decision could be only between 0% and 1% below 2005 levels by 2020. The EU system does not fix separate targets for different sectors. The Effort Sharing Decision allows Member States to meet their targets using unused emissions allowances from earlier years, or through purchasing allowances from other Member States or on international markets. Ireland has certain accumulated credits already acquired. However, I am advised that Ireland will need to purchase allowances to meet projected shortfalls in 2019 and 2020. My Department currently estimates the costs of this requirement to be in the region of €6m to €13m, depending on the price and final quantity of allowances required.

I have recently secured Government approval to prepare an All-of-Government Plan which will set out the actions to be taken to make Ireland a leader in responding to climate change, including how Ireland will, at the very least, meet its targets for the period to 2030.

Post Office Closures

64. Deputy Thomas Pringle asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on the closure of rural post offices in the context of the need for climate abatement measures in which the provision of services close to the public would reduce the need for travel in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3143/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): An Post is a commercial State body with its own Board. Decisions relating to the post office network are an operational matter for An Post. In the face of serious declines in the volume of mail and post office business, An Post faced growing losses and has had to undertake a major restructuring of its business in order to continue to be able to provide its services.

insofar as post office closures are concerned, An Post established a protocol which sets out how the company would facilitate the continued provision of Post Office services where post-masters choose to retire. Its aim is to make as many post offices as possible viable. The protocol takes account of minimum service levels which aim to ensure that all areas with over 500 people will have a Post Office. In rural areas, 95% of the population will be within 15km of at least one Post Office. In urban areas, 95% of the population will be within 3km of at least one post office. The aim is to ensure the retention of a viable post office network where individuals will have to travel the minimum distance possible to avail of the post office facilities.

The company has established a separate business unit to have full control over the post office network and is fully committed to the remaining 960 post offices, which includes an extensive rural network.

Question No. 65 answered with Question No. 16.

Questions - Written Answers
Renewable Energy Generation

66. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he considered the findings and recommendations of a report (details supplied) on healthy diets and sustainable food systems in developing the plan on climate change. [3304/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The findings of the recently published Lancet Commission report, ‘Tracking Progress on Health and Climate Change’, covers a range of policy areas that are currently being considered in the context of the All of Government Plan to Address Climate Disruption. Phasing out coal-fired power generation is a key recommendation, and this is currently already an action in the National Mitigation Plan and will be further advanced in the All of Government Plan. Encouraging a city-level low-carbon transition to reduce urban pollution is also being progressed in the context of measures in the transport sector, including actions to increase the numbers of electric vehicles in Ireland and further increase biofuel blends. The Lancet report calls for a rapid expansion of access to renewable energy, unlocking the substantial economic gains available from this transition. This a critical policy area on which the Plan will focus considerable ambition and I anticipate that a significant scale-up in the penetration of renewables will feature in the Plan.

Defence Forces Deployment

67. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 20, 25 and 32 of 17 January 2019, if his attention has been drawn to the fact that UNIFIL and UNDOF operate under UN Charter Article VI which is primarily in relation to peacekeeping and that the mission to Mali, MINUSMA is under UN Charter Article VII which means it is a mission to maintain peace through force and thus qualitatively different to UNIFIL. [3481/19]

68. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the reason he considers the Army Ranger Wing would be suitable to serve in the MINUSMA mission in Mali in view of the fact that it is an elite special forces unit that is not trained or organised for peacekeeping. [3482/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 67 and 68 together.

The Army Ranger Wing (ARW) are the Special Operations Forces of the Defence Forces. In this context, the ARW are trained and equipped to undertake a range of specialist roles. They are an elite military unit and their capability is a significant asset to the State both in a domestic national security role and in an overseas role.

The ARW is part and parcel of the capabilities available to the State to be deployed in support of our national security and overseas peace support operations. They are deployed overseas to UN peacekeeping missions in accordance with the provisions of the Defence Acts and their deployment is covered by the same legislative provisions as apply to the rest of the Permanent Defence Force. The statutory authority for the despatch of contingents of the Permanent Defence Force for service overseas is set out in Section 2 of the Defence (Amendment) (No.2) Act, 1960 as amended by the Defence (Amendment) Act, 2006. The ARW have previously been deployed on UN mandated peacekeeping operations including, in what was then East Timor with INTERFET, in Liberia with UNMIL and in Chad with EUFOR tChad/RCA where their particular skill set has been required.

MINUSMA, the UN mission in Mali is authorised under Chapter VII of the UN Charter by the UN Security Council. It is a significant UN peace enforcement mission comprising both regular and special operations forces and high end capabilities. The option to deploy a small contingent of Army Ranger Wing personnel to MINUSMA as part of a larger Special Operations Forces within the mission later this year has arisen.

Ireland currently has no Defence Forces personnel deployed to the UN mandated MINUSMA mission. However, potential overseas missions are considered on an on-going basis. The Department and the Defence Forces are in the very early information gathering stage in considering this particular mission. This involves getting detailed information on the mission and its operations, consideration of the possible role which the Defence Forces may be able to undertake in the mission, how such a deployment fits with Defence Forces capabilities having regard to existing and potential commitments at home and overseas and a detailed threat analysis and assessment. This process has only just commenced and will take a period of time to reach a conclusion. On foot of the respective military and policy advice arising from this process, I will then consider the matter. I should emphasise again that no decision has been taken yet and there is some way to go in the process before we reach that point.

Army Barracks Closures

69. Deputy Jack Chambers asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the amount paid to private security firms for the provision of security services by the Defence Forces in each of the past three years in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3504/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): When a military installation is closed and is surplus to requirements all military responsibility for the installation ceases. My Department then takes responsibility for maintenance and security.

In the case of former Columb Barracks, Mullingar, which closed in 2012, my Department put private security arrangements in place in order to prevent the premises being vandalised and becoming the focus of anti-social behaviour. In that regard the effectiveness of the security measures currently in place are being continuously monitored and I am satisfied that the arrangements are warranted for the reasons indicated above. The security company also assists with the ongoing daily management of the Barracks.

The amount paid to the security firm for each of the past 3 years is shown in tabular form on the table.

Provision of Security Services

| Year | Location | Cost |
|------|-----------------------------------|--------------------|
| 2016 | Former Columb Barracks, Mullingar | €37,918.44 |
| 2017 | Former Columb Barracks, Mullingar | €37,608.48 |
| 2018 | Former Columb Barracks, Mullingar | €37,608.48 |
| | TOTAL | €113,135.40 |

Departmental Meetings

70. Deputy Jack Chambers asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of meetings his Department had with the representative associations regarding the working time directive 2003; the dates on which they occurred; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[3533/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Conciliation and Arbitration (C&A) Scheme for members of the Permanent Defence Force (PDF) provides an established mechanism for the PDF representative associations to engage with the Official side.

There is ongoing regular engagement between Department officials and the Representative side on a range of items which are processed through the C&A scheme. The EU Working Time Directive has been the subject of discussions at Conciliation Council many times and has been referenced in Conciliation Council Reports.

The government has committed to bringing the Defence Forces within the scope of the Organisation of Working Time Act, 1997 having regard to the specifics of the EU Working Time Directive. The implementation of this for the Defence Forces is a matter which is being pursued by the Representative Associations through the C&A scheme. As matters dealt with under the C&A Scheme are confidential in nature it would not be appropriate for me to comment further.

Department of Defence and Defence Forces officials also met with representatives from PD-FORRA and RACO on 23rd July 2018. The meeting discussed the establishment of a sub-committee of the Conciliation & Arbitration (C&A) Council to examine these matters. Terms of reference for this sub-committee are under consideration.

Work is also underway to progress the legislative changes required with the Department of Employment Affairs & Social Protection in conjunction with the Department of Justice & Equality. An internal Defence Forces Working Group is also further considering issues and will report on its findings shortly.

Further consultation with the Defence Forces Representative Associations will be undertaken as the current work evolves.

Commemorative Medals

71. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence further to Parliamentary Question No. 1725 of 26 July 2017, if the issue of awarding 1916 commemorative medals to all retired members of the Defence Forces will be reviewed with a view to awarding the medals in 2019. [3552/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Programme for Government provided for the award of the 1916 Commemorative medal to all Defence Forces personnel, Permanent and Reserve, who were recorded as being in service in the course of 2016. This was a special acknowledgement from the Government to the members of Óglaigh na hÉireann who served during the centenary year.

As the Deputy is aware from my replies to previous Parliamentary Questions, and as I have indicated in response to representations on this issue, many thousands of personnel have served in the Defence Forces since the foundation of the State. To put in place a mechanism to establish the identity of each, contact those who are still alive, decide on eligibility and, in the case of infirm or deceased former members, resolve who should get the medal on their behalf, would place an inordinate and disproportionate administrative burden on my Department. This, in turn, would divert important resources to the detriment of other more pressing and relevant requirements of my Department and the Defence Forces.

In recognition of the contribution of veterans to the centenary commemorative events in 2016 it was agreed to present a framed medal to each of the Veterans Associations along with a plaque for each of ONE's 41 Branches and each of IUNVA's 21 Posts. It is not proposed to revisit this arrangement.

Service Medals

72. Deputy Gerry Adams asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if consideration will be given to adapting the existing scheme for posthumously awarding a service medal for Cumann na mBan members in view of the difficulties experienced by many women in Northern Ireland that did not apply for pensions or medals due to the political circumstances within the country at the time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3573/19]

73. Deputy Gerry Adams asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he or his officials have considered additional schemes which would seek to give an official recognition to the significant role played by Cumann na mBan members (details supplied). [3574/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 72 and 73 together.

In certain situations a service medal can be posthumously awarded if no such medal was previously awarded. This is only done in exceptional cases and only where there is incontrovertible verified evidence available from Departmental records that the criteria for the award of a medal have been met. The relevant records were maintained for the specific purpose of dealing with individual applications for medals or pensions and not to act as a record of all activities during the Easter Rising and the War of Independence. Where a person made an application for a pension or medal in respect of their service or involvement in the Easter Rising and/or War of Independence, verified evidence of service was required before the award of a pension or medal was made. Such verification was provided by surviving members of the old IRA and other related organisations who knew of the membership and activities of the applicant. However, not every individual who was involved in Easter Week and/or the War of Independence made an application for a pension or medal and in such cases there would have been no reason to seek or hold verification of membership or individual activities.

As the Deputy will appreciate, there are now no surviving members of Cumann na mBan or the old IRA alive who could verify membership. Due to the length of time that has now elapsed there is no mechanism available at this stage by which service and activities, in the absence of existing Departmental records, can be investigated or verified. In the absence of a verification process at this stage it is very difficult to satisfy the requirements and therefore the award of such posthumous medals is quite rare.

Any application for a posthumous medal made to my Department will be carefully considered; however, I have no plans to put in place wider arrangements or to amend the criteria in relation to the posthumous award of medals relating the 1916-1921 period.

I can confirm that there are no applications for posthumous medals in respect of Cumann na mBan service on hand, nor have any such applications been received in recent years. If the Deputy has a case in mind he can contact my office and I will look into the matter.

Brexit Issues

74. Deputy Lisa Chambers asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of meetings he has attended since the beginning of September 2018 with his officials to discuss and prepare for Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3594/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The outcome of the vote of 23 June 2016 in the UK will have implications across all aspects of the business of the European Union. While the vote does not give rise to fundamental strategic issues for Defence Forces operations or for Ireland's continuing engagement within the EU in the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), it is expected that Brexit will have an impact on future developments in the Defence sphere.

Brexit is a priority issue for this Government, and the Taoiseach, my cabinet colleagues and I have taken every opportunity to engage with EU partners and the UK to advance Ireland's priorities.

I have continually engaged with my EU counterparts to highlight Ireland's concerns in relation to Brexit and to ensure that these concerns are fully reflected in the EU position during negotiations. My activities are reinforced by extensive engagement at diplomatic and official level. At Ministerial level I have ongoing contact with my EU colleagues, both in the context of European Defence and Security, and other matters, including Brexit.

As Chair of the Government Task Force on Emergency Planning, I have regularly emphasised at our meetings the need for all Departments and Agencies to consider any implications that Brexit might have specifically on emergency planning in Ireland. In addition to Departmental planning for Brexit, the Government Task Force has been periodically briefed by those with the lead responsibilities for managing Ireland's position on Brexit.

The overarching response to the decision of the UK is being dealt with within the existing organisational structure of the Department of Defence and the Department operates within the Government structures which are in place to manage the process on a whole-of-government basis.

These structures include:

A Cabinet Committee on Brexit chaired by An Taoiseach that oversees the overall Government response, including both the economic impact and the negotiations at EU level and with the administrations in London and Belfast;

An Assistant Secretary group looking at no-deal planning and Ireland's contingency responses. This group was established in Q4 2018 and forms a key part of our whole-of-Government, interdepartmental approach to contingency planning for the non-central case;

An integrated Division within the Department of the Taoiseach having responsibility for supporting the Taoiseach in his work on EU, Northern Ireland, British-Irish and International affairs;

The strengthening of the EU policy role of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade as well as the strengthening of other key Departments, agencies and overseas missions.

This is complemented by additional structures including:

- An Interdepartmental Group on EU-UK Affairs;
- The Cabinet Committee on EU Affairs and the Senior Officials Group that supports it;
- The joint UK Permanent Secretaries/Irish Secretaries General group and its North-South

equivalent;

- The identification of a senior official in every Government Department, including in the Department of Defence, to oversee this issue;

- A wider consultative group of stakeholders, chaired by Department of the Taoiseach, comprising key business representative groups, ICTU and NGOs.

Engagement with these structures is carried out on a day-to-day basis by officials at my Department who are active participants in the whole-of-Government approach to planning for Brexit.

Defence Forces Recruitment

75. Deputy Mick Wallace asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 110 to 112, inclusive, of 28 November 2018, the reason for the delay in answering the questions; when responses to these questions will be issued; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3625/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I am advised that the delay in providing the information sought was brought about by the need to source material to provide a comprehensive reply. The questions and subsequent reply were also connected to another Ministerial Representation in the system at the time. The reply to all three questions is expected to issue shortly.

Defence Forces Recruitment

76. Deputy Mick Wallace asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he is satisfied with the procedures for height measurement and determination at entry to the Defence Forces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3626/19]

77. Deputy Mick Wallace asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of times a person (details supplied) was measured during the recruitment and training process prior to discharge; the exact reading of each measurement; the number of Defence Forces medical personnel involved in measuring the person; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3627/19]

78. Deputy Mick Wallace asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he will reconsider the discharge of a person (details supplied) and immediately move to reinstate the person in view of his acknowledgement that he is reviewing the procedures for height measurement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3628/19]

79. Deputy Mick Wallace asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he is considering remeasuring all Defence Forces personnel in view of his acknowledgement that he is reviewing the procedures for height measurement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3629/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 76 to 79, inclusive, together.

The minimum height requirement for general service recruitment is set out in Defence Forces Regulation. This prescribes a minimum height requirement for enlistment for general

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service in the Permanent Defence Force (PDF) of 157.48cm. This requirement was made following recommendations by a Defence Forces Working Group which reported in January 2006 and reduced the previous height requirement for both males and females.

The determination of a minimum height requirement for enlistment in the Defence Forces is based on the ergonomic requirements for all members of the Defence Forces to train and carry out operations both at home and overseas with service Personal Load Carrying Equipment.

The height requirements in place were introduced following detailed consideration and were intended to ensure that personnel can conduct safely the various military tasks assigned to them, and they are of general application to all recruits. Accordingly, the height requirements remain in place. The military authorities have informed me that they will conduct another review of DF height standards to update, if necessary, the 2006 report.

It is not permissible for me to release personal data relating to the individual named in your questions but I wish to inform you that I have replied to queries raised by her.

Brexit Negotiations

80. Deputy Micheál Martin asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on his most recent conversation with Mr. Michel Barnier following the result of the vote on the withdrawal treaty which was defeated in the House of Commons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3541/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I met with Michel Barnier on 21 January, in the margins of the Foreign Affairs Council in Brussels. We discussed the disappointing but not unexpected outcome of the 15 January vote in the House of Commons on the EU-UK Withdrawal Agreement. Both Mr Barnier and I are in agreement that what we need from the UK is clarity on how it proposes to move forward, and ultimately what it wants to achieve. The EU could then consider any next steps it might take. The EU continues to take a united approach to the negotiations and I thanked Mr Barnier for his unwavering support for Ireland.

Mr Barnier and I remain firmly of the view that the only way to ensure an orderly withdrawal is to ratify the Withdrawal Agreement as endorsed by the European Council and agreed with the British Government. The European Council has made clear that it stands by the Withdrawal Agreement and that it is not open for renegotiation. The EU stands ready to work further on the Political Declaration as we look to the future relationship.

Mr Barnier reaffirmed his commitment to the backstop provisions contained in the Agreement, which is the only agreement on the table that provides the essential legal guarantee to avoid a hard border in any circumstances and protect the Good Friday Agreement in all its parts.

In light of the ongoing uncertainty in Britain, however, the European Council has asked that preparedness work at the national and EU level intensify, taking account of all possible outcomes. I outlined Ireland's approach in this regard, including planned legislation and other contingency measures. I also thanked Mr Barnier for the Commission's continued helpful and constructive engagement in this area, and their understanding of the particular challenges faced by Ireland.

Passport Data

81. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the budgetary increases in both capital and non-capital allocation for processing passport applications in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3542/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Decisions on the final total allocation to the Passport Service in 2019 are currently being finalised in the Department. As already announced in Budget 2019, last October, further funding is being earmarked for the Passport Service, which has seen a significant increase in demand for Irish passports from Irish citizens in Northern Ireland and Great Britain since the UK voted to leave the EU.

2019 Estimates allocations will help the Department to address critical challenges that are facing Ireland at EU and international level in the context of Brexit. Including a greater focus on delivering further improvements in our services to citizens in such areas as passports.

The agreed additional allocation for Brexit-readiness work includes increased funding for additional staffing to facilitate the processing of increased passport applications (€2m) and applications for Irish citizenship via the Foreign Birth Registration system (€0.6m). There will also be additional funding in 2019 for the operational costs of passport processing.

A key part of the Passport Service's strategy in managing increasing application volumes is a focus on implementation of service improvements. Since 2016, a significant programme of reform to enhance passport services for citizens has been underway, including the introduction and expansion of online passports services and a new passport card. The award winning online passport application service will continue to make a major contribution to the effective management of exceptionally high volumes by allowing existing resources to be more effectively deployed within the Passport Service. The Online Renewal Service allows Irish citizens (both adult and children) to renew their passport twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week from anywhere in the world, has led to an exceptionally enhanced customer service experience. To allow further reform and development of the Passport Service €6m in capital funding will be made available to the Passport Reform Programme in 2019.

Staffing needs in the Passport Service are assessed on the basis of a number of factors including forecasted demand, the balance between more complex first-time applications and renewals as well as the uptake of online services and associated productivity gains. As noted above, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade sought and has been provided with additional funding in the 2019 Estimates for additional full-time staff in the Passport Service in order to better cope with periods of peak demand and the rising volumes of applications. Additional full-time staff have already been recruited and the Passport Service will continue to monitor operational requirements during the year.

Brexit Issues

82. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of meetings he has attended since the beginning of September 2018 with his officials to discuss and prepare for Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3598/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Brexit is a major priority for the Government, for me and the work of my Department.

I meet regularly every Thursday with senior officials from all relevant Divisions in my Department, and the Secretary General, to be briefed on and to discuss the latest developments regarding the Article 50 process and our ongoing preparations for Brexit. The Permanent Rep-

resentation to the EU and the Embassy London take part by video link. In addition, I meet or talk to officials virtually every day to prepare for my very large number of Brexit-related engagements, and to assess developments. I also of course receive numerous reports and other papers from our Embassies and from officials at Headquarters.

Northern Ireland

83. Deputy Brendan Smith asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has discussed with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland the bombing incident and attack in Derry on 19 January 2019; if he is satisfied that the necessary resources are available in Northern Ireland and here to deal with and counteract such threats from paramilitary groups; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3686/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I know that I speak for all members of this House in our utter condemnation of the hijacking and bombing in Derry on 19 January and the subsequent hijackings and security alerts. The people behind such violence have neither mandate nor legitimacy nor support in the community. Their actions show a callous and reckless disregard for human life, and risk causing serious injury and loss of life to innocent bystanders and members of the police and emergency services.

I also wish to welcome the leadership shown by political and civic leaders from across the community in Derry in the past few days. The people who have carried out these attacks do not speak for the people of Derry, nor the people of this island. Their methods are repugnant to the desire of the Irish people for peace and reconciliation on the island of Ireland.

I spoke with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Karen Bradley about the situation in Derry on Monday last and we reiterated our condemnation of these incidents, as well as our support for An Garda Síochána and PSNI who continue to work together to keep people safe.

Dissident republican activity continues to poses a threat to public safety on both sides of the border. There is close, ongoing co-operation between all levels of An Garda Síochána and the PSNI. The Gardaí work seamlessly with their counterparts in Northern Ireland in actively bearing down on those involved in such activity and on the organised crime gangs to which they are linked.

Property Tax

84. Deputy Micheál Martin asked the Minister for Finance when changes to the local property tax arrangements will be announced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3457/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The report of the review of the Local Property Tax is currently being finalised by my Department in conjunction with the Departments of the Taoiseach, Public Expenditure and Reform, Housing Planning and Local Government, and the Office of the Revenue Commissioners. I expect that the review report will provide a number of policy choices for consideration. I will of course carefully consider the conclusions and recommendations of the report when it is presented to me.

Tax Code

85. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance his views on a proposal (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3458/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Decisions on taxation matters are made in the context of the annual Budget process, and the Deputy will understand that I cannot give any indications of my plans for Budget 2020 at this time.

However, I should add that policy in relation to the matters the Deputy raises are, in the first instance, matters for the Minister for Rural and Community Development. “Realising our Rural Potential: Action Plan for Rural Development” contains a detailed list of actions and priorities with a view to revitalising rural Ireland generally. This effort is being led by the Minister for Rural and Community Development in conjunction with Ministers and officials from other Departments, as well as the Local Authorities and a range of other stakeholders. A variety of actions included in this plan aim to assist in improving rural towns and making rural Ireland a better place to live.

Furthermore, the Department of Finance Tax Expenditure Guidelines, published in October 2014, set out guidelines for best practice in ex-ante and ex-post evaluation of tax expenditures and is used by my Department when considering whether or not to introduce a new tax expenditure, or in reviewing an existing measure. These guidelines provide that tax expenditures should only be used in limited circumstances of demonstrable market failure, and where a tax based incentive is likely to be more efficient than a direct expenditure intervention.

Finally, EU State Aid rules make it difficult to introduce tax reliefs that target specific geographic areas while excluding others. In this regard, the Deputy may be aware of the difficulties that my Department encountered in obtaining state aid approval from the European Commission for the Living City initiative.

Customs and Excise Controls

86. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if custom officials carry out adequate surveillance and checks with regard a particular transport service (details supplied) in view of concerns raised. [3464/19]

89. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Finance the number of customs officials that are assigned to Rosslare Port; the start and end times of custom official shifts; and if customs officials are present for all ferry departures and arrivals. [3538/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 86 and 89 together.

I am advised by Revenue that interventions that it makes as regards entry into or importation into the State are risk based. The overall customs regime in place is designed to facilitate the legitimate movement of trade and to secure payment and collection of duty and VAT, as appropriate and protect citizens, trade and the environment.

I am advised by Revenue that they provide trade facilitation services and support and undertake compliance interventions in any location where there are ferry arrivals and departures by reference to the overarching objectives set out above. The nature of the traffic movements concerned as regards an intra community service between EU Member States informs the assessment of risk.

I am assured by Revenue that all ferry services into and out of the location concerned are

risk profiled and risk assessed. Where compliance risks are identified, Revenue resources including staff, detector dogs and Revenue's mobile scanner, are available on a 24/7 basis for deployment.

I am advised by Revenue that there are currently 20 Revenue officials assigned to Rosslare Port with specific responsibility for Revenue's trade facilitation and compliance functions in the port.

These officers are available on a 24/7 basis.

From the 4 March 2019, 20 additional officers will be assigned to Rosslare. These officers will be assigned on a 24/7 shift pattern.

Tracker Mortgage Examination

87. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance when the Central Bank will make a final decision on whether its staff will be included in the tracker review as impacted customers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3495/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy is aware, 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 both from a contractual and transparency perspective. The Examination requires all lenders, which offered tracker interest rate mortgages to their customers (including customers who may be Central Bank staff), 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 does not make the decision on what is impacted or not- this is the responsibility of the lender. The Central Bank reviews and challenges the lender where appropriate on its conclusion.

The Central Bank does not have a statutory role in investigating individual consumer complaints; however, it uses information that it receives directly from consumers to guide the scope of its broader supervisory work.

The Central Bank advises that it is not in a position to comment on individual firm's supervisory engagement. The Bank also advises that a further update on the Tracker Mortgage Examination will be published in early 2019.

Motor Insurance

88. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the situation for many young drivers who hold learner permits and are unable to obtain car insurance (details supplied); the measures he has taken or plans to take to rectify same; if he has considered a special scheme for young drivers in which they are charged a set insurance rate which increases if they commit a driving offence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3509/19]

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 provision or pricing of insurance products, as these matters are of a commercial nature, and are determined by insurance companies based on an assessment of the risks they are willing to accept. This position is reinforced by the EU framework for insurance which expressly prohibits Member States from adopting rules which

require insurance companies to obtain prior approval of the pricing or terms and conditions of insurance products. Consequently, I am not in a position to direct insurance companies as to the pricing level or terms or conditions that they should apply in respect of particular categories of drivers or vehicles such as young drivers with learner permits..

I am aware of the issue of younger drivers continuing to experience increases in their insurance premiums in spite of the fact that prices are generally in decline. Unfortunately, younger drivers have historically tended to face higher premiums as they are seen by insurers as a category which poses a higher risk. In making their individual decisions on whether to offer cover and what terms to apply, insurers will also use a combination of other rating factors, which include the age and type of the vehicle, the relevant claims record and driving experience, the number of drivers, how the car is used, etc. My understanding is that insurance companies do not all use the same combination of rating factors, and as a result prices and availability of cover varies across the market. In addition, insurance companies will price in accordance with their own past claims experience, meaning that in relation to the age of the driver, and relevant experience they may have, different insurance companies will price the risk differently. As one of the factors includes driving experience, it is acknowledged that this may impact the ability of learner drivers to obtain insurance in their own name from particular insurers, however this should not prevent them from taking driving lessons with a qualified driving instructor which should assist a young driver in getting a full licence as soon as possible.

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 young drivers.

Finally, I would recommend younger drivers who are quoted increased premiums to consult the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission website, which has an informative section regarding the purchase of car insurance generally. One of the key tips listed to help cut costs is to “shop around” and “always get quotes from several insurance providers when you need to get or renew insurance”. In addition, I understand the Citizens Information Bureau make recommendations on things young drivers can do to reduce the cost of motor insurance, such as joining a parent’s insurance as a named driver as early as possible, to establish a safety record, or choosing a car with a relatively small engine, as less powerful cars are cheaper to insure.

Question No. 89 answered with Question No. 86.

National Debt

90. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the number of bilateral loans Ireland has with the UK; the amount outstanding per loan; the original principal sum per loan; the interest rate per loan; the way in which these loans will be settled in the context of Brexit; the preparedness of the State regarding Brexit in the context of outstanding bilateral financial commitments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3583/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The UK bilateral loan provided as part of the EU-IMF Programme was drawn down in eight equal tranches of £403 million over the period October 2011 to September 2013. The total UK bilateral loan outstanding is £3.23 billion.

This is a fixed rate loan. The weighted average interest rate, including service fees, on the

aggregate UK loan facility is 2.6%. Interest is paid semi-annually, in June and December.

The first tranche is due to be repaid in April. The table following provides further information.

| Loan Tranche | Amount Maturing £m | Month/Year of Maturity |
|--------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| 1 | 403 | April 2019 |
| 2 | 403 | July 2019 |
| 3 | 403 | September 2019 |
| 4 | 403 | February 2020 |
| 5 | 403 | April 2020 |
| 6 | 403 | September 2020 |
| 7 | 403 | December 2020 |
| 8 | 403 | March 2021 |
| Total | 3,227 | - |

The Exchequer is well positioned to fund these loan maturities. It had over €15 billion in cash at the end of 2018 and the NTMA has already raised €4 billion earlier this month through the issue of a new ten year benchmark bond.

I do not expect Brexit to have any impact on the repayment of the UK bilateral loan.

The currency exposure has been hedged by the NTMA in its management of the National Debt.

Brexit Issues

91. Deputy Lisa Chambers asked the Minister for Finance the number of meetings he has attended since the beginning of September 2018 with his officials to discuss and prepare for Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3597/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Deputy will be aware that Brexit has implications across almost all sectors of the economy. Since the UK referendum, Brexit is an integral part of business planning in the Department of Finance and issues relating to Brexit are mainstreamed across all divisions of my Department. In this context, I meet and engage on an ongoing basis with my officials on issues linked to Brexit. The objective of my approach as Minister for Finance is to protect the economic and financial interests of the state and to support the work of the Revenue Commissioners so as to minimise disruption to trade to the greatest extent possible. These objectives are being advanced under four priority headings which are developing appropriate economic and budgetary policy advice; safeguarding financial stability through engagement with the CBI and the NTMA; assuring continued funding of the State by the NTMA and supporting the work of the Revenue Commissioners in the areas of customs, direct and indirect tax.

I would point out that my Department has been to the fore in producing and funding a number of Brexit-related studies, both before and since the UK's referendum decision, covering overall macroeconomic and sectoral impacts. A dedicated Brexit Unit within the EU and International Division was established in July 2016 to oversee and coordinate Brexit work across the entire Department and to act as a key liaison point, in particular with the Departments of the Taoiseach and of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The Assistant Secretary who heads the EU and

International Division of my Department is designated as the lead official in the Department for Brexit matters. We have appointed lead Brexit coordinators at Principal Officer level across all divisions of the Department. Developments on and preparations for Brexit are a standing item for discussion by my officials at key departmental structures, such as the Executive Board and EU Strategy Committee meetings.

VAT Rate Application

92. Deputy Róisín Shortall asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the concerns expressed by the manufacturers and distributors of food supplements, vitamins and minerals regarding the increase in VAT on their products from 0% to 23%; the rationale for this increase; if he will respond to a request for a meeting from a group (details supplied) to discuss the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3638/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The standard rate of VAT applies to food supplements. However, a Revenue Commissioners concession allowed the zero rate to be applied to certain types of vitamins, minerals and fish oils. Revenue has since decided to remove this concession with effect from 1 March 2019 so that all food supplements will be charged at the standard VAT rate.

The operation of the concession became extremely problematic as a result of efforts by certain businesses in the industry to extend the concession beyond the scope permitted. Consistent challenges to Revenue guidance and decisions on the VAT rating of products gave rise to serious concerns about compliance within the industry and unfair competition between compliant and non-compliant businesses.

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.

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. Should stakeholder groups wish to feed into this process, submissions will be considered in this context.

Property Tax Deferrals

93. Deputy Róisín Shortall asked the Minister for Finance the number of persons availing of the deferral option under Part 12 of the Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 (as amended) by county and postcode in Dublin. [3644/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the information on Local Property Tax (LPT) collection, including information on exemptions and deferrals for the year 2018 is shown on page 8 of the latest LPT report published on the Revenue website at: <https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/local-property-tax/end-of-year-reports/local-property-tax-2018.aspx>.

The information is listed by Local Authority, including the four Dublin Local Authorities. A breakdown by postcode in Dublin is not available.

Motor Insurance Data

94. Deputy Aindrias Moynihan asked the Minister for Finance the number of insurance companies that offer car insurance here; the number that are non-Irish companies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3687/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): For the purpose of this reply, my officials consulted with the Central Bank regarding the information being sought by the Deputy.

The Central Bank has advised that the names of all insurance undertakings with permission to operate in the Irish market whether authorised by the Central Bank or elsewhere in the EU are set out in a register which is publicly available at:

<http://registers.centralbank.ie/DownloadsPage.aspx>.

The Central Bank has indicated that, as per the registers published on 14 January 2019, there are 34 Irish insurance undertakings (with their head office in Ireland) which are authorised to provide motor insurance; and there are 11 undertakings that are operating on a Freedom of Establishment basis (branch basis), that are similarly authorised. It should be noted that just because an insurer is authorised to provide this type of insurance does not mean it is currently doing so. It has also indicated that there are 874 non-life Freedom of Service companies on the register, however the Bank is not in a position to tell me how many of these companies are actively selling motor insurance in the Irish Market. This is because many such companies register and participate only for a limited time in the Irish Market, or never participate at all.

Consequently in order to be as helpful as possible, I am attaching a link below to the membership list of the Motor Insurers' Bureau of Ireland (MIBI). This provides a much clearer profile of the make-up of the motor insurance industry in Ireland because under Section 78 of the Road Traffic Act, all motor insurance undertakings wishing to do business in Ireland are required to become a member of this body in order that the EU requirement of compensating victims of accidents caused by uninsured and unidentified vehicles can be met.

https://www.mibi.ie/_fileupload/Member%20list/1_1%20MIBI%20Members%20List%20-%20Jan%202019.pdf.

When looking at the membership list, the Deputy will note that the freedom of services undertakings are marked by a reference to "FOS" in the company code field of the table. In this list (January 2019) there are 18 Irish undertakings and 22 FOS undertakings. In addition, there are six Lloyd's syndicates operating through brokers. It should be noted that these numbers will change as undertakings enter and exit the Irish market from time to time.

Property Tax Administration

95. Deputy Thomas Byrne asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding property tax liability in circumstances in which a person that has deferred payment of property tax due to unemployment re-enters employment; the stage at which the deferred property tax must be paid; and the time period over which this can be arranged. [3463/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 (as amended) provides for a full deferral or partial deferral (50%) of Local Property Tax (LPT) where income levels are below specified thresholds or where other specified conditions exist.

Once granted, a deferral normally remains in place for the duration of the ‘valuation period’, which is currently 1 May 2013 to 31 October 2019. The deferred LPT becomes payable later and carries an interest charge of 4% per annum. The liability attaches as a charge on the property and must be paid before a sale or transfer of the property can be completed.

However, property owners can opt to pay the deferred liability at any time and in such circumstances Revenue will work with the property owner to agree a payment arrangement that best suits the particular circumstances. The agreed payment arrangement must include the full amount of the deferred tax plus the accrued interest.

If the Deputy is aware of a specific case he should advise the property owner to contact the LPT Helpline at 01-7383626 to discuss the possible alternatives.

Public Service Pay Commission Reports

96. Deputy Jack Chambers asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the joint submission to the Public Service Pay Commission from the Department of Defence and military authorities underwent changes after it was sent to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform; if so, the nature of the changes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3532/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The submission to the Public Service Pay Commission in respect of the Defence Forces was compiled on a collaborative basis between the management side parties in order to provide the Commission with accurate and complete material so as to assist it in its examination of recruitment and retention issues in the Defence Forces.

Flood Prevention Measures

97. Deputy Joe Carey asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the position in relation to a flood prevention scheme (details supplied) in County Clare; when it will be approved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3557/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Ennis South Flood Relief Scheme is being progressed by Clare County Council with funding provided by the Office of Public Works.

The tender process for this project is nearing completion, with formal letters of regret and intent as appropriate due to issue in the coming days. Following the prescribed waiting period, the tender will then be formally awarded to the successful contractor, and with mobilisation time for the contractor taken into account it is hoped that works will commence during March 2019.

Public Sector Staff

98. Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform further to Parliamentary Question No. 284 of 28 March 2017, if the rules relating to persons transferring from the wider public service to the Civil Service, particularly in relation to salaries, have been amended in order that these persons are treated in a similar way to civil servants making internal transfers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3559/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): There has been no amendment to the rules relating to persons transferring from the wider public service to the civil service as described in my reply to Parliamentary Question No. 284 of 28 March 2017.

It remains the case that an appointee who had been serving elsewhere in the public service in an analogous grade and pay-scale may be appointed at the appointee's current point of scale. This allows such appointees to be assimilated on their current pay point on the same basis as a civil servant.

As previously stated, the arrangements outlined above apply only to appointments in an analogous grade and pay-scale and not to appointments to a higher grade which would be considered as a promotion.

Brexit Issues

99. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of meetings he has attended since the beginning of September 2018 with his officials to discuss and prepare for Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3602/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I meet with my officials on Brexit related issues on an ongoing basis. Brexit matters are also discussed by the Management Board on a regular basis.

My Department has a dedicated Brexit unit within the EU/North South Unit. The Unit supports me in my work on Brexit, leads work across the Department and its agencies, and represents the Department on the various groups that coordinate the Government's response to Brexit. Brexit issues are also addressed by staff in relevant areas across the Department.

Forestry Management

100. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if matters in relation to a location (details supplied) will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3531/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The ownership of the woodlands surrounding the Mooghaun Hillfort lies with Coillte and unless the scrub in question is on the DCHG / OPW property, it would be a matter for Coillte to address.

As regards the descriptive table referred to by the Deputy, there are no plans currently to reinstate it and no provision has been made in the OPW's 2019 Business Plan for such works to be done. While I cannot therefore give a firm commitment in this regard, the OPW will examine this matter as resources allow.

Schools Building Projects Status

101. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the works outstanding at a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3513/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): In November 2018, the school in question was requested to forward details of the issues along with a request for an inspection

of the building by officials in the School Building Unit. To date this information has not been received.

Officials from the school building unit have since been in contact with the school and a site visit is due to take place on Wednesday 30th January.

Special Educational Needs Staff

102. Deputy Catherine Martin asked the Minister for Education and Skills when he plans to announce the allocation of special education teachers for the 2019-2020 school year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3519/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I wish to advise the Deputy that DES Circular 0013/2017 for primary schools and 0014/2017 for post primary schools set out the details of the model for allocating special education teachers to schools.

Details of the allocations which will be due to be made for schools for the 2019/20 school year will be advised to schools in the coming weeks.

Schools Building Projects Status

103. Deputy Brendan Griffin asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a technical inspection will be carried out by the school buildings section at a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3534/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I can confirm to the Deputy that a technical visit at the school in question will be carried out shortly and my Department has confirmed this to the school.

Student Grant Scheme

104. Deputy Róisín Shortall asked the Minister for Education and Skills the supports and schemes available to financially assist working persons that wish to change career and move into teaching (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3539/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The main support available to students is the statutory based Student Grant Scheme where students are studying for the first time or are progressing to study at a higher level e.g. progressing to postgraduate study. To qualify for grant support, a student has to meet various criteria such as means, residency, nationality and progression. In 2017 SUSI provided some €370m in student supports that benefitted more than 78,000 students. Additional funding of €4 million was secured in Budget 2017 and a further €3m in Budget 2018 to facilitate the reinstatement of full maintenance grants, from September 2017, for the most disadvantaged postgraduate students.

The National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education published in 2015 has as its overall vision the goal of ensuring that the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels reflects the diversity and social mix of Ireland's population. One of its specific objectives is to increase access by students from target groups to initial teacher education (ITE).

Questions - Written Answers

Arising from this, in September 2016, my predecessor, Mr. Richard Bruton, T.D. announced that an allocation of €2.7m was being made available, over a three year timeframe, for ITE access initiatives under strand 1 of the PATH Fund. The objective of PATH 1 is to increase access to initial teacher education for students from the target groups identified in the National Access Plan, namely Students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, Mature students, Students with disabilities, Travellers, Part time/flexible learners and Further Education award holders.

The Deputy will be aware that in November 2018, I published the Action Plan for Teacher Supply. One of the actions is for the Higher Education Authority to engage with higher education institutions to develop proposals for flexible options which will facilitate access to, and participation in, Professional Master of Education (PME) programmes in targeted subject areas, including for persons who wish to change careers. It is intended that this action will be progressed over the coming months.

Also under the Action Plan, the Department is exploring the provision of additional supports for postgraduate ITE students. Following from this, an additional €1 million was added to the Student Assistance Fund (SAF) for the current academic year 2018/19 for students attending PME programmes. The SAF provides financial assistance to students experiencing financial difficulties while attending third level. Students can be assisted towards rent, childcare costs, transport costs and books/class materials. The total SAF allocation for 2018/2019 is now €10.1 million. In accordance with the Action Plan, the Department will continue to consider the provision of additional supports for postgraduate ITE students.

Schools Building Projects Status

105. Deputy Joe Carey asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position in relation to a school building project (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3556/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): This project is being devolved for delivery to Limerick and Clare ETB (LCETB). A Service Level Agreement (SLA) is currently being prepared by the Department to be issued to LCETB.

Once the SLA is finalised, the ETB can proceed with the appointment of a Design Team who will then commence the architectural design and planning process.

Social Welfare Payments Administration

106. Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 248 of 18 December 2018, when a person (details supplied) will be contacted as promised in relation to their pension entitlements; the reason for the delay in contacting them; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3558/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I can confirm that the issue to which the Deputy refers is being addressed by the Pension Unit of my Department and an official from that Unit has contacted the person in question.

Higher Education Schemes

107. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of higher education access route places offered in universities and colleges here each year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3565/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Each Higher Education Institution (HEI) is responsible for determining its own admissions policy and entry criteria to its academic programmes. This also extends to the number of access route places.

The Higher Education Access Route (HEAR) and the Disability Access Route to Education (DARE) offers places at reduced points to school leavers from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds and students with disabilities. Admissions under the HEAR and DARE scheme are regulated by the institutions themselves. Each institution determines its own admissions policy in relation to the schemes, the number of places they reserve and the allocation of those places. The HEAR/DARE scheme is administrated by the CAO on behalf of the higher education institutions that participate in the scheme. The number of places vary year to year and are offered on a course-by-course and HEI-by-HEI basis.

In 2017 the total eligible HEAR applicants were 4287 of which 3043 accepted an offer and the total eligible DARE applicants were 3542 of which 2423 accepted an offer.

Currently, there are 23 HEIs participating on the HEAR scheme and 24 HEIs participating on the DARE scheme. In addition to the HEAR and DARE schemes, many higher education institutions also operate their own access routes including places available for access students.

Arising from the implementation of the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-19, my Department has made available increased funding for equity of access both through core institutional budgets and also through targeted funding, including in particular the newly established Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH) Fund.

Through the PATH fund an investment of €16.2 million will be made over a three-year period to support greater levels of access and participation across higher education. Different measures through PATH will increase access to initial teacher education for 120 students from the target groups identified in the National Access Plan; award up to 200 Bursaries each year in a three year period to enable students to participate fully through their studies, and regional and community partnership initiatives for increasing access to higher education for 2,000 additional students from the target groups through means of pre-college entry activities.

Brexit Issues

108. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of meetings he has attended since the beginning of September 2018 with his officials to discuss and prepare for Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3595/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Since my appointment in October as Minister for Education and Skills, I have weekly meetings with the Secretary General, at which Brexit has been discussed. It also featured on a regular basis at fortnightly Ministerial-Management Board meetings.

In addition, I have had four specific meetings with those officials dealing with my Department's Brexit preparations on a daily basis.

Local Area Plans

109. Deputy Róisín Shortall asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department continues to hold a reservation (details supplied) in the Trim Development Plan 2014-2020; and his plans to continue with this request in the next Trim development plan when it comes up for revision in 2019. [3615/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): My Department will be considering education requirements in the area in consultation with Meath County Council as part of the statutory planning process when the next Trim Development Plan is being prepared. It would be premature for my Department to comment further at this stage.

Third Level Fees

110. Deputy Michael Healy-Rae asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to review fifth year pharmacy college fees (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3634/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): In Ireland, the Pharmacy Act 2007 conferred responsibility on the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (PSI), the pharmacy regulator, with respect to pharmacy education and training. The PSI is an independent statutory body and is responsible 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.

In August 2014, the Minister for Health approved changes to the education and training of pharmacists. This change in Pharmacy education has come about because the regulatory body, the PSI, now requires graduates to have completed a Masters degree before entering the PSI Register and practising as a Pharmacist. The new programme was intended to keep pace with changing healthcare needs in Ireland and offer an improved student experience through its evidence-based and experiential-based learning approach.

For those students that commenced their pharmacy course from September 2015, the structure of the pharmacist qualification changed from a four-year Bachelor degree programme followed by a one-year Internship Programme (which resulted in the award of a Level 9 degree) to a five-year fully integrated pharmacy degree programme.

This programme structure supports the dispersal of placements throughout the five years (rather than focussed on the final year) and culminates in the award of a Masters in Pharmacy (M. Pharm) following successful completion of the fifth year.

State funding under the Free Fees initiative is available for undergraduate awards only. In practice, this means that the first four years of the pharmacy programme are funded for those students who satisfy the Free Fees criteria. A full tuition fee is then payable by all students for the final year of the programme, as this is a postgraduate Level 9 award.

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.

Any students in third-level institutions experiencing exceptional financial need can apply for support under the Student Assistance Fund. This Fund assists students, in a sensitive and

compassionate manner, who might otherwise be unable to continue their third level studies due to their financial circumstances. Details of this fund are available from the Access Office in the third level institution attended.

In addition, tax relief is available on postgraduate tuition fees paid. Details in relation to this relief are available from the Revenue Commissioners.

Ministerial Meetings

111. Deputy Anne Rabbitte asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he has met the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs regarding a recent report from An Garda Síochána (details supplied); and if not, his plans to meet the Minister in the coming days. [3491/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): I might clarify at the outset that the issues highlighted in the recent Garda report on the management of youth crime are best addressed to the Department of Justice and Equality, where I have responsibility for Youth Justice, as Minister of State. The Minister for Children and Youth Affairs has responsibility in relation to the Oberstown Children Detention Campus and Detention Policy, which do not feature in the report referred to. In this regard, I have not met with or plan to meet with the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs.

As the Deputy is aware, the examination by the Policing Authority of Garda handling of Youth Crime has highlighted some issues of concern. It is completely unacceptable that crimes were not properly pursued in many cases. This situation must be thoroughly addressed; not only for the victims and the proper administration of justice, but also for the future welfare of children who may go on to commit further crimes.

The Garda authorities have taken a number of technical and organisational steps to prevent recurrence of the failures identified. While there have been significant improvements, there is more to be done to achieve a comprehensive solution. The Commissioner has also established a National Bureau for Child Diversion to improve future management of this whole area.

The Policing Authority, which was established to provide independent oversight of policing, has indicated that it will follow through with further detailed examination of this matter and the actions being taken by the Commissioner. I will also continue to monitor the situation closely.

The issues in question relate to youth crime cases deemed unsuitable for the Garda Diversion Programme. Therefore, it is important to recognise that there are no negative implications for the effectiveness of the Diversion Programme itself, which has been operated successfully for many years, helping young offenders turn away from crime.

Youth Justice Strategy

112. Deputy Anne Rabbitte asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the policy on juvenile offenders and youth justice was last reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3492/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): I can assure the Deputy that policy in this area is kept under ongoing review.

The Children Act 2001 (as amended) provides the legislative framework for the Youth Justice system, and is underpinned by key principles which include using detention as a last resort

and diverting children away from involvement in criminal activity.

A National Youth Justice Strategy, 2008-2010, was followed by the current Youth Justice Action Plan, 2014-2018. The YJAP set out on a range of key actions to help reduce the number of young offenders in detention and steer young people away from criminal or anti-social activity, in line with the principles contained in the Children Act. The YJAP was coordinated by the Irish Youth Justice Service, supported by my Department, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, Oberstown Children Detention Campus, An Garda Síochána, the Probation Service, the Irish Prison Service, Tusla and community stakeholders.

I can inform the Deputy that I will be convening an expert Steering Group next month to help guide the development of the new Youth Justice Strategy, including a review of the provisions of the Children Act. My intention is that the new strategy will be developed following consultation with relevant stakeholders over the course of this year, taking into account the outcomes from the current Action Plan and any relevant learning from the review of Youth Referrals, and published in 2020.

Garda Deployment

113. Deputy Micheál Martin asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí that were in the Cabra-Glasnevin district in 2018; if his attention has been drawn to plans to increase this number in 2019; his views on whether there has been an increased amount of crime in the area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3453/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, just under 2,400 Garda recruits have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide, including 800 trainees who passed out from the college during 2018.

As the Deputy is aware, the manner in which the resources of the Garda Síochána are deployed is solely a matter for the Garda Commissioner and his management team and I, as Minister, have no direct role in this regard.

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 can assure the Deputy that local Garda management in the areas referred to remains resolute in its determination to act against all forms of criminal activity and will work with these communities to prevent and detect crime.

The Government has increased the budget for An Garda Síochána to €1.76 billion for 2019, which includes provision for the recruitment of up to 800 Gardaí this year. The Commissioner has now informed me that he plans to recruit a total of 600 trainee Gardaí in 2019 and, in addition, it is his intention to recruit a net 600 Garda Civilian Staff. This Garda Staff recruitment will allow the Commissioner to redeploy a further 500 fully trained Gardaí from administrative duties to frontline policing in 2019. I believe that the injection of this large number of experienced officers into the field, along with the new recruits, will be really beneficial in terms of protecting communities. This and on-going recruitment will clearly provide the Commissioner with the resources needed to deploy increasing numbers of Gardaí to deliver a visible effective and responsive policing service to communities across all Garda Divisions including the D.M.R. West Division.

The Garda Commissioner has confirmed that the Government's commitment to increase the overall strength of An Garda Síochána to 15,000 Garda members will be achieved by the target

date of 2021. The Government fully supports the Commissioner's management decision which will ensure that increasing numbers of Gardaí are available for frontline duties in the prevention and detection of criminal activity in all our communities including the areas referred to by the Deputy.

The Garda strength of the D.M.R. West Division as of 31 December 2018 as provided by the Garda Commissioner is available on my Department's website through the following link:

http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/002_Garda_Numbers_by_Division_District_and%20Station_2009_to_30_December_2018.xlsx/Files/002_Garda_Numbers_by_Division_District_and%20Station_2009_to_30_December_2018.xlsx.

Gangland Crime

114. Deputy Micheál Martin asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views in relation to the increased number of shootings and inter-gang drug shootings and murders; his further views on whether a review is necessary of resources in order to prevent these gang related shootings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3454/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I can assure the Deputy that the Government is fully committed to ensuring that An Garda Síochána has the necessary resources to continue to disrupt the operation of criminal groups who carry out these killings and who endanger the safety of our communities and he will have noted An Garda Síochána have made significant progress in tackling the insidious threat of organised crime, particularly in Dublin's North Inner-City.

Operation Hybrid has been established to coordinate the response to violent crime in Dublin and address public safety concerns about community safety, particularly in the North Inner City, and it benefits from significant support by Armed Support Units. As of 13 January 2019, this response has included:

- 86 arrests.
- 11 persons charged in relation to organised crime gang murder investigations, 3 persons convicted of murder with life sentences imposed.
- 37 firearms seized (in relation to murder offences).
- In the region of 290 searches.
- 16,969 lines of enquiry conducted with more than 73,220 high visibility checkpoints implemented with significant support from Armed Support Units.
- A significant amount of CCTV footage, mobile phone traffic, and forensic evidence has also been examined.

We have also seen reports of very significant drugs seizures by An Garda Síochána in Waterford and Dublin recently which led to a number of arrests being made. Yesterday, as part of an intelligence-led operation targeting serious organised crime activity in the Louth Division, Gardaí from the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau, assisted by Officers from the Criminal Assets Bureau and Louth Division, seized a quantity of cannabis herb with a street value thought to be in the region of €940,000 (pending analysis). An arrest was made on foot of the operation and investigations remain ongoing.

In addition, a number of arrests were made in the UK recently on foot of investigations into the supply of drugs and firearms in Ireland and the UK which resulted in a number of court appearances, while others arrested were released under investigation.

The Deputy will appreciate that the allocation of all Garda resources, including personnel, is a matter for the Garda Commissioner and his management team and I have no role in this matter. However, I have been advised that An Garda Síochána continues to monitor all new and emerging crime trends so that Garda resources can be allocated accordingly.

As part of Budget 2019, the Government has increased the budget for An Garda Síochána to €1.76 billion for this year, which will facilitate the continued recruitment of new Garda members as well as Garda staff. The Garda Commissioner has now indicated that it is his intention to recruit a total of 600 trainee Gardaí along with a net 600 Garda staff. The recruitment of these additional Garda staff will allow the Commissioner to redeploy a further 500 fully trained Gardaí from administrative duties this year to the frontline policing duties for which they were trained.

I have been assured by the Garda Commissioner that the recruitment of Garda members and Garda staff planned for 2019 will ensure that, taking account of projected retirements, the Government's commitment to increasing the strength of An Garda Síochána to 15,000 Garda members and 4,000 Garda staff by 2021 will be achieved. The number of Garda members in An Garda Siociana increased to just over 14,000 at the end of 2018, a net increase of over 1,000 since the end of 2016. The Commissioner's plans for the redeployment of Gardaí to frontline policing in 2019 will result in a net additional 1,100 Gardaí deployed to operational policing by the end of 2019.

This approach to management of resources by the Commissioner, including recruitment and redeployment, is very much in line with the Report of the Commission for the Future of Policing in Ireland which recommended the return of Gardaí to the front line to deliver visible policing. The Deputy will be aware that on 18 December 2018 I 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. Civilianisation, workforce planning and redeployment are some of the key projects which will continue to be progressed over the lifetime of this reform programme.

Prison Service Staff

115. Deputy Micheál Martin asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views in relation to recent reports in the media regarding prison officers leaving their areas of responsibility due to health and safety concerns, particularly in Portlaoise Prison, in which gang members are imprisoned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3455/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Irish Prison Service has informed me that on 04 May 2018 a number of staff members left their post in Portlaoise prison, without leave to do so, while on duty.

This was clearly unacceptable and I am further informed that management immediately implemented measures to ensure that the impact of the situation was minimized and controlled, with the situation returning to normal that evening.

Furthermore, I am informed that management took prompt and appropriate action under the relevant Human Resources policies of the Irish Prison Service. As I am sure the Deputy will appreciate neither I, nor the Irish Prison Service, are in a position to comment further in respect

of the application of Human Resources policies to individual staff members.

Prison Service

116. Deputy Micheál Martin asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he is satisfied in relation to the investment in health and safety provision in prisons here; the investment in same on a yearly basis since 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3456/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by my officials in the Irish Prison Service that it aims to achieve the highest health and safety standards across its operations and to meet the statutory requirements set out in the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005 as well as compliance with the provisions and requirements of other relevant legislation, standards and codes of practice.

To do this the Irish Prison Service has established and maintains an occupational health and safety management system (OHSMS) based on the requirements of the internationally recognised safety management system – Occupational Health and Safety Assessment Series (OHSAS) 18001. The Occupational Health and Safety Management System facilitates the Irish Prison Service's compliance with legal requirements and ensures that the policies and procedures are implemented, operated, checked, audited and reviewed in accordance with a structured programme with the objective of continual improvement.

I am not in a position to disaggregate the spend on health and safety as this is incorporated into a range of subheads such as capital spending, fire safety, planned preventative maintenance, personal protective equipment, staff training, salaries and information and communication technology.

I am assured by the Director General of the Irish Prison Service that she is committed to ensuring that adequate resources are provided to enable the Irish Prison Service meet its statutory requirements and its commitment to the safety of all those to whom it owes a duty of care, including staff, prisoners, contractors and visitors.

Rural Crime

117. Deputy Micheál Martin asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on rural crime; if rural crime statistics are increasing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3469/19]

118. Deputy Micheál Martin asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he has spoken to the Garda Commissioner in relation to rural crime; the actions being taken to prevent incidences of rural crime; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3470/19]

119. Deputy Micheál Martin asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the policy action being taken to prevent rural crime; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3471/19]

120. Deputy Micheál Martin asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the policy on rural crime was last reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3472/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 117 to 120, inclusive, together.

The Deputy will be aware that last week I, along with Minister of State Stanton, responded

to a Private Member's Motion on rural crime in the Dáil, during which I outlined the initiatives and supports introduced by this Government to tackle rural crime. I also recognised that when it comes to tackling crime, including rural crime, all members of the Oireachtas are seeking the same goal, which is safer communities for all of our citizens.

The Government's response to crime in both rural and urban areas is focused on two key objectives: Strengthening the law to get tougher on repeat offenders and investing in the capacity of An Garda Síochána to enforce that law effectively. I can assure the Deputy that this approach is kept under constant review.

The Government remains committed to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country in order to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and to deter crime. Since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, almost 2,400 recruits have attested as Members of An Garda Síochána and Garda numbers reached almost 14,000 by the end of 2018. The Garda Commissioner intends to recruit an additional 600 Gardaí next year along with redeploying a further 500 Gardaí from administrative duties to frontline policing.

The Programme for Government underlines the need for close engagement between An Garda Síochána and local communities and this is an essential feature of the strong community policing ethos which has long been central to policing in this jurisdiction. As part of the overall strategy to oppose criminality, the Garda authorities pursue a range of partnership initiatives with important rural-based organisations such as the IFA, Muintir na Tire and other community organisations.

It is appropriate to also highlight the Government's plan to implement the recommendations of the report of the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland. Those recommendations have a core focus on a more visible Garda organisation working closely and collaboratively with communities and other agencies to keep communities safe and to prevent harm to vulnerable people.

In relation to the deployment of Garda resources, including personnel, to specific areas, members will appreciate that this is the responsibility of the Garda Commissioner. However, I am advised that Garda management constantly monitor the distribution of these resources in light of crime trends and overall policing needs at local level – and this applies equally in both rural and urban areas. A total budget of €1.76 billion has been provided to An Garda Síochána in 2019, an increase of over €100 million on the 2018 allocation. This substantial investment will provide new and leading edge technology to support our front line Gardaí in carrying out their work in both rural and urban communities.

Since November 2015, there has been concentrated policing activity throughout the country as a result of Operation Thor. As of January 2019, there have been over 177,000 targeted checkpoints and more than 270,000 crime prevention patrols carried out nationwide. This concentrated policing activity has produced in the region of 9,300 arrests and 10,600 charges covering a range of offences which, in addition to burglary, have included handling stolen property, possession of firearms and drugs offences. An Garda Síochána will continue to bring pressure on the gangs and individuals responsible for these type of offences.

On 20 December 2018, the Central Statistics Office (CSO) published the latest crime statistics for Q3 2018. While I am pleased that, nationally, burglary and theft-related offences were down, I am concerned that offences relating to robbery increased over the 12 month period to the end of Q3 2018 when compared to the end of Q3 2017. This trend must be tackled comprehensively, and the focus on the recruitment of new Gardaí and increased resourcing of An Garda Síochána reflect this Government's commitment to support Gardaí in the fight against crime.

The Deputy will be aware that at the National Ploughing Championships last September, I announced details of the 2018 Text Alert Rebate Scheme which was available to over 1000 local groups registered under the Garda Text Alert Scheme. My Department committed in the region of €150,000 to local communities who wish to apply for a rebate towards the costs associated with running their local Text Alert Scheme.

The Programme for Government also committed to support investment in CCTV systems and a grant-aid scheme was launched by my Department in 2017 to assist in the establishment of community-based CCTV systems in their local areas with 20 CCTV grants scheme applications approved to date. The scheme is open to all groups wishing to take advantage of the available funding.

Finally, I believe it is absolutely vital that, as elected officials, we continue to encourage all citizens to report all instances of criminality to An Garda Síochána. Only then can the crime be properly investigated by Gardaí. Furthermore, these reports will allow the Garda authorities to identify any new or emerging crime trends affecting a particular community and, where necessary, allocate Garda resources in order to tackle these developments.

Ministerial Meetings

121. Deputy Micheál Martin asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he or his officials met the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport in 2018 to discuss drink driving legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3473/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I can inform the Deputy that my officials meet with officials from the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport on an ongoing basis, in a number of different fora, in relation to road traffic matters.

The overarching road traffic policy structure is the Ministerial Committee on Road Safety, the function of which is to oversee the implementation of the Road Safety Strategy 2013-2020 and provide a forum for high-level discussion of road safety issues.

The Committee is chaired by the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport and attended by myself (or officials from my Department), the Attorney General, CEO of the Road Safety Authority (RSA), the Garda Commissioner (or a senior representative) and officials from other relevant bodies.

The Committee has met on 18 occasions to date under the current Road Safety Strategy, and is scheduled to meet next on 5 March 2019. Traditionally, the Committee had met twice a year, however the Committee met 6 times in 2017 and 4 times in 2018.

The Committee primarily focusses on matters relating to public awareness around road safety and associated media campaigns. Garda road traffic enforcement and issues relating to drink driving are discussed in the context of these matters.

Penalty Points System

122. Deputy Micheál Martin asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the policy input he and his officials had on the latest proposal from the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport in relation to increasing penalty points further for speeding and to remove the discretion of drivers bringing their licences to the Garda station within days of being checked; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3474/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The measures referred to by the Deputy are proposed for inclusion in a forthcoming Road Traffic (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill.

The Deputy will appreciate that I, as Minister for Justice and Equality, have no direct role in the development of road traffic legislation, nor do I have a direct role in the enforcement of road traffic legislation, which is an operational matter for An Garda Síochána.

My officials consulted with An Garda Síochána in relation to the key proposals put forward in the Scheme, on foot of which, my Department expressed general support for the overall intention of the Bill, namely to improve safety on the road network and influence driver behaviour.

As is normal with all road safety measures with implications for policing and enforcement, I would expect further engagement between the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, officials from my Department and An Garda Síochána as these proposals are developed.

Drugs Crime

123. Deputy Micheál Martin asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on the increase in drug related crime; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3475/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, illicit drugs are a feature of many different forms of crime, ranging from persons under the influence of drugs committing burglaries, or involved in assaults or public order offences, to the trafficking of drugs by organised crime gangs.

The illicit drug market and the associated harm it causes to people is a matter of concern to me and to communities nationwide. I can assure the Deputy that An Garda Síochána remains resolute in its determination to act against those within society who pose a significant threat to the welfare and well-being of our citizens and the communities they serve. All Gardaí have a responsibility in the prevention and detection of criminal activity, whether it be in the area of drug offences crime or otherwise. A core focus of the work carried out by An Garda Síochána is aimed at tackling drugs and organised crime.

In that regard, I would like to highlight significant drug seizures made by An Garda Síochána recently in Waterford, Dublin and Louth with a combined estimated value in the region of €1.8 million. These seizures, which also led to arrests being made, were the result of meticulous, intelligence-led planning and execution by key branches of An Garda Síochána in the fight against drugs and organised crime.

The Government has allocated very significant resources to policing in recent years, and this will continue; in particular, through the accelerated programme of Garda recruitment. This will undoubtedly enhance policing services for all communities across the country. I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that as a result of these additional resources, he has been able to assign additional personnel to the Specialist Bureaus that come within the ambit of Special Crime Operations, including the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau. I would like to re-affirm that the Government remains committed to supporting An Garda Síochána to make communities safer.

Garda Civilian Staff Recruitment

124. Deputy Micheál Martin asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the

recruitment of administrative staff for Garda stations; the progress he expects on same in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3476/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who has responsibility to carry on and manage and control generally the administration and business of An Garda Síochana, including by arranging for the recruitment, training and appointment of its members and staff.

The Deputy will be aware that the Government's vision is for a Garda workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021 to include 15,000 Garda members and 4,000 Garda Staff. The projected 4,000 Garda Staff represents a medium-term target of 20% of the Garda full-time workforce comprised of civilians. This target will be achieved through a twin-track approach of firstly, a "civilian by default" policy in relation to the filling of all new posts other than operational policing posts and for non-operational policing posts that become vacant and, secondly, the redeployment of Gardaí to policing roles where their skills can be used to best effect, with the backfilling of these roles by suitably qualified civilians, where necessary.

Progress is being made in relation to civilianisation. As of 31 December 2018, there were approximately 2430 Garda staff undertaking a range of administrative and technical duties in An Garda Síochána.

The Government has increased the budget for An Garda Síochána to €1.76 billion for 2019, which included provision for the recruitment of up to 800 Gardaí this year. The Commissioner has informed me that he intends to recruit a total of 600 trainee Gardaí along with a net 600 Garda Staff. The recruitment of these additional Garda Staff will allow the Commissioner to redeploy this year a further 500 fully trained Gardaí from administrative duties to the frontline policing duties for which they were trained.

This is very much in line with the Report of the Commission for the Future of Policing in Ireland which recommended the return of Gardaí to the front line to deliver visible policing. The Deputy will be aware that 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. Civilianisation is one of the key projects which will continue to be progressed over the lifetime of this reform programme.

Garda Civilian Staff

125. Deputy Micheál Martin asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the impact extra administrative staff will have on Garda duties; if discussions have commenced with the Garda representative organisations regarding same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3477/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who has responsibility to carry on and manage and control generally the administration and business of An Garda Síochana, including by arranging for the recruitment, training and appointment of its members and staff.

The Deputy will be aware that the Government's vision is for a Garda workforce of 21,000 personnel including 15,000 Garda members, and 4,000 Garda Staff (civilians). The projected 4,000 Garda Staff represents a medium-term target of 20% of the Garda full-time workforce comprised of civilians. This target will be achieved through a twin-track approach of firstly, a "civilian by default" policy in relation to the filling of all new posts other than operational policing posts and for non-operational policing posts that become vacant and, secondly, the

redeployment of Gardaí to policing roles where their skills can be used to best effect, with the backfilling of these roles by suitably qualified Garda Staff, where necessary.

I am informed by An Garda Síochána that as at the end of 2018, almost 260 Gardaí have been reassigned to operational duties. I am pleased that this is an additional 260 Gardaí on the front-line over and above those being recruited under the Government's accelerated recruitment programme. The Garda Work Force Modernisation Team established by An Garda Síochána is continuing to drive momentum on civilianisation including in relation to redeployment and the Commissioner expects to make significant progress on this objective this year. The project team has identified the challenges around redeployments and is working to resolve these issues. This includes ongoing engagement with key stakeholders including Garda Associations and Trade Unions.

This programme of civilianisation is very much in line with the Report of the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland which recommends the return of Gardaí to the front line to deliver visible policing. This is evidenced in the High Level Implementation Plan - A Policing Service for the Future - which I published before Christmas which prioritises the twin issues of redeployment and civilianisation.

Garda Data

126. Deputy Micheál Martin asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of new entrants to An Garda Síochána planned for 2019; the number of retirements expected for the same period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3478/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who has responsibility to manage and control generally the administration and business of An Garda Síochána, including by arranging for the recruitment, training and appointment of its members.

The Government has increased the budget for An Garda Síochána to €1.76 billion for 2019, which included provision for the recruitment of up to 800 Gardaí this year. The Garda Commissioner has informed me that he intends to recruit a total of 600 trainee Gardaí in 2019 along with a net 600 Garda staff. The recruitment of these additional Garda staff will allow the Commissioner to redeploy a further 500 Gardaí, from administrative duties to the frontline policing duties for which they were trained, in 2019.

An Garda Síochána have indicated that approximately 300 Gardaí are expected to retire in 2019, which is in line with retirement trends over the past four years. Clearly this figure is an estimate. I have been assured by the Garda Commissioner that the recruitment of Garda members and Garda staff planned for 2019 will ensure that, taking account of projected retirements, the Government's commitment to increasing the strength of An Garda Síochána to 15,000 Garda members and 4,000 Garda staff by 2021 will be achieved. The number of Garda members in An Garda Síochána increased to just over 14,000 at the end of 2018, a net increase of over 1,000 since the end of 2016. The Commissioner's plans for the redeployment of Gardaí to frontline policing in 2019 will result in a net additional 1,100 Gardaí deployed to operational policing by the end of 2019.

This approach to recruitment and redeployment is very much in line with the Report of the Commission for the Future of Policing in Ireland which recommended the return of Gardaí to the front line to deliver visible policing. The Deputy will be aware that on 18 December 2018 I 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. Civilianisation, workforce planning and redeployment are some of the key projects which will continue to be progressed over the lifetime of this reform programme.

Magdalen Laundries

127. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 436 of 6 November 2018, the status of an application by a person (details supplied) to the Magdalen restorative justice ex gratia scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3512/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): To date just over €27.2 million has been paid to 720 women under the Magdalen Restorative Justice Ex Gratia Scheme

In my response to the previous Dáil question in relation to this particular case (Dáil Question no. 436 of 6 November, 2018), I informed the Deputy that the application falls to be dealt under the Addendum to the terms of the original Magdalen scheme. That Addendum, which derives from a recommendation by the Ombudsman in his report of November 2017, provides for persons who were not resident in any of the 12 institutions covered by the original scheme but who may have worked in the laundries of those institutions while resident in one of 14 adjoining institutions.

The Addendum is published on my Department’s website (www.justice.ie). Any redress payment to be made under its terms will comprise two elements; a ‘general’ payment for the period of residency in the adjoining institution, and a ‘work’ payment for whatever period the successful applicant worked in the laundry of the relevant institution.

Applications to the scheme are now being processed and payments have issued to a number of women. Applications being considered include new applicants and women who had previously applied unsuccessfully under the 2013 scheme but who may now be eligible. Applicants under the Addendum, whose applications under the original Magdalen scheme were refused, are not being asked for information already provided. For those cases where there is insufficient documentary evidence available to make an assessment, an interview process is in place so as to facilitate a fairer assessment of a woman’s application.

Committee of Public Accounts

128. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will address matters (details supplied) in relation to issues raised at the meeting of the Oireachtas Standing Committee of Public Accounts on 17 January 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3587/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy is aware this matter was discussed at a meeting of the Public Accounts Committee on 17 January, 2019. At that meeting the Secretary General of my Department undertook to make enquiries into the allegations made in respect of this matter and to furnish a report to the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee as a matter of urgency.

I am advised by my officials in the Irish Prison Service that this report is currently being finalised. However, in advance of the provision of a detailed report, my officials in the Irish Prison Service have confirmed that there is no tractor missing from the fleet allocation assigned

to Shelton Abbey.

I am further advised by the Director General that the Irish Prison Service Fleet Manager has confirmed that there are currently five tractors assigned to Shelton Abbey Open Centre, which has a working farm on site. The fleet manager has confirmed that all tractors have remained on site and have not been loaned or allocated to any other organisation at any time.

Committee of Public Accounts

129. Deputy Marc MacSharry asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will address matters (details supplied) in relation to issues raised at the meeting of the Oireachtas Standing Committee of Public Accounts on 17 January 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3588/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy is aware this matter was discussed at a meeting of the Public Accounts Committee on 17 January, 2019. At that meeting the Secretary General of my Department undertook to make enquiries into the allegations made in respect of this matter and to furnish a report to the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee as a matter of urgency.

I am advised by my officials in the Irish Prison Service that this report is currently being finalised. However, in advance of the provision of a detailed report, my officials in the Irish Prison Service have confirmed that there is one Hyundai i40 assigned to the Midlands Prison for use by staff in accordance with the Irish Prison Service Pooled Vehicles Procedure on the use of fleet cars and that the vehicle concerned is accounted for at the Prison concerned.

A review of the usage of the car in question is currently underway. This review will inform part of the report to the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee.

Brexit Issues

130. Deputy Lisa Chambers asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of meetings he has attended since the beginning of September 2018 with his officials to discuss and prepare for Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3601/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The decision by the United Kingdom to leave the EU is one that we respect and regret. It has provided the context for much of the work of my Department, particularly since 2016. As such, Brexit-related matters are discussed regularly in meetings with my officials, including my regular meetings with the Secretary General and with the Management Board of the Department.

My Department has an International Policy Division which coordinates preparations for Brexit. The focus of the Department has been on the protection of the Common Travel Area, the maintenance of the closest possible cooperation in policing and criminal justice matters, the maintenance of a functioning system of extradition, and the maintenance of efficient mechanisms to deal with cross-border civil, commercial and family law matters, as far as possible.

This focus is reflected both in my regular engagement with officials and when I'm briefed in advance of, for example, meetings with my UK or other EU counterparts, and other engagements, be they domestic or abroad.

In this context I discuss Brexit preparations with my officials in advance of every meeting

of the Justice and Home Affairs Council, at my formal meetings with my Management Board and in my regular discussions with my Secretary General.

In addition to meeting with officials I am in receipt of regular written briefings on the Department's planning for Brexit which ensure that I am kept apprised of the policy issues arising for my Department on an ongoing basis.

Crime Data

131. Deputy Lisa Chambers asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 426 of 6 November 2018, when a reply will issue in relation to same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3606/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): My Department has requested a report from the Garda authorities in relation to the information sought by the Deputy. Please be assured that my Department is actively following up with An Garda Síochána in relation to this request and I will contact the Deputy directly when the information is to hand.

Immigration Status

132. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the procedures to be followed to regularise residency in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3651/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that there is no record of a request from the person concerned for permission to reside in the State.

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 person's 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 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.

Naturalisation Applications

133. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in the determination of eligibility for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3653/19]

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 notifica-

tion 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.

In reference to eligibility for naturalisation the criteria is as follows; if a person has 5 years (60 months) reckonable residency on either stamp 1, stamp 3 or stamp 4 conditions it is open to them to lodge an application for a certificate of Naturalisation.

For the purpose of Naturalisation (Irish citizenship), reckonable residency (i.e. stamp 1, stamp 3 or stamp 4), is calculated by counting months of permission to remain in the State. Reckonable residency is reflected in the corresponding stamp 1, stamp 3 or stamp 4 endorsements in a person's passport. To meet the statutory residency criteria as laid out in the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956 (as amended), an individual needs to have 60 months (5 years) reckonable residency with the year immediately before the date of application being of continuous residency.

In making any such application it should be noted that the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956 (as amended), provides that the Minister may, in his absolute discretion, grant an application for a certificate of Naturalisation provided certain statutory conditions are fulfilled. These conditions are that the applicant must:

- be of full age (18 years or older)
- be of good character
- have had a period of one year's continuous residency in the State immediately before the date of application and, during the eight years immediately preceding that period, have had a total residence in the State amounting to four years
- intend in good faith to continue to reside in the State after naturalisation
- have made, either before a Judge of the District Court in open court or in such a manner as the Minister for special reasons allows, a declaration in the prescribed manner, of fidelity to the nation and loyalty to the State

Full and comprehensive information regarding Citizenship, can be found on our website, along with details of the new guidelines, application forms, fees and a naturalisation residency calculator (link provided below):

<http://www.inis.gov.ie/en/INIS/Pages/Citizenship/>

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.

Leave to Remain

134. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the procedure to be followed by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[3654/19]

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 leave to remain in the State for the period of one year effective from the 19 February 2018 until the 19 February 2019.

The person concerned is required to apply in writing for the renewal of this permission four weeks in advance of the permission expiring. As my Department's records show no evidence of such a renewal request having been made to date, it is recommended that the person concerned should do so without further delay.

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

135. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 185 of 25 October 2018, if all information requested in correspondence issued to a person (details supplied) on 3 October 2018 has been furnished as requested; when consideration of same is likely to conclude; and if he will make a statement on the matter.
[3657/19]

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

A letter issued to the person concerned on 3 October 2018 requesting certain documentation and a reply has been received. Should further documentation be required it will be requested from the applicant in due course.

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

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

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

Questions - Written Answers
Naturalisation Eligibility

136. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in the determination of eligibility for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3658/19]

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

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

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

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

Asylum Applications

137. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 93 of 20 November 2018, the extent to which evaluation of an application in the case of a person (details supplied) has taken place or is likely to do so in view of the primacy of a Parliamentary Question and that they resided here since 2003; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3660/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy is aware, it is an offence under Section 26 of the International Protection Act 2015 to identify an international protection applicant. Therefore, if an application for international protection has been made in the State, it is not the practice to comment on such applications and the applicant or their designated legal advisor should contact the International Protection Office (IPO) or the International Protection Appeals Tribunal (IPAT) directly, as appropriate. This will enable a full and comprehensive reply to be provided.

The IPO may be contacted either by email to info@ipo.gov.ie, by telephone to the IPO Customer Service Centre at 01 6028008 or in writing to Customer Service Centre, International Protection Office, 79-83 Lower Mount Street, Dublin 2. The International Protection Appeals Tribunal may be contacted by email to info@protectionappeals.ie, by telephone at 01-4748400 (or Lo-Call 1890 201 458) or in writing to Corporate Services Division, The International Protection Appeals Tribunal, 6-7 Hanover Street East, Dublin D02 W320.

Immigration Status

138. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); if their full stamp 4 status continues to enable them to travel outside Ireland if necessary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3662/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that this person should contact the Ministerial Decisions Unit of the INIS in order to clarify their residency status and their entitlement to travel. Queries should be submitted to the following address: The Ministerial Decisions Unit, Repatriation Division, Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service, 13/14 Burgh Quay, Dublin 2.

Queries in relation to the status of individual 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 Re-examination

139. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the deportation order regarding a person (details supplied) can be set aside on the basis of the information provided and not enforced in the interim; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3663/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned is the subject of a Deportation Order signed on 11 March 2005. This order requires the person concerned to remove themselves from the State and remain outside the State. The enforcement of the Deportation Order is a matter for the Garda National Immigration Bureau.

Representations were received 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). All relevant aspects of the case will be considered before a decision is made.

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.

The person concerned was required to 'present' at the Offices of the Garda National Immigration Bureau on 7 April 2005, to make arrangements for his deportation from the State. The person concerned failed to 'present' on that occasion and is therefore recorded as a person who is evading deportation.

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.

Brexit Issues

140. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of meetings she has attended since the beginning of September 2018 with her officials to discuss and prepare for Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3590/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department and its offices and agencies continue to work intensively on a cross-government basis to help prepare businesses for all Brexit scenarios, including a No Deal Brexit.

Along with my Ministerial colleagues, Pat Breen and John Halligan, I am actively involved in the contingency work on Brexit preparedness that has been ongoing since the UK decision to leave the EU in 2016.

Work on Brexit involves working closely with the offices, enterprise and regulatory agencies of my Department that are centrally involved in supporting Irish businesses to prepare for all Brexit scenarios, including a No Deal Brexit.

On a regular basis, I chair meetings involving the offices and agencies of my Department to hear about their level of Brexit preparedness and issues arising. Separately, I chair an Enterprise Forum consisting of the main business representative bodies to hear directly from them the issues that their members are facing. The enterprise and regulatory supports that I have put in place are informed by what I hear at these meetings.

I have also, through the Retail consultation Forum which I chair, stepped up engagement with key players in the grocery retail and distribution sector to hear directly from them on their level of preparedness for Brexit and I intend to continue close engagement with this sector.

My agencies have been actively involved in the outreach workshops on Brexit in the context of the Government campaign “Getting Ireland Brexit Ready” and have separately organised events around the country to heighten awareness of the suite of supports that are available to companies to assist them in their Brexit preparations.

Since the UK’s decision to leave the EU in 2016, I have ensured that my Department’s response to the challenges presented by Brexit in the three budgets in 2017, 2018 and 2019 has been stepped up to ensure an adequate level of resourcing to assist the enterprise and regulatory agencies support firms in their preparations for Brexit.

The following table sets out Ministerial meetings with officials as well as external meetings and events attended by Ministers from September 2018 to date on Brexit-related matters.

In addition to this I would point out that Brexit is a standing agenda item on regular internal meetings including meetings of the Management Board and other meetings.

| Minister | Date of Meeting | Area of Department | Context/Purpose of meeting |
|--------------------|-----------------|--|---|
| Minister Humphreys | 13/09/18 | Indigenous Enterprise Division | Briefing on Brexit research |
| Minister Humphreys | 20/09/18 | Indigenous Enterprise Division/ EU Affairs and Trade | ‘Getting Ireland Brexit Ready’ Launch event |
| Minister Humphreys | 20/09/18 | Indigenous Enterprise Division | *Retail Consultation Forum |

| Minister | Date of Meeting | Area of Department | Context/Purpose of meeting |
|--------------------|---------------------|--|--|
| Minister Halligan | 27/09/18 | Innovation and Investment Division | *Pre-briefing in advance of Formal COMPET Research Council Meeting |
| Minister Humphreys | 03/10/18 | EU Affairs and Trade Division | Enterprise Forum on Brexit and Global Challenges, including pre-briefing |
| Minister Humphreys | 03/10/18 | EU Affairs and Trade Division | Co-ordination group on Brexit, including pre-briefing |
| Minister Humphreys | 04/10/18 – 05/10/18 | EU Affairs and Trade Division | *Informal Trade Council, including pre-briefing |
| Minister Humphreys | 09/10/18 | EU Affairs and Trade Division | Brexit Press Conference |
| Minister Humphreys | 17/10/18 | Indigenous Enterprise Division | *Enterprise Ireland International Markets Week |
| Minister Humphreys | 19/10/18 | EU Affairs and Trade Division | Intertrade Ireland Breakfast Event |
| Minister Humphreys | 19/10/18 | EU Affairs and Trade Division | Getting Ireland Brexit Ready Event |
| Minister Humphreys | 24/10/18 | Commerce, Consumer and Competition Division | IAASA Brexit event (Dublin) |
| Minister Humphreys | 25/10/18 | EU Affairs and Trade Division | Getting Ireland Brexit Ready Event (Dublin) |
| Minister Humphreys | 12/11/18 | Indigenous Enterprise Division | Minister's engagement on an EI Brexit related Business Event in Cavan |
| Minister Humphreys | 22/11/18 | Indigenous Enterprise Division | *Retail Consultation Forum |
| Minister Humphreys | 22/11/18 | Strategic Policy Division | *Future Jobs 2019 Summit |
| Minister Breen | 23/11/18 | DBEI agencies/DFAT | Brexit preparedness event in Limerick (Tánaiste was present) |
| Minister Humphreys | 29/11/18 | Strategic Policy Division | *Competitiveness Council, including pre-briefing |
| Minister Halligan | 29/11/18 | Innovation and Investment Division | *Pre -briefing in advance of Formal COMPET Research Council Meeting |
| Minister Humphreys | 03/12/18 | Indigenous Enterprise Division | *Regional Enterprise Development Fund Announcement |
| Minister Humphreys | 12/12/18 | EU Affairs and Trade Division | Brexit Coordination Group including pre-briefing |
| Minister Halligan | 12/12/18 | Strategic Policy Division | Meeting with Freight Transport Association re: Brexit-related skills needs |
| Minister Humphreys | 13/12/18 | EU Affairs and Trade Division | Enterprise Forum Meeting including pre-briefing |
| Minister Humphreys | 13/12/18 | Indigenous Enterprise Division/ EU Affairs and Trade | Getting Brexit Ready meeting with Retailers/Distributors |
| Minister Humphreys | 19/12/18 | EU Affairs and Trade Division | Briefing for Ministers on contingency plan for a no-deal Brexit |

Questions - Written Answers

| Minister | Date of Meeting | Area of Department | Context/Purpose of meeting |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------|--|---|
| Minister Humphreys | 03/01/19 | Innovation and Investment Division | *Minister briefed on IDA End of Year Results in advance of release; pre-briefing on IDA Annual Conference |
| Minister Humphreys | 09/01/19 | Indigenous Enterprise Division | *Minister briefed in advance of release of Enterprise Ireland End of Year Results |
| Minister Humphreys | 17/01/19 | EU Affairs and Trade Division | Statements re: Government's Brexit Preparedness |
| Minister Humphreys | 17/01/19 | Indigenous Enterprise Division / EU Affairs and Trade Division | Minister briefed on developing Enterprise Supports |
| Minister Breen | 17/01/19 | [briefing from Department of the Taoiseach] | Inter-Departmental Committee on Digital Issues (Brexit - data flow issues for Public Services) |
| Minister Humphreys and Minister Breen | 23/01/19 | EU Affairs and Trade Division | Brexit Coordination Group including pre-briefing |
| Minister Humphreys | 24/01/19 | Indigenous Enterprise Division | Getting Brexit Ready meeting with Retailers/Distributors |
| Minister Humphreys | 24/01/19 | Indigenous Enterprise Division | Meeting with Commissioner Vestager (Brexit-related) |

* While these meetings were primarily focused on other issues, Brexit was also covered as an agenda item.

Brexit Supports

141. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of food businesses that have applied for working capital under the Brexit loan scheme which opened in March 2018; the number of such businesses that have been sanctioned financing to date; and the value of same. [3690/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (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 to facilitate the practical actions to be taken in response to the UK's exit from the EU.

The Brexit Loan Scheme provides affordable working capital to eligible businesses with up to 499 employees that are or will be impacted by Brexit and meet the scheme criteria. The €23 million exchequer funding (€14 million from my Department and €9 million from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine) has been leveraged to provide a fund of up to €300 million.

It has been designed to assist eligible Irish businesses in the short-term to deal with the challenges of Brexit, which include the pressures of increased market instability and currency volatility. The scheme is open to both State Agency clients and businesses that do not have any relationship with State Agencies. Sole traders may also apply.

The scheme features a two-stage application process. First, businesses must apply to the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) to confirm their eligibility for the scheme.

This application process requires businesses to use guidelines provided on the SBCI website to determine if they are eligible, and if so, to complete the eligibility form. As part of the process, businesses must submit a business plan, demonstrating the means by which they intend to innovate, change or adapt to meet the challenges posed by Brexit. Guidance is available on the SBCI website on how to complete a business plan. The SBCI assess the applications and successful applicants receive an eligibility reference number.

Successful applicants can then apply for a loan under the scheme with one of the participating finance providers. Participating finance providers are the Bank of Ireland, Ulster Bank and Allied Irish Bank. Approval of loans under the Brexit Loan Scheme is subject to the finance providers' own credit policies and procedures.

The scheme was launched in March 2018 and, as at close of business on 18th January, there have been 376 eligibility applications received of which 337 eligibility applications have been approved and 65 loans progressed to sanction at Bank level to a value of €14.9m.

Of the 337 eligibility applications, 42 food businesses have been approved for eligibility from the following categories: 2 under 'Non-Primary Agriculture', 27 under 'Manufacturing', 8 under 'Wholesale & Retail Trade and 5 under 'Accommodation & Food Service Activities'. Of the 65 loans progressed to sanction at Bank level, 8 relate to food businesses to a value of €3.8m.

Protected Disclosures

142. Deputy Micheál Martin asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if she has received complaints in relation to the way in which an investigative report was undertaken on a protected disclosure made in 2015 regarding concerns (details supplied) relating to the National Employment Rights Authority; the way in which the complaints were dealt with; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3543/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department did receive complaints from an individual who made a protected disclosure in 2015 concerning NERA. The individual complained to my Department about the outcome reached by an external professional investigator, commissioned by my Department to investigate the substance of the individual's disclosure and report back to the Department. The individual's complaints were duly considered and responded to by my Department. I understand that complaints by the individual concerned are currently pending consideration by the Labour Court and so, the Deputy will appreciate, it would not be appropriate for me to comment further on these matters.

National Children's Hospital Expenditure

143. Deputy Mattie McGrath asked the Minister for Health the measures he is taking to address the overspend on the national children's hospital; if there will be a cost limit imposed in terms of the eventual contribution to the project from the Exchequer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3579/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My Department is working with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the Health Service Executive on capital planning for 2019 and subsequent years having regard to the increased capital costs of the new children's hospital, following Government's approval to proceed with Phase B of the new children's hos-

pital and outpatient and urgent care centres.

National Children's Hospital

144. Deputy Mattie McGrath asked the Minister for Health if the professional indemnity insurance providers of the quantity surveyors and design engineers associated with the national children's hospital will be contributing toward recouping some of the escalating costs of the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3582/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I am already on record as stating that 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. 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.

An independent review 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 commenced this week. The review is expected to take place over an 8-week period with the report to be completed in March. The Department, the HSE and the National Paediatric Hospital Development Board are fully committed to collaborating with these reviews and to implementing any recommendations arising.

Medical Card Applications

145. Deputy Charlie McConalogue asked the Minister for Health the reason the medical card section requested self-employment details from persons (details supplied); if the matter will be investigated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3432/19]

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.

Hospitals Discharges

146. Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly asked the Minister for Health the number of bed days lost through delayed discharges in 2018 for each public voluntary hospital in tabular form. [3433/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Ensuring that patients who are clinically fit to leave hospital but require supports such as a home care package, transitional care, or a nursing home bed without delay is a priority this winter.

A major strength of the Winter Plan is the integrated nature of the plan and the involvement and ownership of management and staff in local hospitals and community health organisations in both the development and roll-out of the plan in the months ahead. A key component of the Winter Plan is the provision of an additional 550 home care packages over the winter period to help patients return home from hospital with the supports they need.

In relation to the Deputy's specific question, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy

directly with the data requested.

Hospital Beds Data

147. Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly asked the Minister for Health the number of beds and wards in all public and voluntary acute hospitals that were closed on 17 January 2019 or the latest date for which data for validated bed closures at hospital and ward level are available in tabular form. [3434/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): According to provisional data received from the HSE Acute Business Information Unit, there were on average 10,893 inpatient beds and 2,218 day case beds available nationally between January and December 2018.

Information relating to closed beds is collated at a particular date in time. The number of beds closed can fluctuate greatly from day to day for a variety of reasons, including on-going refurbishment, maintenance work, and infection control measures.

In relation to the particular data requested, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Emergency Services Data

148. Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly asked the Minister for Health the percentage of clinical status 1 ECHO incidents responded to by a first responder in seven minutes and 59 seconds or less; and the percentage of clinical status 1 DELTA incidents responded to by a patient carrying vehicle in seven minutes and 59 seconds or less for each ambulance station by month in the year to the end of December 2018 or the latest date available in tabular form. [3435/19]

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

Emergency Departments Data

149. Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly asked the Minister for Health the number of patients aged 75 years of age or over that experienced an emergency department wait time more than 24 hours in 2018; and the hospitals in which the wait occurred. [3436/19]

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

The hospital system is currently operating at close to full capacity. The number of patients attending Emergency Departments continues to increase year on year, with approximately 1.3 million attendances in 2018, up 3.5% on 2017. This reflects increasing demand for unscheduled care, especially by patients in the 75 years and over age group. Patients in this age group are the highest users of most health and social care services, have more complex needs and longer stays in our acute hospitals.

However, the National Service Plan 2018 includes an expected activity target that 100% of patients aged 75 and over are discharged or admitted within 24 hours of registration. There-

fore, any breach of this target in respect of patients in this age cohort is unacceptable.

With regard to the specific question the Deputy has asked, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond directly.

Home Care Packages Data

150. Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly asked the Minister for Health the number of home support hours being provided in each LHO area. [3437/19]

151. Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on the waiting list for home support hours in each LHO area; and the number waiting for time periods (details supplied) in tabular form. [3438/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 150 and 151 together.

As these are service matters I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Emergency Departments Waiting Times

152. Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly asked the Minister for Health the number of ambulance attendances at each emergency departments nationwide in December 2018; the number of such ambulances that waited longer than 20 minutes to hand over patients, get their trolleys back and return to responding to calls; and the number that waited longer than 40, 60, 90, 120 and more than 180 minutes for same, respectively in tabular form. [3439/19]

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 Data

153. Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly asked the Minister for Health the number of spinal fusion patients currently waiting less than four months for treatment; the number waiting four to eight months; the number waiting more than eight months; and if similar information will be provided for other spinal patients for Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin and Temple Street Children's University Hospital, respectively in tabular form. [3440/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The long-term strategy to develop sustainable scoliosis services from 2018 and into 2019 has been prioritised by my Department and the HSE.

In 2018 CHG delivered 418 scoliosis procedures. This represents an increase in activity of 12% against 2017 (371 procedures) and an increase in activity of 87% compared to 2016 when 224 procedures were carried out.

In terms of the numbers waiting for procedures, there was a reduction of 27% in the numbers waiting for a scoliosis procedure as of the end of December 2018 when 176 patients were waiting compared to the same period in 2017, when 224 patients were awaiting treatment.

In relation to the number of patients waiting by specific time-band as requested by the Deputy, as this is a service matter I have asked the HSE to respond the Deputy directly.

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

154. Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly asked the Minister for Health the number of public patients that have been removed from outpatient lists in 2018 as a result of a validation exercise and not as a result of having an appointment with a consultant for each public and voluntary hospital in tabular form. [3441/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Good practice around the management of hospital waiting lists recommends periodic validation of waiting lists.

Validation is the process whereby hospital administration contacts patients on waiting lists at pre-planned intervals during the year to ensure that patients are ready, willing, suitable and available to attend a hospital appointment or wish to be removed.

Importantly, the validation process allows for situations where, if requested by the GP/referring clinician, patients can be reinstated back to their original place on to the Waiting List.

Last year, I approved the establishment of a Central Waiting List Validation Office within the NTPF. The new office delivers a standardisation of approach to validation across all waiting lists and all hospitals in line with the best patient-centred practices. The validation of waiting lists better informs the true demand for hospital services and enable improved efficiency and patient scheduling.

The data requested by the deputy is outlined in the attached document and sets out details of the number of patients who were validated off the Outpatient Waiting List through the HSE validation exercise undertaken in 2018.

[Validation numbers 2018].

Primary Care Services Provision

155. Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly asked the Minister for Health the number of persons in each LHO area waiting for a podiatry appointment in primary care; and the number waiting for time periods (details supplied). [3442/19]

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.

Primary Care Services Provision

156. Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly asked the Minister for Health the number of persons in each LHO area waiting for an ophthalmology appointment in primary care; and the number waiting by time periods (details supplied). [3443/19]

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.

Questions - Written Answers
Primary Care Services Provision

157. Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly asked the Minister for Health the number of persons in each LHO area waiting for an audiology appointment in primary care; the number waiting by time periods (details supplied). [3444/19]

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 Waiting Lists Data

158. Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly asked the Minister for Health the number of patients in each relevant hospital that have been waiting for an outpatient appointment since before 1 January 2017; and the number of patients in each that have been waiting since before 1 January 2016 for an outpatient appointment in tabular form. [3445/19]

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 waiting list information requested by the Deputy is set out in the attached document published by the NTPF which shows the number of patients who were waiting 24-36months; 36-48months; and over 48months at the end of December 2018.

| | |
|-----------|-------|
| Specialty | (All) |
| WL Status | (All) |

2018-12-20

| | Hospital name | 24-36 Months | 36-48 Months | 48+ Months | Grand Total |
|---------------------------------|---|--------------|--------------|------------|-------------|
| Children's Hos-pital Group | | | | | |
| | Childrens University Hos-pital Temple Street | 2452 | 237 | 4 | 2693 |
| | Our Lady's Children's Hospital Crumlin | 2238 | 727 | 46 | 3011 |
| | Tallaght Children's Hos-pital | 546 | 1 | | 547 |
| Dublin Mid-lands Hospital Group | | | | | |
| | Coombe Women and In-fants University Hospital | 6 | 0 | 0 | 6 |
| | Midland Regional Hospital Portlaoise | 44 | | 1 | 45 |
| | Midland Regional Hospital Tullamore | 1942 | 459 | 0 | 2401 |

| | Hospital name | 24-36 Months | 36-48 Months | 48+ Months | Grand Total |
|-------------------------------------|---|--------------|--------------|------------|-------------|
| | Naas General Hospital | 717 | 104 | 7 | 828 |
| | St. James's Hospital | 1017 | 293 | 24 | 1334 |
| | Tallaght Hospital | 2916 | 1246 | 174 | 4336 |
| Ireland East Hospital Group | | | | | |
| | Cappagh National Orthopaedic Hospital | 0 | | | 0 |
| | Mater Misericordiae University Hospital | 3113 | 950 | 85 | 4148 |
| | Midland Regional Hospital Mullingar | 428 | 206 | 43 | 677 |
| | Our Lady's Hospital Navan | 92 | | | 92 |
| | Royal Victoria Eye and Ear Hospital | 1605 | 424 | 6 | 2035 |
| | St. Columcille's Hospital | 463 | 144 | 0 | 607 |
| | St. Luke's General Hospital Kilkenny | 2 | | 1 | 3 |
| | St. Michael's Hospital Dun Laoghaire | 1 | | | 1 |
| | St. Vincent's University Hospital | 530 | 24 | | 554 |
| RCSI Hospitals Group | | | | | |
| | Beaumont Hospital | 558 | 132 | 3 | 693 |
| | Cavan General Hospital | 283 | 33 | 0 | 316 |
| | Connolly Hospital | 262 | 23 | | 285 |
| | Louth County Hospital | 0 | | | 0 |
| | Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital Drogheda | 292 | 0 | | 292 |
| | Rotunda Hospital | | | 0 | 0 |
| Saolta University Health Care Group | | | | | |
| | Galway University Hospital | 2611 | 453 | 71 | 3135 |
| | Letterkenny General Hospital | 1392 | 64 | 2 | 1458 |
| | Mayo General Hospital | 1016 | 536 | 144 | 1696 |
| | Portiuncula Hospital | 82 | 0 | | 82 |
| | Roscommon Hospital | 407 | 29 | | 436 |
| | Sligo Regional Hospital | 429 | 39 | | 468 |
| South/South West Hospital Group | | | | | |
| | Bantry General Hospital | | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| | Cork University Hospital | 1449 | 102 | 2 | 1553 |
| | Cork University Maternity Hospital | 14 | | 0 | 14 |
| | Kerry General Hospital | 681 | 22 | | 703 |
| | Mallow General Hospital | 155 | 2 | | 157 |
| | Mercy University Hospital | 164 | 9 | | 173 |

Questions - Written Answers

| | Hospital name | 24-36 Months | 36-48 Months | 48+ Months | Grand Total |
|---------------------------------------|--|--------------|--------------|------------|-------------|
| | South Infirmary Victoria University Hospital | 2264 | 437 | 23 | 2724 |
| | South Tipperary General Hospital | 92 | | | 92 |
| | University Hospital Waterford | 4812 | 1410 | 110 | 6332 |
| University of Limerick Hospital Group | | | | | |
| | Croom Orthopaedic Hospital | 1120 | 366 | 21 | 1507 |
| | Ennis Hospital | 30 | 29 | 6 | 65 |
| | Nenagh Hospital | 20 | 0 | | 20 |
| | St. John's Hospital Limerick | 4 | 5 | | 9 |
| | University Hospital Limerick | 2796 | 474 | 14 | 3284 |
| Grand Total | | 39045 | 8980 | 788 | 48813 |

Health Strategies

159. Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly asked the Minister for Health when a detailed action plan to implement Sláintecare will be published. [3446/19]

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 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.

Primary Care Services Provision

160. Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly asked the Minister for Health the number of persons in each LHO area waiting for a dietetics appointment in primary care; and the number waiting by time periods (details supplied). [3447/19]

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.

Primary Care Services Provision

161. Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly asked the Minister for Health the number of persons in

each LHO area waiting for an oral health appointment in primary care; and the number waiting by time periods (details supplied). [3448/19]

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.

Home Help Service Data

162. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide figures in relation to a service (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3460/19]

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.

Primary Care Centres

163. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the future plans for the health centre on Church Road, East Wall, Dublin 3. [3461/19]

164. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the closure of the health centre on Church Road, East Wall, Dublin 3. [3462/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 163 and 164 together.

As the HSE has responsibility for the provision, along with the maintenance and operation of Primary Care Centres and other Primary Care facilities, the Executive has been asked to reply directly to the Deputy.

Home Care Packages Provision

165. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if a homecare package will be reviewed in the case of a person (details supplied); the reason one carer has been dropped from house calls to the person who needs two carers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3486/19]

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.

Alcohol Pricing

166. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Health if he gave a commitment that minimum unit pricing of alcohol would not be introduced here until it was also being introduced in Northern Ireland with regard to concerns being expressed by an association (details supplied) regarding the minimum unit pricing for alcohol; if his attention has been drawn to the damage the introduction of this new system in one jurisdiction here and not the other would do

to thousands of small off-licence businesses in the Border region; his plans in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3488/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The objective of Minimum Unit Pricing is to ensure that strong alcohol can no longer be sold at low prices and, in particular, to prevent it being sold at pocket money prices in order to protect our children.

The 2013 Government Decision which approved the drafting of the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill envisaged that Minimum Unit Pricing would be implemented simultaneously in Northern Ireland. The situation has changed owing to the suspended administration in Northern Ireland and on that basis it is my intention to seek a revised Government Decision to implement Minimum Unit Pricing in this jurisdiction only in order to address the health harms and costs associated with the availability of cheap strong alcohol.

Medical Aids and Appliances Applications

167. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the funding options available to persons who wish to purchase an electric wheelchair. [3497/19]

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.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme

168. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that residents of private nursing homes who continue to hold full general medical services cards do not in practice have the same eligibility as other persons who live in the community in matters (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3499/19]

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.

The NHSS covers the cost of the standard components of long-term residential care which are:

- Nursing and personal care appropriate to the level of care needs of the person;
- Bed and board;
- Basic aids and appliances necessary to assist a person with the activities of daily living; and
- Laundry service.

A person's eligibility for other schemes, such as the medical card scheme or the drugs payment scheme, is unaffected by participation in the NHSS or residence in a nursing home. In determining the services covered by the NHSS it was considered very important that the care recipient and the taxpayer would be protected and would not end up paying for the same services twice. For this reason, medications and aids that are already prescribed for individuals under an existing scheme are not included in the services covered by the NHSS, as this would

involve effectively paying twice for the same service.

Nursing Home Services

169. Deputy Imelda Munster asked the Minister for Health if incontinence products supplied on a client-specific basis to residents of private nursing homes who hold full general medical services cards are exclusively used for the benefit of the identified client. [3500/19]

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.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme

170. Deputy Imelda Munster asked the Minister for Health if senior managers in the social care division of the HSE actively engage with and provide oversight to private nursing homes to ensure that exceptional governance is ongoing and that this engagement is in addition to the statutory responsibility of HIQA; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3501/19]

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. 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.

The HSE operate the payment system of the Nursing Homes Support Scheme (NHSS) to private nursing homes. However, this is purely an administrative function after the rate for the nursing home has been set by the NTPF.

The HSE was prior to the Health Act 2007 the registration and inspection authority for nursing homes. This is no longer the case as this function has transferred in totality to HIQA as established under this same Act.

The HSE source Transitional Care Beds from private nursing homes for people leaving hospital where required and where their onward care plan has not yet been finalised. The HSE secure this using the same rate that the NTPF have approved for the nursing home under the NHSS. The HSE has no function beyond this as Transitional Care is for a short period and is entirely voluntary on the part of the service user.

The HSE can in certain circumstances be requested by HIQA or the Court to step in to provide governance but only where the nursing home is being pursued in respect of a breach of the regulations to such an extent that HIQA believe it is in the public interest to remove registration or to replace the provider. In these limited cases the HSE will oversee the management of the home. However, this is relatively rare.

The HSE is itself a provider of public nursing homes and is subject to the same registration and inspection requirements of HIQA as that of a private nursing home.

The HSE does not have a statutory or regulatory function in respect of the governance of private nursing homes.

Questions - Written Answers
Hospital Appointments Status

171. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if a hospital appointment will be expedited for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3503/19]

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.

Services for People with Disabilities

172. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Health the status of an application for funding by a club (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3506/19]

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.

EU Directives

173. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact the falsified medicines directive is due to come into operation on 9 February 2019 and it is perceived that the system is completely unprepared at all levels; if a more realistic timeframe will be put in place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3515/19]

177. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the liability individual hospital pharmacists who are employees of the HSE and do not own the pharmacy in which they work will have under the falsified medicines directive due to come into effect on 9 February 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3535/19]

181. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the responsibility under the falsi-

fied medicines directive which lies with the HSE, in which it is the owner of hospital pharmacies, to provide and maintain the means by which verification and decommissioning can be enacted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3545/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 173, 177 and 181 together.

The Safety Features Delegated Regulation (EU 2016/16) provides that from February 2019, most prescription medicines and a very small number of non-prescription medicines will have to carry ‘safety features’ on their outer packaging. These safety features take the form of an anti-tamper device (e.g. foil seal, breakable cap) and a set of unique identifiers embedded in a 2D barcode on the pack.

The Delegated Regulation is directly applicable across all EU Member States. However, a Statutory Instrument is being prepared to ensure that the Irish legislative system is consistent with the requirements of the new Regulation.

The Delegated Regulation was finalised and published in 2016. The intervening 3 year transition period allowed more than ample time for all concerned parties to prepare well in advance of the legislation coming into full effect on 9th February 2019. Details of the requirements of the Delegated Regulation have been widely communicated to all sectors throughout this 3 year transition period, including to the HSE.

The intention of the provisions of the national Regulations in respect of persons authorised to supply medicinal products to the public, is that the offences for non-compliance with this EU Commission Delegated Regulation will be in line with offences already set out in other national medicinal product legislation. The new national Regulations, The Medicinal Products (Safety Features on Packaging) Regulations 2019, currently in draft form, are made under Section 32 of the Irish Medicines Board Act, 1995, as is the case with existing medicinal product Regulations which already provide for such rules and offences for non-compliance occurrences.

As with other medicinal products Regulations, this national legislation will provide that the ‘persons’ upon whom any proposed sanctions or penalties are placed may be a body corporate as well as an individual. This is dealt with by section 18(c) of the Interpretation Act 2005, which provides that a reference to “person” in any enactment includes a body corporate as well as an individual.

To reiterate this important point, the liable parties and the corresponding offences for this Delegated Regulation are in line with existing legislative arrangements governing the sale and supply of medicinal products to the public. There is nothing new in terms of the obligations under this legislation in terms of the focus of where the legal obligations lie. It is the responsibility of the body corporate to ensure that the infrastructure is in place and correctly functioning to facilitate the pharmacist decommissioning the medicinal product from the national repository prior to supplying to the patient. It is also the responsibility of the pharmacist that dispenses the medicinal product to comply with their requirements under this legislation. It will be for the appropriate regulator to decide who might be prosecuted for an offence specified in the Statutory Instrument.

The Department recommends that HSE personnel who have questions or concerns relating to their obligations and the obligations of their organisation under Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2016/161 and the draft Medicinal Products (Safety Features on Packaging) Regulations 2018, should seek guidance from HSE Management in the first instance, including the readiness of the infrastructure to facilitate decommissioning of medicines, and from their professional Regulator.

The Department is considering all points submitted in the consultation.

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

174. Deputy Róisín Shortall asked the Minister for Health the waiting times for a hysterectomy for public patients at Cork University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3522/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Reducing waiting times for hospital appointments and procedures is a key commitment of Government. The 2019 Scheduled Care Access Plan is currently being finalised by my Department and will set out HSE activity levels to reduce waiting lists across specialties and improve access. The Access Plan will also set out activity levels for the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) who, following an increase in funding in Budget 2019 to €75 million, will supply additionality to HSE activity by arranging both insourced and outsourced appointments and treatments to reduce waiting times experienced by patients.

The Access Plan is being developed to ensure an appropriate balance between high volume activities and offering treatment to complex long waiting patients. The NTPF will do this by inviting public hospitals to seek solutions for very long waiters either in the private sector or through insourcing. The NTPF will provide funding to the solutions proposed if appropriate.

In relation to the information requested by the Deputy, the NTPF have advised that Cork University Hospital (CUH) does not hold a waiting list for the procedure of hysterectomy. The NPTF further advise that as of the 17th January 2019 there were 28 patients awaiting a hysterectomy in Cork University Maternity Hospital (CUMH), with an average waiting time of 239 days. A breakdown of this waiting list by time bands is provided for the Deputy.

Total IPDC Waiters for a Hysterectomy Procedure in Cork University Maternity Hospital as of 17/01/2019

| Hospital | 0-3 months | 3-6 months | 6-9 months | 9-12 months | 15-18 months | 18+ months | Grand Total |
|------------------------------------|------------|-------------------|------------|-------------|--------------|------------|-------------|
| Cork University Maternity Hospital | 12 | 6 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 28 |
| | | Average Wait Time | | | | | |
| Cork University Maternity Hospital | 239 Days | | | | | | |

Healthcare Infrastructure Provision

175. Deputy Maurice Quinlivan asked the Minister for Health the status of the construction of the 60-bed interim unit at University Hospital Limerick; when works will commence; the expected cost of the project; the expected completion date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3529/19]

176. Deputy Maurice Quinlivan asked the Minister for Health the status of the construction of the 90-bed inpatient facility at University Hospital Limerick; when works will com-

mence; the expected cost of the project; the expected completion date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3530/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 175 and 176 together.

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.

Question No. 177 answered with Question No. 173.

General Medical Services Scheme

178. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the entitlements general practitioners have under the general practitioner contract to payment of compassionate leave; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3536/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the General Medical Services (GMS) contract, GPs are reimbursed for a range of services they provide to medical card and GP visit card holders. GPs are remunerated for these services primarily on a capitation basis, with a range of additional support payments and fees for specific items of service.

GPs contracted under the GMS scheme receive a contribution towards the cost of securing locum cover for certain types of leave, including annual leave, sick leave, maternity/paternity leave, adoptive leave and study leave. The amount payable is dependent on the size of the GP's GMS patient panel. There is no provision under the GMS scheme for a GP to receive contribution towards locum expenses to cover periods of compassionate leave.

Medical Card Administration

179. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if perceived misleading information will be removed from correspondence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3540/19]

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 Waiting Lists

180. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the status of the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3544/19]

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. 181 answered with Question No. 173.

Nursing Staff Data

182. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the number of graduate nurses and midwives in 2018 who have been provided employment contracts; the number recruited; the type of contract provided in each area in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3546/19]

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

Brexit Issues

183. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the number of times the group examining the risk of medicine shortages and continuity of supply resulting from Brexit have met over the past two years to date; the membership of the group; the remit of the group; the stakeholder groups with which it has engaged; the frequency of this engagement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3547/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As part of the overall Government response to Brexit, my Department is working on a comprehensive and coordinated set of actions to ensure, as far as is possible, continuity of supply of medicines in the event of a “no-deal” Brexit.

Significant work has been undertaken by my Department, the HSE, and the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA), together with medicines manufacturers and suppliers, to ensure that risks to the continuity of supply are mitigated to the greatest possible extent.

No major supply issues have been identified through this preparedness and contingency planning work.

The Department of Health, HSE and HPRA do not anticipate an immediate impact on medicine supplies should there be a no-deal Brexit on 29 March. There are already additional stocks of medicines routinely built into the Irish medicine supply chain, and these additional stocks, together with planning by Revenue to allow the fast-tracking of essential drugs into Ireland, will help deal with any delays that may arise.

It is important to note that there is no need for hospitals, pharmacists or patients to order extra quantities of medicines, or for doctors to issue additional prescriptions. To do so could disrupt existing stock levels and hamper the supply of medicines for other patients.

In 2018, the HPRA developed and launched a multi-stakeholder Medicine Shortages Framework to anticipate and manage medicine shortages when they occur. This framework is used to manage and address an average of 45 shortage notifications a month. The health system is therefore well placed to anticipate and respond to any additional shortages, should they arise

because of Brexit.

As an additional safeguard, consideration is being given to those categories of medicines which are considered most essential to public health. HSE and HPRA technical experts are undertaking a process to verify the contingency planning in place for the continuity of supply of medicines essential to public health, in order to determine those medicines that have the potential to be vulnerable to supply disruption and, where necessary, identify clinically appropriate alternatives. Work on this process is ongoing and will continue in the months before and after Brexit.

Both the HPRA and HSE have requested that medicines manufacturers and suppliers highlight any issues regarding the availability of specific products associated with Brexit and, to date, no major issues have been identified through this process.

Medicinal Products

184. Deputy John Brassil asked the Minister for Health the reason a national biosimilar policy has not been published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3548/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My Department and the HSE are engaging in a number of initiatives which will endeavour to lead to better access to medicines for patients, value for the taxpayer and the cost- effective provision of medicines in Ireland.

A public consultation on a National Biosimilar Medicines Policy was undertaken by my Department in 2017. The responses to that consultation and other possible policy levers are being considered by my Department with a view to developing a National Biosimilar Medicines Policy which will require the involvement of stakeholders from across the health service. I expect that my Department will make progress in this regard in 2019.

At an operational level, the HSE's Acute Hospitals Drugs Management Programme has a biosimilar strategy in place since 2017 which is making considerable progress using a collaborative approach with hospital pharmacists and clinical teams to bring about changes in prescribing practice. In that respect, hospitals are working towards a targeted minimum prescribing rate for biosimilars of 50%.

Medicinal Products Expenditure

185. Deputy John Brassil asked the Minister for Health the full spend by his Department and the HSE on biologic medicines and biosimilar medicines respectively in each of the years 2016 to 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3549/19]

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.

Pharmaceutical Sector

186. Deputy John Brassil asked the Minister for Health his views on the proposal by the HPRA to increase its fees to Irish pharmaceutical companies by 8% in 2019; his plans to grant

this increase; the work he has undertaken to analyse the merits of the increase in view of the pressures faced by companies in meeting the challenges of Brexit and by the introduction of the falsified medicines directive in February 2019. [3550/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) has increased its fees to all pharmaceutical companies by an average of 8% in 2019. It should be noted that the Authority's last significant fee increase was in 2010. In 2011 and 2012, the HPRA reduced fees, and there were no fee increases between 2013 and 2017. Fees were increased by approximately 2% in 2018.

The impact of new EU legislation continues to be felt across the HPRA. For example, the Falsified Medicines Directive will commence in February 2019, the Medical Devices Regulations will commence in May 2020, the Clinical Trials Regulation is scheduled to be implemented in 2020 and the In Vitro Diagnostic Medical Devices Regulations will commence in 2022. The regulatory model for medicines is becoming more complex, and EU pharmacovigilance legislation has led to an increase in the number of referrals and regulatory actions arising from the outcome of these referrals. Public scrutiny and the role of the regulator in relation to medical devices and medicines such as the HPV vaccine has increased, while compliance activity is also increasing.

Over the last several years, the HPRA has continued to enhance services to support the pharmaceutical industry in Ireland. The development of an innovation office and an international platform has brought greater oversight and global co-operation to the benefit of all stakeholders and of public health. The development of the agency has ensured that the HPRA is well placed to negotiate the impact of Brexit and continual changes in the regulatory environment.

It is acknowledged that Brexit and the Falsified Medicines Directive will also present significant challenges to the pharmaceutical industry. However, the HPRA plays a vital role in supporting this industry, and this fee increase is considered necessary in order to enable the Authority to continue to fulfil its public health remit.

Hospital Transfers

187. Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 385 of 4 December 2018, the reason a reply to same has not issued; when a reply will issue (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3551/19]

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 Services Provision

188. Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív asked the Minister for Health the reason there is a delay in the

delivery of items to a person (details supplied); when the matter will be rectified; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3560/19]

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.

General Practitioner Services

189. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health his plans to extend the retirement age of general practitioners after 72 years of age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3567/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Government is committed to the continued development of GP capacity to ensure that patients across the country continue to have access to GP services and that general practice is sustainable in all areas into the future.

Several efforts to increase the number of practising GPs have been undertaken in recent years. These include increases in the number of GP training places, which have risen from 120 places in 2009 to 202 places available in 2019.

Changes have been made to the entry provisions to the GMS scheme to accommodate more flexible/shared GMS/GP contracts, and to the retirement provisions for GPs under the GMS scheme, allowing GPs to hold GMS contracts until their 72nd birthday, as well as the introduction of an enhanced supports package for rural GP practices.

There are no plans at present to extend the retirement age for GPs beyond 72 years.

Driver Licence Renewals

190. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Health his plans to review the issue of medical certificates for persons over 70 years of age renewing driver licences not being covered by the medical card in order to reduce the significant cost that now applies to this group of drivers following changes to the rules governing driver licence renewals for persons over 70 years of age. [3575/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The GMS contract stipulates that fees for medical and GP visit card holders are not paid to GPs in respect of certain medical certificates which may be required, for example, “under the Social Welfare Acts or for the purposes of insurance or assurance policies or for the issue of driving licences”.

Any fees charged by GPs for services provided outside the terms of the GMS contract are a matter of private contract between the GP and their patients.

There are no plans at present to include the completion of forms required for driving licence applications as a service to be provided to GMS patients under the GMS or GP Visit Card scheme.

Abortion Legislation

191. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health his plans to review the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018 as a matter of urgency in view of the recent

case in which a woman was denied a termination at 14 weeks despite presenting with a foetus suffering from a severe abnormality; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3577/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): It is not appropriate for either me, as Minister for Health, or the Department of Health to comment on any individual case.

As the Deputy is aware, the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018 was signed into law by the President on 20 December 2018, and services for termination of pregnancy commenced just over three weeks ago, on 1 January 2019.

Section 11 of the Act sets out the law on access to termination of pregnancy in cases where there is a condition present affecting the foetus that is likely to lead to the death of the foetus before or within 28 days of birth. This provision is in line with the report of the Joint Committee on the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution, which recommended that “the law should not provide for the termination of pregnancy on the ground that the unborn child has a significant foetal abnormality where such abnormality is not likely to result in death before or shortly after birth.”

The operation of the legislation is entirely a matter for attending clinicians. Neither the Minister nor the Department of Health has any role in the medical management of cases. Where a patient requires care not available in a particular location, the patient should be transferred to a hospital/service where the necessary care is available.

The Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018 makes provision for women in cases where a medical practitioner has not given an opinion or has given an opinion that would not lead to certification for termination of pregnancy to be carried out. Section 13 of the Act provides that the woman, or a person acting on her behalf, may make an application to the HSE for a review of the relevant decision. Within 3 days of receiving such an application, the HSE must convene a committee of medical practitioners to review the relevant decision. The committee must complete its review not later than 7 days from the date on which it was established.

Under section 7 of the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018, I am committed to carrying out a review of the operation of the Act not later than three years after it was commenced.

Maternity Services

192. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health if he will review the operations at maternity hospitals to ensure hospitals afford the same service to pregnant women suffering from severe foetal abnormalities; if clinical decisions are made only by the two relevant medical practitioners and not other bodies or hospital personnel; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3578/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this question relates to a service issue, it has been referred to the HSE for answer.

National Children's Hospital Expenditure

193. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the measures he is taking to hold members of the National Paediatric Hospital Development Board accountable for the significant cost increases associated with the national children's hospital; the number of occasions

he has met with the board since April 2017; if the escalating costs were discussed; his views on same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3580/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Governance structures, approved by Government in April 2017, are in place to oversee and monitor progress on the Children's Hospital Project and Programme. These include the Children's Hospital Project and Programme Board, chaired by the Secretary General of the Department of Health, and the Children's Hospital Project and Programme Steering Group, chaired by the Deputy Director General of the Health Service Executive. The Steering Group directs the overall programme of work within agreed parameters, and reports to the Children's Hospital Project and Programme Board.

An independent review 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 commenced this week. The review is expected to take place over an 8-week period with the report to be completed in March.

In addition, a review of the existing oversight arrangements between the Department of Health, HSE and the NPHDB will also be undertaken to assess the adequacy of existing management and governance in place to ensure the completion of this project. It is expected that the findings from the independent review will inform the work required on the broader governance review.

The Department, the HSE and the National Paediatric Hospital Development Board are fully committed to collaborating with these reviews and to implementing any recommendations arising.

Hospitals Capital Programme

194. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if the delivery and operation of the modular unit at South Tipperary General Hospital is being affected due to the escalating costs of the national children's hospital project at St James's Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3581/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): This development is included in the HSE's National Service Plan for 2019 and the necessary capital funding is in place for the delivery of this project, which is underway and is expected to be completed by the end of Q1 2019 and operational in Q2 2019.

Brexit Issues

195. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the number of meetings he has attended since the beginning of September 2018 with his officials to discuss and prepare for Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3599/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As part of a whole of Government response to Brexit, I and my Department are 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 insofar as possible.

Brexit is a priority issue both for me and officials in my Department. The Management Board considers the issue on a regular basis. It is a regular item for discussion with the Secretary General, with other senior officials and at Ministerial Management Board meetings. My engagements can range from structured meetings to informal briefings.

This covers, among other matters the work of the various Departmental Brexit working groups including the Secretary General Heads of Agencies Group and the weekly Health Sector Operations Team on Brexit. I am also briefed on the Department's participation in the inter-departmental work on Brexit being led by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Department of the Taoiseach. I have also, with my Department engaged on Brexit issues at EU level and bilaterally with the UK.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme

196. Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe asked the Minister for Health if a review of an allowance in payment to a person (details supplied) will be arranged with a view to increasing the weekly amount. [3608/19]

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.

In order to determine how much an applicant will contribute to the cost of their care, a financial assessment is carried out by the HSE which takes account of a person's income and assets.

I would suggest that the applicant contact their local HSE Nursing Homes Support Scheme Office to request a review of the financial assessment, if twelve months have elapsed since the date of the initial financial assessment or the most recent review of that assessment.

Where a resident under the Nursing Homes Support Scheme (NHSS) has assets including land or property, they may defer their contribution to care based on such assets under Ancillary State Support (also known as Nursing Home Loan). This contribution becomes payable on their death. However, where the asset concerned is the principal residence of the surviving partner of the person who has died, the surviving partner may request that repayment of the loan is further deferred for their lifetime. A person wishing to apply for a further deferral, or a representative acting on their behalf, must apply for such a deferral not later than 3 months after the death of the applicant. In compelling circumstances, an application may be made up until 6 months after the death of the applicant. The application should be made on the form specified by the HSE.

Industrial Relations

197. Deputy Pearse Doherty asked the Minister for Health his plans to intervene in the ongoing industrial dispute between members of an organisation (details supplied) and the HSE; the efforts he is making to ensure that a resolution to the dispute can be found with the view to avoiding the occurrence of industrial action by the organisation and the impact which such a strike action may have on services and patients; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[3609/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): SIPTU is recognised by the HSE and has negotiating rights for frontline ambulance grades employed by the Executive. As a result, the HSE deducts subscriptions at source for those ambulance staff that are members of that union. However, the National Ambulance Service Representative Association (NASRA) is not recognised by the HSE and, therefore, does not have negotiating rights.

Whilst individuals have a right to membership of any trade union, if they choose to join an association which is not recognised by their employer, such membership is not facilitated by their employer. This means that the HSE does not facilitate deduction of union subscriptions for this particular Association.

In order to mitigate the risk of any potential disruption to service, I have been advised by the HSE that the National Ambulance Service had robust contingency arrangements in place to respond to the industrial action. This involved ensuring the availability of the Irish Defence Forces to provide crewed ambulances on the day of the strike.

It is regrettable that NASRA has taken industrial action. Whilst negotiation is usually a preferred course of action, in this instance it is not possible for the HSE to engage with NASRA as it is an organisation with no negotiating rights in respect of frontline ambulance personnel.

Home Help Service Data

198. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons that have been granted home help hours; and the number still on the waiting list that have not received hours to date. [3610/19]

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.

Medical Card Applications

199. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an application for a medical card by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3611/19]

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.

Pharmacy Regulations

200. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his plans to reverse a decision (details supplied) and allow pharmacists who are training to be paid during placement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3621/19]

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.

Medical Records

201. Deputy James Browne asked the Minister for Health the reason the only route for a patient seeking a copy of X-rays is to submit a freedom of information request; the reason there is not a less costly method to provide same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3630/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Generally, access to one's health records, including copies of x-rays, should be provided routinely and administratively, having regard to privacy, confidentiality and the public interest. An application may be made in writing to the appropriate service or agency providing enough information (date of birth, current and previous

addresses, dates of contact with the specific services etc.) to help in locating records.

For patients of the public system, access to their medical records can be requested under the Freedom of Information Act. There is no application fee for such requests. However, there is a charge of €6 for an x-ray. They may apply in writing to the public body that holds the records. Such patients may also be entitled to their medical records under the Data Protection Acts (2003 and 2008), for which there is no charge.

People who visit their G.P. privately or attend a non-HSE funded or private hospital may access their records under the Data Protection Acts (2003 and 2008). No charge applies.

Mental Health Services

202. Deputy Mick Wallace asked the Minister for Health the status of the open dialogue programme that started in Bantry, County Cork in September 2015; the way in which the programme works; if it has been considered a success; if it will be rolled out to other CHO teams and areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3631/19]

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 Minister as soon as possible.

Mental Health Services

203. Deputy Mick Wallace asked the Minister for Health the status of the advancing recovery Ireland initiative in counties Wexford and Waterford; the achievements the programme has had there; the number of meetings that have taken place since the initiative began; the number of service users that engaged with the initiative; the number of HSE staff that engaged with the initiative in counties Wexford and Waterford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3632/19]

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 Minister as soon as possible.

HSE Expenditure

204. Deputy Mick Wallace asked the Minister for Health the expenses claimed by HSE staff in connection with the advancing recovery Ireland initiative since its inception by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3633/19]

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 Minister as soon as possible.

Primary Care Centres Provision

205. Deputy Róisín Shortall asked the Minister for Health the status of the provision of a primary care centre at a location (details supplied); if the provision of the centre remains a

high priority for the HSE; the timescale for the completion of the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3635/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the HSE has responsibility for the provision, along with the maintenance and operation of Primary Care Centres and other Primary Care facilities, the Executive has been asked to reply directly to the Deputy.

General Practitioner Services Provision

206. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the status of the provision an out-of-hours general practitioner service for an area (details supplied); when the service will begin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3636/19]

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.

Vaccination Programme

207. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the steps he will take to ensure that the HSE national immunisation office will update its delivery and communication strategies for the HPV vaccine programme in advance of the extension of the vaccine to boys in September 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3637/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The 2019 HSE Service Plan included additional funding for the expansion of the Primary Childhood Immunisation Schedule to include HPV vaccination for boys.

The HSE National Immunisation Office has advised that it will develop updated materials and a communication strategy for a gender neutral HPV programme which will be available for parents and healthcare professionals in advance of the start of the gender neutral programme.

All vaccines administered through the Primary Childhood Immunisation Schedule are provided free of charge.

Disability Services Funding

208. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health if he or his officials have received correspondence from an organisation (details supplied) regarding the lack of funding for the organisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3639/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I am aware of the financial difficulties that the Irish Deaf Society is currently experiencing and concerns regarding its future sustainability. Officials from my Office have been in regular contact with the Society's C.E.O., Mr. John Sherwin, on the matter.

The Irish Deaf Society focuses its service delivery on advocacy, training and development as distinct from the delivery of health and social care supports to the deaf community and for this reason, it does not receive core-funding from the Health Vote. However, there are a number of other funding options available to the Irish Deaf Society. It has received funding, in the past, from the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government and the Department of

Education & Skills. It has also received grants from the Department of Justice and Equality and the National Lottery.

I am currently working with colleagues in Government to see if this issue can be resolved and I remain hopeful of a positive outcome.

General Practitioner Contracts

209. Deputy Aindrias Moynihan asked the Minister for Health the status of the proposed new general practitioner contract; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3645/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Government is committed to engaging with GP representatives on the development of modernised GP contractual arrangements.

Talks between the State and the Irish Medical Organisation 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 and talks are continuing 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.

Hospital Waiting Lists

210. Deputy Thomas Byrne asked the Minister for Health when a hip operation will take place for a person (details supplied). [3647/19]

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.

Questions - Written Answers
General Practitioner Training

211. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3648/19]

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.

Medical Card Applications

212. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if immediate steps will be taken to issue an emergency medical card in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3659/19]

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 Waiting Lists

213. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will have a knee replacement. [3683/19]

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 Availability

214. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the status of measures to expand access to Pembrolizumab to all clinically suitable women with cervical cancer. [3688/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Deputy will be aware that a Government decision of 11 May 2018 put in place a package of support measures for the women and families affected by the issues related to CervicalCheck. Those measures included medicines which might not be approved for reimbursement including Pembrolizumab, once they are prescribed by the treating clinician.

Following that decision, concerns were raised regarding the provision of Pembrolizumab to

other cervical cancer patients on the same basis as encompassed by the Government decision of 11 May 2018. In the light of those concerns, I asked the HSE to examine ways in which other women with cervical cancer could be afforded access to Pembrolizumab if prescribed by their treating clinician.

That examination would have to have regard to the fact that the drug Pembrolizumab does not have a marketing authorisation in Europe and accordingly cannot be considered for reimbursement through the HSE statutory process. Furthermore, any decision would have to have regard to the fact that Pembrolizumab is an off label investigational medicine for the treatment of cervical cancer and that supporting evidence for the use of this drug to treat cervical cancer is limited.

Following discussions between my Department and the HSE, the HSE has put in place arrangements which will facilitate access to Pembrolizumab for cervical cancer patients, on a case-by-case basis in public hospitals, when a treating clinician determines that this is in the patient's best interests. All prescribing decisions will be entirely a matter for the treating clinician, in line with patient safety protocols and the Medical Council Guide to Professional Conduct and Ethics. The HSE has communicated this approach to hospitals and medical oncologists.

This arrangement will apply to cervical cancer patients only. The statutory responsibility of the HSE for medicine pricing and reimbursement decisions, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, remains unchanged.

Services for People with Disabilities

215. Deputy Michael Healy-Rae asked the Minister for Health the supports that can be put in place to help a person (details supplied) following on from their discharge from hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3689/19]

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 Care Packages Provision

216. Deputy Seán Crowe asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) residing in hospital after a recent illness has been awarded 21 hours of care but remains unapproved on a financial basis; the reason for the delay; and when this care package will be finalised and approved. [3467/19]

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.

Questions - Written Answers
Agriculture Scheme Appeals

217. Deputy Charlie McConalogue asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of an agricultural appeal by a person (details supplied); when a decision will be made on same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3511/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Agriculture Appeals Office operates independently of my Department. I have been advised that the records of the Agriculture Appeals Office indicate that an appeal was received from the person named on 19 June 2018 and was assigned to an Appeals Officer. Following a full assessment of the case, a comprehensive decision letter was issued by the Appeals Officer to the appellant on 11 January 2019.

Brexit Issues

218. Deputy Lisa Chambers asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of meetings he has attended since the beginning of September 2018 with his officials to discuss and prepare for Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3589/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The United Kingdom is a strategically important trading partner for the Irish agri-food sector, with 38% of total agri-food sector goods exported to the UK in 2017, and an even greater reliance on the UK market for specific sectors such as the beef industry. As such, all policy meetings relating to areas exposed to the UK in a Brexit context feature a common thread of discussion on Brexit matters.

It is the most significant challenge facing the agrifood sector at this time. Therefore, my officials and I meet on a daily basis internally, with state agencies and with representatives from the agri-food and fisheries sectors to discuss and prepare for Brexit. We also meet regularly with Ministerial colleagues and their officials, with EU Commissioners and their officials, as well as with EU counterparts

The meetings with the main industry representative organisations such as Meat Industry Ireland, and Food and Drink Industry Ireland, as well as with the farming and fishing representative organisations provide me with an opportunity to hear their concerns, to outline their challenges that the UK withdrawal from the EU will present to them and allow me and my officials update them on developments at EU level and on our preparedness measures.

Brexit is a standing agenda item on my Department's weekly Management Board meetings, where all of the necessary policy and preparedness issues are addressed. Both Minister Doyle and myself have attended Management Board meetings where we have been fully briefed on my Department's planning for a central and no-deal Brexit scenario. I and my officials are also continuing to meet with my EU counterparts in key Member States to ensure they are fully aware of Ireland's concerns about the impact of Brexit on the agri-food sector.

Brexit is also a standing item on the agenda for the regular High Level Committee meetings which oversee the implementation of the FoodWise 2025 programme.

In addition, I and my officials have had a range of bilateral meetings with Commissioner Hogan, with other EU Commissioners, with the Chief Brexit Negotiator Michel Barnier and with Commission officials to apprise them of Ireland's key 'asks' of the Brexit negotiations and to apprise them of the impacts Brexit will have on the sector.

Finally, myself and my officials are in regular discussion with Cabinet colleagues and their officials to discuss developments and strategies around Brexit as part of the ‘whole of Government’ response to Brexit.

GLAS Payments

219. Deputy Brendan Griffin asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when 2017 and 2018 GLAS payments will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3607/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named was approved into GLAS 3 and has received payments for scheme year 2017. The 2017 balance has been paid following the resolution of an outstanding issue. This application will now move forward for processing of the 2018 advance. GLAS payments are continuing to issue on a weekly basis.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme

220. Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if land (details supplied) has been included for qualification under the new round of the ANC scheme. [3612/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department has recently concluded the redesignation of eligible lands for the 2019 Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme, as required under the EU Regulations. The lands referenced in the question, in Killalaug East, were not eligible for the ANC Scheme prior to this redesignation, and are also not eligible under the new designation of eligible lands. An independent appeals process is in place for any farmer who wishes to query the eligibility status of a townland. Further details are available on my Department website: www.agriculture.gov.ie.

Horticulture Sector

221. Deputy Charlie McConalogue asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he is taking to address labour shortages in the horticulture sector; and if he had discussions with his counterpart in the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation with respect to work permits. [3691/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I am aware that there is a shortage of labour across parts of the agricultural sector, including on horticultural farms.

In addressing this issue, it became clear that while some potential exists to recruit labour from within the domestic and European labour markets, this is insufficient to meet the demand. Therefore, my Department has had extensive engagement with the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation Heather Humphreys and her Department in relation to employment permits for non-European Economic Area nationals.

This engagement culminated in my Department submitting a detailed, evidence based case to Minister Humphreys Department earlier this year which laid out the justification for granting employment permits to three sectors – dairy farm assistants, general operatives in meat plants,

and horticultural farm assistants. This resulted in the introduction in May 2018 of a pilot quota of permits by Minister Humphreys, including 500 for horticulture workers. So far, I understand that 39 of these have been issued, with around 60 applications having been received. These numbers are lower than was expected, although I understand that with the drought and the timing of the announcement, demand may have been lower than anticipated.

Alongside the dedicated pilot scheme for the agri-food sector, it is also important to point out that an overarching review of the broader employment permit system has been carried out by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation. Minister Humphreys published the report on this review last September and my Department, having actively participated in the review, is now part of an inter-departmental group tasked with implementing the recommendations. I am confident that this exercise will lead to a permit regime that is more flexible and adaptable to the labour needs of the agri-food sector, particularly for seasonal employment.

Brexit Supports

222. Deputy Charlie McConologue asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of applications received to date for the Brexit loan scheme for food businesses by company size (details supplied); the number of applications approved and not approved, respectively, to date by firm size; and the number of loans granted to date. [3693/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The €300 million Brexit Loan Scheme was designed, in cooperation with DBEI and the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI), to provide working capital support to enable eligible Irish businesses to implement necessary changes to address the challenges posed by Brexit. The Scheme opened for applications on 28 March, 2018 and it will remain open until 31st March 2020.

It provides for loans of €25,000 to €1,500,000 per eligible enterprise at a maximum interest rate of 4%, ranging from 1 year to 3 years, with unsecured loans up to €500,000. The loans can be used for future working capital requirements or to fund innovation, change or adaptation of the business to mitigate the impact of Brexit.

Applications for eligibility assessment must be made to the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) who on approval will assign an eligibility reference number. This reference number along with the loan application may then be provided to the business's preferred participating lender.

The number of eligibility applications received by SBCI to close of business on 21 January for the Brexit Loan Scheme for food businesses by company size is shown below:

| Company Size | Number of Eligibility Applications Approved for Food Businesses | Number of Eligibility Applications Not Approved for Food Businesses |
|-------------------------|---|---|
| Less than 10 employees | 16 | 0 |
| 11 to 49 employees | 17 | 1 |
| 50 to 249 employees | 9 | 1 |
| More than 250 employees | 0 | 1 |
| Total | 42 | 3 |

As at close of business on 21 January there have been a total of 376 eligibility applications received, including food business figures shown above, of which 337 eligibility applications

have been approved and 7 are ineligible, as shown in the following table:

| Company Size | Approved Eligibility Applications | Ineligible Eligibility Applications |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Less than 10 employees | 160 | 3 |
| 11 to 49 employees | 132 | 1 |
| 50 to 249 employees | 45 | 2 |
| More than 250 employees | 0 | 1 |
| Total | 337 | 7 |

The total number of loans progressed to sanction at bank level as at close of business on 21 January is 65 to a value of €14.9m, eight of which relate to food businesses with a total value of €3.6m.

TAMS Funding

223. Deputy Charlie McConalogue asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of funding approved for works in TAMS II applications that has yet to be drawn down and which expired by the end of 2018; the number of applicants in this position; the value of moneys approved not drawn down by the end of 2018; the status of moneys approved but not drawn down; and if the funds can be carried forward within the scheme or returned to the Exchequer. [3694/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): There is a budget in place of €395m for the suite of seven measures available under TAMS II for the duration of the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020. To date the expenditure amounts to €105.574m. The Scheme is co-funded under the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development.

964 approvals expired at the end of 2018 with a grant value of €11.787m. At the same time over 8,900 farmers had a TAMSII approval in place for which they had not yet submitted a payment claim with a grant value of €171.904m. All of these approvals represent committed expenditure under the TAMS II measure of the Rural Development Programme 2014 - 2020. Until such time as these approvals are acted upon or expire the budget for TAMS must include provision for the potential expenditure involved.

All participants who have completed approved works are urged to submit their payment claims immediately to facilitate early payment.

The Scheme remains open for new applications and applications continue to be received and processed under the Scheme with over 2,000 applications submitted under the latest tranche that closed on 7 December 2018.

TAMS Data

224. Deputy Charlie McConalogue asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of applications received under TAMS II by county; the number of approved applications; the number of payment claims lodged; the number of payment claims that have been approved for payment, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3695/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The TAMS II Scheme has been very successful to date in terms of applications. Of the applications approved over 8,200 payment claims have been submitted to date and payments to the value of €105.6m have issued. The information requested in relation to the TAMS II Scheme is shown in tabular form:

| County | Applications Received | Approved | Payment Claims Received | Approved For Payment |
|-------------|-----------------------|----------|-------------------------|----------------------|
| Carlow | 413 | 313 | 153 | 137 |
| Cavan | 784 | 587 | 228 | 199 |
| Clare | 652 | 518 | 256 | 248 |
| Cork | 3666 | 2875 | 1389 | 1199 |
| Donegal | 1172 | 897 | 297 | 271 |
| Dublin | 142 | 115 | 58 | 54 |
| Galway | 1532 | 1197 | 536 | 478 |
| Kerry | 1508 | 1144 | 497 | 464 |
| Kildare | 533 | 382 | 178 | 161 |
| Kilkenny | 1175 | 931 | 495 | 429 |
| Laois | 688 | 546 | 275 | 263 |
| Leitrim | 289 | 211 | 84 | 69 |
| Limerick | 1096 | 879 | 419 | 380 |
| Longford | 301 | 229 | 90 | 82 |
| Louth | 285 | 225 | 101 | 87 |
| Mayo | 868 | 634 | 251 | 218 |
| Meath | 770 | 597 | 270 | 251 |
| Monaghan | 702 | 550 | 212 | 179 |
| Offaly | 538 | 403 | 190 | 176 |
| Roscommon | 756 | 578 | 260 | 223 |
| Sligo | 311 | 243 | 97 | 76 |
| Tipperary | 1892 | 1511 | 796 | 725 |
| Waterford | 739 | 600 | 296 | 260 |
| Westmeath | 523 | 399 | 163 | 152 |
| Wexford | 1338 | 1039 | 499 | 454 |
| Wicklow | 421 | 321 | 129 | 115 |
| Grand Total | 23094 | 17924 | 8219 | 7350 |

Agrifood Sector

225. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he is taking to protect Irish agrifood interests at EU level in the upcoming EU-US trade discussions, following the US outlining objectives that put a strong emphasis on negotiating tariffs and non-tariff barriers for agriculture (details supplied). [3696/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Ireland's position on increased market access into the EU for beef or any other food products from the US or other third countries is well-known. I will vigorously defend the interests of the Irish and EU food sectors against this outcome from any trade negotiations that would have negative consequences for the sector.

The EU Commission has made its position very clear from the outset that they will not discuss market access/tariff reductions with the food/agriculture sector. Furthermore, Commissioner Malmstrom has indicated that the EU will not formally start negotiations with the US if the United States Trade Representative insists on including agriculture in its negotiating mandate.

Beef Industry

226. Deputy Charlie McConalogue asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of cattle slaughtered that originated from factory feedlots at approved beef exporting plants; and the percentage of such cattle from the total national beef kill in 2017 and 2018, in tabular form. [3697/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The detailed information requested by the Deputy, taking account of the end year figures for 2018, is not yet available and will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Teagasc Courses

227. Deputy Charlie McConalogue asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of green certificates issued by 31 December 2018 for students who had passed their exams during 2018; and the number of outstanding green certificates outstanding on 31 December 2018 to be issued by certification operators to persons who successfully completed and passed their exams in 2018. [3698/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The information requested by the Deputy is an operational matter for Teagasc who deliver the Green Cert.

Accordingly, the Deputy's question has been passed on by my Department to Teagasc who have been requested to respond to the Deputy within 10 days.

Brexit Issues

228. Deputy Charlie McConalogue asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if changes are planned to primary legislation under the remit of his Department to form a part of a Bill (details supplied). [3699/19]

229. Deputy Charlie McConalogue asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if emergency legislation has been drawn up in the event of a no-deal Brexit; the number of pieces of primary legislation this includes; and if he will provide a list of same. [3700/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 228 and 229 together.

My Department has no input in the Miscellaneous Provisions (Withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union on 29 March 2019) Bill as, based on current considerations, there is no requirement to alter primary legislation under my Departments remit for Brexit at this time.

We will, however, be amending Statutory Instruments setting the time limits for pre-notifi-

cation for imports to arrive in the State for the purposes of carrying out of documentary, identity and physical checks on imports of animals, plants, and products of animal and plant origin, as set out in EU legislation and will also have a separate Statutory Instrument dealing with movements of pets including movement from the UK post Brexit.

Throughout this work, the focus of the Department will continue to be on the need to discharge its legal responsibilities while ensuring the minimum possible disruption to trade.

Brexit Issues

230. Deputy Charlie McConalogue asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if an application has been submitted to the EU Commission to designate additional Irish airports or ports as designated Border inspection posts in preparation for the possibility of the UK becoming a third country with the EU in 2019 in a no-deal Brexit scenario; and, if so, if the detail of such airports and ports will be provided. [3701/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department has been actively participating in the Whole-of-Government approach to preparedness and contingency planning. We have fed into the overall Government Contingency Action Plan which was published on 19 December, and we have been working very closely with colleagues in other Departments and agencies to address in particular the requirements that will arise in relation to the implementation at ports and airports of import controls on agri-food products coming from the UK.

These requirements are significant, and arise in relation to the carrying out of documentary, identity and physical checks on imports of animals, plants, and products of animal and plant origin, as set out in EU legislation.

We will be applying to the EU Commission to expand the types of products and animals that our existing Border Inspection Posts (BIPs) in Dublin Port and Dublin Airport are authorised to inspect and we are seeking Commission approval for a BIP at Rosslare Port.

In the meantime an existing site has been secured in Dublin Port for the temporary accommodation required in the event of a no deal Brexit and work on refurbishing an existing building will have commenced by the end of the month. Space is being secured for truck parking. There will be dock-levellers, parking for HGVs, toll booth facilities and a public office, along with accommodation for staff.

At the same time, permanent facilities are being developed, with sites identified and plans at an advanced stage.

At Rosslare Europort office, staff accommodation will be located at existing premises in and around the harbour and work on refurbishing them will have commenced by the end of the month. Space for truck parking is being secured.

As in Dublin Port, permanent facilities are being developed in Rosslare Europort, with a site in the harbour identified and plans at an advanced stage.

At Dublin Airport, the volumes of traffic involved in the event of a no deal Brexit can be catered for by existing facilities.

Throughout all this work, the focus of my Department will continue to be on the need to discharge its legal responsibilities while ensuring the minimum disruption to trade.

Brexit Issues

231. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the impact a no-deal Brexit will have on the equine industry here; and the contingencies being put in place in this regard. [3702/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The current position is that EU rules on the movement of equidae between EU Member States require that the animals being moved are inspected by an official veterinarian and accompanied by a veterinary health certificate issued under the EU TRACES system and a horse passport issued by an approved horse passport issuing body.

However, these rules also allow Member States which have implemented alternative but equivalent health control systems in their respective territories, to grant one another derogations from the standard movement rules. The derogation provided for under Community rules on the movement of equidae is applicable to movements between EU Member States only. It is not inclusive of movements between the EU and Third Countries.

Currently Ireland is part of a Tripartite Agreement (TPA), along with the UK and France which allows for the movement and trade of horses between the three countries without undergoing veterinary inspections and without health certificates. As the TPA is based on EU legislation on the movement of horses within the EU, the UK cannot be part of the Agreement once it becomes a Third Country.

The current focus of our ‘no deal’ contingency planning is on the arrangements that will be necessary for the Department to fulfil its legal obligations with respect to import controls on live animals and agri food products as efficiently as possible while also ensuring the minimum possible disruption to trading arrangements.

As part of this planning we are upgrading existing Border Inspection Posts (BIPs) and developing additional BIPs to cater for the increased volume of inspections necessary, including in respect of equines being imported from the UK, and making arrangements to facilitate the certification of horses to the UK as necessary.

Question No. 232 answered with Question No. 35.

Electricity Generation

233. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he received the list of options he requested from the ESB on the future of a power station (details supplied); if so, his views on same; and his views on the future of the electricity generating station. [3489/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): It is settled policy that electricity generation from coal will cease no later than 2025. This position has been set out in a number of policy documents, including the National Mitigation Plan, the National Development Plan 2018-2027 and the 2015 Energy Policy Paper, “Ireland’s Transition to a Low-Carbon Energy Future”, and most recently in the National Energy and Climate Plan. The 2016 Programme for Government included a commitment that the most suitable low-carbon technology to replace coal by 2025 would be identified.

Removing the largest single dispatchable generation plant from our energy system raises significant issues and the ESB, the owner and operator of the plant, has been asked for a report

on the issues and options that arise in decommissioning the plant. As part of this study, the ESB will consider the best option in energy and climate policy terms. This work is not yet completed and I have not yet received the report. I expect to receive it shortly.

National Broadband Plan

234. Deputy Michael Harty asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of approval for the national broadband plan. [3490/19]

242. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the ongoing progress on the programme to provide broadband of a high quality and high speed nationally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3664/19]

243. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the extent to which the provision of broadband continues nationally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3665/19]

244. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the extent to which efforts continue to finalise the programme for the provision of high speed, high quality broadband nationally, notwithstanding the various setbacks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3666/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 234 and 242, to 244, inclusive, together.

The National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to ensure high speed broadband access to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location. 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.

Commercial operators have invested over €2.75bn in upgrading and modernising their networks over the past 5 years, and further investments are planned.

Under a Commitment Agreement signed with my Department in April 2017, eir is in the process of passing 300,000 predominantly rural homes with high speed broadband. According to information submitted by eir to my Department, as of Quarter 4 2018 the company has passed some 225,000 premises nationwide as part of its ongoing deployment. This is in the process of verification by officials in my Department.

Information on eir's planned rural deployment is available on that company's website, <http://fibrerollout.ie/Eircode-lookup/>. A copy of the Commitment Agreement is available on my Department's website, www.dccae.gov.ie.

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. 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.

Better Energy Homes Scheme Data

235. Deputy Thomas Pringle asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number and value in euro of grants provided under each individual scheme under better energy programme administered by the SEAI, in each of the years 2014 to 2018, by county in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3553/19]

239. Deputy Thomas Pringle asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number and value of grants provided under each individual scheme in the SEAI better energy programme for the years 2014 to 2018, by county in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3618/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 235 and 239 together.

The Better Energy Programme is funded by my Department and operated by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI). The programme consists of three main schemes: Homes, Warmer Homes and Communities.

- Better Energy Homes provides a financial incentive to private homeowners who wish to improve the energy performance of their homes.

- Better Energy Warmer Homes delivers a range of energy efficiency measures free of charge to low income households who meet the defined eligibility criteria and who are vulnerable to energy poverty.

- Better Energy Communities supports energy efficiency upgrades to mixed projects of homes, community facilities and businesses in a local community.

- These schemes are supplemented by two pilot schemes exploring the multiple benefits of energy efficiency and the challenges of moving to deeper retrofit.

The Warmth and Wellbeing scheme which was launched as a pilot initiative under the Government's Strategy to Combat Energy Poverty and the Healthy Ireland Framework. The aim of the scheme, a joint policy initiative between my Department and the Department of Health, which began in 2016, is to demonstrate the positive effects that making homes warmer and more energy efficient can have on the health and well-being of people in energy poverty who are living with a chronic respiratory condition. An independent research project is underway alongside the scheme's delivery and will assess the impact the scheme is having.

The Deep Retrofit Pilot Scheme which launched in 2017 is investigating how to create a scalable offering for the deep retrofit of Ireland's housing stock to an A3 Building Energy Rating (BER), while building consumer demand and contractor capacity for deep retrofit. Under the scheme Government is funding up to 50% of the total capital and project management costs

for homes that achieve an A3 Building Energy Rating post retrofit.

The information requested in relation to number and value of grants provided under each scheme, by county breakdown for 2014 to 2018 where available, is set out in the following tables contained in the following link:

[Tables].

Energy Schemes Data

236. Deputy Thomas Pringle asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number and value in euro of grants provided under the smart lighting programme pilot administered by the SEAI in 2018, by county in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3554/19]

240. Deputy Thomas Pringle asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number and value of grants provided under the SEAI smart lighting programme pilot in 2018, by county in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3619/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 236 and 240 together.

The Smart Lighting Pilot Programme provides grants of up to 30% for SMEs to upgrade to more efficient lighting, permanently reducing future energy use and spend. The pilot scheme was introduced in 2017 and saw a significant increase in uptake in participation for 2018. The scheme will be re-introduced in 2019.

The total value of the grants in 2018 was just over €369,000, breakdown by county is set out in the table.

| County | No. of Applications | Value of Grants Sought |
|----------|---------------------|------------------------|
| Carlow | 0 | € - |
| Cavan | 2 | € 11,000 |
| Clare | 2 | € 7,000 |
| Cork | 31 | € 132,258 |
| Donegal | 2 | € 6,480 |
| Dublin | 0 | € - |
| Galway | 0 | € - |
| Kerry | 3 | € 13,300 |
| Kildare | 4 | € 12,750 |
| Kilkenny | 7 | € 26,089 |
| Laois | 1 | € 1,750 |
| Leitrim | 0 | € - |
| Limerick | 3 | € 8,397 |
| Longford | 0 | € - |
| Louth | 2 | € 7,000 |
| Mayo | 3 | € 10,000 |
| Meath | 6 | € 34,380 |

| County | No. of Applications | Value of Grants Sought |
|--------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| Monaghan | 5 | € 19,560 |
| Offaly | 2 | € 7,000 |
| Roscommon | 0 | € - |
| Sligo | 0 | € - |
| Tipperary | 5 | € 16,892 |
| Waterford | 7 | € 27,750 |
| Westmeath | 0 | € - |
| Wexford | 3 | € 12,600 |
| Wicklow | 4 | € 15,120 |
| Multi County | 0 | € - |

Energy Schemes Data

237. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number and value in euros of applications under the ACA scheme administered by the SEAI in 2018, by county in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3555/19]

241. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number and value of applications under the SEAI ACA scheme in 2018 by county in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3620/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 237 and 241 together.

The Accelerated Capital Allowance (ACA) is a tax incentive scheme that promotes investment in energy efficient products & equipment. The scheme is available to companies and unincorporated businesses which incur expenditure on approved energy efficient equipment for use in their trade. Products eligible under the scheme are included in a list of energy-efficient equipment approved by this Department and maintained by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI). Revenue administer the scheme, in which companies can claim the allowance through their Return of Income Form CT1. The information currently returned to Revenue by taxpayers in relation to the ACA scheme gives an indication of the cost of the scheme to the Exchequer and the tax benefit to taxpayers.

My department is however not in a position to provide more detailed information on the uptake of the scheme as this information resides with Revenue and not with my Department. I understand that there is currently no legislative basis for Revenue to share information that is returned to Revenue by taxpayers with Government departments beyond aggregate statistics.

The most recent aggregate data, as published on Revenue's website, is for 2016 and shows a total of 71 claims with a combined value of allowances claimed of €0.9m. This information can be accessed on page 2 at the link below under the heading "Capital Allowances Used (Energy Efficient Capital Allowance only)".

<https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/documents/statistics/tax-expenditures/costs-tax-expenditures.pdf>.

Brexit Issues

238. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of meetings he has attended since the beginning of September 2018 with his officials to discuss and prepare for Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3592/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): At least once a month, I meet with the Department's Management Board. Brexit is a standing item on the Agenda at these meetings and members are updated on contingency and preparedness planning in my Department, and I also discuss Brexit issues with officials as issues arise. These meetings update on developments and discuss actions and contingency plans being developed by the Department. Since I was appointed Minister on 16 October last, I have attended six such meetings where Brexit issues have been discussed:

17 October 2018

25 October 2018

20 November 2018

7 December 2018

11 January 2019

18 January 2019

Apart from these formal meetings, I speak regularly with senior officials at other meetings as issues and queries arise so that I receive up to date information and advice, and Brexit is also considered at Cabinet.

Question No. 239 answered with Question No. 235.

Question No. 240 answered with Question No. 236.

Question No. 241 answered with Question No. 237.

Questions Nos. 242 to 244, inclusive, answered with Question No. 234.

Question No. 245 answered with Question No. 31.

Electricity Generation

246. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the degree to which electricity generation remains reliant on fossil fuels in totality or in part; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3668/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Energy in Ireland 2018 Report was published by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) in December 2018. 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 report sets out the progress that Ireland has made in reducing reliance on fossil fuels for transport, heating and electricity production. In 2017, as Ireland’s economy grew by 7.2% as measured by gross domestic product (GDP) or 3% as measured by gross national income (GNI), whereas energy use increased by 0.5%. The report also states that renewable energy use grew by 52% between 2013 and 2017. Notwithstanding this, over 90% of all energy used, including transport, in Ire-

land in 2017 was from fossil fuels.

There are no specific international requirements on the composition of electricity generation in the fuel mix. 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. SEAI analysis states that 10.6% of Ireland's overall energy requirements in 2017 were met from renewable sources. This avoided 4.1 million tonnes of CO₂ emissions and €439 million of fossil fuel imports. Ireland achieved 30.1% of electricity, 6.9% of heat and 7.4% of transport energy requirements using renewable energy sources in 2017.

Renewable Energy Generation

247. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the extent to which electricity generation by alternative means such as wind, solar, hydro, wave, anaerobic digesters or other non-fossil means has grown to replace fossil fuel generation in the past ten years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3669/19]

248. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the extent to which electricity generation needs are met through alternative non-fossil energy generation; the extent to which such generation is adequate or inadequate to meet national grid requirements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3670/19]

250. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the amount of wind, hydro and solar-generated electricity that is available and admitted to the national grid on a daily basis; the extent to which the stability of the grid remains constant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3673/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 247, 248 and 250 together.

The *Energy in Ireland 2018 Report* was published by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) in December 2018. Table 11 (Page 34) shows that the share of electricity from renewable energy has increased fourfold between 2005 and 2017 – from 7.2% to 30.1% - an increase of 23 percentage points over 12 years. Table 11 also shows how electricity production from wind energy has increased to the point where it accounted for 84% of the renewable electricity generated in 2017. Electricity generated from biomass accounted for 8% of renewable electricity in 2017. Biomass consists of contributions from solid biomass, landfill gas, the renewable portion of waste and other biogas (including anaerobic digestion). Renewable electricity (or non-fossil fuel) generation accounted for 30.1% of gross electricity consumption in 2017. SEAI does not have any preliminary data for the year 2018 yet.

Wind, hydro and solar photovoltaic (PV) generated electricity in 2017, respectively, accounted for 25.2%, 2.4% and 0.04% of Ireland's gross electricity consumption. Wave energy technology is still at the Research, Development and Demonstration stage globally. Tidal energy is a little closer to commercialisation.

Details in relation to All-Island electricity system demand and fuel mix are publicly available on the EirGrid website at <http://www.eirgridgroup.com/>. This includes information on the number, type and generating capacity of plants on the system. EirGrid's report titled “*All-Island Generation Capacity Statement*” (Pages 12 and 13) gives details of the fuel mix (2017) from different energy sources for both Ireland and Northern Ireland. Regarding grid stability, EirGrid

are progressing plans for further cross border interconnection and initiatives that encourage flexibility such as the DS3 programme that support integration of more intermittent generation sources.

The total amount of renewable generation connected to the grid at November 2018 was 3,938MW, of which wind generation was approximately 3,610MW, 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.

In regard to projected electricity needed for the next five and ten years, EirGrid have projected a number of scenarios in the publication titled “*Tomorrow’s Energy Scenarios 2017 – Planning our Energy Future*” (July 2017).

Renewable Energy Generation Targets

249. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the extent to which the existing electricity generating stations dependent on fossil fuels have been restricted or otherwise stood down in the past 12 months with a view to bringing emissions into line with international standards and targets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3671/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Government’s commitment to reduce Ireland’s greenhouse gas emissions over the longer term is set out in the 2017 National Mitigation Plan, the 2015 Energy White Paper and recently published National Energy and Climate Plan. In the electricity sector, which accounts for less than one fifth of Ireland’s overall emissions, we have made good progress and are well on our way to our target of 40% of electricity from renewable sources by 2020. Ireland’s commitment is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the energy sector by at least 80% by 2050. As energy use and greenhouse gas emissions are linked, meeting this objective requires a radical transformation of Ireland’s energy system from being predominantly fossil fuel based to a clean, low carbon energy system. As set out in the Energy Policy White Paper, a low-carbon future involves moving away from high-emissions fuels in electricity generation to lower emissions fuels such as gas, and ultimately away from fossil fuels altogether. This policy is fully aligned with EU policy objectives of decarbonisation in the electricity sector.

On the way to achieving this low-carbon future, it is settled policy that Moneypoint will cease burning coal by 2025, and the three peat-fired electricity generating stations in the Midlands will cease burning peat before 2030. All three plants have been awarded support for biomass combustion under the REFIT3 Scheme for up to 30% of the installed capacity up to 2030. Bord na Móna commenced co-firing at its Edenderry Plant with biomass in 2008, and it is expected that ESB will commence co-firing at its 2 peat fired plants with biomass in 2020, subject to the plants receiving planning permission.

In relation to electricity generating stations being restricted in the past twelve months on the basis of their levels of GHG emissions, all fossil fuel based stations participate under the EU Emissions Trading System (EU ETS), which is a system designed to reduce emissions and provides a strong incentive to decarbonise the manner in which these installations produce electricity. EU ETS carbon prices have been on average over €20 per tonne since August 2018. As the carbon price rises even further, these installations become less economically viable, and incentivises companies to move to lower GHG emitting technologies, including renewable generation.

Question No. 250 answered with Question No. 247.

Electricity Generation

251. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the daily requirement of electricity generated and available to the domestic and industrial markets without restriction; the extent to which this is compliant with public service obligations such as the need to ensure continuity of supply; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3674/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Electricity Security of Supply Report 2018 published by the Commission for the Regulation of Utilities on 8 November 2018, points to peak daily system electricity demand in Ireland recorded during 2017 was close to, but slightly higher than, 5GW. The full report is available on the CRU website: <https://www.cru.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/CRU18122-Electricity-Security-of-Supply-Report-2018.pdf> As the Deputy is aware, the PSO levy has been in place since 2001 and consists of a set of support schemes designed to facilitate national electricity policy objectives for renewables, indigenous fuels and security of supply. It has successfully delivered on these objectives, with a total amount of renewable generation connected to the electricity grid of 3,938 Mega Watts (MW) in November 2018, the vast majority of which was comprised of onshore wind generation.

The Generation Capacity Statement published annually by EirGrid provides a forecast of expected electricity demand and the level of generation capacity that will be required on the island over the next ten years, using a range of scenarios. Under a median demand forecast, EirGrid currently anticipates Ireland's total electricity requirement peak will exceed 6.5 GW by 2026. This data is used to plan for future electricity generation adequacy, security of supply, and associated network enhancements. The latest Generation Capacity Statement, entitled the "All-Island Generation Capacity Statement 2018-2027", is available on the EirGrid website:

http://www.eirgridgroup.com/site-files/library/EirGrid/Generation_Capacity_Statement_2018.pdf.

Telecommunications Services Data

252. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the degree to which his Department, directly or through the Commission for Communications Regulation, can monitor the quality and extent of mobile phone coverage nationally comparable with the quality of service available in other European countries; if particular deficiencies have been identified in this regard; the nature of actions pending; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3675/19]

253. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if particular investigations have been undertaken with a view to ensuring the availability of adequate quality and scale of mobile telephony nationally; his plans to improve identified blackspots; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3676/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 252 and 253 together.

Providing telecommunications services, including mobile phone services, is a matter for the

relevant service providers operating in a fully liberalised market regulated by the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg), as independent Regulator. I do not have statutory authority to require commercial companies to rollout services and make specific investments in particular locations.

With regard to mobile telephony service quality in other countries, comparisons between Member States and within regions can be problematic for many reasons, including the fact that the technical characteristics of mobile phone networks determining coverage and capacity will vary between operators and locations. Other factors include the characteristics of individual markets, including topography, population density, frequencies used etc.

The Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce produced a report in December 2016, available on my Department's website, containing 40 actions to alleviate telecommunications networks coverage deficits. An Implementation Group is overseeing implementation of the actions and comprises all key stakeholders responsible for delivery.

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 the Taskforce actions. Of the 40 actions, 29 had 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, 23 new measures were identified for delivery in 2018. The outcome of discussions at the second Annual National Stakeholder Forum held in October 2018 informed preparation of the 2018 Annual Review report which will be published shortly together with the 2019 Work Programme.

Some of the Taskforce's key achievements to date in addressing mobile phone coverage issues include:

- Work by my Department and the Department of Rural and Community Development to achieve a greater consensus around site selection for telecoms infrastructure and therefore improve mobile phone coverage.
- Both Departments are working with a pilot group of local authorities to identify the issues associated with 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.
- Establishment of a focus group to provide guidance with respect on categories of location where high quality reliable mobile coverage should be made available as a priority. The focus group report was published on my Department's website on 31 August 2018. It is anticipated that the output of the focus group should influence the actions of the mobile network operators in their work to reduce mobile phone blackspots, as well as informing future policy in my Department with regard to priorities for mobile phone services.

- Work underway by a working group which is investigating 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 service available to them.

- Development by ComReg of a licensing scheme enabling households and businesses to use mobile phone repeaters to boost signals into their premises and bring immediate improve-

ments in mobile coverage.

ComReg is providing expert advice to the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce and has committed to implementing a number of actions designed to improve the service experience of mobile phone users. In late 2016, in accordance with its strategic plan and in alignment with taskforce actions, the Regulator commenced several projects to gain greater understanding of factors affecting mobile user experience, including the effect of building materials on indoor coverage.

In 2017 ComReg published the results of a survey, the first of its kind in Ireland, investigating Irish people's experience and perceptions of their mobile phone service. The survey involved over 2,800 face-to-face interviews and to ensure that the experience of those in rural areas were captured, the survey sampled a higher percentage of those living in less densely populated parts of the country. The full report can be found on ComReg's website at www.comreg.ie/publications.

In tandem with the work of the Taskforce, the release by ComReg of the 3.6GHz radio spectrum band, which has been identified at EU level as a primary band suitable for 5G rollout, will also contribute to addressing increasing mobile data demands and improve mobile coverage. Mobile operators' commercial investment has also resulted in improved services, following ComReg's 2012 multi-band spectrum auction. At least one operator has now in excess of 90% 4G population coverage.

All of these initiatives should help enhance the quality of mobile phone and data services, particularly in rural areas.

National Car Test

254. Deputy Niamh Smyth asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if there have been policy changes or changes to the way in which the national car test, NCT, is conducted in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3465/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The governing legislation for the National Car Test is provided by the Road Traffic (National Car Test) Regulations 2017 - S.I. No. 415 of 2017. These Regulations came into operation on 20 May 2018 (with the exception of Regulation 3(9)(a) that comes into operation on 1 January 2020) and revoked the Road Traffic (National Car Test) Regulations 2014 - S.I. No. 322 of 2014.

The main changes introduced to the National Car Test in 2018 are:

- Mutual recognition of valid Certificates of Roadworthiness issued by the competent authorities of other Member States;
- Deficiencies categorised into minor, major and dangerous;
- Cars aged between 30 and 40 years old tested biennially.

National Car Test Data

255. Deputy Niamh Smyth asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the first time pass rate in each national car test, NCT, centre nationally in each of the years 2015 to 2018, in tabular form. [3466/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The operation of the National Car Testing Service is the statutory responsibility of the Road Safety Authority. 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.

Road Traffic Offences

256. Deputy Thomas Pringle asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the penalties that would apply to a HGV vehicle caught travelling at 101 kilometres an hour in a 50 kilometres an hour zone; his plans to change the penalties that would apply in this circumstance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3483/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): At present, a person caught exceeding the speed limit will receive a fixed charge notice, requiring them to pay a fixed charge of €80 within 28 days. If they do not pay within 28 days, they have a further 28 days within which they may pay the charge plus 50%. If no payment is made within 56 days, court proceedings are begun. When a summons to court is sent, there is a so-called ‘third payment option’ included, permitting the person to pay the fixed charge plus 100%. If they do so no later than 7 days before date of the court hearing, court proceedings will be discontinued. If they pay the fixed charge at any of the three stages of this process, they will also receive 3 penalty points on their licence record. The amount by which they have exceeded the speed limit is not taken into account in this current system.

If the person does not pay the fixed charge and is subsequently convicted in court, they will receive a fine of up to a maximum of €1,000 for a first offence, and up to €2,000 for a second or subsequent offence. In the case of a third or subsequent offence within a 12-month period, they will receive a fine up to a maximum of €2,000 and/or up to 3 months in prison. In all cases following conviction in court they will receive 5 penalty points.

I believe that a system of graduated speeding penalties, which would see higher sanctions for breaking the speed limit by greater amounts would be fairer and more proportionate than the current system, as well as acting as a deterrent to excessive speeding. It would also be in line with the legislation on alcohol, where people who drive over the limit receive higher penalties if they are over the limit by higher amounts.

Specific proposals for the penalties in question are to be considered by a Cabinet committee on 31 January, and it would not be appropriate for me to comment on possible penalties for specific brackets of speeding offences before Government has discussed and agreed them.

Bus Services

257. Deputy Michael Healy-Rae asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to install a bus shelter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3498/19]

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 responsibility for the development and implementation of public transport infrastructure including the provision of bus shelters. I am advised that the NTA has developed a strategy for determination of investment in the installation of bus shelters around the country.

In light of the NTA's responsibility in this area, 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.

Motor Insurance

258. Deputy Imelda Munster asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the situation for many young drivers that hold learner permits and are unable to obtain car insurance (details supplied); the measures he has taken or plans to take to rectify same; if he has considered a special scheme for young drivers in which they are charged a set insurance rate which increases if they commit a driving offence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3508/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Insurance companies are private companies. Neither my Department nor the Central Bank of Ireland has the power to direct insurance companies on the pricing of insurance products. The EU framework for insurance expressly prohibits Member States from adopting rules which require prior approval of the pricing or terms and conditions of insurance products. The provision of insurance cover and the price at which it is offered are commercial matters for insurance companies and are based on an assessment of the risks they are willing to accept and adequate provisioning to meet those risks. These are considered by insurance companies on a case by case basis.

Consideration is given to the age of the driver, the type of car, the claims record, driving experience, the number of drivers, how the car is used, etc. Insurers do not all use the same combination of rating factors, prices vary across the market and consumers are free to choose. Insurance companies price in accordance with their own past claims experience, for example, where the age of a car is a factor, different insurance companies would use different age thresholds. The Cost of Insurance Working Group is looking at the circumstances behind the cost of motor insurance and how to improve the situation, but will still not be able to directly affect the actual costs of motor insurance. A copy of the Cost of Insurance Working Group Report and subsequent updates can be found here:

<http://www.finance.gov.ie/what-we-do/insurance/the-cost-of-insurance-working-group/>.

Insurance Ireland operates a free insurance information service for those who have queries, complaints or difficulties in relation to obtaining insurance. All calls regarding refusal to quote, or quotations that are so excessive as to be in effect a refusal, should be directed to Insurance Ireland by phone at (01) 676 1820, by email at declined@insuranceireland.ie or by post at 5 Harbourmaster Place, IFSC, Dublin 1 quoting the Declined Cases Agreement.

Road Projects Status

259. Deputy Charlie McConalogue asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of a road project (details supplied) in County Donegal; if information will be provided with regard to matters; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3517/19]

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 County or City Council, 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. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter for the Council.

Prior to the financial crisis, applications for funding for road improvement projects would have been considered as part of the Specific Improvement, and Strategic Regional and Local Road Grant Schemes. However, the extent of the cutbacks in grant funding during the crisis meant these grant schemes had to be curtailed after 2013 because expenditure on maintenance/renewal was falling well short of what was required to adequately maintain the regional and local road network.

The NDP does provide for the gradual build up in funding for the road network but it will take some years yet to reach the level required for the adequate maintenance and renewal of the network. For this reason there is limited scope at present for funding projects under the Specific and Strategic Grant Programmes.

Any projects proposed by local authorities for consideration under the Specific and Strategic Grant Programmes are assessed by the Department on a case-by-case basis. All projects put forward by local authorities for consideration must comply with the requirements of the Public Spending Code and my Department's Capital Appraisal Framework and it is important for local authorities to prioritise projects within their overall area of responsibility with these requirements in mind.

Under the capital project appraisal process a Preliminary Appraisal has to be submitted in relation to each proposed project. Once an appraisal is received it is assessed taking into account other competing projects and the overall roads budget. A Preliminary Appraisal has been received from Donegal County Council and is currently under review.

It is expected that regional and local road allocations for 2019 will be notified to local authorities shortly.

Cycling Facilities Provision

260. Deputy Clare Daly asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the discussions to date which have taken place between Irish Rail and Fingal County Council regarding the planned Broadmeadows Way cycle and pedestrian route in County Dublin; his plans to ensure assistance is provided to progress this regional greenway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3585/19]

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 and sustainable transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area, including cycling infrastructure.

I am not aware of any such discussions as referred to by the Deputy; however, I have referred the question to Iarnród Éireann for direct reply. Please contact my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 days.

More generally, the Deputy will be aware that my Department provides substantial funding to the NTA for the development of cycling infrastructure across the Greater Dublin Area and indeed the wider State. It is a matter for the local authority to engage with the NTA as regards any potential assistance that may be afforded a particular cycling project.

Brexit Issues

261. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of meetings he has attended since the beginning of September 2018 with his officials to discuss and prepare for Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3604/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Overall responsibility for Brexit matters within my Department is vested in the Management Board both collectively and individually on a sectoral basis. The Coordination and oversight of analyses and planning is assigned at Principal Officer Level to the Policy and EU Division of the Department while the Tourism Marketing Policy and Impact Assessment Division oversee the tourism impacts.

A Departmental Brexit Committee, comprising the Heads of Function of all relevant Divisions and sectors, is established and meets monthly. Its role is to ensure a cohesive and informed approach to identifying, planning and acting on Brexit issues across all areas of the Department. Each Head of Function is responsible for liaising with their respective State Bodies in identifying the implications and preparing for Brexit

I meet with Management Board members, Heads of Functions, and other officials on a day-to-day basis on all matters which fall under the remit of the Department, including either specifically on Brexit actions and planning as they arise or generally as part of wider discussions. I also discuss issues including Brexit with officials by phone where required and also receive written briefings on specific issues or Brexit issues generally. It would not be possible to quantify this level of interaction.

Sports Capital Programme

262. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the final allocation of 2018 sports capital grants will be completed. [3613/19]

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.

186 of these applications were for projects that were deemed invalid under the 2017 round of the programme that subsequently submitted corrected documents. These applications were assessed first and €7m in allocations to 170 projects were announced on the 17th January.

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.

Rural Transport Services Provision

263. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the consideration he has given to facilitate the development of a model (details supplied) of taxi service to help address the challenges of connectivity for persons living in rural Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3614/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Deputy refers to a specific company, which is licensed as a dispatch operator in Ireland.

In Ireland, carrying passengers in a car for a payment is regulated under the Taxi Regulation Act 2013. That Act provides for regulating the small public service vehicle (SPSV) industry including taxis, hackneys and other similar activities. The Act requires the holding of an SPSV licence for the vehicle and also one for the driver, in order to carry passengers for hire or reward. The regulatory regime places no quantitative restriction on the number of licences in place.

The regulatory regime requires drivers to be Garda vetted, to have demonstrated knowledge both of industry standards and of the areas in which they will be working, to have a vehicle meets specific safety standards, to have appropriate insurance in place, and to operate to an appropriate standard of service, within a pricing system.

The focus of the regulatory regime to protect the consumer and to help personal safety. These are vital objectives and must continue to be central to how the SPSV industry is operated and regulated. Within this context, there is also a need to evolve and be open to new technologies and innovation. In this regard, there is now widespread use of technology in the SPSV industry, and such innovations are of benefit to both consumers and operators.

As regards the specific issue of transport connectivity in rural Ireland, the Deputy will be aware that the NTA has responsibility for providing integrated local and rural transport. This includes responsibility for the Rural Transport Programme which now operates under the "Local Link" brand. The number of services has been expanded in recent years and spending on the programme has increased substantially also. In recent months, the NTA has been conducting a pilot scheme to test evening and night-time services as part of the Rural Transport Programme. This pilot was recently extended and future arrangements will be informed by an evaluation of its experience.

Bus Services

264. Deputy Martin Heydon asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the feedback that has been received into the pilot link bus service that was extended to evenings and weekends in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3617/19]

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 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.

Light Rail Projects

265. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of tram sets operating on the Luas green line (details supplied); the overall planned percentage increase in passenger capacity of all trams operating on the green line over the period 2018 to 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3677/19]

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 the development and implementation of public transport in the Greater Dublin Area, including the Luas Green Line.

In light of the NTA's responsibility in the matters raised, I have referred the Deputy's question to the Authority for a more detailed reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Juvenile Offenders

266. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she met with the Minister for Justice and Equality or officials from his Department regarding revelations in September 2018 which showed that a person that was deemed likely responsible for the murder of a person in the Leinster region had benefited from at least eight different youth liaison officers. [3493/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I am aware of the media reports that the Deputy refers to.

However, this matter falls solely under the remit of the Minister for Justice and Equality and therefore there has not been meetings between myself and the Minister for Justice and Equality or officials from his Department regarding this matter.

Guardian's Payment

267. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the financial support which can be provided to a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3510/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I must inform the Deputy that it would not be appropriate for me to comment on an individual case. However, I have written to Tusla, the Child and Family Agency and asked them to make direct contact with the individual concerned. Tusla have confirmed that the matter has been brought to the attention of the local area.

Where a child is being cared for by a family member, but is not in State care, the family member may apply to the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection for a Guardian's Payment in respect of the child. The purpose of the Guardian's Payment Scheme is to provide income support in respect of those children. This is a private law matter and these children are not in the care of the State.

The payment is administered by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. Payment is made directly to the 'guardian' on behalf of the child. A guardian may be appointed by the courts; if there is no legally appointed guardian, the person with whom the child lives and who is responsible for their care may get the payment as long as the person uses the

payment for the benefit of the child.

Brexit Issues

268. Deputy Lisa Chambers asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of meetings she has attended since the beginning of September 2018 with her officials to discuss and prepare for Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3591/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My officials have kept me fully briefed on all aspects of Brexit as they relate to this Department. Officials of my Department have participated fully in all relevant inter-departmental groups relating to Brexit, including groups that meet regularly at Secretary General level and Assistant Secretary level.

Library Projects

269. Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of a project (details supplied); and the estimated date for completion. [3571/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): My Department funds a Libraries Capital Programme that will invest €29m in 19 projects, as well as the My Open Library service, between 2016 and 2022. The programme was developed on the basis of priority proposals submitted by local authorities in 2015. Blackrock Mahon Library was not submitted as a priority by Cork City Council at that time and could not be considered for funding under the programme.

The Libraries Capital Programme is currently fully committed. However, funding for new library projects can be considered as additional funds become available. Local authorities may also submit library development proposals as elements of broader regeneration proposals under the Urban and Rural Regeneration and Development Funds. The first call for proposals closed at the end of September 2018, but further calls are expected to issue in 2019.

That said, the provision of library services, including the provision of library buildings, is primarily a matter for local authorities in their capacity as library authorities under the Local Government Act 2001. Accordingly, the status of Blackrock Mahon Library is first and foremost a matter for Cork City Council.

Brexit Issues

270. Deputy Lisa Chambers asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of meetings he has attended since the beginning of September 2018 with his officials to discuss and prepare for Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3603/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I have met with my officials on numerous occasions in the period outlined by the Deputy, and the issue of Brexit has been discussed frequently as it pertains to the ongoing work of my Department.

Additionally, as we draw closer to the Brexit date of 29 March, Brexit preparatory planning has become a standing agenda item at my monthly meetings with the Management Board of

my Department.

Voluntary Sector Funding

271. Deputy Catherine Murphy asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development his plans to release funding to an organisation (details supplied) in 2019 and 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3649/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Seán Canney): The Scheme to Support National Organisations in the Community and Voluntary Sector (SSNO) is a key element of my Department's support for the role of the sector in contributing to the development of strong and vibrant civil society and in improving outcomes for those most disadvantaged.

The scheme provides multi-annual funding towards core costs of national organisations in the sector, with a focus on organisations that provide supports to those who are disadvantaged. The current three-year scheme concludes on 30 June 2019 and the next iteration of the scheme will commence on 1 July 2019. A total of €16.7m has been allocated under the current scheme to 71 different organisations.

As with the current scheme, national organisations such as the one in question can apply to be considered for funding, which will be allocated through a competitive process. This competition was advertised on 12 December 2018 and the closing date for receipt of applications is 31 January. An appraisal of the applications will be conducted by Pobal on behalf of my Department and final recommendations will be sent to my Department for approval. Applicants will be informed in due course of their success or otherwise in qualifying for funding.

The organisation in question was allocated €269,700 over the 36 month period of the current SSNO scheme.

Dog Breeding Industry

272. Deputy Charlie McConologue asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of the revised guidelines for dog breeding establishments introduced under the Dog Breeding Establishments Act 2010; the organisations on the working group established to develop the draft set of revised guidelines; and the consultation held with all stakeholders including animal welfare organisations with respect to these new guidelines. [3692/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Seán Canney): My Department published new Guidelines for dog breeding establishments in July 2018. The Guidelines came into effect on 1 January 2019.

The revised guidelines were developed in collaboration with the County and City Management Association (CCMA) Dogs Working Group. The working group included representatives from the ISPCA, the DSPCA, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, the Department of Agriculture Northern Ireland, Local Authority Veterinary Inspectors, and the then Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government.

The Guidelines were further progressed taking into account responses received through public consultation and by consulting with industry experts. The Guidelines are available on my Department's website at the following link <https://drcd.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/Guidelines-for-DBEs-.pdf>. A Cover Note, outlining the next steps, was published alongside the re-

vised Guidelines and is available at the following link <https://drcd.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/Cover-Note-for-Dog-Breeding-Establishment-Guidelines.pdf>.

I want to see high standards achieved by Dog Breeding Establishments in Ireland. Having published the new Guidelines, my Department is now identifying any necessary legislative amendments that may be required to further improve standards.

Partial Capacity Benefit Scheme Applications

273. Deputy Denis Naughten asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason for the delay in approving an application by a person (details supplied) to commence employment under the partial capacity benefit; when this approval will issue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3468/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Partial Capacity Benefit (PCB) allows a person who has been in receipt of Illness Benefit for six months 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 personal rate of payment is based on the assessment of your restriction on capacity for work i.e. Moderate, Severe or Profound, where you retain 50%, 75%, or 100% of your payment respectively.

The Partial Capacity Benefit claim from the person concerned has been processed. A letter issued on the 24th October 2018 informing the claimant that she has been assessed as having a severe restriction on her capacity to work and asked that she inform the department before starting work in order that her claim be put into payment.

Once the department has received a return to work date from the person concerned she can be put on to a PCB payment.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Public Services Card

274. Deputy Catherine Murphy asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the level of co-operation she and her officials are having with the Data Protection Commissioner regarding its investigation of the public services card; if she has considered suspending the issuing of cards until the Commissioner publishes the report; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3484/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): In October 2017, the Data Protection Commissioner (DPC) initiated an investigation to assess the legal basis for the processing of data in connection with the Public Services Card (PSC) and other related matters.

The DPC provided a draft report on the PSC to my Department in late August 2018. The draft report requested further information and clarifications on a broad range of areas. The DPC gave strict instructions that the Department should not disclose the draft report to any other party and this request was respected.

My Department cooperated fully and provided a comprehensive response to the DPC's

draft report on 30th November 2018 and we now await the Commissioner's response.

My Department will continue to issue PSCs in accordance with the SAFE 2 registration process as set out in legislation.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy

Blind Welfare Allowance

275. Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she is satisfied with the service offered to social welfare recipients at the point of contact as specified in Part 3 section 23 of the Disability Act 2005; the way in which and her views on whether a person (details supplied) should receive reasonable accommodation at point of contact in view of their long established disability; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3485/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): My Department is committed to providing a professional, efficient and courteous service to all its customers and regularly provides information in formats such as Braille and Audio or to customers using assistive technology. We also provide Sign Language interpretations and translation services to meet customer needs. The Department can also discuss other options including visiting a customer in person where these accommodations do not meet their needs.

This lady is currently in receipt of Blind Pension (BP). As BP is a means tested payment, entitlement is reviewed from time to time and in this case the applicant was selected for review in 2018. Correspondence from the Department associated with this review has issued in braille and other formats as requested by the applicant. Towards the end of 2018 a Social Welfare Inspector attempted to meet with the applicant in an effort to progress the review and I am aware that an official from the Blind Pension Section is liaising directly with the applicant at present in relation to that review.

Initially when this lady made contact with disability allowance (DA), she was offered the option to have the form completed with a Social Welfare Inspector (SWI). SWIs regularly confirm applications for Social Welfare and clearly advise the client of the purpose of documents they are asked to sign such as declarations on claim forms etc.

On 10 January 2018, my department received an electronic document via email applying for DA. This has been accepted as an application by this lady for this scheme. She is unwilling to complete the medical portion of the application and has requested that my department should use medical information supplied in support of her BP application in 1983. This medical evidence has been requested from Blind Pension Section and will be referred to one of the Department's Medical Assessors for their opinion as to her eligibility for DA.

A SWI has been requested to contact this lady to clarify some aspects of her DA claim and may then progress both the ongoing BP review and the DA entitlement. On completion of the necessary investigations on all aspects of her claim a decision will be made and she will be notified directly of the outcome.

It should be noted there are a number of differences between DA and BP. The schemes are independent of each other and the qualifying criteria are different for each scheme.

BP is a means-tested payment for blind and visually impaired people between the ages of

18 and 66 who are habitually resident in Ireland. To qualify for the BP a person must supply an eye test from an ophthalmic surgeon to verify his / her visual impairment.

Disability Allowance (DA) is a means tested payment for people with a specified disability who are aged 16 or over and under the age of 66. The applicant must be suffering from an injury, disease, congenital deformity or physical or mental illness or defect, which has lasted for one year or is expected to last for one year and as a result of which they are substantially restricted in undertaking work which would otherwise be suitable having regard to the person's age, experience and qualifications.

There are also a number of significant differences between the means test for BP and DA such as in the assessment of capital, spousal earnings and the income disregards that apply.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pension (Contributory)

276. Deputy Clare Daly asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason pensioners who have received decision letters on their pensions since the beginning of 2019 are still being assessed for contributory pensions under the old system rather than the new total contributions approach (details supplied). [3505/19]

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. This work includes all new claimants who were awarded reduced rate state pension (contributory) since the Government decision. The required primary legislative provisions are contained in the Social Welfare, Pensions and Civil Registration Act 2018, enacted on 24 December 2018. Accompanying regulations will be introduced shortly which will allow certain decisions under the new arrangements to be made.

Over 100 temporary resources have been recruited to separately process the pension reviews. In some cases, additional information about gap periods in social insurance records is required from claimants who have been, or are about to be, awarded a reduced rate state pension (contributory). In the short term, these requests for information will result in decision delays for pensioners. To avoid this, a twin track approach is being implemented for a short period.

It is expected that the additional process to assess HomeCaring Period entitlement (including requesting additional information in some cases) and the calculation under the new 'aggregated contribution method' will be integrated into the existing claim decision process in Quarter 2 2019.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Household Benefits Scheme

277. Deputy Bríd Smith asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the policy on possible restoration of the subsidy for phone usage for those on State pensions in view of the previous commitment to restore same; if it will be fully restored to couples in the future; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3514/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The household benefits package (HHB) comprises the electricity or gas allowance, and the free television licence. My Department will spend approximately €248 million this year on HHB for over 443,000 customers.

The package is generally available to people living in the State aged 66 years or over who are in receipt of a social welfare type payment or who satisfy a means test. The package is also available to some people under the age of 66 who are in receipt of certain welfare type payments.

In Budget 2014, the decision was made to abolish the telephone allowance element of the HHB package. The savings arising from the initial reduction and subsequent discontinuance of the telephone allowance meant that my Department was able to retain the other valuable elements of the household benefits package such as the electricity and gas allowance and the television licence.

In Budget 2018 I announced a new scheme called the Telephone Support Allowance (TSA). The primary objective of the TSA payment is to allow the most vulnerable people access to personal alarms or phones for security by providing a contribution towards the cost. People in receipt of qualifying Social Protection payments and also in receipt of the living alone increase and fuel allowance automatically qualify for the TSA.

Unlike the previous telephone allowance element of the Household benefits package, the TSA does not require that a person have a telephone, or subscribe to any utility company, in order to receive payment, and I am not convinced that the introduction of a payment with such a criterion is the most effective way of using additional resources to support older people. Instead, the approach taken by the Government has been to increase general payments to all pensioners, and enhance additional targeted supports for those pensioners most at risk of poverty.

The criteria for the TSA are framed in order to direct the limited resources available to my Department in as targeted a manner as possible. Fuel Allowance is a means tested payment and these criteria will ensure that the TSA payment goes to those most at risk of social isolation.

Any decision to extend the TSA scheme to all pensioners regardless of their means or personal circumstances or to reinstate the telephone allowance element of the household benefits package would have significant budget implications and would have to be considered in the context of overall budgetary negotiations.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Data

278. Deputy Maurice Quinlivan asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of disability allowance applications received in 2018; the number refused and appealed, respectively to the social welfare appeals office; the number overturned by the appeals office; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3524/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The number of disability allowance (DA) applications received, allowed and disallowed or withdrawn in 2018 is set out in the table below.

DA Scheme

| Year | DA Received | *DA Award | DA Disallowed | DA Withdrawn |
|------|-------------|-----------|---------------|--------------|
| 2018 | 23,080 | 17,205* | 12,682 | 1,130 |

(*)Please note that the statistics in relation to awarded cases include cases in the disallowed category which were subsequently awarded following a review or a successful appeal.

The table show the number of DA appeals received and allowed or partially allowed by the Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO) in 2018.

Outcome of DA appeals received and allowed by SWAO

| Year | **DA Appeals received | DA Appeals allowed by SWAO | DA Appeals partially allowed by SWAO |
|------|-----------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 2018 | 5,200** | 3,112 | 99 |

(**)Please note that the statistics in relation to appeals received include both received and re-opened appeal cases less cancelled appeals.

Invalidity Pension Data

279. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of invalidity pension applications received in 2018; the number refused and appealed, respectively to the social welfare appeals office; the number overturned by the appeals office; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3525/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The table shows the number of invalidity pension claims received, disallowed, appealed and overturned by the appeals office (AO) for period requested.

| Period | Received | Disallowed | Appealed | Overturned by AO |
|--------|----------|------------|----------|--|
| 2018 | 10,967 | 4,601 | 1,387 | 466 (458 allowed, 8 partially allowed) |

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Data

280. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of carer's allowance applications received in 2018; the number refused and appealed, respectively to the social welfare appeals office; the number overturned by the appeals office; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3526/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): During 2018 my Department received 20,122 claims in respect of carer's allowance, it rejected 9,291 claims which did not satisfy the eligibility criteria.

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 which were resolved by way of a revised decision in favour of the appellant by a Deciding Officer/Designated Person are detailed in the attached tabular statement.

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 31.5% of all 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.

Tabular statement

Appeal Receipts and Outcome of Carer's Allowance Appeals Finalised in 2018

| | Appeal Receipts | Appeals Finalised | Allowed By Appeals Officers | Partially Allowed by Appeals Officers | Revised Decisions By Deciding Officers | Appeals Disallowed by Appeals Officers | Withdrawn |
|------|-----------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|--|-----------|
| 2018 | 2,902 | 2,710 | 1,047 | 144 | 440 | 989 | 90 |

Domiciliary Care Allowance Data

281. Deputy Maurice Quinlivan asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of domiciliary care allowance applications received in 2018; the number refused and appealed, respectively to the social welfare appeals office; the number overturned by the appeals office; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3527/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The number of applications for domiciliary care allowance (DCA) has more than doubled since 2012 when 4,079 applications were received. In 2018, a total of 8,609 applications were received representing a 5% increase on the 2017 figure.

The number of initial applications disallowed by a Deciding Officer in 2018 was 2,225.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office finalised 1,589 DCA cases in 2018. Of these, 957 were decided by an Appeals Officer, 590 were reviewed and revised by a Deciding Officer in DCA section, while a further 42 cases were either cancelled or withdrawn. Of the 957 cases decided by an Appeals Officer, a total of 686 were allowed and a further 13 partially allowed.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Appeals Waiting Times

282. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the wait time for each individual claim section for the forwarding of the file of an applicant to the social welfare appeals office; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3528/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The table attached provides the appeal processing times for schemes in 2018 broken down by weeks spent in the Social Welfare Appeals Office, the Department and with the appellant.

The time taken to process an appeal reflects all aspects of the appeal process including the time spent in the Department reviewing the decision in light of the appeal contentions and/or preparing the appeal submission.

The time spent in the Department will include cases that the Department has referred back to customers for more information/clarification (rather than awaiting action in the Department).

The Department continues to work with the Social Welfare Appeals Office to reduce time in submitting appeal files and DO submissions.

Tabular statement

Appeals Processing Times by Scheme 01 January 2018 – 31 December 2018

| Scheme | SWAO (weeks) | Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (weeks) | Appellant (weeks) | Totals |
|------------------------------|--------------|--|-------------------|--------|
| Blind Person's Pension | 13.4 | 11.0 | 0.7 | 25.0 |
| Carer's Allowance | 13.2 | 10.4 | 0.6 | 24.2 |
| Carer's Benefit | 12.0 | 8.9 | 0.2 | 21.1 |
| Child Benefit | 17.8 | 13.3 | 0.4 | 31.5 |
| Disability Allowance | 11.4 | 5.1 | 0.5 | 16.9 |
| Illness Benefit | 15.6 | 9.4 | 0.6 | 25.6 |
| Partial Capacity Benefit | 15.6 | 9.8 | 1.1 | 26.5 |
| Domiciliary Care Allowance | 11.7 | 15.3 | 0.4 | 27.5 |
| Deserted Wife's Allowance ** | 18.9 | 51.7 | - | 70.6 |
| Deserted Wife's Benefit | 31.9 | 17.0 | - | 48.9 |
| Farm Assist | 28.6 | 18.9 | 0.3 | 47.8 |
| Bereavement Grant | 34.2 | 1.9 | - | 36.1 |
| Death Benefit (Pension) | 28.3 | 3.2 | - | 31.5 |
| Working Family Payment * | 16.8 | 12.8 | 0.1 | 29.6 |
| Invalidity Pension | 11.7 | 12.1 | 0.3 | 24.2 |
| Liable Relatives | 21.2 | 11.9 | - | 33.1 |
| Maternity Benefit | 17.8 | 4.4 | 0.3 | 22.5 |
| Paternity Benefit | 21.1 | 6.7 | - | 27.9 |
| One Parent Family Payment | 19.0 | 11.7 | 0.2 | 30.9 |

| Scheme | SWAO (weeks) | Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (weeks) | Appellant (weeks) | Totals |
|--|--------------|--|-------------------|--------|
| State Pension (Contributory) | 17.9 | 19.4 | 0.4 | 37.7 |
| State Pension (Non-Contributory) | 18.6 | 11.7 | 0.8 | 31.1 |
| Occupational Injury Benefit | 23.3 | 7.6 | 0.4 | 31.3 |
| Disablement Pension | 19.9 | 12.1 | 0.2 | 32.2 |
| Medical Care | 12.8 | 4.7 | - | 17.5 |
| Guardian's Payment (Contributory) | 22.8 | 5.4 | 0.4 | 28.6 |
| Guardian's Payment (Non-Contributory) | 16.8 | 6.5 | - | 23.3 |
| Jobseeker's Allowance (Means) | 19.1 | 14.0 | 0.3 | 33.4 |
| Jobseeker's Allowance (Payments) | 16.8 | 9.9 | 0.3 | 27.0 |
| BTW Family Dividend | 12.6 | 12.1 | - | 24.7 |
| Jobseeker's Transitional | 17.1 | 6.6 | - | 23.7 |
| Recoverable Benefits & Assistance | 12.5 | 6.3 | - | 18.8 |
| Pre-retirement Allowance | 39.8 | 7.1 | - | 47.0 |
| Jobseeker's Benefit | 15.7 | 7.4 | - | 23.2 |
| Carer's Support Grant | 14.6 | 10.1 | 0.2 | 25.0 |
| Treatment Benefit | 0.1 | 4.5 | 3.4 | 7.8 |
| Incapacity Supplement | 22.7 | 11.5 | - | 34.2 |
| Insurability of Employment | 41.2 | 12.5 | 0.7 | 54.4 |
| Supplementary Welfare Allowance | 11.1 | 16.7 | 0.3 | 28.1 |
| Widow/Widower's Pension (Contributory) | 18.5 | 9.4 | 0.5 | 28.5 |
| Widow/Widower's Pension (Non-Contributory) | 16.7 | 5.7 | 0.2 | 22.6 |
| Widowed Parent Grant | 20.1 | 14.3 | - | 34.5 |
| All Appeals | 15.1 | 9.6 | 0.4 | 25.1 |

* Previously called Family Income Supplement

** Deserted Wife's Allowance - involved one very protracted case only.

Social Welfare Appeals Status

283. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if an appeal by a person (details supplied) can be expedited; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3568/19]

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

Questions - Written Answers

Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 9 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.

Dental Services Provision

284. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a person (details supplied) will be eligible under PRSI to have a realignment of false teeth. [3569/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The scheme provides for a contribution towards the cost of a scale and polish or periodontal treatment, in addition to the free annual examination.

If the person concerned is the holder of a Medical Card, they should contact their local HSE office which will advise on entitlements under the HSE scheme.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Appeals

285. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the appeals process in the case of a person (details supplied) can be expedited with a view to ensuring that they have adequate support to care for a dependant child; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3570/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a person who has such a disability that they require that level of care.

It is a condition for receipt of CA that the means of the person concerned must be less than the statutory limit.

Means are any income of the carer and their spouse, civil partner, or cohabitant, property, (except their own home) or an asset that could bring in money or provide them with an income, for example occupational pensions or pensions or benefits from another country.

During the course of a review a deciding officer determined that the means of the person concerned exceeded the statutory limit for CA.

The person concerned was notified on 15 June 2018 of this decision, the reason for it and of their right of review and appeal.

The person concerned has appealed this decision to the Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO).

The first step in the appeals process is a review of the original decision by a Deciding Officer. That review is now complete and the person concerned will be notified shortly regarding the outcome.

A submission in support of the decision is been finalised and will be submitted with the file to the SWAO for their determination shortly.

In the meantime, if the means of the person concerned are insufficient to meet their needs, they should apply for a means-tested supplementary welfare allowance from their local community welfare service.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Brexit Issues

286. Deputy Lisa Chambers asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of meetings she has attended since the beginning of September 2018 with her officials to discuss and prepare for Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3596/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): 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. Last April I met with the then UK Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the Right Honourable Esther McVey. 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.

In addition to specific meetings on the topic, Brexit, including its implications and my Department's contingency and preparedness plans are the subject of regular contacts with my officials. I have weekly meetings with the Secretary General of my Department, at which Brexit has been discussed. Brexit is also a standing item on the agenda for the Department's Management Board meetings and also features on a regular basis at Ministerial-Management Board meetings.

Rural Social Scheme Eligibility

287. Deputy Eamon Scanlon asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the way in which means is assessed for the purpose of the rural social scheme; the changes in recent times to in the way in which means is assessed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3616/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The rural social scheme (RSS) provides opportunities for farmers and fishermen / women who are currently in receipt of specified social welfare payments to work to provide certain services of benefit to rural communities. Communities benefit from the skills and talents of local farmers and fishermen and participants have the opportunity to improve existing skills, or develop new skills, while performing this valuable work in their local communities.

As the RSS is a supplementary income support scheme designed specifically for those whose income falls below a certain limit, an individual must continue to satisfy the qualifying criteria for the scheme to be eligible to participate on the RSS.

If a participant's circumstances change, a means test is undertaken to determine their new rate of payment. The means assessment for RSS includes income that the participant and their spouse, civil partner or cohabitant has in addition to any capital or property (except their own home). Payment of RSS is not taken into account when assessing the weekly means. If changes were made to the conditions to allow all participants receive the full rate of payment regardless of their means, it would in effect change the nature of the scheme of supporting farmers and farm families with low incomes.

The rate paid to a participant on the RSS is equivalent to the participants underlying social welfare payment plus a top-up of €22.50 subject to a minimum payment of €220.50. RSS participants in receipt of a widow's pension or disability allowance retain their payment and also receive a top-up payment which will bring the minimum weekly payment equal to €220.50.

As part of the recent Social Welfare Budget package for 2019, I increased the weekly personal rate for participants by €5.00 with proportionate increases in weekly payments for qualified adult dependants with effect from March 2019.

Disability Allowance Payments

288. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a disability allowance payment will issue to a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3652/19]

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 6 June 2018. Their application was refused on habitual residency grounds as he was not found to be habitually resident in the state. The person concerned was notified in writing of this decision on 31 August 2018.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Payments

289. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when missing weeks of illness benefit payment due before Christmas 2018 will issue in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3655/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Medical Certificates for the person concerned were not received until January 2019 and this caused a delay in her Illness Benefit payments for December. The Department can only pay for periods in which a person is medically certified as unfit for work.

The Department received the medical certificate from the person concerned for the period of 2nd December 2018 - 10th December 2018 on the 10th January 2019. The Department received her certificate for the 10th December 2018 - 17th December 2018 on the 17th January 2019.

She has been fully paid up to the 17th December 2018, which is the date of the most recently received medical certificate. Weekly medical certificates should be submitted as soon as possible after receipt from the certifier.

If the person concerned remains ill and unfit for work, a further medical certificate should be submitted to the Department in order for further payments to issue.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the deputy.

Carer's Allowance Payments

290. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a carer's allowance payment will issue to a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3656/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a child or an adult who has such a disability that as a result they require that level of care.

An application for CA was received from the person concerned on 13 November 2018.

The application was awarded to the person concerned on 21 January 2019, first payment will issue to his nominated post office on 31 January 2019.

Arrears of allowance due from 15 November 2018 to 30 January 2019 have also issued.

The person concerned was notified on 21 January 2019 of this decision, the reason for it and of his right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Eligibility

291. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to the fact that a person (details supplied) suffers from a multiplicity of medical conditions complicated by homelessness and regular attendance at hospital and continuous medications which renders the person incapable of work and that encouragement for the person to seek employment would make matters worse; if the case for disability allowance will be examined; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3661/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Disability Allowance is a weekly allowance paid to people with a specified disability who are aged over 16 and under 66. The disability must be expected to last for at least one year and the allowance is subject to a medical assessment, a means test and a habitual residency test.

A decision as to whether or not a person is eligible to receive a DA payment can only be considered on receipt of a completed application form for that payment. To date no application for DA has been received from the person concerned.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Questions - Written Answers
Rent Supplement Scheme Expenditure

292. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the cost of the provision of rent supplement schemes in 2016 to 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3682/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Rent supplement continues its vital role in housing families and individuals, with the scheme supporting approximately 24,300 recipients for which the Government has provided €132.4 million for 2019.

End of year statistics for rent supplement recipients and expenditure for the years 2016 to 2018 are provided in the following tabular statement.

The strategic goal of returning rent supplement to its original purpose; that of a short-term income support, has been primarily facilitated by the introduction of the HAP. The “Rebuilding Ireland - Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness (July 2016), reiterated in the “Housing First National Implementation Plan 2018-2021” (September 2018), is to provide 87,000 flexible housing supports through the HAP and Rental Accommodation Scheme between 2016 and 2021. As part of this commitment will be the transfer of those out of rent supplement with long term housing needs to HAP with a targeted completion date of these transfers by the end of 2020.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Tabular Statement:

Rent Supplement: Recipient Numbers & Expenditure 2016 - 2018

| Year | Recipients | Cost €000 |
|------|------------|-----------|
| 2016 | 48,041 | 275,294 |
| 2017 | 34,378 | 230,566 |
| 2018 | 24,303 | 179,500 |

Wind Energy Guidelines

293. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the position in regard to regulations appertaining to setback limits in respect of wind farms; when this is likely to change; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3672/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department is currently undertaking a focused review of the 2006 Wind Energy Development Guidelines. The review is addressing a number of key aspects including sound or noise, visual amenity setback distances, shadow flicker, community obligation, community dividend and grid connections. 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. Following a tendering process, my Department appointed SEA experts in December 2017 to assist in this

regard. 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 later in Q1 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, as amended. 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.

Regeneration Projects

294. Deputy Micheál Martin asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he has considered setting up a north inner city development authority to address the root causes of problems and champion social and economic regeneration of the area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3449/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I have no proposals to set up a North Inner City Development Authority, especially given that the establishment of such an agency would likely replicate the work and objectives of the existing North East Inner City Implementation Board, which was established in June 2017 to oversee the implementation of a community-led programme of social and economic renewal in the area.

The establishment of the Implementation Board emanated from a recommendation in the Mulvey Report - Dublin's North East Inner City: Creating a Brighter Future - which was published in February 2017, following a request by the then Taoiseach to report on the profound challenges facing the communities of North East Inner City Dublin, and to recommend specific measures which would support the long-term economic and social regeneration of the area.

In this regard, the Mulvey Report identified a number of priority actions and proposed that the required social and economic regeneration should be overseen by an Implementation Board comprising an independent executive chair appointed by the Taoiseach and representatives from a broad range of statutory bodies and the local community. The Implementation Board is supported by a Programme Office with a multi-disciplinary team which oversees a range of community engagement and funding initiatives across a number of priority regeneration themes. I am satisfied that these arrangements are working effectively.

Local Authority Housing

295. Deputy Micheál Martin asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to accelerate the delivery of affordable, cost rental, social and or co-op built housing on all state-owned land in Dublin city; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3451/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): 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. My Department has been working closely with all local authorities to ensure that new social and affordable homes are delivered from the public land bank, including that of Dublin City Council, with particular emphasis on prioritising those sites with the greatest potential to deliver housing at scale, in the

short to medium term.

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. Some 2,586 social housing homes in the Dublin City Council area are either completed or are currently progressing through the various stages of the project life-cycle. Further projects will continue to be added to the pipeline on an ongoing basis.

A detailed breakdown of the social housing construction programme, including that of Dublin City Council, is set out in the Social Housing Construction Status Report which is published on a quarterly basis. 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. Details of the Dublin City Council SSF projects are listed in the following table.

| Local Authority | Project/Location | Total Provisional Cost of Proposal € | Provisional Exchequer Grant Amount € | Provisional Local Authority Contribution € | Affordable Housing Potential |
|-----------------|----------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|------------------------------|
| 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 |
| Total | - | €15,755,766 | €14,022,631 | €1,733,135 | 340 |

The combination of this Fund and the significantly increased funding for the social housing programme will open up more opportunities for larger mixed-tenure developments. My Department will continue to engage proactively with the City Council to accelerate the delivery of these projects, in particular on such key sites as O'Devaney Gardens and Oscar Traynor Road, which combined will deliver over 1,200 homes.

As regards other public sites in Dublin that are not in the ownership of local authorities, the Land Development Agency (LDA) is in the process of advancing agreements with various State bodies, including the Housing Agency, the Office of Public Works, and the HSE, which are participating in the first tranche of land agreements in the Dublin region, and is keen to work in partnership and co-operation with local authorities. A detailed business plan for the LDA is currently in development and will provide additional information on its delivery programme.

Acknowledging that renters in Dublin 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.

A significant early mover project is being advanced by Dublin City Council, which will

deliver important lessons in terms of cost rental in an Irish setting, at Emmet Road, Inchicore. While the final tenure-mix on the site will be decided by Dublin City Council, to be 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, the European Investment Bank and the LDA to examine the optimum funding and delivery options to support cost rental delivery at scale in Dublin and other urban areas.

Finally 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. In addition, some local authorities facilitated housing developments through supporting co-operatives to deliver housing under the low cost sites scheme. With the introduction of a new affordable purchase housing scheme and cost rental, supported by the Serviced Sites Fund, there will be further opportunities for approved housing bodies, including co-operatives, to provide affordable housing.

Local Authority Housing Maintenance

296. Deputy Micheál Martin asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans and the timeline for funding and delivering a refurbishment programme for flat complexes in Dublin city centre to tackle in particular dampness and to provide for insulation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3452/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): It is very important that local authority housing stock is maintained to an appropriate standard. Under the Housing Acts, such management and maintenance, is, in the first instance, a matter for each individual local authority. In order to support local authorities in this work my Department provides exchequer funding for eligible capital improvements to local authority housing, including through the voids and energy efficiency programmes.

Furthermore, over the lifetime of Rebuilding Ireland, some €211 million is being made available under the National Regeneration Programme to support the direct delivery of over 1,000 new social housing homes. Together with providing a significant number of new homes, the projects seek to also address the causes of disadvantage in these communities through a holistic programme of physical, social and economic regeneration.

I understand that Dublin City Council is currently carrying out a stock condition audit which is expected to be completed later in Q1 2019. Arising from this audit, DCC plan to strategically determine and prioritise the optimum approach to the redevelopment or refurbishment of its apartment portfolio.

In order to ensure that progress is made as quickly as possible, notwithstanding the overall strategic approach being adopted by the City Council, in the meantime it has submitted detailed proposals on the following major schemes: Dorset Street; Constitution Hill; Dunne Street; Matt Talbot Court; Lissadel Road/Rafter's Lane; Cromcastle Court; Infirmary Road; and Croke Villas/Sackville Avenue.

In addition, my Department provided Exchequer funding to the City Council towards the recently completed phase 1 of the regeneration of Dolphin House, delivering 100 high quality social housing homes, and contractors are on-site in St Theresa's Gardens, Dominick Street and O'Devaney Gardens.

Questions - Written Answers
Approved Housing Bodies

297. Deputy Bríd Smith asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his policy on the way in which approved housing bodies allocate housing units, set rents and make available units to tenants that are not on the social housing waiting list of the local authority and whose rents are not differentially set; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3561/19]

298. Deputy Bríd Smith asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if approved housing bodies that receive State funding can allocate housing units on criteria other than that set by the local authority housing waiting list. [3562/19]

299. Deputy Bríd Smith asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the proposal of an approved housing body to allocate housing units to couples that will pay €1,500 per month in rent that are not on the social housing waiting lists and that will have some of the rent set aside as a savings scheme to purchase a home in the future; if this scheme has his approval; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3563/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 297 to 299, inclusive, together.

The manner in which Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) allocate dwellings and set rent is dependent on the way in which the building/acquisition of the dwellings was funded.

Where AHB homes are acquired with funding under the Capital Advanced Loan Facility/ Payment and Availability Agreement, or are leased with assistance under the Long-Term Leasing Scheme, it is a condition of such funding that tenancies may only be allocated to households nominated by the relevant housing authority from their social housing waiting list. Such tenants pay the differential rent set out in the relevant housing authority differential rent scheme.

In the case of homes funded historically under the now closed Capital Loan and Subsidy Scheme, social housing tenants, that is, households nominated by the housing authority, pay a rent to be determined by the AHB, subject to a minimum set out by my Department, as a condition of the provision of funding under the scheme. Where the development was partly - at least 5% - funded by the AHB itself, however, up to 25% of the tenancies could be allocated to households/persons not on a social housing waiting list, and in such cases the rent to be paid is a matter for the AHB itself.

In the case of AHB units funded under the Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS), it also the case that up to 25% of tenancies may be allocated to persons not on the housing authority's social housing waiting list in cases where the units are at least 5% funded by the AHB. In such cases the rent will be determined by the AHB. Social housing tenants in CAS units pay, as a condition of funding under the scheme, an economic rent; if this rent is unaffordable, tenants may avail of support under Rent Supplement from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

Occasionally AHBs acquire units without funding from my Department (e.g. bequests, gifts). In such cases, the allocation of tenancies and the rent to be paid is a matter for the individual AHB concerned.

Discussions on affordable housing are ongoing between my Department, local authorities and AHBs. However, no proposal of the nature referred to by the Deputy has been received by my Department at this time.

Greenways Development

300. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the discussions to date which have taken place between his Department and Fingal County Council regarding the planned Broadmeadows Way cycle and pedestrian route in County Dublin; his plans to ensure assistance is provided to progress this regional greenway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3586/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): A request was received in September 2018 from Fingal County Council to meet with my Department to discuss the proposal concerned in advance of submitting an application under the Foreshore Act 1933, as amended. My Department has since been engaging with the local authority in relation to the information that is required to progress the matter.

As the foreshore application is likely to come before me for decision at some point in the future, it would not be appropriate to comment further on the matter at this time.

Brexit Issues

301. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of meetings he has attended since the beginning of September 2018 with his officials to discuss and prepare for Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3600/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Government's contingency planning for Brexit was initiated well in advance of the UK referendum in June 2016 and has intensified in recent months.

To this end, co-ordination of the whole-of-Government response to Brexit is being taken forward through the cross-Departmental coordination structures chaired by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. These include meetings of various groups on a weekly and fortnightly basis as well as a range of ongoing meetings with individual Departments across the range of sectors.

In my own Department, I have multiple engagements with the Secretary General every week to discuss Government business and the main business priorities of the Department, which would include regular discussions on Brexit.

In addition, a working group of senior officials within the Department is in place to coordinate the Department's Brexit planning. Brexit is a standing agenda item at the monthly Ministerial Management Board meetings and at weekly meetings of the Department's Management Board.

Preparation and planning is ongoing across Government to address a range of Brexit scenarios, including a 'no deal' scenario, and Departments and agencies continue to develop and implement, as appropriate, Brexit preparedness and contingency planning in their areas of responsibility.

Local Authority Staff Data

302. Deputy Róisín Shortall asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the staffing numbers by local authority in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3641/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department gathers quarterly data on staff numbers in local authorities.

Staffing numbers for the local authority sector, as well as the broader public sector, are available on the Public Service Numbers databank which is hosted and maintained by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and is available at the following link: <http://data-bank.per.gov.ie/>, providing access to information from 1980 onwards.

The staffing levels for the end of Quarter 4, 2018 are currently being collated and will be published on the PER databank when finalised.

Local Authority Funding

303. Deputy Róisín Shortall asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of grants and subsidies provided to local authorities in 2017 and 2018, by local authority. [3642/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): Central Government funding of local authorities presents a complex picture, with transfers, both current and capital, coming from a range of Departments and Offices for a variety of purposes. Some streams of funding are delivered directly from funding departments to local authorities, while others are routed through departmental agencies.

Most of the funding sourced from Central Government and provided to local authorities must be used for specified services. These can be grouped into five broad programme categories: recreational, education, environment, housing and transport. My Department does not collate specific information on the number of grants and subsidies provided to local authorities; this information may be available at individual local authority level. However, the table below sets out the figures included in the audited annual financial statements of local authorities for 2017 for both revenue (current) and capital income received from grants and subsidies.

These figures relate to 2017 only and include LPT self funding in the case of those local authorities where this obligation arises. They do not include other LPT allocations. Unaudited financial statements for 2018 are not due for submission to my Department until 31 March 2019, after which the audit of those statements will begin.

Table of Grants and Subsidies income for both Revenue and Capital to all local authorities in 2017 extracted from their audited annual financial statements

| County | Grants & Subsidies Revenue | Grants & Subsidies Capital |
|-------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Carlow | 13,697,401 | 14,862,324 |
| Cavan | 21,899,870 | 13,854,773 |
| Clare | 32,179,863 | 26,617,722 |
| Cork City | 26,080,693 | 40,079,820 |
| Cork County | 76,579,306 | 93,183,779 |
| Donegal | 39,637,699 | 34,210,001 |

| County | Grants & Subsidies Revenue | Grants & Subsidies Capital |
|---------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Dublin City | 218,709,943 | 225,808,039 |
| Dún Laoghaire–Rathdown | 31,582,461 | 44,505,798 |
| Fingal | 42,254,638 | 60,827,656 |
| Galway City | 15,387,699 | 8,587,479 |
| Galway County | 38,248,800 | 32,408,432 |
| Kerry | 34,071,453 | 41,090,821 |
| Kildare | 38,696,800 | 72,980,723 |
| Kilkenny | 24,201,589 | 26,381,003 |
| Laois | 17,274,479 | 15,617,612 |
| Leitrim | 12,057,534 | 6,423,446 |
| Limerick City and County | 182,956,027 * | 78,596,434 |
| Longford | 11,139,631 | 9,106,010 |
| Louth | 25,084,015 | 21,644,185 |
| Mayo | 41,873,633 | 38,189,175 |
| Meath | 26,433,914 | 32,129,575 |
| Monaghan | 18,896,478 | 22,953,736 |
| Offaly | 19,211,939 | 6,267,313 |
| Roscommon | 18,736,697 | 16,605,728 |
| Sligo | 18,240,463 | 19,708,301 |
| South Dublin | 53,672,244 | 47,930,657 |
| Tipperary | 44,507,049 | 21,351,571 |
| Waterford City and County | 36,347,309 | 12,809,581 |
| Westmeath | 20,369,762 | 17,461,530 |
| Wexford | 26,781,273 | 35,379,657 |
| Wicklow | 24,090,943 | 12,564,498 |
| Total | 1,250,901,607 | 1,150,137,378 |

* This includes funding provided to Limerick City and County Council in its role as the shared service provider for the Housing Assistance Payment scheme.

Property Tax Yield

304. Deputy Róisín Shortall asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the baseline figure in the context of the local property tax for each local authority for 2019. [3643/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): In accordance with Government decisions on Local Property Tax (LPT) distribution, every local authority has a minimum level of funding available, known as the baseline. There are variances in LPT levels across the country, but all local authorities receive at least this baseline funding to support the delivery of services. The total LPT baseline figure for 2019 is €355 million. The individual baselines for local authorities are set out in the table below.

The final LPT allocations to local authorities for 2019, amounting to €503 million, along with details of the amounts retained locally in each area, local variation decisions, baselines, equalisation amounts etc., are published on my Department's website at the following link:

<https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/chargestaxes/local-property-tax/local-property-tax->

Table 1- 2019 LPT Baselines

| Local Authority | 2019 Baseline € |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Carlow County Council | 6,138,657 |
| Cavan County Council | 9,480,501 |
| Cork City Council | 11,927,355 |
| Donegal County Council | 25,119,850 |
| Galway County Council | 14,517,890 |
| Kerry County Council | 13,776,761 |
| Kilkenny County Council | 10,673,913 |
| Laois County Council | 8,558,877 |
| Leitrim County Council | 8,956,315 |
| Limerick City & County Council | 17,554,464 |
| Longford County Council | 8,906,648 |
| Louth County Council | 9,866,198 |
| Mayo County Council | 19,812,344 |
| Monaghan County Council | 11,238,572 |
| Offaly County Council | 7,656,288 |
| Roscommon County Council | 10,216,232 |
| Sligo County Council | 10,202,627 |
| Tipperary County Council | 25,951,602 |
| Waterford City & County Council | 18,678,971 |
| Westmeath County Council | 11,205,507 |
| Wexford County Council | 13,547,516 |
| Meath County Council | 10,535,969 |
| Clare County Council | 4,435,383 |
| Cork County Council | 8,402,758 |
| Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council | 8,270,919 |
| Dublin City Council | 19,095,592 |
| Fingal County Council | 3,699,275 |
| Galway City Council | 2,599,723 |
| Kildare County Council | 11,755,790 |
| South Dublin County Council | 3,856,262 |
| Wicklow County Council | 8,547,247 |
| Total | 355,186,005 |

Local Authority Housing Waiting Lists

305. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of persons on a waiting list for social housing in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019, by local authority area and length of time on the list by single, couple, family applications and so on; the number of persons on local authority housing transfer lists in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019, by local authority area and length of time on the list, by single, couple, family applications and so on; and if he will make a statement on

the matter. [3679/19]

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 set out in the statutory Summary of Social Housing Assessments (SSHA). Since 2016, the summary process has been carried out on an annual basis.

The SSHA report includes breakdowns by each local authority across a range of categories. Details in relation to household composition can be found at tables 2.4 and A1.4. Details on the length of time spent on the record of qualified households (waiting lists) can be found at tables 2.8 and A1.8. It should be noted that the SSHA is a point in time exercise and does not necessarily reflect the dynamic nature of entry to and exit from the list.

The most recent summary, which was carried out in 2018, details the number of households on all local authority waiting lists as at 11 June 2018. The SSHAs for 2018, 2017 and 2016 can be found on my Department's website at the links below.

Report 2018

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

Report 2017

https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/sha_summary_2017.pdf.

Report 2016

https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/summary_of_social_housing_assessments_2016.pdf.

My Department is currently working with the Housing Agency on the proposed 2019 summary. I expect the results of that summary to be available early in the final quarter of this year.

My Department does not hold information on the number of households on local authorities' housing transfer lists. The management of these lists is a matter for individual local authorities and the numbers fluctuate continually as, for example, households are granted transfers, in accordance with an authority's allocation scheme, to take up other accommodation options.

Emergency Accommodation Data

306. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of persons in emergency homeless accommodation by local authority area and by length of time in such accommodation; the number of children and adults in each case in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019; the cost of providing such accommodation in each of the past three years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3680/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department publishes a monthly report on homelessness. The monthly report is based on data provided by housing authorities and produced through the Pathway Accommodation & Support System (PASS). The report captures details of individuals utilising State-funded emergency accommodation arrangements that are overseen by housing authorities.

Questions - Written Answers

The most recent report is for November 2018 which showed that there were 6,157 adults and 3,811 dependants in emergency accommodation in that month. Monthly reports for 2016, 2017 and 2018 are available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/homelessness/other/homelessness-data>.

Quarterly performance reports prepared by the local authorities on a regional basis provide information on the duration of time spent by persons in emergency accommodation. The most recently published report is for Quarter 3 2018 and shows that 43% of the adults recorded were in emergency accommodation for less than 6 months, and 57% for more than 6 months. The regional breakdown at the end of Quarter 3 2018 is shown in the table.

Q3 Duration in Emergency Accommodation - Regional Breakdown

| | < 6 months | | > 6 Months | | Regional Total |
|------------|------------|-----|------------|-----|----------------|
| | Amount | % | Amount | % | |
| Dublin | 1,196 | 31% | 2,683 | 69% | 3,879 |
| Mid-East | 282 | 75% | 92 | 25% | 374 |
| Midland | 78 | 70% | 34 | 30% | 112 |
| Mid West | 226 | 68% | 107 | 32% | 333 |
| North East | 76 | 64% | 42 | 36% | 118 |
| North West | 35 | 78% | 10 | 22% | 45 |
| South East | 175 | 53% | 153 | 47% | 328 |
| South West | 266 | 73% | 99 | 27% | 365 |
| West | 188 | 57% | 142 | 43% | 330 |
| Totals | 2,522 | 43% | 3,362 | 57% | 5,884 |

In relation to the costs of providing emergency accommodation, my Department provides funding to housing authorities on a regional basis towards the operational costs of homeless accommodation and related services. Under the funding arrangements, housing authorities must provide at least 10% of the cost of services from their own resources. Housing authorities may also incur additional expenditure on homeless related services outside of these funding arrangements with my Department. Therefore, the exact amounts spent by housing authorities on homeless services, as well as the types of accommodation and the service providers engaged, are a matter for those authorities.

Performance and Financial reports from each of the regions, setting out expenditure on homeless services, including emergency accommodation, in each region are published on my Department's website at the following link:

<http://www.housing.gov.ie/node/5498>.

Social and Affordable Housing Expenditure

307. Deputy Noel Grealish asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the cost of providing the HAP scheme 2016 to 2018; the cost of the RAS scheme 2016 to 2018; the cost of the provision of social housing by each local authority area in the same period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3681/19]

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

Expenditure details in respect of the provision of social housing through build, acquisition and leasing programmes and under the HAP and RAS schemes for the period 2016 to 2018 are set out in the table.

The breakdown of the build, acquisition and leasing by each individual local authority over the period in question is not readily available. However, if the Deputy is concerned about a specific local authority or local authorities, I will have the matter explored further on receipt of the relevant information.

| Delivery Stream | 2016 Expenditure €m | 2017 Expenditure €m | 2018 Expenditure €m | Total |
|----------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|----------|
| Build, Acquisition & Lease | 462.09 | 802.0 | 1,268.84 | 2,532.93 |
| RAS | 130.99 | 142.84 | 143.34 | 417.17 |
| HAP | 57.7 | 152.69 | 276.60 | 486.99 |

Electoral Divisions Report

308. Deputy James Browne asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of occasions he departed from the recommendations of the local electoral boundary committee in making local electoral boundary statutory instruments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3684/19]

309. Deputy James Browne asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the reason for each individual occasion he departed from the recommendations of the local electoral boundary committee in making local electoral boundary statutory instruments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3685/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 308 and 309 together.

I established two independent Local Electoral Area Boundary Committees (No. 1 and No. 2) in December 2017 to review and make recommendations on local electoral areas (LEAs) having regard to, among other things, the results of Census 2016 as well as the commitment to consider reducing the size of territorially large local electoral areas and ensuring adequate levels of representation for towns and urban areas.

The committees were not specifically tasked with defining municipal districts (MDs), save where it was considered necessary, as it was intended that MDs would largely remain unchanged.

The recommendations in the local electoral area boundary committee reports (No.'s 1 and 2) in respect of LEAs were accepted in full. The overall policy objectives have, in the main, been met, particularly in relation to the creation of distinct town-based or urban electoral areas for large urban areas with populations in excess of 15,000.

I have accepted the recommendations of the report in relation to municipal district configuration which are in line with overall policy objectives, with four exceptions in counties Tipperary, Sligo, Wexford and Kerry, where the desired policy objective of an urban focus was not fully realised in the Committee's proposal and, in the case of Wexford, to better reflect coastal alignment of local electoral areas.

310. Deputy Gerry Adams asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her plans for events in specific recognition of Cumann na mBan members and their service in view of the commemorative events and decade of centenaries taking place. [3572/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josephine Madigan): As the Minister with responsibility for leading the Decade of Centenaries commemorative programme, my priority is to ensure that the Government's approach to the remembrance of the significant historical events and related themes of the period from 1919 to 1923 is appropriate, measured, respectful, inclusive and sensitive to the different perspectives that persist on the events of this period.

The founding of Cumann na mBan on 2 April 1914 was a very significant development and was a salient date in the centenary commemorative calendar under the Decade of Centenaries. In seeking to ensure that the commemorative programme is authentic and comprehensive, I am particularly interested in ensuring that the vital role of women in making and shaping our national shared history will continue to be acknowledged and lead to a deepening of the public awareness and understanding of the role.

The history and achievements of Cumann na mBan have previously been commemorated under the State commemorative programme, specifically with a conference at the National Museum Collins Barracks in April 2014 and a commemorative stamp issued by An Post the same year. In 2016 the State commemoration to honour the role of women in the Easter Rising was led by President Higgins at the Royal Hospital Kilmainham on International Women's Day. On 6 February last year I marked the date of passage of the legislation introducing the voting rights for women and their right to stand in parliamentary elections with the publication of the Mná1916 book by my Department, a copy of which I shared with each member of the Houses of the Oireachtas. The story of Cumann na mBan is also featured in both the Decade of Centenaries website and Century Ireland, the online contemporary newspaper of the Centenary programme supported by my Department.

The Decade of Centenaries commemorative programme 2019-2023 will be based on a four strand approach comprising:

- A State Ceremonial Strand which will comprise a limited number of symbolic acts of national commemoration focusing on themes of remembrance and reconciliation and on the commemoration of all of those who lost their lives during this period.

- An Historical Strand which will comprise a diverse range of activities designed to encourage authentic historical enquiry about this period and promote the use of primary archival sources. Initiatives will be developed in collaboration with State partners, National Cultural Institutions, institutions of learning and other stakeholders.

- A Community Strand, which will involve a collaborative approach – similar to that adopted for the 1916 centenary commemorations – between the State, local authority network and community organisations, including in Northern Ireland where appropriate.

- The Creative Imagination Strand, which will continue to encourage artistic and creative expression in remembrance of the significant historical events of the period from 1919 to 1923 and all of those who lost their lives.

The development of Cumann na mBan and its significant contribution to the nation over the course of this historical period will continue to be recognised through these four commemora-

tive strands.

Ferry Services Provision

311. Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the steps that need to be taken to change ferry times on Sherkin Island by 15 minutes to facilitate schoolchildren who attend classes on the mainland following the closure of the school on the island; if her attention has been drawn to fact that the ferry operator is refusing to facilitate the request; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3537/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Séan Kyne): It is a requirement of contracts in place between my Department and private ferry operators that a timetable be agreed between the operator and representatives of the island community.

Specifically in relation to Sherkin Island, my officials have been in contact with both the operator and island representatives in relation to moving the 2pm Monday to Friday sailing to 2:15pm during the school term and talks are ongoing to seek a satisfactory resolution to the issue.

Turf Cutting Compensation Scheme Applications

312. Deputy Anne Rabbitte asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the status of a file in the case of a person (details supplied); when the person will receive outstanding payments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3584/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): An application for compensation under the cessation of turf cutting compensation scheme has been received by my Department from the individual referred to in the Deputy's Question. With respect to 36 raised bog natural heritage areas, the qualifying criteria for the scheme are that:

- The applicant must have had a legal interest (ownership or a turbary right (right to cut turf)) in one of these sites on 25 May 2010 and must have had the right to cut and remove turf from the property on that date;
- The applicant must have been cutting turf on the land in question during the relevant five year period up to 14 January 2014;
- The turf resource on the site has not been exhausted; and
- No turf cutting or associated activity is ongoing on the property.

My Department is examining the application in view of the qualifying criteria for the scheme. I am advised that an inspection of the plot of bog in respect of which the applicant has applied for compensation is scheduled to be undertaken shortly. My Department will be in a position to further process the application when this inspection has been completed.

Brexit Issues

313. Deputy Lisa Chambers asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of meetings she has attended since the beginning of September 2018 with her officials

to discuss and prepare for Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3593/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josephine Madigan): Brexit is a standing agenda item on my Department's Management Board and Ministerial Management Board agenda. Ongoing coordination of the Department's response to Brexit including participation in inter-Departmental preparations for Brexit is overseen by an internal Working Group chaired at Assistant Secretary level and comprising officials from across the Department. This Working Group is supported by the Department's Corporate Governance and Coordination Unit. In addition to these meetings I meet regularly with senior Department officials in relation to individual policy areas. As the Deputy will appreciate, the potential impact of Brexit is also addressed in these meetings.