

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 17, inclusive, answered orally.

Questions Nos. 18 to 38, inclusive, resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 39 to 44, inclusive, answered orally.

Equality Proofing of Budgets

45. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if consideration will be given to disability proofing the next budget and all budgets thereafter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7147/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Following a commitment in A Programme for a Partnership Government to ‘develop the process of budget and policy proofing as a means of advancing equality, reducing poverty and strengthening economic and social rights’ an Equality Budgeting pilot was implemented for the 2018 budgetary cycle. The approach I have taken in introducing Equality Budgeting is that equality budgeting is to be integrated into the existing budgetary process. Therefore, equality budgeting is contained within the existing performance budgeting framework and utilises the processes already in place.

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

The Revised Estimates Volume 2019 (REV), published last December, includes performance information across all Government Departments. To provide greater visibility on the many areas of spend that specifically address inequality, the REV includes a reference guide that collates performance indicators that directly relate to areas of equality. These indicators are classified across nine themes taking into account the various Government strategies in place to guide policy development in the area of equality, including the National Disability Inclusion Strategy.

Questions Nos. 46 to 53, inclusive, answered orally.

Public Service Stability Agreement

54. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to remove members of a union (details supplied) from the provisions of the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10623/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The provisions of the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020 apply to those unions who have confirmed in writing to the Workplace Relations Commission that they agree to be bound by the terms of the agreement.

The union referenced by the Deputy, (INMO), has subscribed to the Public Service Stability Agreement and is currently considering a Labour Court Recommendation to resolve an industrial dispute. The Labour Court has stated that the proposed resolution to the matter is within the terms of the PSSA and there are no plans to take steps to exclude members of that union from the benefits of the PSSA.

The Public Service Pay and Pensions Act 2017 provides for a range of benefits for those public servants who have accepted and comply with the terms of the PSSA including an accelerated and more advantageous phased series of pay increases up to October 2020 as part of the unwinding of FEMPI legislation. Separately, the PSSA also provides processes through the Public Service Pay Commission to address recruitment and retention issues in the public service and provision to address salary scale issues for “New Entrants” to the public service.

Departmental Budgets

55. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which he has been alerted to potential budgetary overruns in respect of various Departments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10628/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Expenditure Report 2019 set out total gross voted expenditure of €66.6 billion for 2019. Of this, €59.3 billion is gross voted current expenditure, while €7.3 billion is gross voted capital expenditure. Ministerial allocations, as agreed by the Government, were set out in further detail in the Revised Estimates Volume (REV) published in December.

The effective and efficient delivery of public services within budgetary allocations is a key responsibility of each Minister and Department. In relation to spending, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform is in regular contact with all other Departments and Offices to ensure that expenditure is being managed within the overall fiscal parameters. The drawdown of funds from the Exchequer is reported on each month against expenditure profiles in the Fiscal Monitor published by the Department of Finance.

At end-February, gross voted expenditure of €9,787 million was €141 million, or 1.4 per cent, below profile. In year-on-year terms, this is €725 million (8.0%) ahead on the same period in 2018. Gross Voted Current Expenditure of €9,286 million is €60 million, or 0.6 per cent, below profile and up by €660 million, or 7.6 per cent in year-on-year terms. Gross Voted Capital Expenditure of €501 million is €81 million, or 14 per cent, below profile and up by €66 million, or 15.1 per cent, year-on-year. At this stage of the year, 13 of the 17 Vote groups are on or below profile.

National Monuments

56. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of improvement works at the Hill of Tara, County Meath. [10627/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Office of Public Works has responsibility for the management of the Hill of Tara National Monument site and operates a seasonal Guide service based at the former Church of Ireland building on the site. It also provides maintenance services and manages both Monument structures and the extensive acreage involved.

Tara is clearly an important historical site which is popular with many visitors, domestic and foreign and safeguarding it is, and will continue to be, a high priority for OPW. Currently, the focus of OPW is on performing the standard tasks required to maintain the Monuments and keep the site safe for visitors.

As the Deputy is no doubt aware, the various parties centrally involved at Tara are currently engaged in the final stages of preparing a new Conservation Management Plan for the site and its future direction will be clearly set out within that Plan when completed.

Public Service Contracts

57. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans in relation to public contracts and lowballing firms as stated in Dáil Éireann on 12 February 2019. [8037/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The period immediately following the introduction of the public works contracts in 2007 was marked by a severe contraction in construction output in the wake of the financial crisis of 2008. In addition to a number of high profile insolvencies tender, prices dropped by 30% as contractors competed to win the remaining work available.

In 2014 the performance of the public works contracts was reviewed and, given the challenging tender environment preceding the review, the issue of price and its impact on the award and performance of the contract was identified. The report published in 2014 set out a series of recommendations and specifically highlighted the need for much greater definition of a project's requirements so that those tendering can adequately price the project and the contracting authority can properly evaluate the prices returned in the tender.

With the increase in activity in the construction sector in recent years, tender prices are recovering to a level that more realistically reflects current construction costs. Indeed inflation in the sector is well ahead of that in the economy generally. The challenge for Government in this context is to maintain a competitive tension in tenders to ensure that value for money is delivered for the taxpayer. This challenge should not be underestimated given the increased investment in the sector both in terms of the NDP but also private investment.

The measures that have already been introduced since 2016 to ensure contracting authorities have a better understanding of the price returned in a tender include:

1. The standing of the bill of quantities was increased for the traditional contract type. This measure increases the focus of the design team in preparing more comprehensive design information that can be accurately measured for pricing purposes. With a comprehensive price breakdown it is easier to establish where unsustainable rates may be applied.

2. A mechanism to directly tender specialist works was also introduced so that these critical work elements are priced directly by the specialist market thus reducing the extent of the contract sum for which the main contractor has overall price responsibility.

3. The greater use of the Most Economically Advantageous Tender (MEAT) was also a recommendation in the report and while this measure does go some way to addressing the issue of low pricing, where a public body is dealing with a strong field of competent contractors their scores for quality will not vary significantly unless a targeted approach is taken with respect to the quality criteria, otherwise price will end up being the determinant.

These measures will be further enhanced by requirements for the adoption of Building Information Modelling once these are finalised by the Office of Government Procurement and implemented on a phased basis across the public capital programme.

In order to avail of the long standing provisions that are set down in the EU procurement directives for dealing with abnormally low tenders it is vital that projects are adequately defined so that a proper analysis of the constituent elements of the project can be undertaken. Ambiguity in the project requirements can easily result in a price that may adequately cover the tenderer's interpretation of the tender documents but that may not necessarily align with the contracting authority's expectations.

Public Sector Pay

58. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to review public service pay in view of the recently agreed deal with nurses; his further plans to open pay negotiations with trade unions and other social partners; if so, when; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10640/19]

71. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his views on the likely gross and net cost of the recent pay agreement with nurses; his plans to examine and review likely pay implications for other public sector workers and the wider economy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10638/19]

74. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the estimated cost in 2019 and 2020 of resolving the nurses dispute; his plans to achieve pay equality in the health and education sectors in 2019 and 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10483/19]

165. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to consult with public sector unions in respect of public pay negotiations; if the recent negotiations with nurses will have a knock-on implication for other employees in the Civil Service; if so, the likely implications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9969/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 58, 71, 74 and 165 together.

The Labour Court decided to intervene in the nursing dispute due to the grave and extensive implications for our health services and patient safety.

In making its decision the Labour Court acknowledged that "The Public Service employers made clear to the Court that any resolution of the within dispute must take place within the framework of the Public Service Stability Agreement (PSSA)" and that "the Trade Union has also made clear to the Court its acknowledgement that the resolution to the within dispute must

be found within the framework of the PSSA”.

As such the Court stressed that in making its recommendation it had only considered possible solutions “in the context of the PSSA”.

It is important to note that the Irish Congress of Trade Unions were involved in the negotiations at the Labour Court and supported the Agreement on this basis. Accordingly, I have no plans to engage on public service pay negotiations outside the terms of the current agreement.

Within the framework provided by the PSSA, the Labour Court has made a recommendation and the details of the recommendation will be subject to ballot by INMO members between the 11th and 25th of March. Subject to the outcome to current discussions on contractual matters related to the Labour Court Recommendation, other nursing unions (SIPTU & PNA) have also indicated they will undertake ballots of their members.

The indicative estimates of the net additional costs associated with Labour Court Recommendation LCR 21900 are as follows:

2019: €10m - €15m

2020: €30m - €35m

These estimates include the cost of the potential movement of staff to the new Enhanced Nursing Practice salary scale and other elements of the Recommendation such as the extension of the location/qualification allowance to medical and surgical areas, offset by Agency Savings and the re-configuration of the new entrant deal.

These estimates are necessarily high level and indicative reflecting the fact that further detailed work is currently under way, as provided for under the Labour Court Recommendation, in relation to a new nursing contract and supporting verification mechanisms.

On the 24th September last, agreement was reached with the Public Services Committee of ICTU on measures to address the new entrant pay issue.

In general, the agreement provides for two separate interventions which will take place at point 4 and point 8 of pay scales. The practical effect of this is that for ‘new entrants’ the relevant points on the pay scale will be bypassed thereby reducing the time spent (by bypassing two increment points) on the scale for progression to the maximum point.

The benefits under the measure are effective from 1 March 2019 and are restricted to Parties adhering to the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020 excluding nurses, who will benefit from measures that form part of the Labour Court Recommendation.

Heritage Sites

59. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans for the Brú na Bóinne visitor centre, County Meath. [10626/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Brú na Bóinne complex is one of Ireland’s major visitor attractions and one of two UNESCO World Heritage sites in the State. The investment at Brú na Bóinne, supported by the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and the Fáilte Ireland Capital Grants Programme, includes improvements in three separate areas: at the Brú na Bóinne Visitor Centre, at Knowth Monument and at the core Newgrange Monument itself.

The Visitor Centre acts as the admission point to Newgrange and Knowth and as a management hub for a range of nearby monuments, providing information and interpretation of these important sites. The Centre was built and the existing exhibition installed in the mid 1990's so it is timely at this stage, over 20 years after its inception, to review the exhibition and modernise it so that it provides added value to visitors and provides them with a more interactive, dynamic and engaging experience. In tandem, the fabric of the building, which is considerably dated at this point, is being substantially refurbished and updated.

The new facilities at Knowth celebrate the megalithic art at the site and will be open to visitors during the coming season. The state of the art exhibition currently being developed at the Knowth Farm buildings will explore how the art was produced as well as its significance and will for the first time allow visitors to experience in virtual reality the interior of one of the great tombs at Knowth. Traditionally, Knowth has only been open to the public from the end of March to the beginning of November for conservation reasons. The development at Knowth means that the site will be open to the public for much longer, leading ultimately to a year-round visitor offering at the site.

The project at Newgrange Monument will focus on bringing the former Tourist Office at the site back into use together with changes to traffic management and landscaping. This work is currently subject to a Planning Application to Meath Co. Council. Improved interpretation at Newgrange itself will allow us to change the way in which we present the site to the public and aid the better management of visitor volumes. Following completion of this project more visitors will be offered the chance to enjoy the site and the exterior of the tomb with entry to the tomb being treated as a 'premium' experience. The net effect will be to sustainably increase the overall number of visitors who experience the Newgrange site.

I am satisfied that once all of these proposed projects have been completed, we will not only deliver a state-of-the-art entry point to the World Heritage site via Brú na Bóinne Visitor Centre but will also facilitate a sustainable increase in visitor numbers to the entire archaeological zone encompassed by the World Heritage Site.

Customs and Excise Controls

60. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when the detailed action plan on the requirements of Rosslare Europort in advance of Brexit is due for publication and-or finalisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10213/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): While ratification of the Withdrawal Agreement is still the Government's priority, we will continue our preparations for all scenarios. On 11 December 2018, the Government decided to give greater immediate priority to the preparations for a no deal Brexit. This work is ongoing and includes all Government Departments and Agencies. It includes measures both nationally and in conjunction with the EU.

In a no deal scenario, goods entering the EU from the UK would be treated as imports from a third country and goods leaving the EU to the UK will be treated as exports. All relevant EU legislation on imported goods and exported goods would apply, including the levy of certain duties and taxes, in accordance with EU commitments and under the rules of the World Trade Organisation. Relevant customs declarations would be needed, and sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) controls would need to be applied. Additional staff have been recruited for our ports and airports, and ICT systems have been enhanced to support this work.

The Government is committed to working with the European Commission and our EU partners to ensure that any potential disruption to connectivity as a result of necessary additional checks and controls is kept to a minimum. At the same time, Ireland is committed to protecting the integrity of the Single Market and Customs Union, membership of which is a core element of our economic strategy and has been good for Irish business.

Further to agreement by Government, OPW, working with key stakeholders, are now progressing arrangements for new customs, health and sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) requirements at ports and airports. Preparatory works are ongoing in four separate locations in Rosslare to provide facilities infrastructure for staff carrying out customs, SPS and health checks in the event of a no deal Brexit. A new export facility is being delivered within the Port and the development of new import inspection facilities will commence in the coming days.

Departmental Expenditure

61. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if a review has been carried out into monitoring systems for capital and current expenditure across Government and in which there has been a review of his Department's invigilation of these expenditures; the changes in procedure following such reviews; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10484/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Managing the delivery of public services within allocations and meeting our budgetary targets forms a key part of the responsibilities of every Minister and Department. My own Department is in regular contact with all other Departments and Offices to ensure that expenditure is being managed within the overall fiscal parameters.

Monthly expenditure profiles for each Government Department for 2019 were recently published and included in the February Fiscal Monitor. The drawdown of funds from the Exchequer is monitored throughout the year and reported on against profile on a monthly basis in the Fiscal Monitor published by the Department of Finance.

A public investment management assessment (PIMA) mission to Ireland was undertaken by the IMF in July 2017, which assessed our management of public capital resources compared with what would be expected in an advanced economy. Its final report was published on my Department's website on 10 November 2017.

The PIMA report concluded that, overall, Ireland manages its public infrastructure relatively well.

It highlights both strengths and weaknesses and contains a number of recommendations to improve future performance in terms of the efficiency of public capital investment. The national development plan, published in February 2018, sets out planned improvements for the management of capital spend, drawing in particular on the 2017 PIMA report.

A number of reforms were implemented in 2018 based on the PIMA recommendations in order to ensure the efficient, coordinated and timely implementation of Project Ireland 2040. In particular, an Investment Projects and Programmes Office (IPPO) has been established in the Department to support the implementation of the National Development Plan 2018-2027 and drive strengthened business case and project appraisal. In this context, and in the context of the ongoing rollout and delivery of Project Ireland 2040, my Department is also conducting a review of the provisions of the Public Spending Code, with a view to underpinning the focus upon value-for-money across all Departments and Offices in the appraisal, management and

delivery of capital investment projects.

Capital Expenditure Programme

62. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when he expects capital projects in County Kildare under Project Ireland 2040 to be progressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10614/19]

76. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the levels of capital expenditure which will be allocated for infrastructure projects for County Donegal; the timeframe for these allocations; the projects for which funding will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10343/19]

84. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the position regarding the timing of major capital projects in County Kildare under Project Ireland 2040; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10613/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 62, 76 and 84 together.

In my role as Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform I am responsible for setting the overall capital allocations across Departments and for monitoring monthly expenditure at a Departmental level. Decisions on how and where those allocations are invested by Departments are a matter, in the first instance, for my Ministerial colleagues. The key role in leading development at county level rests with the relevant local authority.

However, my Department publishes a major capital projects tracker on the website of the Department, which sets out details of the key projects and programmes being implemented under the NDP, including the location of the projects where possible. The tracker currently focuses on projects and programmes with a value of greater than €20 million. Therefore, while it does not provide an exhaustive list of all capital expenditure, the list of projects serves to highlight the diverse range of infrastructural demands competing for the resources of the State.

The tracker can be found at the following URL:

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

It is currently possible to search the project tracker by location and, for example, obtain a list of the projects on the tracker that are being delivered in a particular county. However, my Department is currently developing a mapping function for projects on the capital tracker in consultation with Ordnance Survey Ireland. This function will be available shortly and will make it easier to locate projects being delivered in a particular location, which will be an important step in increasing public awareness of the projects being delivered under Project Ireland 2040 and the National Development Plan 2018-2027.

Public Private Partnerships Cost

63. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the annual cost of public private partnerships through unitary payments; and the reason total unitary payments are greater than the contractual value of projects. [10633/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): A breakdown

of the annual cost of unitary payments by individual project can be found on the PPP website. The cost of unitary payments for 2018 is in the region of €260 million.

Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) are partnerships between the public and private sectors for the purpose of delivering a project or service. Some of the advantages associated with PPPs are that they allow the public sector to avail of private sector expertise and innovation and the private partner assumes responsibility for a considerable portion of the risk.

The contracts tend to be long-term arrangements, typically spanning 25 years or more, and can be Design-Build-Finance-Maintain (DBFM), Design-Build-Finance-Operate-Maintain (DBFOM) and Concession projects.

Design-Build-Finance-Maintain (DBFM): DBFM projects require the PPP Co to provide and maintain the asset/infrastructure but not to operate it. This is likely to be used to provide schools and similar infrastructure; in such cases the public sector will want use of the asset but will not require that the private partner provide the attendant service, i.e. in the case of a school, the public sector or the relevant patron would employ the teaching staff.

Design-Build-Finance-Operate-Maintain (DBFOM): DBFOM PPPs effectively require the private sector to replace the public sector for the duration of the contract. These PPPs require the private sector to both provide and operate the asset/infrastructure. In the case of a water treatment plant, for example, this would require the private sector to staff the plant to ensure service delivery on behalf of the public sector contractor.

Concessions: Concessions differ from other PPPs in how they provide a financial return to the private sector. Unlike other PPPs the private sector achieves its financial return by levying a user charge on the service. In Ireland, concessions have been used to a large extent in the transport sector.

The capital cost consists of all the costs (including VAT) associated with the construction or acquisition of the physical assets to the point of it becoming available for use. The public sector provides annual unitary payments to the private sector for a contractually agreed period of time. These unitary payments typically comprise one or more of the following elements – usage payments, availability payments and service performance payments.

Hence, unitary payments cover more than the construction cost of the asset. They comprise the full availability payments entailed to deliver the required service level.

Social Welfare Benefits Data

64. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he has received costed proposals from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection in relation to the indexation of social welfare allowances and benefits; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10485/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Indexation of social welfare allowances and benefits is a matter in the first instance for my colleague, the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

Public Sector Pay

65. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the efforts

that have been made to incorporate retired public servants into the wider public pay discussions; if there are legislative reasons trade unions cannot represent retired public servants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10567/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As I informed the Deputy in my response to his written question of 27 November 2018 (PQ Ref: 49185/18), there is no formal mechanism to include recipients of public service pensions within the industrial relations framework and pay determination processes in the public service, and I understand that under employment and trade union law, trade unions can only represent workers in employment in negotiations on pay and conditions.

However, I can assure the Deputy that the interests and concerns of public service pensioners have been regularly articulated in meetings between the Alliance of Retired Public Servants, myself and my Department, including at a meeting between the Alliance and officials from my Department which took place last Thursday 28th February. Through this process of engagement, I believe that public service pensioners have had, and continue to be afforded, a meaningful and direct means of articulating their concerns in relation to pensions and related issues.

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

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

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

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

Public Procurement Contracts

66. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the consideration given to using a remeasurable contract in the decision making process in selecting a fixed price contract under the contract works management framework in relation to the national children's hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10615/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Department of Finance Circular 33/06 requires all public works projects that are delivered under the Exchequer-funded element of the Government's capital plan to be procured in accordance with the provisions laid down in the Capital Works Management Framework (CWMF). The CWMF is an integrated set of contractual provisions, guidance material, technical templates and procedures which cover all aspects of the delivery process of a public works project from inception to final project delivery and review to assist contracting authorities in meeting their ongoing procurement requirements. The public works contract is a key component of the CWMF and is

a lump sum, fixed-price contract which is to be used on all public works projects.

Section 7 of Circular 33/06 provides for a derogation from the use of the standard forms of contract by means of an application to the Government Contracts Committee for Construction (GCCC). This process may be used for complex or large projects which have specific requirements which do not naturally fit with the standard lump sum contracts.

The National Paediatric Hospital Development Board (NPHDB) commenced their formal engagement with the GCCC in May 2014 with a view to securing a derogation from the requirement to use the standard lump sum, fixed-price public works contract. The GCCC supported the principle of the procurement and contracting strategy proposed by the NPHDB on the basis of the risk presented by a project of this scale and complexity and the programme set for the opening of the hospital.

It is important to note that a derogation, if agreed, does not approve the approach or strategy of the contracting authority, but simply acknowledges that the circumstances are such as to warrant a different approach than the standard. It is a matter for the contracting authority and the sanctioning authority to satisfy themselves as to the adequacy of the approach with regards to compliance with procurement rules and project appraisal in accordance with the Public Spending Code. Accountability for the procurement strategy rests with the contracting authority.

The response provided by my colleague the Minister for Health, Simon Harris T.D. to a similar question posed by the Deputy (PQ 109, 27/2/19 refers) sets out the procurement and contracting strategy that was undertaken by the NPHDB.

National Children's Hospital Expenditure

67. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to review the cost overrun of the national children's hospital; his further plans to conduct an evaluation of the oversight role of his Department for major construction projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10635/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): On the 12th of February, I published how the €99m necessary this year for the timely provision of the National Children's Hospital will be accommodated with a minimum of disruption to the scheduled rollout of key infrastructure projects under Project Ireland 2040. I also detailed reforms designed to ensure world class project management across the whole of Government.

I have also outlined the progress made delivering projects on time and on budget but it is clear that the experience of the National Children's Hospital must be drawn upon, and lessons learned, to ensure that this type of cost overrun is avoided in future and that our project management procedures keep pace with international best practices. Reforms to public procurement processes, and to the Public Spending Code, which were put in train in the context of Project Ireland 2040 are accordingly being stepped up and accelerated.

Flood Relief Schemes Funding

68. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if funding will be removed from the flood relief scheme planned for Buncrana, County Donegal, due to the reprofiling of investment under the flood risk management programme of the OPW to defer €3 million towards the cost overrun at the new national children's hospital; and if he will

make a statement on the matter. [9751/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): In May 2018 I launched 29 Flood Risk Management Plans for all the main river basins identifying a total of 118 flood relief projects to protect the main flood risk areas throughout the country. These Plans and projects are a key part of the overall flood risk management strategy set out in the National Development Plan 2017 - 2028 involving total investment of almost €1 billion over the ten year time frame of that Plan. As it is not possible to implement all of the 118 projects at the one time, a total of 50 projects were prioritised for the initial tranche of investment and delivery based on the level of risk and number of properties to be protected.

Fifteen flood relief projects have been identified for County Donegal arising from the completion of the Plans. Following consultation and discussions between the Office of Public Works (OPW) and Donegal County Council (DCC), six of the Donegal projects have been identified to be progressed in the first phase of implementation. A joint OPW and DCC Steering Group has been established to advance these projects and plans are currently being put together to appoint consultants over the coming months for these projects.

The proposed project at Buncrana and Luddan, Co. Donegal, at an estimated cost of €3.3m, consists of a series of sea walls, flood embankments and flood walls, which will provide flood protection to approximately 32 properties when completed. The proposed project is not in the first phase of projects to be progressed, but I can assure you that the OPW and Donegal County Council will work closely to ensure that it will be commenced as soon as possible in the coming years and within the 10 year timeframe for the programme of investment.

Arising from the Government decision of Tuesday, 12 February 2019 in relation to capital reallocations, the OPW is reviewing the most appropriate means of achieving the required capital savings of €3 million in the flood risk management area. Expenditure on any particular project or programme in any year is dependent on many variables related to the progress of the project and programme. I can assure the Deputy that all capital projects committed to will be delivered and I do not foresee any major impacts on the progression of the project in question in due course.

Pension Provisions

69. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans in respect of outstanding pension restorations that resulted as a consequence of reduction in pensions during the economic crisis; when pension reductions in respect of public sector workers with pension of under €35,000, under €70,000 and above €70,000, respectively, will be restored in full; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9970/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy is aware the unwinding of the emergency FEMPI legislation commenced with the Lansdowne Road Agreement 2016-2018 and will be mostly unwound under the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018 -2020.

The Public Service Pay and Pensions Act 2017, provides for further significant lessening of the impact of PSPR by way of threshold and rate changes to apply on 1 January 2019 and 1 January 2020. When fully in place from the beginning of 2020, these changes will mean that the vast majority of public service retirees, comprising everyone with occupational pension values up to at least €54,000, will be entirely free of PSPR.

Application of PSPR in 2019

Effective 1 January 2019, the legislated PSPR liability position is as follows:

(i) Pensions awarded in respect of retirements up to end-February 2012:

Only those pensions in this category which have a pre-PSPR value in excess of €39,000 are liable to PSPR in 2019. PSPR is imposed on such pensions by reference to the following:

PSPR in 2019 (pre-March 2012 pensions)

Annualised amount of public service pension - Reduction

Up to €39,000 - Exempt

Any amount over €39,000 but not over €60,000 - 12%

Any amount over €60,000 but not over €100,000 - 17%

Any amount over €100,000 - 28%

(ii) Pensions awarded in respect of retirements from 1 March 2012 to 1 April 2019 (the expiry date of the FEMPI 2013 grace period):

Only those pensions in this category which have a pre-PSPR value in excess of €60,000 are liable to PSPR in 2019. PSPR is imposed on such pensions by reference to the following:

PSPR in 2019 (post-February 2012 pensions)

Annualised amount of public service pension - Reduction

Up to €60,000 - Exempt

Any amount over €60,000 but not over €100,000 - 3%

Any amount over €100,000 - 8%

Application of PSPR from 2020

Effective 1 January 2020, the legislated PSPR liability position is as follows:

(i) Pensions awarded in respect of retirements up to end-February 2012:

Only those pensions in this category which have a pre-PSPR value in excess of €54,000 are liable to PSPR from 1 January 2020. PSPR is imposed on such pensions by reference to the following:

PSPR from 2020 (pre-March 2012 pensions)

Annualised amount of public service pension - Reduction

Up to €54,000 - Exempt

Any amount over €54,000 but not over €60,000 - 12%

Any amount over €60,000 but not over €100,000 - 17%

Any amount over €100,000 - 28%

(ii) Pensions awarded in respect of retirements from 1 March 2012 to 1 April 2019 (the ex-

piry date of the FEMPI 2013 grace period):

Only those pensions in this category which have a pre-PSPR value in excess of €60,000 are liable to PSPR from 1 January 2020. PSPR is imposed on such pensions by reference to the following:

PSPR from 2020 (post-February 2012 pensions)

Annualised amount of public service pension - Reduction

Up to €60,000 - Exempt

Any amount over €60,000 but not over €100,000 - 1%

Any amount over €100,000 - 6%

Ministerial order on PSPR to be issued by end-2020

When the PSPR amelioration provisions in the 2017 Act as described above are fully in place from 1 January 2020, only a small number of public service pensions and new pension awards will remain affected by PSPR. Section 27 of the 2017 Act states that the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform will, no later than 31 December 2020, issue an order which will specify a date for the full removal of PSPR from that residual group of PSPR-affected pensions.

The date so specified in the order will effectively be the date of complete abolition of PSPR.

Government Construction Contracts Committee

70. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the role of the Government Contracts Committee for Construction in derogations from standard forms of public contracts; the person or body that is ultimately responsible for approving the public contract used by contracting authorities for capital projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10632/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Department of Finance Circular 33/06 requires all public works projects that are delivered under the Exchequer-funded element of the Government's capital plan to be procured in accordance with the provisions laid down in the Capital Works Management Framework (CWMF). The CWMF is an integrated set of contractual provisions, guidance material, technical templates and procedures which cover all aspects of the delivery process of a public works project from inception to final project delivery and review to assist contracting authorities in meeting their ongoing procurement requirements. The public works contract is a key component of the CWMF and is a lump sum, fixed-price contract which is to be used on all public works projects.

Section 7 of Circular 33/06 provides for a derogation from the use of the standard forms of contract from the Government Contracts Committee for Construction (GCCC). This process may be used for complex or large projects which have specific requirements which do not naturally fit with the standard 'lump sum' contracts and has been availed of by a number of sanctioning authorities.

A derogation, if agreed, does not approve the approach or strategy of the contracting authority, but simply acknowledges that the circumstances are such as to warrant a different approach than the standard. Whilst the GCCC will advise and comment on the proposed strategy it is a matter for the contracting authority and the sanctioning authority to satisfy themselves as to

the adequacy of the approach with regards to compliance with procurement rules and project appraisal in accordance with the Public Spending Code.

The GCCC was established under Section 11 of Circular 40/02. It is a forum for the discussion and development of public policy in the tendering and contracting of all aspects of construction projects (apart from PPPs).

The OGP provides the functions of Chair and Secretariat to the GCCC. The membership of the GCCC includes representatives from the main capital spending bodies and departments with a significant involvement in public sector construction related activities.

Relevant departments and bodies nominate representatives with either technical or administrative backgrounds and these nominees may change from time to time. Special advisors/consultants or other guests may be invited to participate in the work of the Committee as may be required from time to time.

Question No. 71 answered with Question No. 58.

Cross-Border Projects

72. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the outcome of the most recent discussions his officials have had with their counterparts in Northern Ireland in relation to funding for cross-Border projects post-2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10562/19]

80. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the outcome of the most recent discussions he has had with his British counterpart in relation to the funding of cross-Border projects post-2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10563/19]

83. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he has held discussions with the European Commission in relation to the possible allocation of additional funding for the Border region in view of the particular challenges that will arise in that area following Brexit and the need to improve infrastructure to assist existing businesses remain competitive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10342/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 72, 80 and 83 together.

Ireland and the UK are currently partners in two EU-funded cross-border Cooperation Programmes – PEACE and INTERREG – with a total value of €550 million over the period 2014-2020.

These programmes are 85% funded by the EU through the European Regional Development Fund under the European Union's Cohesion Policy.

The two programmes are important drivers of regional development in a cross-border context. Through EU-funded cooperation, a range of organisations, North and South, have engaged in and benefited from a variety of cross-border and cross-community projects.

The Irish Government has been clear and consistent about its commitment to the successful implementation of the current PEACE and INTERREG programmes and to a successor programme post-2020, and my officials and I have been working to ensure that this important source of funding for the border region continues post-Brexit.

As far back as December 2017 both the EU and UK undertook to honour their commitments to the current PEACE and INTERREG programmes and to examine favourably the possibilities for future programmes.

I was pleased, therefore, that last May the European Commission responded to the Irish Government's support for a future programme with a proposal for a special new PEACE PLUS programme that will build on and continue the work of PEACE and INTERREG.

I welcome the inclusion in the draft Withdrawal Agreement of a commitment by both parties to the completion of the current programmes and to a future programme post-2020, a commitment that is carried through to the draft Political Declaration setting out the Framework for the Future Relationship between the EU and the UK.

I also welcome the Commission's more recent proposal for a Regulation that will enable the current programmes to continue even in the event of no-deal.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

73. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the way in which he plans to apply a new revised cost of carbon in the National Development Plan 2018-2027; and the new analysis of the project which will be carried out before the cost is agreed. [10620/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Facing challenging and legally binding greenhouse gas emission reduction targets, it is imperative that the assessment of public investment projects include an appropriate valuation of the cost that society will bear in dealing with the increased greenhouse gas emissions a project might give rise to. Under the National Mitigation Plan, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform committed to "undertake a review of guidance on public expenditure appraisal and evaluation to ensure their suitability to capturing key costs and benefits of climate measures". In November 2018 my Department published a consultation paper on valuing greenhouse gas emissions in the public spending code, along with a review of the central technical appraisal parameters used in the Public Spending Code.

The paper on valuing greenhouse gas emissions concluded that the model currently in use for pricing carbon in the Public Spending Code is outdated. It proposed a new methodology that values future greenhouse gas emissions according to a shadow price of carbon that is based on the estimated marginal cost that will be faced by society in achieving Ireland's legally binding 2030 greenhouse gas emissions target.

In practical terms, this means a new shadow price of carbon for non-ETS emissions of €32 per tonne in 2020, rising by €6.80 a year to reach €100 per tonne by 2030. Beyond 2030, it is proposed that the shadow price of carbon will simply rise by 5% a year. This means that the shadow price of carbon rises to €128 for 2035, €163 for 2040, €208 for 2045 and €265 for 2050.

The consultation period has now concluded and my Department is in the final stages of evaluating the responses received. It is my intention to publish a decision paper detailing my Department's response to the views received and shortly thereafter to issue a circular revising the Public Spending Code to take account of the revised shadow price of carbon. This circular will also update other technical parameters, including a downward revision of the test discount rate from 5% to 4%.

Collectively, these reforms will ensure that the Public Spending Code incorporates a more

realistic appreciation of the climate consequences of all Government investment decisions. Once the circular is published the use of the revised values will be mandatory for all appraisals. This includes all appraisals of the projects detailed in Project Ireland 2040.

Question No. 74 answered with Question No. 58.

Flood Relief Schemes Funding

75. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if funds made available for minor flood works and coastal protection have been drawn down by Fingal County Council to tackle coastal erosion at the Burrow, Portrane. [10571/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am well aware of the coastal erosion at Portrane and I visited the area on the 18th October 2018 to view the commencement of the interim works. Local Authorities lead on identifying works to protect the coast in their respective areas and Fingal County Council are continuing to liaise with the OPW regarding a long term solution for the protection of Portrane.

The interim works consist of three lines of “SeaBee” units, filled with stone, which were placed on the beach in November 2018 along a 270-metre stretch. I am advised by my office that funding of €456,464 has been approved to Fingal County Council under the OPW Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme for the works at this location. In November 2018, €365,171 was drawn down and on the 28th February 2019 Fingal County Council submitted a further request to draw down the remainder of the approved funding.

Question No. 76 answered with Question No. 62.

Question No. 77 answered with Question No. 48.

Question No. 78 answered with Question No. 53.

Public Service Stability Agreement

79. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the consequences for trade unions that are not covered by the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020, specifically the loss of increments and proposed pay rises for non-covered public servants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10621/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Sections 3 and 23 of the Public Service Pay and Pensions Act 2017 and Section 5 of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act No. 2 of 2009 (as amended) provide, taken together, for accelerated payments only in respect of those public servants who have engaged with and are complying with the Public Service Pay Agreement 2018-2020. Public servants who are members of trade unions who have not signed up to or have chosen to resile from the Public Service Stability Agreement, become “non-covered public servants” as provided for in the Public Service Pay and Pensions Act 2017.

In summary terms, non-covered public servants do not benefit from the accelerated timetable set out in the Agreement for pay increases and are instead:

- subject to a delay of nine months in each pay restoration/increase;

- subject to freezing of incremental progression until end 2020;
- subject to a less favourable regime in relation to additional superannuation contributions (ASC);
- excluded from benefits arising from the reports of the Public Service Pay Commission and/or measures relating to new entrants.

Question No. 80 answered with Question No. 72.

Departmental Funding

81. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the policy regarding emergency funding for coastal protection for homes at immediate risk due to coastal erosion. [10572/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Strategic policy responsibility for the coast, including coastal erosion, is a matter for the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government. Local Authorities are responsible for the management of the coastline, including response to coastal erosion risk within their administrative areas.

My Office has responsibility for co-ordinating government policy on flood risk management for fluvial flooding and coastal protection, including where that coastal flooding arises from coastal erosion. In this regard, the OPW is leading a whole of Government response to flooding and is in the process of advancing its 10-year programme of investment in Flood Risk Management Plans which, inter alia, includes feasible solutions for mitigating flood risk for 90 coastal communities.

The OPW also operates the Minor Flood Mitigation Works & Coastal Protection Scheme. The purpose of this Scheme is to provide funding to Local Authorities to undertake minor flood mitigation works or studies to address localised flooding and coastal protection problems within their administrative areas. The Scheme generally applies where a solution can be readily identified and achieved in a short timeframe.

Under the Scheme, applications from Local Authorities are considered for projects that are estimated to cost not more than €750,000 in each instance. Funding of up to 90% of the cost is available for approved projects. Applications are assessed by the OPW having regard to the specific economic, social and environmental criteria of the scheme, including a cost benefit ratio.

When severe weather causes flooding on a widespread scale, the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection may activate the Humanitarian Assistance Scheme. The scheme aims to provide financial support to people who have suffered damage to their home. It is designed to alleviate hardship rather than provide full compensation for damage.

Office of Government Procurement

82. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the companies the public service can procure services from in the area of industrial relations and human resource support specifically for industrial relations investigations relating to disciplinary matters; and the costs of procuring these services since 2012. [10624/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Office of Government Procurement on behalf of the Minister for Public Expenditure & Reform carried out a competitive tender process for the establishment of a Framework Agreement for the provision of External Workplace Investigation Services (EWIS) available to central government departments and other public bodies. It is Government policy as set out in Circular 16/13 that public bodies, where possible, should make use of all such central procurement frameworks. In that context, public bodies may tender for such services themselves in circumstances where their needs are not met by these arrangements or where they can secure better value in the marketplace.

The purpose of this particular framework agreement was to establish a panel of external professional investigators to conduct formal workplace investigation services. For Central Government bodies these services are required in accordance with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) “Dignity at Work” Policy, an Anti-Bullying, Harassment and Sexual Harassment Policy for the Irish Civil Service.

This framework went live in March 2015.

The framework suppliers are as follows:

- Acrux Consulting Limited;
- Collier Broderick Management Consultants and;
- Raise A Concern Limited.

The OGP facilitates competitions to these suppliers under this framework for both Central Government and non-Central Government. It acts in an advisory role in this respect but the individual public bodies are accountable and responsible for the mini-competitions and any subsequent contracts.

The number of investigations undertaken by each company and the cost of each investigation is a matter for relevant Contracting Authority.

Question No. 83 answered with Question No. 72.

Question No. 84 answered with Question No. 62.

Public Procurement Contracts

85. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to review the public procurement process in view of the cost overruns at the national children’s hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10580/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform requires those charged with the delivery of public works projects to comply with the Public Spending Code and the Capital Works Management Framework (CWMF).

The Public Spending Code sets out the high level principles which apply in relation to project governance and, in particular, the procedures that must be followed by bodies with delegated sanction for capital expenditure. All projects are required to complete the review stages set out in the Code before sanction is given to go to tender. This process is undertaken between the sponsoring agency and the sanctioning authority.

A review of the Public Spending Code is currently underway in my Department. As elements of the review are completed, the associated updated guidance will be published. Work is ongoing on updating the requirements in relation to the different stages involved in the process of selection, appraisal, approval, and delivery of capital investment projects. This will be completed in Q1 2019.

The Capital Works Management Framework (CWMF) represents the tools that a public body must use to procure and manage the external resources necessary to deliver a public works project that is to be delivered under the Exchequer-funded element of the National Development Plan. The CWMF is managed by the Office of Government Procurement in consultation with the Government Contracts Committee for Construction.

The performance of a key component of the CWMF; the public works contract, was reviewed in 2014 and a series of recommendations that apply to the conditions of contract have been implemented since 2016. The OGP is shortly to commence on a more comprehensive review of the manner in which public works projects are procured in order to develop the next generation of the CWMF.

The review will incorporate consultation with industry and the public bodies charged with the delivery of public works projects on a broad range of issues such as risk management, information quality standards, managing price inflation and the adoption of digital technologies in project delivery.

Public Private Partnerships Data

86. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of procurement officials within the NTMA or across Departments charged with managing and overseeing public private partnership contracts; the average annual cost of salaries in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10634/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As I have no responsibility for assigning individual roles in other Departments I am unable to provide the Deputy with a breakdown of procurement officials or salary costs in that regard as it would be a matter for the individual Minister concerned.

I have made enquiries from the National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA), which is designated as the National Development Finance Agency (NDFA) when providing financial advice to State authorities undertaking major public investment projects and delivering Public Private Partnership (PPP) projects in sectors other than transport and the local authorities. Further information on the NDFA and its role, including its role in respect of PPPs, is available in the NTMA Annual Report and Accounts for 2017. This report is accessible at <https://www.ntma.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/NTMA-Annual-Report-and-Accounts-2017.pdf> and I would draw the Deputy's attention to pages 28-31 in particular. As the Deputy will note from this report, NDFA staff are engaged across a wide-range of financial advisory, procurement, project delivery and contract management services linked to the NDFA's role in advising on and procuring major infrastructure projects for the State.

At the end of 2018, the NDFA had 61 staff at an approximate salary cost of €4.8m.

Seanad Reform

87. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Taoiseach the status of the work of the Seanad reform implementation group, in particular its considerations on the extension of Seanad election voting rights to additional third-level institutions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10314/19]

The Taoiseach: The Seanad Reform Implementation Group chaired by Senator McDowell submitted its report to me on 20 December 2018. The Report was also published online and copies of the report were distributed to all members of the Oireachtas.

The Report will be considered by Government shortly.

Mayoral Election

88. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Taoiseach the status of the formation of a citizens' assembly for Dublin regarding a directly elected mayor; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10785/19]

The Taoiseach: I have proposed that a Dublin Citizens' Assembly be specifically convened to consider the issue of directly elected mayors for Dublin and the form that this should take. This would be part of a comprehensive local Government Reform report brought to Government by the Minister of State with responsibility for Local Government, Deputy John Paul Phelan.

Work is currently underway in my Department to bring forward proposals to establish a Dublin Citizens' Assembly and I expect this to come before Government shortly.

Economic Policy

89. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Taoiseach the role of his Department in leading Ireland's participation in the annual European semester process. [9517/19]

The Taoiseach: The annual European Semester cycle is the framework to enhance economic and fiscal policy coordination at EU Level. As part of the Semester programme, Member States submit a National Reform Programme (NRP) to the European Commission by mid-April each year. This report covers progress in response to the country-specific recommendations received in the previous year's semester, as well as national progress towards the Europe 2020 targets. It also provides an opportunity to highlight national efforts to respond to the challenges identified in the annual Country Report.

My Department ensures a co-ordinated approach across Government, and in engagement with the European Commission, on the European Semester, including the preparation of Ireland's National Reform Programme and supporting the formal engagement between the Commission and Government on the Semester.

Brexit Negotiations

90. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he discussed the possibility of a second referendum on Brexit in the UK with Prime Minister May when they last spoke or met; and his views as to whether this is a realistic and helpful option. [10592/19]

The Taoiseach: I last met with Prime Minister May on the margins of the EU-Arab League summit in Egypt on Monday 25 February, where we discussed the recent developments on Brexit. We did not specifically discuss the possibility of a second referendum on Brexit in the UK.

I also used the opportunity in Sharm el Sheikh to speak informally to Presidents Tusk and Juncker, as well as to a number of my EU counterparts including the Prime Ministers of the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Belgium, Portugal, Greece, Cyprus, Slovakia, Hungary, Poland, Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Italy, Croatia and Czechia, as well as the Chancellors of Austria and Germany.

Our discussions focussed on Brexit and other important EU issues. I reiterated our appreciation for their strong and ongoing solidarity regarding the backstop, and we agreed that the Withdrawal Agreement is not for renegotiation.

Departmental Transport

91. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Taoiseach the date on which the helipad on Government Buildings was last used; the annual maintenance costs incurred in respect of the helipad in the past ten years; if it has been assessed in order to establish whether it is suitable for use by modern aircraft; and if he plans to decommission it. [10215/19]

The Taoiseach: The helipad on Government Buildings has not been used since the 1990s. There are no plans to use the helipad in the near future. There have been no maintenance costs incurred in relation to the helipad while not in use. There has been no assessment undertaken on the suitability of the helipad for use by modern aircraft.

Unemployment Levels

92. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach the number of persons registered as unemployed in 2011. [10212/19]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Seán Kyne): The Labour Force Survey (LFS) is the official source of estimates of unemployment (ILO) in the State. This survey replaced the Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) from Q3 2017. The most recent LFS figures available are for Q4 2018.

The annual average number of persons aged 15-74 years classified as unemployed (ILO) in 2011 was 342,500.

International Summits

93. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Taoiseach if Sudan was raised during the recent EU-League of Arab States summit in Egypt; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10667/19]

The Taoiseach: I attended the first ever Summit-level meeting between the EU and the League of Arab States, which took place in Sharm El Sheik on 24 and 25 February.

At the meeting, leaders agreed to deepen Arab-European ties to enhance the stability, prosperity, and well-being of the two regions. We also agreed that stronger regional cooperation is

important if we are to find solutions to common challenges such as migration, and we committed to working more closely together to address the root causes of terrorism and to continue joint efforts to combat foreign terrorist fighters.

A number of regional issues were discussed, with leaders reaffirming their common positions on the Middle East Peace Process and their commitment to reaching a two-state solution. Leaders also had thorough discussions on ways to achieve political solutions in Syria, Libya and Yemen in line with relevant UN resolutions.

While Sudan was not formally on the agenda, in our discussions and in the Statement that issued from the Summit we renewed our commitment to effective multilateralism and to an international system based on international law in order to tackle global challenges, including through increased cooperation between the LAS, EU, the United Nations (UN) and the African Union (AU). In particular, we reiterated that reaching political solutions to the regional crises, in accordance with international law, including international humanitarian law, is key to achieving the peace and prosperity that the people of the region need and deserve.

The Government is concerned about the current situation in Sudan, in particular the Sudanese authorities' heavy-handed response to protests, which began late last year.

Measures announced under the newly declared state of emergency create a permissive climate for the security services to act with impunity against peaceful protesters, and this is not conducive to creating the national consensus needed to resolve Sudan's deep political and economic crisis.

Imports Data

94. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Taoiseach the value of fossil fuel imports over the past five years in tabular form. [10705/19]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Seán Kyne): The data requested by the Deputy is set out in the table below.

Table A: Imports of fossil fuels 2014-2018

Sector	2014 € million	2015 € million	2016 € million	2017 € million	2018 € million
Coal, coke and briquettes	165.5	180.8	142.5	170.1	175.8
Petroleum, petroleum products and related materials	4,951.1	3,702.9	3,010.0	3,744.9	4,400.9
Gas, natural and manufactured	1,281.8	1,153.7	719.9	795.3	1,102.3
Total	6,398.4	5,037.3	3,872.5	4,710.3	5,679.0

Defence Forces Personnel

95. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if members of the Defence Forces who undertake specialist training in areas of academia or skills based

will be provided with the opportunity to practice in the areas of their specialism once qualified (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10287/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Members of the Defence Forces are provided with training to fulfil the tasks required of them. Personnel may choose to enhance their skills through further education and training and this is facilitated. Personnel may be assigned roles in line with such training and education where appropriate vacancies exist, or may have an opportunity to use them overseas.

Defence Forces Personnel

96. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the steps being taken to address low pay and retention issues in the Defence Forces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10304/19]

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

Improvements within the economy have provided an opportunity to begin the unwinding of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (FEMPI) legislation, which imposed pay cuts across the Public Service during the financial crisis.

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

The Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020, which was accepted by members of the Permanent Defence Force through their representative associations, provides for increases in pay ranging from 6.2% to 7.4% over the lifetime of the Agreement. The increases due under the agreement from 1 January 2018, 1 October 2018 and 1 January 2019 have been paid to Permanent Defence Force personnel. Further increases in pay are scheduled in 2019 and 2020.

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

New entrants who have joined the Defence Forces since 2011 may also benefit from the measures which were recently announced in relation to interventions at points 4 and 8 of the pay scales for relevant new entrants to the public service.

In accordance with the provisions of the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020, the Government has tasked the Public Service Pay Commission with conducting a comprehensive examination of specific recruitment and retention challenges in the Defence Sector. The Commission's work is ongoing. The Government will give due consideration to the findings and any recommendations that arise from the work of the Commission.

Defence Forces Operations

97. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the cyber capabilities of the Defence Forces in terms of staffing levels and capability; and the way in which

they are currently utilised. [10394/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): For security and operational reasons it would be inappropriate for me to comment on the specific cyber capabilities of the Defence Forces.

Defence Forces Operations

98. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the way in which he plans to enhance the cyber capabilities of the Defence Forces in view of the increased threat of cyberattacks from criminal, terrorist, and state actors and Ireland's growing reliance on the digital economy. [10395/19]

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

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

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

From an operational perspective it would be inappropriate to comment on the cyber capability of the Defence Forces other than to say that there is ongoing development of cyber capabilities within the Defence Forces.

Military Medals

99. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the steps that have been taken to fulfil the commitment given by a former Taoiseach to award the distinguished service medals and military medals for gallantry to the 32 members of A Company Infantry Battalion, including deceased servicemen who served during the siege of Jadotville in 1961; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10425/19]

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

Jadotville was a prominent event that occurred during Ireland's peacekeeping mission in the Congo in September 1961. "A" Company, 35th Infantry Battalion took responsibility for the UN post at Jadotville on 3rd September 1961. On the 9th September, a large force of Katangese Gendarmerie surrounded them and early on the morning of the 13th September "A" Company came under attack. From the 13th to the 17th September they endured almost continuous attack. They were taken into captivity on the 17th September and remained in captivity until finally released on the 25th October 1961.

In accordance with Defence Forces regulations, the award of medals for bravery is time-bound. These may not be awarded in any case unless a recommendation is made through the usual channels to the Chief of Staff, not later than two years in the case of the Military Medal for Gallantry, and not later than four years in the case of the Distinguished Service Medal, after the performance of the act in respect of which the recommendation is made. Such awards are made on the recommendation of a Military Board appointed by the Chief of Staff for the purpose of examining and reporting on every recommendation for an award.

The issue of the award of medals to the men of "A" Company, 35th Infantry Battalion was comprehensively addressed in 1965. A properly constituted Medals Board considered the recommendation for the award of medals and made a decision that no medals would be awarded.

The Chief of Staff of the day considered the decision of the Board and was satisfied with the findings. Subsequently, at that time, the question was raised again in a letter to a newly appointed Chief of Staff. He forwarded the letter to the original Medals Board and asked that they reconvene and review their decision. The Board indicated that the issues raised had received due consideration and that they were not prepared to alter their findings.

A review was conducted in 2004 by military officers for the purpose of a broader examination of the Jadotville case. This Board recommended that the events of Jadotville and the contribution of the 35th Battalion be given recognition. In this context, a number of measures have taken place to honour and to commemorate the events at Jadotville and the very significant contribution of "A" Company and of the 35th Battalion, as a whole, to the UN Peace Support Mission in the Congo.

Recognition of their contribution over the years include:

- A. A presentation of scrolls to "A" Company in 2006.
- B. Portraits of Lt Col McNamee (35th Battalion Commander) and Comdt Quinlan (Company Commander "A" Company) were commissioned in 2006.
- C. In July of 2010 the 50th anniversary of the first deployment to the Congo was commemorated in a highly publicised and well-attended event in Casement Aerodrome, Baldonnell.
- D. A nominal roll of "A" Company, printed in copper, was affixed to the monument in Costume Barracks and was unveiled as part of the 50th Anniversary of the Jadotville affair in September 2011.
- E. On the occasion of the 55th anniversary of the Siege of Jadotville, I decided to issue a Unit Citation to honour the collective actions and bravery of the men of "A" Company. This was the first time a Unit Citation was awarded within the Defence Forces and I was delighted to be able to formally recognize the brave actions of these men.

Furthermore, on 13th June 2017, the Government decided, as an exceptional step, to award a medal known as "An Bonn Jadotville" or "The Jadotville Medal" to each member of "A" Company, 35th Infantry Battalion and to the family representatives of deceased members to

give full and due recognition in honour of their courageous actions at the Siege of Jadotville. I was delighted to present these Jadotville Medals at a ceremony that took place on 2nd December 2017 in Custume Barracks, Athlone. Custume Barracks was the location for this event as it is considered the spiritual home of “A” Company and it is from here that “A” company assembled in advance of their fateful deployment to the Congo.

Over the past number of years various representations have been received in my Department outlining the courage and bravery of “A” Company. All representations have been considered and responded to acknowledging their valiant actions while under siege in Jadotville.

I am satisfied that the events and happenings to date properly honour the collective bravery of the men of “A” Company and full and due recognition has been afforded to them in their honour.

Air Corps Recruitment

100. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of pilots and air traffic controllers who have been recruited to the Air Corps in 2018 and to date in 2019; the number of same in training to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10492/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I am informed by the military authorities that, from January 2018 to date, six Air Corps Flying Officer Cadets were inducted and 5 are currently still in training. Further recruitment will commence shortly with the launch of the 2019 Cadetship competition.

Actions are also underway to increase the number of qualified Air Traffic Controller (ATC) personnel in the Air Corps. While no such personnel were recruited during the period in question, 6 personnel are currently undertaking ATC training, and similar training is planned for 2019.

Defence Forces Personnel

101. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if all Defence Forces pharmacists, civilian and military, are on the same pay scale; if they are on a HSE equivalent pay scale with increments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10555/19]

102. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the position regarding the external civilian pharmacy being used instead of a pharmacy (details supplied); if it has been offered a full-time contract instead of the usual out of hours emergency contract; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10559/19]

103. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the position regarding the Defence Force pharmacies; if they are regulated; if they are registered premises; if they comply with the EU falsified medicines directive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10573/19]

104. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the steps taken to address the vacant pharmacist position and premises in Athlone, County Westmeath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10574/19]

105. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the position re-

garding the rank of captain held by the retired pharmacist at Athlone; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10583/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 101 to 105, inclusive, together.

A Joint civil/military Standing Committee on Medical Service Delivery was established in 2014 with a view to advancing the development of a sustainable integrated medical service for the Defence Forces, and to address the appropriate means of delivery of key medical capabilities.

An integrated model for the provision of the required medical services, involving both the Medical Corps and outsourced service provision, where appropriate, is currently being progressed. The Standing Committee is reviewing each medical service individually, in order to evaluate and make recommendations regarding the most appropriate means of delivering key medical capabilities to the Defence Forces.

In this regard, a review of the Defence Forces Pharmacy Service is currently nearing completion. The objective of this review is to document and evaluate the current service provided, analyse the current and possible future demand for services and make recommendations regarding the most appropriate means of delivering pharmacy services to the Defence Forces.

No long-term decision will be made regarding the status of the pharmacist position in Athlone, rendered vacant upon the retirement of the incumbent pharmacist in January 2019, or pharmacy premises, pending the outcome of this review.

In the meantime, personnel in three barracks are reporting to civilian pharmacies already contracted by the Defence Forces to provide an out-of-hours pharmacy service. The barracks in question are Custume Barracks, Athlone; Dún Uí Mhaoilíosa, Galway; and Finner Camp, Donegal. As per the terms of their contracts, each civilian pharmacy is located within 2 kilometres of the front gate of the respective barracks.

There has been no change in the terms under which contracted civilian pharmacies are operating. As above, no decision in this regard will be made until the completion of the ongoing pharmacy review.

There are currently two military pharmacists serving at the rank of Commandant. These individuals are paid according to Defence Forces pay scales appropriate to their rank. There are two civilian pharmacists employed at a salary of €66,817 per annum.

The question as to whether or not military pharmacies fall within the definition of ‘retail pharmacy’, as laid out in the Pharmacy Act 2007, was finally clarified to the Defence Forces in late 2017 by the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland’s (PSI) Head of Regulation. The next steps are being considered as part of the Review of the Defence Forces Pharmacy Service, which is nearing completion.

It must be stressed that all Defence Forces pharmacists are registered with the PSI and apply the governing rules as laid down by the PSI in relation to their day-to-day dealings with the dispensing of drugs.

Defence Forces Operations

106. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if the de-

ployment of Defence Forces personnel under the EUTM in Mali was authorised under section 3 of the Defence (Amendment) Act 2006; if the operation is considered training for the purposes of the Act; if authorisation was sought from Dáil Éireann prior to or since the deployment of Defence Forces personnel; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10751/19]

107. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the operations that have been approved under section 3(1)(b) of the Defence (Amendment) Act 2006; the number of personnel involved in each operation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10752/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 106 and 107 together.

Ireland has participated in the EU Training Mission in Mali, known as EUTM Mali, since the mission was launched in 2013. The Government recently approved the continued provision of up to 20 members of the Permanent Defence Force for service with EUTM Mali for a further 12 months. Members of the Defence Forces are deployed to this mission in a training role, which is consistent with the provisions of Section 3(1)(b) and 3 (1)(d) of the Defence (Amendment) Act 2006. No Dáil Éireann approval for such deployments is required.

EUTM Mali is part of a wider EU effort in support of international peace and security in the wider Sahel region. The mission is being undertaken at the request of the Malian Government and has the support of a UN Security Council Resolution.

A United Nations Security Council Resolution is not required to underpin a Defence Forces deployment for training purposes. However, the training of the Malian Defence and Security Forces is specifically provided for in relevant United Nations Security Resolutions (UNSR). UNSR 2295 (2016) commends “the role of the European Union Training mission (EUTM Mali) in Mali in providing training and advice for the Malian Defence and Security Forces, including contributing to the strengthening of civilian authority and respect for human rights”. The role of EUTM Mali is consistent with the provisions of the UN Security Council Resolution.

Overseas Missions

108. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if the soldiers deployed to Mali have been there for a period exceeding six consecutive months; the anti-malarial drug that has been typically prescribed to the contingent; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10753/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Military Authorities have advised that all Defence Force personnel currently serving in the EU Training Mission (EUTM) Mali deployed on 15th September 2018 and will all return to Ireland on 23rd March 2019. The tour of duty consists of six months and one week to accommodate a hand over and take over period. The Military Authorities further advise that the anti-malarial drug that has been typically prescribed to the contingent is Mefloquine.

EUTM Mali is part of a wider EU effort in support of international peace and security in the wider Sahel region. The mission is being undertaken at the request of the Malian Government and has the support of a UN Security Council Resolution.

Capital Expenditure Programme

109. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the capital allocation for defence in 2019; the expenditure allocations for defensive equipment, major capital infrastructural projects, the Naval Service, Air Corps, Army vehicles, equipment and protective suits; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10806/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): A total of €106 million has been allocated for 2019 for capital expenditure in Vote 36 Defence. This is in accordance with the National Development Plan, which provides for an overall capital allocation of €541m for Defence for the period 2018 to 2022. This capital funding will allow the Defence Organisation to undertake a programme of sustained equipment replacement and infrastructure development as identified in the White Paper.

The main categories of expenditure in the 2019 capital allocation across the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service are as follows:

- Capability Development = €70m;
- Built Infrastructure = €19m;
- Military Transport = €6m;
- Defence Forces Communication and Information Technology Equipment = €5m;
- Other Equipment = €6m.

The capital allocation for Defence for 2019 and for the period to 2022 demonstrates the Government's commitment to ensuring that the Defence Forces have the capabilities necessary to deliver on all their assigned roles, both at home and overseas.

Passport Applications Administration

110. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the reason it states under an item (details supplied) that a citizen who wishes to have a new passport following a name change must have two documents dating back two years from the point of application proving that name; the reason a public services card that was issued less than two years prior to date of application may be accepted as one of the documents; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10552/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The issuance of passports is subject to the terms of the Passports Act, 2008 ("the Act"). In cases where a name change arises other than by marriage, civil partnership or adoption, section 10 of the Act specifically requires evidence of the use of this new name over a two year period to be submitted before a passport can issue in a new name.

In order for passport to issue in a new name, two documents that show the applicant is using their new name, such as a driver's licence, college identification card, school report, social welfare receipts, pay slip, utility bills, bank statements or official correspondence from a public or private sector organisation must be supplied with the new passport application. These supporting documents must date back at least two years from the date that the application is made.

A copy of valid Public Services Card issued in the applicant's new name can be considered as one document showing proof of usage, even if the card was issued less than 2 years ago. The PSC and the relevant issuing process, which is managed by the Department of Social Protection, is secure and robust and gives a high degree of assurance regarding the identity of the

holder.

The Passport Service may request additional documentary evidence and information as may be needed to establish and verify an applicant's identity.

These rules seek to protect the integrity and security of the Irish passports against passport and identity fraud while allowing for genuine cases where name changes have occurred. The Irish passport has a strong international reputation due to the strength of security features within the book and the robust processes involved in its issuance.

Climate Change Policy

111. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the financial instruments used in regard to €58 million of the international development programme on climate interventions in 2017; the breakdown of the climate finance from Ireland over the past three years; and the type of financial instruments in this regard, in tabular form. [10698/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): Over the three years 2015-2017 inclusive, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade expended approximately €100 million on climate related interventions at a global and country level. These funds were channelled through multilateral organisations including International Financial Institutions, country partners primarily in sub-Saharan Africa, international and national civil society organizations, and UN agencies. A list of organisations and levels of funding provided to them for the three years 2015-2017 is itemised in the following table.

Ireland's new policy for international development, A Better World, launched by the Taoiseach, Tánaiste and Minister of State for the Diaspora and International Development on 28th February maintains a strong focus on addressing climate change. Given the urgency of the issue and in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals the new policy commits us to increase our funding and engagement with those most affected by the impact of climate change.

Channel of Climate Financing	2015	2016	2017
Bi-lateral Cooperation	€32,464,110	€35,201,946	€32,996,849
Civil Society Organisations	€17,194,070	€19,618,479	€19,839,557
Multilateral financial Institutions & climate funds	€1,200,000	€1,500,000	€1,500,000
Multilateral international (UN) agencies -	€489,000	€669,000	€1,500,000
Other channels of support (IIED, Mary Robinson Foundation – Climate Justice, World Resource Institute)	€1,850,000	€1,850,000	€1,860,000

Further information on Ireland's international climate finance can be found at the Climate and Development Learning Platform[1], an open source website that supports Irish Aid and partners to better integrate climate change into development programming.

[1] <https://www.climatelearningplatform.org/about-this-site>

Northern Ireland

112. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has written to his British counterpart about an inquiry into the murder of a person (details supplied) in view of the fact that it was agreed under the Weston agreement in 2001 and the recent UK Supreme Court decision on same. [10908/19]

127. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has spoken to his British counterpart about the public inquiry into the murder of a person (details supplied) following the UK Supreme Court ruling on 27 February 2019. [10591/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 112 and 127 together.

The Government has noted the important judgment of the UK Supreme Court in the Finucane case on 27 February, including the unanimous decision that an investigation compliant with Article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights has not been held into the murder of Pat Finucane.

The Finucane family and the British Government will wish to consider this judgment in full. The Government will also be examining the judgment closely.

The Taoiseach confirmed last week that the Government's position remains that an independent public inquiry into the murder of Pat Finucane should be established, in line with the political commitments made by the British and Irish Governments at Weston Park in 2001. The Government has made this position consistently clear to the British Government, and will continue to do so.

I met with the UK Minister for the Cabinet Office, David Lidington MP, in Dublin on 28 February and, as part of our discussions, I raised the UK Supreme Court judgment the previous day and the Government's position that an independent public inquiry is required in the Finucane case. I will also be raising the matter in my next meeting with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Karen Bradley MP. The Government's position will also be reaffirmed to the British Government in writing, taking account of the UK Supreme Court judgment and declaration in the Finucane case last week.

The Taoiseach and I were pleased to meet with the Finucane family in recent months to confirm the Government's ongoing support for their search for truth and justice. My Department remains in ongoing contact with the family at this time.

My thoughts are with Geraldine Finucane and her family who have had to campaign unceasingly over the last 30 years, simply seeking to establish the full facts behind the loss of Pat - a husband, father and brother.

The efforts of the Finucane family, pursued with courage, dignity and resilience, are replicated in different ways by many other families across all sections of the community, North and South, East and West, who continue to seek truth and justice following the loss of their loved

ones in the dark years of the Troubles.

The legacy of the past still needs to be fully addressed, and this must be done in a way that meets commitments made to all victims and survivors, including by implementing the Stormont House Agreement and by honouring the commitments made at Weston Park nearly 18 years ago.

The Government will continue to engage with the British Government to seek progress with outstanding commitments and issues, to comprehensively address the legacy of the past and meet the needs and expectations of victims and survivors.

Northern Ireland

113. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on the lack of a Northern Assembly and the possibility of direct rule returning to Northern Ireland. [10910/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The continuing absence of vital institutions of the Good Friday Agreement is a source of deep concern for the Government, as it is for the British Government. The Government will continue to do everything in its power, in accordance with its responsibilities as a co-guarantor of the Good Friday Agreement, to secure the effective operation of all of its institutions.

Secretary of State Bradley and I met with the leaders of the 5 main political parties at Stormont on 15 February, further to our respective consultations with each of the party leaders in January. This meeting sought the parties' views at this stage on how a new talks' process could most constructively be commenced in the period immediately ahead.

Each of the party leaders confirmed their wish to participate in the institutions again and provided views on the necessary basis for an effective talks' process.

It was agreed that the two Governments would engage further with the parties to seek an urgent way forward with a new political process that can secure an agreement for a functioning Executive and Assembly.

Following these further consultations, the Government does not underestimate the way to go in achieving a resolution, but continues to believe that this can be achieved and that there is an increasingly urgent need for talks to commence.

The two-year absence of the devolved institutions cannot be allowed to continue. There are pressing decisions and issues across a range of areas, which require a functioning Executive and Assembly. The devolved institutions of the Agreement are also urgently needed so that the Assembly and power-sharing Executive can represent the interests of all of the people of Northern Ireland and address issues of concern, including the challenges for Northern Ireland resulting from the UK decision to exit the European Union. The North South Ministerial Council is also essential to oversee and develop North South cooperation on matters of mutual interest, as provided for under the Good Friday Agreement.

The legislation that was brought forward by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, which temporarily suspends the requirement to call an Assembly election, underlines the urgent requirement for all with responsibilities to do everything in their power to get them operating again.

I am continuing to work with the Secretary of State and remain in regular contact with the leaders of each of the political parties to get the necessary political process underway to secure an agreement for a functioning Executive and Assembly and North South Ministerial Council.

Passport Applications

114. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if persons (details supplied) qualify for Irish passports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10243/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): All passport applications are subject to the provisions of the Passports Act 2008. The Act provides, among other things, that a person must be an Irish citizen before a passport can be issued to him/her. In order to meet this, each person must demonstrate an entitlement to Irish citizenship by providing acceptable documentary evidence of this entitlement.

Entitlement to Irish citizenship is in turn determined by the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended, under which and in general, Irish citizenship may be obtained by birth, by descent, or by naturalisation.

An individual born on the island of Ireland before 1 January 2005 is automatically an Irish citizen. For individuals born outside of Ireland, they may claim citizenship if they had at least one parent who was born in the island of Ireland.

Individuals born outside of Ireland can also claim citizenship through a parent who was not born in Ireland but was an Irish citizen at the time of the individual's birth or through a grandparent born in Ireland. Individuals who wish to claim citizenship through these means must have his/her birth entered on the Foreign Births Register (FBR). Citizenship commences after inclusion on the FBR. Further details regarding the process can be consulted at the Passport Service's website:

www.dfa.ie/passports-citizenship/citizenship/born-abroad/

There are no provisions for the spouse of an Irish citizen to acquire Irish citizenship solely by virtue of marriage. Post nuptial citizenship was repealed with effect from 30 November 2005. The Passport Service will accept a valid post-nuptial certificate as evidence of citizenship if this post nuptial certificate was awarded prior to November 30 2005. There is no provision to apply for post nuptial citizenship retrospectively.

In cases where no Irish lineage exists, an individual may apply for Irish citizenship through naturalisation. Minimum residency terms must be satisfied before an individual is eligible for citizenship through naturalisation. The Department of Justice and Equality is responsible for citizenship matters, including applications for naturalisation.

Election Monitoring Missions

115. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the names of election observers registered with his Department through Irish Aid who observed elections in each of the past ten years. [10305/19]

117. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if an appropriate accommodation will be allowed for a registered disabled appellant

(details supplied) whose disability impeded the person sending the application in the format required by Irish Aid; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10347/19]

119. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the materials that will be considered by the election observer appeals panel which decides upon the final mark for appellants; if the panels will consider disability and other relevant appeal statements made by appellants; if these considerations will be documented in a way that is open to further review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10422/19]

126. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the new election observer roster is in operation; the observer missions selected from the roster to date; the missions planned for 2019; if he is satisfied that the recruitment process for the roster meets best practice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10707/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): I propose to take Questions Nos. 115, 117, 119 and 126 together.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade maintains and administers a roster of suitably skilled individuals who are available to participate in election observation missions overseas, organised in the main by the EU and the OSCE. A new roster was put in place in January 2019 following a Call for Volunteers which issued in July 2018. I am fully satisfied that the process of selection for the new roster was fair and that it was in accordance with best practice in selecting volunteer observers. Feedback from new and experienced roster members in the four training sessions held so far has been extremely positive, noting the continuing upskilling and improvement of the roster.

The intense competition for roster places allows Ireland to contribute high quality election observers, while the rotation of the roster ensures the sustainability of Ireland’s international election observation.

In the interest of fairness, an appeals process was made available to unsuccessful applicants. The need for thorough consideration of one request made at a very late stage, and to procure the necessary legal advices, delayed finalisation of the appeals panel’s deliberations. The appeals process has now concluded and the outcomes will be released to individual appellants imminently. The terms of reference which were established for the appeals process were attached to the response to Parliamentary Question No. 108 of 26 February 2019. The decision of the appeals panel is final.

The new election observation roster has been in operation since January. So far in 2019 members of that roster have participated in election observation missions in El Salvador, Moldova, Nigeria and Senegal. Roster members are also being nominated to participate in the forthcoming OSCE Election Observation Mission in Ukraine.

With regard to previous roster members selected by the EU or the OSCE for election monitoring missions, and further to the responses to Parliamentary Question No. 109 of 24 July 2018 and of 8 May 2013, the composite list of observers who have been nominated, selected and served on election missions in the last ten years is in the documents attached to the answer to this Parliamentary Question.

Regarding the individual case, I refer the Deputies to the responses to Parliamentary Questions No. 80 of 30 January 2019, No. 61 of 6 February 2019 and No. 84 of 20 February 2019 and No. 87 of 26 February 2019. No request for a reasonable accommodation was received before the deadline for applications. If such a request had been received, it would have received full and thorough consideration.

I also refer the Deputies to the responses to a series of Parliamentary Questions tabled during the months of January and February which provide further information on the election observation roster, the recent roster selection process and related matters.

[Deployed 2009 to April 2013]

[Deployed May 13 to Dec 18]

Passport Applications

116. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the reason a passport for a person (details supplied) has not been issued; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10312/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): All passport applications are subject to the provisions of the Passports Act 2008. The Act provides, among other things, that a person must be an Irish citizen before a passport can be issued to him/her. In order to meet this, each person must demonstrate an entitlement to Irish citizenship by providing acceptable documentary evidence of this entitlement.

Entitlement to Irish citizenship is in turn determined by the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended, under which and in general, Irish citizenship may be obtained by birth, by descent, or by naturalisation.

An individual born on the island of Ireland before 1 January 2005 is automatically an Irish citizen. For individuals born outside of Ireland, they may claim citizenship if they had at least one parent who was born in the island of Ireland.

In addition, individuals born outside of Ireland can claim citizenship through a parent who was not born in Ireland but was an Irish citizen at the time of the individual's birth, or through a grandparent born in Ireland. Individuals who wish to claim citizenship through these means must have his/her birth entered on the Foreign Births Register. Citizenship commences after inclusion on the Foreign Birth Register.

I understand that an application for inclusion on the Foreign Births Register has been submitted on behalf of the person in question. This application is currently being processed by the Passport Service. Once the Foreign Births Registration process has been completed, an application can be made for a passport.

Question No. 117 answered with Question No. 115.

Ministerial Meetings

118. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to have a bilateral meeting with his Spanish counterpart; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10366/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): While I have not had a formal meeting with the Spanish Minister for Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation, Josep Borrell since his appointment in June 2018, I have met with him a num-

ber of times at meetings of the Foreign Affairs Council.

With my current schedule of meetings focused on Brexit, Northern Ireland and St Patrick's Day engagements, I do not have a bilateral meeting planned with Minister Borrell at the moment.

Question No. 119 answered with Question No. 115.

Human Rights

120. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of recent events in Sudan; the steps being taken at national and EU level to address the turmoil there; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10665/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): I am deeply concerned about the violence which has accompanied recent protests in Sudan, including credible reports of the use of live fire by the Government of Sudan and of multiple deaths.

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

In reaction to the protests, schools have been closed and a state of emergency declared in some regions. Sudanese police have used tear gas and live ammunition in an attempt to disperse crowds. It is reported that over 1,000 people have been arrested across the country since protests began and that more than 50 have been killed. The use of live fire and arbitrary detention cannot be justified.

Ireland fully supports the 28 February 2019 statement by the EU High Representative expressing concern at the situation in Sudan. This underlined the importance of an environment for political dialogue in which the Sudanese people can exercise their legitimate right to express their views. This will be essential to create the national consensus needed to find sustainable responses to Sudan's deep political and economic crisis. In addition, Ireland also fully supports the EU statement of 11 January 2019 which calls on the Government of Sudan to release all journalists, members of the opposition, human rights defenders and other protesters arbitrarily detained, and to guarantee the independence of the Investigation Committee, under the Chairmanship of the Sudanese Director of Public Prosecutions, tasked with the investigation of abuses.

The Embassy of Ireland in Nairobi, which is accredited to Sudan, continues to monitor the situation closely in cooperation with the Delegation of the European Union in Khartoum.

In addition to the current unrest, Sudan continues to suffer from a range of humanitarian crises, driven by protracted conflicts, inequality and climate change. These feed into the popular disaffection leading to protests. This humanitarian situation has been further exacerbated by the economic crisis in 2018, leading to severe levels of food insecurity and malnutrition across the country. More than 1.8 million people are internally displaced and Sudan hosts a further 1.2 million refugees that have fled conflict in neighbouring countries, the majority of whom rely on humanitarian aid for their survival. As a result, an estimated 5.5 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance in Sudan this year, including 2.6 million children. Ireland is responding to these crises, with almost €26 million in direct humanitarian assistance to Sudan through our

UN, NGO and Red Cross partners since 2012.

Foreign Conflicts

121. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of the ongoing hostilities between Pakistan and India; the response and position of the EU to recent events; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10666/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am deeply concerned about the very strained relations between Pakistan and India at present. The increase in military activity between them since the suicide bombing in the Pulwama district of Jammu and Kashmir on 14 February has been alarming. The dangers posed to the people in the region by the ongoing hostilities between the two countries are very grave. Officials in my Department, including in the Embassy of Ireland in India and the Embassy of Ireland in Turkey (which is also accredited to Pakistan) will continue to monitor the situation.

I hope that the difficulties between Pakistan and India will be resolved peacefully and as soon as possible. Other EU Member States have called for the prompt de-escalation of the crisis, and on behalf of the EU, HR/VP Mogherini has called for restraint by both parties.

In the aftermath of the terrorist attack on Indian security personnel in Jammu and Kashmir, I condemned its occurrence and stressed that Ireland will always work to promote peace and reconciliation. We are deeply aware that the impact of violence and conflict on people and communities can be devastating.

I hope that Pakistan and India will work together to prevent further acts of terrorism in the region and pursue diplomatic solutions to the issues they face.

Overseas Development Aid Expenditure

122. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of Ireland's plans to reach the target of 0.7% of GNI for overseas development aid; the date by which it is expected to reach the targets; the level of funding as it relates to the target; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10668/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): In its Global Ireland strategy, published in June 2018, the Government stated it would commit to delivering the United Nations target of allocating 0.7% of Gross National Income (GNI), to Official Development Assistance by 2030. At the launch of Ireland's new policy for international development, A Better World, on the 28th February, the Taoiseach, Tánaiste and I reiterated this commitment. A Better World provides the framework for this expansion.

Sustained, managed increments in ODA will be required to attain this commitment. Careful planning and consultation with other Government Departments and stakeholders will also be needed to ensure it is done effectively. Recognising that the point of departure is an ODA expenditure of 0.3% of GNI, it is proposed to adopt a steady and phased approach, taking into consideration the range of demands across Government and the capacity of the public finances to meet them. In order to achieve this ambition difficult choices will be required between competing priorities, especially if economic circumstances change.

The Government is already making progress, having increased allocations to ODA by 32% since 2014. Budget 2019 saw the highest increase in funding available in over a decade. Overall

Irish ODA in 2019 is forecast to reach almost €817 million, an increase of approximately €110 million, or a 16% increase on the allocation announced in budget 2018.

It will also be critical to ensure that as the ODA budget grows, Ireland works to maintain its reputation, built up over many years, for delivering high quality, untied, focused and coherent development cooperation. A Better World provides the framework for continued quality Irish Overseas Development Cooperation. Regular peer reviews by the OECD DAC provide solid evidence of this reputation and in 2018 Ireland was judged by the Overseas Development Institute to be the most efficient donor in targeting extreme poverty.

Humanitarian Aid Provision

123. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of the situation in Yemen; the way in which the additional €5 million announced will be spent; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10669/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): Yemen is the world's largest humanitarian crisis in terms of numbers of people in need - the UN estimates that 24.1 million people, equivalent to four fifths of its population, are severely affected and require some form of humanitarian assistance. 70 per cent of all districts are estimated to be at heightened risk of famine.

Last week, the United Nations and the Governments of Sweden and Switzerland convened a High-Level Pledging Event for the Humanitarian Crisis in Yemen in Geneva. I attended the event on behalf of Ireland and pledged the provision of €5 million for humanitarian assistance to Yemen. This brings Ireland's support to the Yemeni people to over €22.5 million since 2012.

Ireland's will allocate this €5 million funding to the United Nation's Yemen Humanitarian Fund (YHF). The YHF provides rapid, flexible funding to NGOs and UN agencies which have the best capacity to deliver services on the ground. Services cover a range of different sectors including health, water and sanitation, nutrition and education. By incorporating the contributions of multiple donors into a single pooled fund, the YHF allows for a better coordinated response, with support targeted where there is greatest need.

Ireland also contributes to global funds that allocate funding to the Yemen Crisis, including the UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), which provides emergency funding for UN agencies, for both rapid onset and underfunded crises; and to the Start Fund, a humanitarian pooled fund for NGOs which is supported by a number of donors. The CERF is the UN's primary mechanism for emergency response, and Yemen was the second largest recipient of CERF funding in 2018, receiving a total of \$32 million. Ireland contributed €12 million to the CERF in 2018, and since the establishment of the fund in 2005 has been among the top ten donors.

As I stated at the Yemen Pledging Conference in Geneva, while it is vital that countries provide humanitarian support to Yemen, we must also come together as an international community to address the underlying causes of the conflict. All parties to the conflict must engage fully in the UN-led process, and implement in its entirety the Stockholm agreement.

Election Monitoring Missions

124. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of the recent elections in Nigeria; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[10670/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): On 27 February last, the Nigerian Independent National Electoral Commission, announced that President Muhammadu Buhari had been re-elected for a second four year term following Presidential elections on 23 February.

The ballot had originally been scheduled for 16 February and was postponed at short notice for one week. The Independent National Electoral Commission gave a number of reasons for the delay, including sabotage and bad weather.

The election period saw election-related violence, with an estimated 39 people reported to have lost their lives.

Officials from the Embassy of Ireland in Abuja participated in the European Union Election Observation Mission headed by Maria Arena, MEP. This Observation Mission issued a preliminary statement on Monday 25 February which acknowledged serious operational shortcomings.

Ireland has a long and rich relationship with Nigeria. I look forward to deepening our relationship over the coming years and to continued Irish support for Nigeria and its civil society in strengthening its democracy.

International Relations

125. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on correspondence (details supplied); his views on whether this amounts to an implied threat and interference in the work of Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann; if he has plans to respond to the correspondence; if so, if he will provide this Deputy with a copy of same; if not, the reason therefor; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10690/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am aware of the correspondence referred to by the Deputy.

Such representations by Ministers or parliamentarians in other countries are a commonplace feature of international relations between states, governments and parliaments. The Deputy himself, and others in this House, regularly call on me, in my capacity as Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, to make statements or take actions which other countries might similarly regard as interference in their sovereign affairs. In some instances, it is suggested that the Government use levers available to us to put pressure on other countries. The expression of such views is a normal and legitimate part of the work of the Oireachtas, and other parliaments will of course operate in the same fashion.

The Control of Economic Activities (Occupied Territories) Bill, which is the subject of this letter and which the Deputy has supported in this House, is itself intended to have an impact beyond the jurisdiction of this State. As you are aware, the Government opposes that Bill for a number of legal and political reasons.

The letter to which the Deputy refers draws attention to a possible legal conflict between existing and pending US legislation, and the Occupied Territories Bill, which the letter suggests may create a very difficult position for US firms established in Ireland. This is a very real concern and danger, which I have myself stated clearly in my own speeches in relation to this Bill, and one which should be seriously considered.

The question of how best to respond to this letter will in the first instance be a matter for the Taoiseach, in due course.

Question No. 126 answered with Question No. 115.

Question No. 127 answered with Question No. 112.

Foreign Policy

128. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if representations will be made to the UK Government urging it to respect the judgment of the International Court of Justice in respect of the Chagos Islands, specifically that the UK bring to an end its administration of the Chagos Archipelago and return it to Mauritius to allow the return home of exiled Chagossians as rapidly as possible. [10807/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The United Nations General Assembly on 22 June 2017 adopted a Resolution put forward by Mauritius to seek an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice on the legal consequences of the separation of the Chagos Archipelago from Mauritius in 1965, prior to Mauritian independence from the UK.

On 25 February 2019 the Court delivered its Advisory Opinion. The Court found that the separation of the Chagos Archipelago from Mauritius was contrary to the right to self-determination and that accordingly the decolonisation of Mauritius was not completed in conformity with international law.

Advisory opinions are addressed to the UN organs or agencies requesting them; in this case the UN General Assembly. It is now a matter for the UN General Assembly to consider the consequences of the Advisory Opinion and to determine how it wishes to proceed on this matter. Ireland paid close attention to the discussions leading up to the adoption of the General Assembly Resolution put forward by Mauritius. As a member of the General Assembly we will continue to pay close attention to this matter in the period ahead.

Middle East Issues

129. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on Palestinian children detained in Israeli prisons; if he has raised this issue with the authorities in Israel; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10812/19]

130. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the issue of Palestinian children detained and prosecuted in the Israeli military court system has been raised at EU level including the Foreign Affairs Council; if the EU has taken action in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10813/19]

131. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has taken action in relation to Palestinian children detained in Israeli prisons; his views on whether the human rights of Palestinian children are being violated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10814/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 129 to 131, inclusive, together.

The human rights situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory is a matter of deep concern. The manner and practices around the detention and trial of Palestinian children in Israeli prisons and the Israeli military court system continue to be unacceptable. It is my view that Palestinians who are detained, especially children, should have the same protections and conditions that Israel affords its own citizens who are subject to detention.

Ireland has recommended that Israel urgently end the admissibility of evidence in military courts of written confessions in Hebrew signed by Palestinian children, the use of solitary confinement and the denial of access to family members or to legal representation.

As a contracting party, Israel is bound by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). I am not satisfied that Israel is meeting its obligations under Articles 37 and 40 of the CRC and Articles 9 and 14 of the ICCPR. For example, Article 37 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that “The arrest, detention or imprisonment of a child shall be in conformity with the law and shall be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time.”

During my visits to Israel and Palestine, I have personally raised Ireland’s concerns about the detention of minors directly with the Israeli authorities, including on the practices of night-time arrests and blindfolding. I have strongly urged the Israeli authorities to use detention only as a last resort, and for the shortest possible period of time, in the case of minors, as stipulated in the UN Convention.

More generally, I am seriously concerned by the Israeli military court system which is used in relation to Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including children. Palestinians do not enjoy the same legal protections as Israeli settlers in the same area. These military courts have a near-one hundred percent conviction rate, a statistic which raises serious questions about the system’s compliance with international standards of due process.

Ireland has repeatedly drawn attention to concerns regarding the treatment of Palestinian prisoners, and in particular, over recent years to issues related to the detention of minors. In the most recent UN Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review of Israel in 2018, Ireland drew attention to concerns in this regard. Ireland also raised the issue of administrative detention and recommended that Israel ensure full respect for international human rights obligations, in particular those specified in article 9 of the ICCPR, towards all prisoners.

Ireland has also raised these issues at EU level. In February 2019, the Foreign Affairs Council adopted Conclusions on EU Priorities in UN human rights fora, which reaffirmed the EU’s commitment to the full implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Protocols worldwide.

Ireland also provides financial support to Israeli and Palestinian NGOs who are active in bringing the issues related to the detention of minors to light, and combatting abuses.

My Department and I will continue to press on these issues in the relevant multilateral fora, and also, where appropriate, directly with Israel, both with the Israeli Embassy here and through our own Embassy in Tel Aviv.

Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management Programme

132. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Finance the steps he is taking to reduce the cost of flood insurance for areas which require flood relief works as prescribed by the Office of Public Works under the CFRAM scheme but which are not included in the first

tranche of works; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10360/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am conscious of the difficulties that the cost of flood insurance cover can cause to homeowners and businesses, and that is one of the reasons the Government has been prioritising investment in flood defences over the last number of years.

However, you should be aware that the provision of insurance is a commercial matter for insurance companies, which has to be based on a proper assessment of the risks they are willing to accept. This assessment will in many cases include insurers own presumptions based on their private modelling and research. Consequently, neither the Government nor the Central Bank can interfere in the provision or pricing of insurance products or have the power to direct insurance companies to provide flood cover to specific individuals or businesses. This position is reinforced by the EU framework for insurance which expressly prohibits Member States from doing so.

The above mentioned limitations means that addressing the cost and availability of flood insurance must be addressed from a different angle. In this regard the core strategy for addressing areas at potentially significant risk from flooding is the OPW Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (“CFRAM”) Programme. The CFRAM Programme focussed on 300 Areas for Further Assessment (“AFAs”) including 90 coastal areas, mainly in urban locations nationwide, identified as being at potentially significant risk of flooding. The proposed feasible measures, both structural and non-structural, identified for AFAs are outlined in Flood Risk Management Plans. The Plans set out the flood relief schemes that have already been constructed and those that are currently underway. The Plans also provide the outline of 118 proposed schemes that can protect a further 11,500 properties and the evidence to prioritise their delivery to where its benefit is greatest. OPW have informed my Department that they and Local Authorities will work closely together on all of the projects to ensure that they are implemented in the lifetime of the Programme. The OPW has also advised that they are working with Local Authorities to ensure these schemes are progressed within agreed timeframes.

Therefore, Government policy in relation to flooding is focused on the development of a sustainable, planned and risk-based approach to dealing with flooding problems. This in turn should lead to the increased availability of flood insurance.

A key part of the overall strategy is ongoing communication between the OPW and the insurance industry, in order to reach a better understanding about the provision of flood cover in marginal areas. This is facilitated by a Memorandum of Understanding between the OPW and Insurance Ireland, which provides for the exchange of data in relation to completed flood defence schemes which should provide a basis for the increased provision of flood insurance in areas where works have been completed. In this regard, the Insurance Ireland/OPW working group, which the Department of Finance attends, now meets on a quarterly basis to support the information flow and improve the understanding of issues between both parties.

Finally, you should be aware that a consumer can make a complaint to the Financial Services Ombudsman in relation to any dealings with a Financial Services or Insurance provider during which they feel they have been unfairly treated. In addition, individuals who are experiencing difficulty in obtaining flood insurance or believe that they are being treated unfairly may contact Insurance Ireland which operates a free Insurance Information Service for those who have queries, complaints or difficulties in relation to insurance.

Insurance Costs

133. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Finance if the recommendations of the cost of insurance working group will be implemented as a priority; if a national claims information database and anti-fraud unit will be established within An Garda Síochána; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10362/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy is aware, the Cost of Insurance Working Group (CIWG) is chaired by the Minister of State for Financial Services and Insurance, Mr. Michael D’Arcy T.D., and has produced two primary reports, the 2017 Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance (“Motor Report”) and the 2018 Report on the Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance (“EL/PL Report”). Work has been ongoing on the implementation of the recommendations from these two Reports by the relevant Government Departments and Agencies and there is a commitment that the Working Group will prepare regular updates on its progress.

The eighth such Progress Update has just been published and concentrated in particular on outlining the definitive position in relation to all of the 33 recommendations from the Motor Report, as the last of the deadlines within its Action Plan passed at the end of 2018. 29 of these recommendations have either been completed, are categorised as “ongoing” and in respect of which work is continuing, or have been concluded in so far as the direct involvement of the CIWG is concerned.

In respect of the EL/PL Report, 24 out of the total of 26 action points which were due for completion during 2018 overall have been accomplished.

Taking the two specific issues highlighted by the Deputy in turn, I can confirm that the Central Bank (National Claims Information Database) Bill 2018 completed all stages in the Oireachtas on 20 December 2018 and the Act was commenced on 28 January 2019. The Central Bank of Ireland (CBI) is now making appropriate regulations in respect of this database, as provided for in the Act. The CBI will collaborate with insurance undertakings to ensure efficient data collection, and expects to publish its first report in respect of the National Claims Information Database during the second half of 2019. Once fully operational, the database will enable the CBI to publish a range of claims-related information on an annual basis to increase transparency.

Regarding the other matter raised by the Deputy, the latest Progress Update confirms that the Garda Commissioner has undertaken to further consider the establishment of an insurance fraud investigation unit within the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau (GNECB). In response to the original proposal to explore the possibility that a specific unit be set up within An Garda Síochána using funding from the insurance industry, the Commissioner indicated his preference that, in principle, An Garda Síochána should not be funded by any source other than the exchequer for the purposes of tackling insurance fraud. The Deputy will, of course, appreciate that it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for the allocation of resources within An Garda Síochána and neither I nor the Minister for Justice and Equality has a role in such operational matters.

It should be reiterated that an industry-funded Garda unit was a single mechanism proposed as a potential means by which to implement the intent behind the relevant recommendation, the wording of which calls for An Garda Síochána to explore the potential for further cooperation between it and the insurance sector in relation to insurance fraud investigation. In this regard, much constructive engagement has taken place through the Fraud Roundtable, which was formed by the CIWG primarily to implement Recommendation 13 of the EL/PL Report, work which culminated in the publication by An Garda Síochána of the Guidelines for the Reporting of Suspected Fraudulent Insurance Claims by Insurance Entities to An Garda Síochána in Octo-

ber 2018. A particularly positive ‘spin-off’ development from the Roundtable has been that the GNECB and Insurance Ireland’s Anti-Fraud Forum – which is drawn from the fraud sections of the major individual insurers – have committed to meet on a regular basis in order to discuss and act upon current and ongoing general issues which arise in the area of insurance fraud.

Finally, the Deputy should be assured that Minister of State D’Arcy and the Working Group will continue to push for the completion of all outstanding recommendations and action points, as well as seeking to put into place the relevant measures proposed by the Personal Injuries Commission.

Climate Change Adaptation Plans

134. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Finance the status of the progress of the Fossil Fuel Divestment Act 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10697/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Fossil Fuel Divestment Act, 2018 was signed into law by the President on 17 December 2018. It became effective immediately, once enacted and prohibited the ISIF from having direct investment in any company that generates greater than 20% of its revenues from the exploration, extraction or refinement of Fossil Fuels (e.g. oil, natural gas, peat, coal or any derivative thereof intended for use in the production of energy by combustion). In the case of pooled investment vehicles, exposure to such undertakings should be 15% or less.

Within weeks of the Fossil Fuel Divestment Act being signed into law, the ISIF advised me that it had divested from all required companies within the meaning of the Act – a total €72 million of equity and debt exposures - and the ISIF has developed a wider “Fossil Fuel List” of 148 companies in which it will not invest.

Mortgage Lending

135. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if there are guidelines in relation to the way in which banks treat mortgage applicants who receive their principal employment income in a non-Euro currency such as sterling; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10218/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The European Union (Consumer Mortgage Credit Agreements) Regulations 2016 (which transpose the 2014 Mortgage Credit Directive into Irish law) sets out, in respect of the credit agreements which fall within the scope of the Regulations, certain particular requirements in relation to “foreign currency loans”.

The Regulations define a “foreign currency loan” as a credit agreement where the credit is:

(a) denominated in a currency other than that in which the consumer receives the income or holds the assets from which the credit is to be repaid, or

(b) denominated in a currency other than that of the EEA Member State in which the consumer is resident.

As required by the Directive, the transposing Regulations provide that, where a credit agreement relates to a “foreign currency loan”, a creditor must ensure that:

- the consumer has a right to convert the credit agreement into an alternative currency (if

conditions specified by the creditor are met); or

- there are other arrangements in place to limit the exchange rate risk to which the consumer is exposed under the credit agreement (such other arrangements include a limit on the amount that the consumer has to pay under the credit agreement, or a risk warning where such a warning would be sufficient to limit the exchange rate risk to which the consumer is exposed).

Where the consumer has a right to convert the credit agreement into an alternative currency, such an alternative currency will be either the currency in which the consumer primarily receives income (or holds assets from which the credit is to be repaid), or the currency of the EEA Member State in which the consumer either was resident at the time the credit agreement was concluded or is currently resident. (The exchange rate at which the conversion will be carried out shall be the market exchange rate applicable on the day of application for conversion, unless otherwise specified in the credit agreement).

The Regulations also requires creditors to provide relevant information and warnings to the consumer at the commencement of the agreement (by way of the European Standardised Information Sheet) and regularly during the course of the agreement (at a minimum where the value of outstanding credit amount payable or the regular instalments varies by more than 20 per cent).

In addition, the other more general requirements of the Mortgage Credit Directive, including those which oblige lenders to obtain relevant information and to conduct a credit worthiness assessment prior to granting credit, will also apply where appropriate to “foreign currency loans”.

While the Regulations (and indeed other applicable legislative and regulatory requirement) provides a framework within which creditors must operate when providing “foreign currency loans” and indeed mortgages more generally, it remains the case that the decision on whether or not to provide “foreign currency loans” (or indeed any other type of credit) remains a commercial and business decision for individual lenders.

Investor Compensation Company Limited

136. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the position in relation to compensation for investors that lost significant amounts arising from their investment in a fund (details supplied); the position of the Central Bank in relation to the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10227/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware this matter is the focus ongoing legal action before the courts. As such it would not be appropriate for me as Minister or for my Department to comment.

My officials contacted AIB and received the following response:

“Litigation relating to the Belfry property investment funds [the Second Belfry Properties (UK) plc, the third Belfry Properties (UK) plc, the Fourth Belfry Properties (UK) plc, the Fifth Belfry Properties (UK) plc, the Sixth Belfry Properties (UK) SA] is currently before the Courts. As the litigation is ongoing it is not appropriate for further comment to be made.”

My officials contacted the Central Bank and received the following response:

“As this issue is being considered by the Courts, the Central Bank will decline to reply di-

rectly to this PQ.”

The Central Bank provided the following “general contextual information” which may of use to the Deputy:

“The Investor Compensation Company (ICCL) can only begin to accept claims for compensation if a member investment firm of the Compensation Scheme has gone out of business, and, cannot return client assets or client money in accordance with legal and contractual obligations; and a Central Bank determination (decision) or High Court ruling declaring the member firm insolvent has been made under the Investor Compensation Act, 1998.”

“It is important to note that compensation cannot be claimed if the value of an investment has fallen due to market movements. Investing in shares and other investments carries a certain degree of risk. Sometimes these investments may lose some of their value. Occasionally, they lose all their value. We do not pay compensation where the value of an investment has fallen due to market movements, economic conditions or the operation of a provision in respect of the investment instrument concerned, for example, the expiry of an option.”

“The ICCL has not been advised of any Central Bank determination or High Court insolvency ruling in relation to the AIB Belfry Fund. The AIB Belfry Fund, of itself, is not a member of the ICCL operated scheme.”

Brexit Issues

137. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Finance the number of applications made by businesses to register for an economic operators registration and identification number to enable the import or export of goods into or out of the European Union by county,## in tabular form; and the number of letters written by the Revenue Commissioners to businesses in each county urging them to register for such a customs number which will be required to continue trading with the UK post-Brexit. [10273/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that there has been a significant increase in registrations for Economic Operators Registration and Identification (EORI) numbers in 2019. An EORI number is a basic requirement for businesses that wish to move goods to, from or through the UK post-Brexit.

In the time available, Revenue has provided national level figures for the number of EORI applications. Further work is required by the Revenue IT Department to provide a breakdown by county. As soon as Revenue has a county breakdown available, I have asked them to send this information to the Deputy.

Year	Number of EORI Registrations
2018	2,976
January/February 2019	2,617

Since November 2018, Revenue has written directly to approximately 84,000 businesses, who from Revenue’s records have recently had at least some level of trade with the UK, encouraging them do a Brexit impact assessment for their business, and bringing their attention to the availability of free and dedicated customs information seminars.

The breakdown of the number of letters written by Revenue to businesses without an EORI number by county is set out in the following table.

County	Number of Businesses contacted by Revenue
Carlow	799
Cavan	1,634
Clare	1,498
Donegal	3,588
Galway	3,188
Kerry	1,994
Kildare	2,721
Kilkenny	1,211
Laois	946
Leitrim	767
Limerick	2,091
Longford	591
Louth	2,227
Mayo	1,904
Meath	2,941
Monaghan	1,700
Offaly	927
Roscommon	884
Sligo	1,132
Tipperary	1,989
Waterford	1,413
Westmeath	1,195
Wexford	2,423
Wicklow	2,065
Dublin City	7,200
Dublin County	7,517
Cork City	1,147
Cork County	5,036

Tax Credits

138. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Finance if the case of a person (details supplied) will be examined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10354/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that it has reviewed the person's tax situation and is satisfied that the position regarding their tax credits and rate band entitlements for 2019 is correct and is not related to the issues that occurred in 2018.

The reduction in the person's tax credits for 2019 was correctly applied to take account of the tax liabilities on a full year payment of the State Contributory Pension by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP) to their spouse. The person's spouse only received the State Contributory Pension from May 2018, which resulted in a smaller reduction in their tax credits for that year. In situations where a couple has both an employment income and a State Pension from DEASP, the tax due on the pension is collected by reducing the tax credits on the employment income.

Flood Risk Insurance Cover Provision

139. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Finance if he is satisfied that homesteads that have flood defences in place can secure home insurance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10357/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am conscious of the difficulties that the absence or withdrawal of flood insurance cover can cause to homeowners and businesses, and that is one of the reasons the Government has been prioritising investment in flood defences over the last number of years.

However, you should be aware that the provision of insurance is a commercial matter for insurance companies, which has to be based on a proper assessment of the risks they are willing to accept.

Consequently, neither the Government nor the Central Bank can interfere in the provision or pricing of insurance products or have the power to direct insurance companies to provide flood cover to specific individuals or businesses.

Government policy in relation to flooding is focused on the development of a sustainable, planned and risk-based approach to dealing with flooding problems. This in turn should lead to the increased availability of flood insurance. To achieve this aim, there is a focus on:

- prioritising spending on flood relief measures by the Office of Public Works (OPW) and relevant local authorities;

- development and implementation of plans by the OPW to implement flood relief schemes; and,

- improving channels of communication between the OPW and the insurance industry, in order to reach a better understanding about the provision of flood cover in marginal areas.

The above approach is complemented by a Memorandum of Understanding between the OPW and Insurance Ireland, which provides for the exchange of data in relation to completed flood defence schemes which should provide a basis for the increased provision of flood insurance in areas where works have been completed. In this regard, the Insurance Ireland/OPW working group, which the Department of Finance attends, now meets on a quarterly basis to support the information flow and improve the understanding of issues between both parties.

Finally, you should be aware that a consumer can make a complaint to the Financial Services Ombudsman in relation to any dealings with a Financial Services or Insurance provider during which they feel they have been unfairly treated. In addition, individuals who are experiencing difficulty in obtaining flood insurance or believe that they are being treated unfairly may contact Insurance Ireland which operates a free Insurance Information Service for those who have queries, complaints or difficulties in relation to insurance.

Departmental Reports

140. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Finance if he has received a report (details supplied). [10361/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I wish to inform the Deputy that I received a detailed response from the Office on 30th August 2018. I am advised further that a

copy of the response was also sent by that Office to the Committee of Public Accounts.

State Pension (Contributory) Eligibility

141. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Finance the way in which a contributory old age pension is treated for taxation for a person that is paying class S PRSI; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10404/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, for individuals to qualify for the Contributory State Pension they must be over the age of 66. If an individual is over the age of 66, they are exempt from paying PRSI on their income.

However, in relation to the tax treatment of the State Contributory Pension and the taxation of self-employed persons in the context of the question asked by the Deputy, I am advised by Revenue that the position is as follows.

The State Contributory Pension is chargeable to income tax under Schedule E by virtue of section 19 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997. The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection advise Revenue of individuals who are in receipt of the State Contributory Pension and the amount of the pension paid. Where Revenue has this information, it will automatically show on the individual's pre-populated income tax return.

Generally, individuals who are self-employed, and under the age of 66, pay Class S PRSI. Self-employed individuals are required to file an annual income tax return. The annual income tax return must be filed no later than 31 October following the end of the tax year in the case of those taxpayers who file a paper return and not later than mid-November following the end of the tax year in the case of those taxpayers who file their return using Revenue's Online Service (ROS). Details of any taxable payments received from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection should be either included or confirmed on the annual income tax return. Any tax due in respect of such payments is payable at the same time as the annual tax return is required to be made.

Brexit Issues

142. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Finance the impact Brexit or a crash out will have on Irish persons who are paying into private pensions in the United Kingdom. [10486/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am assuming that the question is in reference to occupational pension schemes.

In that context I would like to clarify that the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP) is responsible for occupational pensions policy. Additionally, the Pensions Authority (PA), which is a body under the aegis of DEASP is responsible for regulating Institutions for Occupational Retirement Provision (IORPs) under the IORP Directive, which governs the operation of cross-border IORPs. The PA also supervises Personal Retirement Savings Account (PRSA) providers in relation to their approved PRSA products.

Firstly, regarding Irish persons paying into approved private pension schemes in the UK, tax relief is available on contributions into and on the growth of the investment under our Exempt, Exempt, Taxed (EET) system which is set out in the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997. Provisions to maintain this in the event of a hard Brexit are included in the Withdrawal of the United

Kingdom from the European Union (Consequential Provisions) Bill 2019, the so called Brexit Omnibus Bill, which is currently going through the Houses.

The question of whether or not a UK Company Scheme Pension will be paid into an Irish bank account post-Brexit is a matter for the relevant scheme provider. If the pension provider is an insurance company that has not yet established in an EU/EEA as part of their contingency preparations this contract would be covered under the legislative amendments to the EU Insurance and reinsurance regulations, contained in Part 8 of the draft legislation. It may be beneficial for any concerned party to contact their personal pension provider in the first instance to clarify what contingency plans have been put in place.

In relation to the making of or receiving financial payments. SEPA is the Single Euro Payments Area which enables payment transfers in euro between accounts in SEPA countries. The UK Government has committed to keeping its payment rules in line with SEPA in order to continue its access post Brexit. As stated on its website: ‘There is nothing in UK private occupational pensions legislation that prevents occupational pension schemes from making pension payments overseas, We do not expect that this will change as a result of Brexit.’

In the event that the UK is excluded from SEPA some additional costs may arise for transfers in euro moving between accounts in the UK and accounts in the EU, and they may take longer than they currently do. Customers should contact their finance provider where they have specific queries.

Finally, the impact of Brexit, and in particular a hard Brexit, on markets and the euro/sterling exchange rate is difficult to estimate with any certainty but may have an impact on the beneficiaries of occupational pension schemes.

Insurance Industry Regulation

143. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the legal framework that applies for the establishment of a mutual insurance fund; when this process was last reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10502/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): At the outset the Deputy should note that, as the term ‘mutual insurance fund’ is not one which is used within the Irish legal framework as it relates to life and non-life insurance, I am making the assumption for the purpose of this reply that you are referring to the establishment of a mutual insurance company.

As the Deputy is aware, as Minister for Finance, I am responsible for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation. In this regard you should note that the Solvency II Directive (2009/138/EC), which was transposed into Irish law via the European Union (Insurance and Reinsurance) Regulations 2015 (S.I. No. 485 of 2015) and came into force from 1 January 2016 is the framework for the regulation of insurance undertakings in Europe. Solvency II sets out new, more comprehensive EU-wide requirements on capital adequacy and risk management for insurers. It was designed to modernise supervision, deepen market integration and increase the competitiveness of European insurers.

As I have no role in the day to day supervision of insurance companies, I consulted the Central Bank on the Deputy’s query. In response the Bank has advised that any insurance or reinsurance undertaking, including a mutual insurance company, wishing to establish its head office in Ireland and wishing to carry out the business of insurance or reinsurance must first obtain an authorisation from the Central Bank of Ireland in accordance with the European Union (Insurance and Reinsurance) Regulation 2015 – S.I. No. 485 of 2015.

In summary therefore in principle the same legal framework applies to a mutual insurer as applies to a non-mutual insurer.

Home Renovation Incentive Scheme

144. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance his plans in relation to the reopening of the home renovation incentive scheme (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10740/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Section 477B of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 provided for the Home Renovation Incentive (HRI), which was introduced in Budget 2014 and terminated in accordance with its sunset clause on 31 December 2018. I currently have no plans to re-open the scheme.

Under my Department's Tax Expenditure Guidelines, the introduction of new tax incentive measures should only be considered in circumstances where there is a demonstrable market failure and where a tax based incentive is more efficient than a direct expenditure intervention.

The HRI was introduced in 2014 at a time when there was considerable loss of employment within the construction sector, with the aim of addressing this market failure by stimulating increased activity in the sector. In the current context of a growing economy and construction sector, the initial objectives of the scheme have been fulfilled, and this support is no longer needed in the terms in which it was originally envisaged.

Furthermore, in light of the current housing supply shortage, and the need to deliver 25,000 additional housing units per annum over the period 2017-2021, there is a risk that the HRI could lead to increased competition for scarce resources within the construction sector, leading to upward pressure on construction costs and house prices. The potential for displacement of labour from work on new builds to work on home renovations would create a high opportunity cost of labour associated with HRI which was not present at the inception of the scheme.

Revenue advise me that, as of 2 January 2019, the cost to the Exchequer of the HRI was c. €105 million, with a further €65 million worth of credits yet to be claimed in respect of the incentive. As the Deputy will appreciate, I must be mindful of the public finances and the many demands on the Exchequer. Tax reliefs, no matter how worthwhile in themselves, lead to a narrowing of the tax base.

Finally, the Deputy makes reference in the details appended to the question to homeowners claiming back VAT under the HRI. I should clarify that the incentive operated as a relief from Income Tax (albeit at a rate of 13.5%) and not VAT, for qualifying individuals who carried out repairs, renovations and improvements to a home or rental property.

Tax Data

145. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Finance the number of Irish citizens living here that do not pay income tax; the percentage of wage earners living here that do not pay income tax; the number and the percentage of wage earners living here that do not pay the universal social charge; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10759/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that taxpayers are not required to declare their citizenship on Income Tax returns, therefore statistics relating specifically to Irish citizens are unavailable.

The overall numbers of taxpayers paying at each Income Tax rate, and those who are exempt from paying Income Tax, are available at link: <https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/income-distributions/income-earners-it.aspx>.

The same information for USC is available at link: <https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/income-distributions/income-earners-usc-rates.aspx>.

The information provided above shows information up to 2016, the most recent year for which tax returns are filed and processed. However, projections for 2019 are included in the Revenue Reckoner on page 3 at link: <https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/ready-reckoner/index.aspx>.

VAT Rate Increases

146. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Finance his views on a matter (details supplied) in relation to the VAT rate changes for health food supplements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10832/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the standard rate of VAT applies to food supplements in general while a concession allows the zero rate to be applied to certain types of vitamins, minerals and fish oils.

The operation of this 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. For these reasons, Revenue announced last December the decision to remove this concession with effect from 1 March 2019, which would have had the effect that all food supplements would be charged at the standard VAT rate.

Revenue has since deferred this date to 1 November 2019 in order to allow time for my Department to examine the policy and legislative options for the taxation of food supplements ahead of Budget 2020. This, in effect, means that the current VAT treatment of food supplements will remain in place. The zero rate of VAT applies to basic food supplements, such as vitamins, minerals and fish oils. All other supplements, such as those designed for cosmetic or body building purposes, apply at the standard VAT rate.

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. With this in mind, and cognisant of the opinions expressed by all parties on the VAT treatment of food supplements, I propose to issue a public consultation seeking engagement from all parties on the issue. I will also consult with my colleague the Minister for Health on the use of food supplements. This consultation will feed into the review undertaken by the Department in the tax strategy group process. Details on the proposed public consultation will be announced in the near future.

Tax Reliefs Availability

147. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the provision of tax relief on childcare services for families; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[10842/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Minister for Children and Youth Affairs has primary responsibility for Government policy in relation to childcare. As the Deputy may be aware, parents are exempted from any income tax liability in respect of direct payments to childcare providers under the Single Affordable Childcare Scheme as operated by that Minister's Department.

The tax code also provides certain tax reliefs and incentives in this general area including the scheme of Accelerated Capital Allowances for employers that incur capital expenditure in providing childcare facilities for use by their employees (introduced in Finance Act 2018) and the Home Carer Tax Credit.

With regard to the Home Carer Tax Credit, a review of this measure will be carried out by my Department in 2019 as part of First 5, the Whole of Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families (2019-2028) which was launched in November 2018. The purpose of this review will be to undertake research and analysis of the utilisation and effectiveness of the Home Carer Tax Credit, in line with the Tax Expenditure Guidelines.

In relation to taxation more generally, I have no plans at present in relation to the question of possible further income tax relief for parents for childcare services. In this regard, I note the findings of the Interdepartmental Working Group on Future Investment in Childcare in Ireland, which published their report in July 2015. Having considered the option of a tax credit that would be available to those who incur childcare costs, the Group recommended against introducing such a measure. The group had concerns that a tax credit would not be equitable, would have high possible deadweight, could end up being fully absorbed in the cost of childcare, and might not have a meaningful impact on a parent's decision on whether to join or to return to the labour market.

The Interdepartmental Working Group also made some initial estimates of the potential costs of such a tax credit based on available data. Tentative costings, based on estimates of average childcare costs per pre-primary and primary school childcare place, were applied to Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection figures on the numbers of such children in receipt of Child Benefit. If a tax credit were provided in respect of even half of these children at the standard rate of 20%, it would involve a potential cost to the Exchequer of between €290 million and €590 million per annum. The variation depends on the rate of take-up which is difficult to estimate. It was assumed for the purposes of that costing that all paid childcare would be covered by the relief (i.e. not just centre-based care).

Stamp Duty

148. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of stamp duty liable for a purchase of agricultural land to the value of €150,000; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10896/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that, in the normal course of events, stamp duty is chargeable on the purchase of agricultural land at the rate of 6%. Land valued at €150,000 would therefore be liable to stamp duty of €9,000. However, in the absence of any specific details of the purchase involved, including any other acquisitions of land, it isn't possible to say whether any relief or exemption from stamp duty would apply to the purchase.

Reliefs and exemptions that can apply to the purchase of agricultural land include the fol-

lowing:

Exemption for ‘young trained farmers’ : stamp duty is not payable where a person is under the age of 35 years and has obtained a recognised agricultural qualification and where certain other conditions in relation to the use of the land are met following the purchase. These conditions include

the requirement for a purchaser to spend at least 50% of his or her normal working time farming the land and to retain ownership of that land for a period of at least five years from the date of execution of the deed transferring the land.

Farm consolidation relief: where a Teagasc-approved consolidation of farmland takes place involving both a sale and purchase of land, stamp duty at a reduced rate of 1% is applied to the excess of the value of land purchased over the value of land disposed of, where the purchase and disposal take place within a 24-month period of each other.

Consanguinity relief : where agricultural land is purchased from certain relatives (such as parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles) stamp duty is chargeable at a reduced rate of 1% on the value of the land. Certain conditions must be met such as the requirement for the purchaser to farm the land or to lease it to someone who farms the land.

Full details of the available stamp duty reliefs and exemptions can be found in the “Property” section on the home page of the Revenue website (www.revenue.ie) by following the “stamp duty” link. Alternatively, the purchaser of the agricultural land should be advised to contact his or her local Revenue office with full details of the circumstances involved to ascertain if any stamp duty reliefs or exemption apply to the purchase.

Public Sector Pensions Levy

149. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of persons paying the pension-related deduction in each year since it was introduced; the revenue received in each year since it was introduced; the number and references to each circular relating to the deduction; the number of pensioners per annum who have received refunds due to the fact they were overcharged since reductions were announced; the value in monetary terms of refunds paid each year; the processes in place to ensure that pensioners are paying the correct additional superannuation contribution level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10270/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Pension Related Deduction (PRD) was introduced in March 2009 under the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2009 (as amended) and was a temporary deduction from the salary of any **servicing** public service employee having a public service pension entitlement as defined in the legislation. PRD did not apply to pensioners and therefore should not be applied to pension payments. PRD has now been replaced by the Additional Superannuation Contribution (ASC) as provided under the Public Service Pay and Pensions Act 2017 with effect from 1 January 2019. ASC is a permanent contribution towards the cost of public service superannuation. As with PRD, ASC only applies to **servicing** public service employees who have a public service pension entitlement. It does not apply to pensioners. PRD was, and ASC is, deducted at source from employee remuneration at payroll level and, deductions, refunds or underpayments where they arise are managed through the relevant payroll for the individual concerned.

All public service employees who have a public service pension entitlement were liable for PRD and are now liable for ASC with those earning less than €32,000 in the case of members of

a “standard accrual” pension scheme or the Single Scheme and €28,750 in the case of members of a “fast accrual” pension scheme being exempt from ASC.

It should be noted that PRD and ASC are different to the Public Service Pension Reduction (PSPR) which impacted on pensioners. PSPR was introduced under the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2010 with effect from 1 January 2011 and imposed reductions to pensions at levels which varied according to the date of retirement and the pay cut already suffered.

Please see PRD receipts detailed on a yearly basis since its introduction in 2009.

PRD Yield

Year	Amount (€ millions)
2009	€837.419
2010	€948.605
2011	€960.224
2012	€934.739
2013	€925.986
2014	€877.800
2015	€875.985
2016	€705.998
2017	€478.617
2018	€522.499

Note 1: The years 2011 to 2016 do not include Local Government PRD yields

Note 2: The years 2017 & 2018 do not include the HSE PRD yield. These figures will be provided directly to Deputy McGrath by the Department of Health.

Public Sector Pensions

150. **Deputy Frank O’Rourke** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the timeline and publication date for the report as per section 3(6) of the Public Service Superannuation (Age of Retirement) Act 2018 which commits to a report being laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas within three months of the passing of the Act (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10499/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Public Service Superannuation (Age of Retirement) Act 2018 provides for an increase to age 70 in the compulsory retirement age of most public servants recruited before 1 April 2004.

Public servants who reached the compulsory retirement age of 65 before the new legislation was enacted were required to retire in accordance with the statutory compulsory retirement age in effect at the time. Those who availed of the interim arrangements did so in the knowledge that the contract was for one year only, until they reached the age of 66. The Public Service Superannuation (Age of Retirement) Act 2018 has no effect on those public servants who availed of the interim arrangements. The terms of their fixed term contracts continue to apply and they will cease working at age 66 as previously provided.

Section 3A(6) of the Act provides that I, as Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform shall, within three months of the passing of the Act, prepare and lay before the Oireachtas a report

on the public servants obliged to retire between 6 December 2017 and the commencement of the Act, due to reaching the age of 65 years, and on potential remedies to assist this cohort of worker.

Work on the report is under way in accordance with the terms of Section 3A(6). Under that provision, publication of the report is required within three months of the passing of the Act on 26 December and I intend to comply with that timeline.

It would not be appropriate for me to comment on the content of a report which is currently under preparation, not completed and which I am statutorily obliged to lay before the Oireachtas.

Capital Expenditure Programme

151. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the financial impact on the annual capital envelopes outlined in annex 1 of the National Development Plan 2018-2027 as a result of the increased costs associated with the national children's hospital; the Departments that will be impacted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10225/19]

162. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the figures for the capital plan are subject to evaluation and examination by his Department before inclusion in the budget; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7361/19]

163. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the way in which the capital plan is prepared and profiled; the regularity with which the budget is re-examined to identify changes required in provisioning for capital expenditure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7360/19]

164. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which budgetary corrections in respect of capital expenditure need to follow in the wake of the overrun of costs for the national children's hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7346/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 151 and 162 to 164, inclusive, together.

My Government colleagues and I have examined all projects and programmes across government in order to meet the funding pressures accruing on the National Children's Hospital project. This has allowed us to reschedule €75 million from projects such as in the case of the A5 Motorway in Northern Ireland, which is paused due to external issues; and to re-profile the delivery of some projects within the multi-year capital envelopes. The Department of Health will also re-profile €24 million in capital funding across both 2019 and 2020 to facilitate multi-annual management of projects and works within the capital envelopes and to ensure the timely delivery of the National Children's Hospital project. A full list of the adjustments is set out below;

- re-scheduling of €27m arising in relation to the A5 Motorway in Northern Ireland;
- re-scheduling of €10m arising in relation to the National Forensic Science Laboratory;
- advance payment of a sum of €10m from the Department of Education and Skills in respect of higher education facilities at the National Children's Hospital;

- an updating of the scheduled draw-down of €16m from the two Project Ireland 2040 Re-generation Funds, which are being profiled for expenditure throughout the course of both 2019 and 2020 without delays in project planning, design and delivery;

- re-profiling of payments of €4m under certain programmes of investment in Communications, Climate Action & Environment;

- €3m from the re-profiling of investment under the Flood Risk Management Programme of the Office of Public Works to allow for capacity to be built up over the course of the NDP period;

- revision of the schedule of drawdown of funding in the PER and Finance Groups of Votes totalling €3m; and

- €2m through changes to the timing of payments relating to certain capital works by the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, with full project delivery scheduled across both 2019 and 2020.

The Government has approved the proposals in this regard, which I announced on the 12th February. The overall intention is to proceed with our very ambitious agenda of strategic infrastructure investment throughout the course of 2019 and subsequent years, with the minimum of disruption to the rollout and delivery of key projects.

The National Development Plan (NDP) sets out the Government's commitment to capital investment up to 2027, and was prepared with substantial involvement by all relevant Departments and Agencies. Responsibility for evaluation and costing of individual projects is a matter for those Departments and Agencies. NDP sets out the multi-annual capital funding strategy, which feeds into the normal Budgetary cycle, culminating in the Revised Estimates Volume voted by the Dáil. As high-level aggregate allocations, the NDP capital envelopes have a broadly stable character; it is anticipated that updates to the overall envelopes, to take account of policy developments and to include the new incoming year of the five-year frame of reference, will be made in due course.

Garda Stations

152. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if a vacant Garda station (details supplied) in County Kerry is for sale; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10332/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The former Garda station at Camp, Co. Kerry is currently not for sale.

As part of the Programme for a Partnership Government, the Office of Public Works (OPW) was requested not to dispose of any further closed Garda stations pending the outcome of two reviews of closed Garda stations.

The first review identified six closed Garda stations for reopening and the second review, published on the 21st December 2018, did not identify any further closed Garda stations for reopening.

The Commissioners of Public Works will now proceed to review the remaining closed Garda stations in State ownership in line with the OPW's policy on surplus vacant property.

The OPW policy with regard to non-operational (vacant) State property, including the for-

mer Garda station at Camp, Co. Kerry is to:

1. Identify if the property is required/suitable for alternative State use by either Government Departments or the wider public sector.
2. If there is no other State use identified for a property, the OPW will then consider disposing of the property on the open market if and when conditions prevail, in order to generate revenue for the Exchequer.
3. If no State requirement is identified or if a decision is taken not to dispose of a particular property, the OPW may consider community involvement (subject to a detailed written submission, which would indicate that the community/voluntary group has the means to insure, maintain and manage the property and that there are no ongoing costs for the Exchequer).

Garda Station Refurbishment

153. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the position regarding the upgrade of Tubbercurry Garda station in County Sligo; when approval for works will be granted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10372/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The Office of Public Works, working with Garda Estate Management, has identified options for the upgrade of Tubbercurry Garda Station. A decision on the approval and prioritisation of these works is a matter for An Garda Síochána in due course.

Public Sector Pensions

154. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to abolish parity-based public service pension schemes and replace them with pension schemes linked to the consumer price index; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10419/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I have no plans to abolish existing public service pension schemes. In accordance with the policy adopted when the Single Pension Scheme (SPS) was introduced for new entrants to the public service from 1 January 2013 onwards, pre-existing pension schemes will continue to apply to public servants who are not members of the SPS.

As the member may be aware, the SPS is a career average pension scheme which provides that both the referable amounts that are accrued by serving staff while in employment, as well as pensions in payment, are uprated in line with changes in the consumer price index.

The legislation that introduced the SPS includes a provision that allows for the extension to the pre-existing pension schemes of the policy of uprating pensions in line with changes in the consumer price index.

As part of the Government's commitment under the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020, the pension increase policy that is currently in place in respect of the pre-existing pension schemes represents a time-limited (expires end-2020), conditions-bound return to the non-statutory, pay-linked method of pension adjustment which prevailed until the onset of the financial emergency.

Information and Communications Technology

155. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if Ireland has set up its electronic data exchange system known as e-cohesion; and if not, the reason. [10535/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The eCohe-
sion ICT system went live last year, March 2018.

Information and Communications Technology

156. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if Ireland has implemented a national information technology system to meet the 2014-2020 European Structural and Investment Funds requirements; and if not, the amount of funding which has either been lost or been unable to be drawn down each year due to this in tabular form. [10537/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The eCohe-
sion ICT system, a regulatory requirement for 2014 - 2020 ESIF, went live last year, March 2018.

With regard to the Deputy's question on drawdown, I would like to reassure her that we have not lost any EU funding.

Information and Communications Technology

157. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if Ireland has implemented a national information technology system to meet the 2014-2020 European Structural and Investment Funds requirements; and if not, the reason therefor. [10539/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The eCohe-
sion ICT system, a regulatory requirement for 2014 - 2020 ESIF, went live last year, March 2018.

Information and Communications Technology

158. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the estimated conclusion date for the implementation of a national information technology system to meet the 2014-2020 European Structural and Investment Funds requirements. [10541/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The eCohe-
sion ICT system, a regulatory requirement for 2014 - 2020 ESIF, went live last year, March 2018.

Information and Communications Technology

159. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the name of the company which won the tender for the contract to develop and implement the national information technology system to meet the 2014-2020 European Structural and Invest-

ment Funds requirements. [10543/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Following a tendering process organised by the Office of Government Procurement (OGP), the contract was awarded to SugarCRM Inc., / Provident CRM Limited.

Flood Relief Schemes Status

160. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the work planned to protect residents from flooding in the Corbally area of County Limerick; when work will commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10584/19]

161. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the timeframe for the planning and construction of flood defences on the Abbey river in Limerick city; when works will commence; the projected timeframe for completion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10587/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): I propose to take Questions Nos. 160 and 161 together.

Corbally – Limerick City & Environs Flood Relief Scheme (FRS)

The Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) recommends progressing the project-level development and assessment of a Flood Relief Scheme for Limerick City & Environs, which includes the Corbally area. This work will involve detailed development of the measures, environmental assessment as necessary, and further public consultation, for refinement and preparation for planning/exhibition and, if and as appropriate, implementation.

The Office of Public Works (OPW) has set up a project steering group for the Limerick City and Environs Flood Relief Scheme, comprising of OPW personnel and representatives from Limerick County Council. The first Steering Group meeting was held in September, 2018. The group’s initial task will be to prepare a Brief for the procurement of engineering and environmental consultants to progress the design of the works and to examine all the required environmental considerations.

Once consultants are appointed to progress this Flood Relief Scheme, consultation with statutory and non-statutory bodies, as well as the public, will take place at the appropriate stages to ensure that all parties have the opportunity to input into the development of these schemes.

Abbey River - King’s Island FRS

Following severe flooding in Limerick City in February 2014, a commitment to funding both temporary and permanent flood defence works was given by OPW to Limerick City and County Council (LCCC). These works formed part of the Limerick Regeneration Project. Funding was granted to the local authority for the construction of sheet piling behind an embankment as a temporary measure with a view to the more permanent solution eventually incorporating these works. Approval was granted to the local authority in August 2015 to proceed with the development of a flood relief scheme, which will form part of the overall solution for the City.

Limerick City and County Council, with support from the OPW, are actively progressing the flood relief scheme at Kings Island, which includes the Abbey River, at an estimated cost of €26m. The scheme will protect approximately 450 residential and 23 commercial properties. Limerick City and County Council are scheduled to lodge planning with An Bord Pleánala later

this year with a completion date of end of 2021.

The King's Island Flood Relief Scheme remains a priority and the OPW has included provision for the cost of the proposed works in its financial profiles.

Questions Nos. 162 to 164, inclusive, answered with Question No. 151.

Question No. 165 answered with Question No. 58.

Office of Public Works

166. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the Office of Public Works, OPW, will consider buying a property (details supplied); the process for potential sellers to contact the OPW relating to property sales; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10657/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The Commissioners of Public Works, on behalf of the State, hold and manage a large and diverse property portfolio which includes office accommodation, heritage properties, visitor centres and Garda Stations.

The Commissioner of Public Works adhere to a policy on property acquisition and disposal which is set down in DPER Circular 17/2016 - Policy for Property Acquisition and for the Disposal of Surplus Property. Central to this policy is an assessment of need. A decision to acquire property in a particular location is first based on an assessment of need, and the property options for satisfying that need. Once a decision has been made that property needs to be acquired, the OPW follows procedures that are suited to the local market conditions applying at that time.

Office of Public Works Projects

167. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the reason the Office of Public Works, OPW, has not secured ownership of the 25% section of a site (details supplied) by requiring Wexford County Council to also obtain a new folio for this part of the site and transfer the new folio to the OPW. [10721/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The Commissioners of Public Works are the registered owners of the properties contained in Folios WX22940F and WX21417F. These properties known as Government Offices, Anne Street, Wexford currently accommodate the Office of the Revenue Commissioners and the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

There are a number of complex title issues associated with these properties, which are being dealt with in turn by the Office of Public Works (OPW) and the Chief State Solicitor's Office.

Once the matters are fully investigated and resolved, the OPW will provide Deputy Barry with an update.

Garda Station Closures

168. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the prog-

ress to date in regard to the reopening of Rush Garda station; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10838/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The Programme for Government included for the re-opening of a number of closed Garda Stations (6) throughout the country, including Rush Garda Station, Co. Dublin. The Office of Public Works (OPW) has undertaken an assessment of all the Stations identified in this ‘pilot programme’, and based on the Garda Síochána ‘brief of requirements’ received, has advised them on the works required and indicative costs involved.

On 15th August 2018, OPW issued a “Notice to Quit” to the then Licencee of the building, and received vacant possession of this building by end September, 2018.

An Garda Síochána (AGS) confirmed final agreement to proposed plans for the reopening of Rush Garda Station on 6th December 2018, and the Office of Public Works is now progressing with the procurement of the required works and these are expected to be completed and handed over to AGS by mid-2019.

Departmental Programmes

169. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which he remains satisfied of being able to continue to meet the targets set by him in the context of spending and reform; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10940/19]

175. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his priorities in order to achieve best economic practice for Ireland in the next five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10946/19]

176. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the extent to which reforms throughout the public sector are likely to yield improved economic performance in 2019 has been quantified; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10947/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 169, 175 and 176 together.

Managing the delivery of public services within allocations and meeting our budgetary targets forms a key part of the responsibilities of every Minister and Department. The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform is in regular contact with all other Departments and Offices to ensure that expenditure is being managed within the overall fiscal parameters. The drawdown of funds from the Exchequer is reported on each month against expenditure profiles, in the Fiscal Monitor published by the Department of Finance.

As set out in the most recent Fiscal Monitor, total gross voted expenditure at end-February 2019 was €9,787 million. This is €141 million, or 1.4% below profile. Gross voted current expenditure of €9,286 million, is €60 million, or 0.6% below profile. Of the 17 Vote Ministerial Vote groups, 12 are below profile on current expenditure for end-February. Gross voted capital expenditure of €501 million, is €81 million, or 14% below profile and up €66 million, or 15.1% on February 2018.

A number of budgetary reforms have been implemented in the last number of years to improve transparency and accountability around the Budget process, while also facilitating best economic practice. This includes initiatives such as performance and equality budgeting and

new publications such as the Mid-Year Expenditure Report. Sound public finances are necessary to underpin sustainable economic growth in the context of our economic recovery and to progress towards our social and economic goals. This requires effective and efficient management of overall expenditure. To support this goal, my Department has been engaging with a range of Departments on year three of the Spending Review process, with a view to reinforcing a systematic analysis of existing spending programmes, focusing on an assessment of efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability.

In addition to this, the third Public Service Performance Report will be published in quarter 2. This report aims to strengthen focus on what is being delivered with public funds. Performance targets are published in the Revised Estimates Volume each year. The Performance Report provides timely quantitative performance data to help to enhance the focus on performance and delivery by presenting relevant performance indicators in a dedicated, focused document.

Economic Competitiveness

170. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the role he expects for reform throughout the public sector to impact on economic performance in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10941/19]

172. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the most effective reforms undertaken throughout the public and private sectors over the past number of years which have contributed substantially to economic progress; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10943/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 170 and 172 together.

I am pleased to inform the Deputy that the significant public service reforms that this Government has undertaken in recent years continue to deliver improved services and value for money across a range of specific areas such as governance, accountability, procurement, shared services, organisational reform and property management. Two notable examples are the establishment of a centralised Office of Government Procurement with responsibility (together with the key sectors of Health, Defence, Education and Local Government) for sourcing goods and services on behalf of the Public Service, and the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer, established to lead the implementation of the Public Service ICT Strategy in cooperation with departments and agencies across the Public Service. The Deputy can be assured that public service reform remains an integral part of the Government's economic strategy to enable us to continue to improve outcomes for the public. As regards the private sector, the Government agreed last July to develop a new and ambitious whole of Government plan to ensure our economy is well positioned for the rapidly changing global and economic environment. This initiative - Future Jobs, which will be launched shortly - will include concrete and ambitious actions to enhance productivity, ensure quality and sustainable jobs, and build sustainability and innovation into the economy.

Our Public Service 2020 – the current phase of public service reform which became operational during 2018 – represents a whole-of-public-service initiative designed to build on previous reforms while expanding the scope of reform to focus on collaboration, innovation and evaluation. *Our Public Service 2020* seeks better outcomes for the public, to support innovation and collaboration and to build public service organisations that are resilient and agile.

As Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform I must ensure that our fiscal

and public expenditure policy is sustainable and that Public Sector policy continues to facilitate good economic performance in the future. There are a number of budgetary reforms introduced in recent years to guide my decisions on overall fiscal policy in this regard, including fiscal rules, expenditure ceilings and spending reviews. The actions in *Our Public Service 2020* will also ensure that the focus of the public service is very much on delivery of quality public services over the coming years, without impacting negatively on economic performance.

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

House Sales

171. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the action he will take in terms of public expenditure and reform with a view to ensuring that the domestic customer has a reasonable chance of purchasing a home notwithstanding the competition from investors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10942/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As part of Budget 2019, I announced a significant increase in expenditure to the Serviced Site Fund (SSF) to enable the Department of Housing, Planning & Local Government to deliver additional affordable housing for low and middle income first time buyers. A total exchequer allocation of €275 million is being provided for the SSF from 2019 to 2021, plus a local authority contribution of €35 million, bringing the total fund to €310 million over the next three years. The SSF will fund facilitating infrastructure on local authority sites. Infrastructure works on projects will begin as soon as possible and delivery of affordable homes is anticipated from early 2020 onwards.

As housing policy, including policy in relation to affordable housing, falls under the remit of the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, additional information on the SSF and other affordable housing initiatives can be obtained from his Department.

Question No. 172 answered with Question No. 170.

Public Sector Staff Recruitment

173. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the full extent to date of recruitment throughout the public sector in the context of economic recovery; the expectation in respect of future recruitments throughout the sector in 2019 and thereafter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10944/19]

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

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

ing place for recruitment to the Civil Service.

I understand from the Public Appointments Service, who are the independent recruiter for the Civil Service, that since the lifting of the moratorium, approximately 10,700 civil servants from open competitions excluding temporary assignments and professional and technical posts, have been assigned to Government departments and offices across general service grades. This figure would, of course be offset by retirements and other people leaving the Civil Service.

In the Civil Service in 2019, a Clerical Officer competition for Dublin only has been advertised. Competitions for Assistant Principal and Principal Officer may be held later in the year.

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

Economic Competitiveness

174. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the degree to which he in the context of reform has introduced new criteria in view of the international and global trading challenges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10945/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy suggests, we live in a world that is uncertain and in which Ireland faces many challenges, including the international and global trading challenges to which his question refers. Central to the Government's preparation for such challenges is the prudent management of the public finances in order to ensure that the economy remains competitive in the face of future economic headwinds. Measures being taken include balancing the books, reducing our debt burden, building up the Rainy Day Fund and continuing to invest in infrastructure.

In the particular context of reform, a series of initiatives taken by this Government since 2011 have made the work of the civil and public services more transparent, decision-making more accountable and service delivery more effective and efficient. Our Public Service 2020, which became operational during 2018, is a new policy framework designed to build on these previous reforms while expanding the scope of reform to focus more on collaboration, innovation and evaluation. Progress in each of these areas, but especially innovation, will better position Ireland to meet the challenges arising in the global environment to which the Deputy refers.

Certain of the eighteen specific actions set out in Our Public Service 2020, such as accelerating digital delivery of services, driving efficiency and effectiveness and promoting a culture of innovation in the public service are particularly relevant in this regard. A Public Service Leadership Board comprising Secretary General and CEO level participants from across the civil and public service has been established to drive the new reform agenda and lead on its implementation. This approach will support and enable public servants and their organisations to perform at their best and to work together to deliver high-quality, value-for-money outcomes that will benefit the economy.

Questions Nos. 175 and 176 answered with Question No. 169.

Capital Expenditure Programme

177. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform

the extent to which his Department has received communication from other Departments, bodies and agencies under their aegis seeking expenditure on such issues as upgrade of motorways, new roadworks, investment in water and other items of infrastructural importance; if he expects to be in a position to respond favourably to such requests in the near future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10948/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The capital allocations made in the Revised Estimates of Public Services and the National Development Plan 2018-2027 were informed by the extensive evidence base collated and published on the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform's website in 2017 as part of the mid-term review of the previous capital plan. This evidence base included a macroeconomic analysis, an assessment of progress to date on delivery of the 2015 Capital Plan, Departmental submissions, a public consultation process, an infrastructure capacity and demand analysis and an examination of the resourcing available for increased investment. In addition to this, a review of PPPs was undertaken as well as a Public Investment Management Assessment by the International Monetary Fund.

It should be noted, however, that while my Department is responsible for setting the overall allocations (capital and current) across Departments and for monitoring monthly expenditure at Departmental level, decisions on which capital projects are prioritised within these allocations, and in the context of the National Development Plan, are a matter, in the first instance, for the relevant responsible sectoral Minister.

Brexit Preparations

178. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which he can take steps to minimise the impact of Brexit on the economy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10949/19]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Central to the Government's preparation for Brexit is the prudent management of the public finances so as to ensure the economy remains competitive in the face of future economic headwinds. Dedicated measures to prepare for Brexit have been announced in Budgets 2017, 2018 and 2019, to ensure that Ireland is in the best possible position to respond to the challenges that Brexit will bring.

Most recently, Budget 2019 ensures that the economy is prepared for the challenges of Brexit through continued prudent management of the public finances: by balancing the books; reducing the debt burden; improving the competitiveness of our personal taxation system; and continuing to invest in infrastructure.

It builds on other Government initiatives, namely investing in the future of the country through Project Ireland 2040; opening new markets for businesses through the Global Ireland 2025 strategy; and developing policies to adapt to changes in the world of work through the Future Jobs Programme.

Budget 2019 contains specific measures aimed at making Ireland Brexit ready, including increased resources across a range of Departments and Offices; the introduction of the €300 million Future Growth Loan Scheme to provide a longer-term facility to support strategic capital investment by business at competitive rates in a post-Brexit environment; and a €71 million package to further strengthen the agriculture sector's ability to become more resilient in addressing the challenges of Brexit.

Summer Works Scheme Applications

179. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a school (details supplied) in County Kerry will be considered for the summer works and emergency works schemes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10219/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The school to which the Deputy refers was successful in obtaining grant funding to carry out electrical works under the 2016 Summer Works Scheme. I understand that these works are now completed.

I also wish to advise the Deputy that I am committed to a new Summer Works Scheme which will open for applications in the coming months for projects to be delivered from Summer 2020. It will be open to the school in question to make an application for this funding.

I can confirm that my Department does not have any current applications from the school in question for funding under the Department's Emergency Works Scheme (EWS). If the school authority has identified an issue which meets the criteria set out in the relevant circular, it is open to it to make an application for funding under the EWS to address that issue. Both the application form and the circular are available on the Departments Website: www.education.ie.

School Services Staff

180. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 67 of 8 November 2018, the status of the matter; his views in regard to same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10228/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The majority of primary and voluntary secondary schools in the Free Education Scheme receive grant assistance to provide for secretarial and/or caretaking services. Within the grant schemes, it is a matter for each individual school to decide how best to apply the grant funding to suit its particular needs and the Department does not stipulate how these services are to be obtained. Where a school uses the grant funding to employ a secretary or caretaker, such staff are employees of individual schools. My Department therefore does not have any role in determining the pay and conditions under which they are engaged. These are matters to be agreed between the staff concerned and the school authorities.

Notwithstanding the above, in 2015 my Department agreed to engage with the union side in relation to the pay of School Secretaries and Caretakers who are employed using grant funding and to enter an arbitration process if necessary. The Arbitrator recommended a cumulative pay increase of 10% between 2016 and 2019 for School Secretaries and Caretakers comprehended by the terms of the arbitration process and that a minimum hourly pay rate of €13 for such staff be phased in over the period 2016 to 2019.

The Arbitrator's recommendations were accepted by both sides. My Department has subsequently issued a number of Circulars to schools to implement and give effect to the Arbitrator's recommendation. Accordingly, please find links below to the latest circulars in this regard:

<https://circulars.gov.ie/pdf/circular/education/2018/76.pdf>

<https://circulars.gov.ie/pdf/circular/education/2018/77.pdf>

My Department has not been made aware of any specific instances of non-compliance with these circulars.

Teacher Recruitment

181. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the sharing of teachers by schools (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10230/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Circular 0015/2019 which is available on my Department's website introduces a new scheme for the 2019/20 school year to allow post primary schools to share teachers in priority subjects. The aim of this scheme is to alleviate some of the challenges schools have faced in recruiting teachers by allowing two schools to work together to recruit a teacher for a job and employ them on more hours than if they were teaching in just one school.

The recruitment and appointment of teachers to fill teaching posts is a matter for individual school authorities, subject to procedures agreed under Section 24(3) of the Education Act, 1998 (as amended by the Education (Amendment) Act, 2012).

Third Level Fees

182. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if third-level institutions have the discretion to apply EU fees rather than non-EU fees to persons here with a stamp 2 visa; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10244/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): As an autonomous institution, it is a matter for the relevant higher education institution to determine the fee rate payable by students (EU or non-EU) in cases where students do not qualify for funding under my Department's free fees schemes. Institutions determine the fee rate applicable in line with their own criteria.

Schools Establishment

183. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans in regard to opening an Educate Together primary school in Dungarvan, County Waterford; if the location is part of his commitment in the reconfiguration process; the timescale envisaged; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10254/19]

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

The previous model of patronage divestment yielded only a very limited number of schools for transfer to multi-denominational patrons (11 since 2013, with a twelfth school, Westport ETNS, due to be established under this process for September 2019). I believe that the new Schools Reconfiguration for Diversity process has the potential to significantly increase patron diversity in our school system.

While the Schools Reconfiguration process is being advanced, my Department is continuing to work with the main stakeholders to progress delivery of diversity in areas already identified, including Dungarvan.

To date, it has not been possible to secure a school property to facilitate a new school being established in Dungarvan. However, my Department will continue its efforts in relation to identifying a suitable solution under the patronage divesting process, which would facilitate a new Educate Together school being established to serve the Dungarvan area.

School Staff

184. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on a matter relating to a school (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10260/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The criteria used for the allocation of teaching posts is published annually on the Department website. The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September.

The staffing schedule includes an appeals mechanism for schools to submit a staffing appeal under certain criteria to an independent Appeals Board.

The school submitted an application for consideration by the Appeals Board at its May 2018 meeting under the Exceptional Accommodation Difficulties criteria. The appeal was refused by the Appeals Board on the basis that the grounds of the appeal did not warrant the allocation of an additional post under Circular 0010/2018. The Appeals Board operates independently of the Department and its decision is final.

The staffing allocation process is complete for the current school year. Circular 0019/2019 which sets out the primary school staffing arrangements for the 2019/20 school year, including details on the staffing appeals process, is available on the Department website.

Schools Establishment

185. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on a matter relating to the provision of an Educate Together school in an area (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10271/19]

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

The previous model of patronage divestment yielded only a very limited number of schools for transfer to multi-denominational patrons (11 since 2013, with a twelfth school, Westport ETNS, due to be established under this process for September 2019). I believe that the new Schools Reconfiguration for Diversity process has the potential to significantly increase patron diversity in our school system.

While the Schools Reconfiguration process is being advanced, my Department is continuing to work with the main stakeholders to progress delivery of diversity in areas already identified, including Killarney.

To date, it has not been possible to secure a school property to facilitate a new school being

established in Killarney. However, my Department will continue its efforts in relation to identifying a suitable solution under the patronage divesting process, which would facilitate a new Educate Together school being established to serve the Killarney area.

Education and Training Boards Payments

186. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an oral hearing will be granted in regard to the payment of a pension for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10290/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that the ETB in question has advised my officials that that they will facilitate an oral hearing in relation to pension payment with the person to whom he refers.

School Equipment

187. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if funding will be provided for a defibrillator to a school (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10296/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Under the provisions of the Education Act 1998, the Board of Management is the body charged with the direct governance of a school.

The decision to install a defibrillator is made at local school level and is a matter for the Board of Management of each individual school.

I understand that a National Steering Group on Out of Hospital Cardiac Arrest was established in 2017 by the HSE and is representative of health professionals, patient groups, health-care providers and other sectors. It aims to strengthen the chain of survival for cardiac arrest. The annual report from the group provides advice to the HSE and the Department of Health on the most effective ways of improving survival for cardiac arrest including training for cardiopulmonary resuscitation, building on the Community First Responder Programme and making public access defibrillators more easily accessible in community settings and in schools.

Schools Establishment

188. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the development of a secondary school for Hollystown, Dublin 15 will be examined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10412/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): In order to plan for school provision and analyse the relevant demographic data, my Department divides the country into 314 school planning areas and uses a Geographical Information System, using data from a range of sources, to identify where the pressure for school places across the country will arise. With this information, my Department carries out nationwide demographic exercises to determine where additional school accommodation is needed at primary and post-primary level.

Where demographic data indicates that additional provision is required, the delivery of such additional provision is dependent on the particular circumstances of each case and may, depend-

ing on the circumstances, be provided through either one, or a combination of, the following:

- Utilising existing unused capacity within a school or schools,
- Extending the capacity of a school or schools,
- Provision of a new school or schools.

As the Deputy may be aware, the Government recently announced plans for the establishment of 42 new schools over the next four years (2019 to 2022). This announcement follows nationwide demographic exercises carried out by my Department into the future need for primary and post-primary schools across the country and the 4-year horizon will enable increased lead-in times for planning and delivery of the necessary infrastructure.

For school planning purposes, Hollystown is located in the Mulhuddart_Tyrrelstown_D15 school planning area and as the Deputy may be aware, a new 1,000 pupil post-primary school was established in 2014 to serve this school planning area.

While the recent announcement did not include a new post-primary school in the area, the requirement for new schools will be kept under on-going review and in particular would have regard for the increased rollout of housing provision as outlined in Project Ireland 2040.

School Transport Provision

189. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will direct the school bus transport scheme and Bus Éireann to provide services for students in an area (details supplied). [10415/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): School transport is a significant operation managed by Bus Éireann on behalf of the Department.

There are currently over 117,500 children, including over 13,000 children with special educational needs, transported in over 5,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually. The purpose of the scheme is, having regard to available resources, to support the transport to and from school of children who reside remote from their nearest school.

Under the terms of the Post-Primary School Transport Scheme, children are eligible for transport where they reside not less than 4.8 kilometres from and are attending their nearest education centre as determined by the Department of Education/Bus Éireann, having regard to ethos and language.

Children who are eligible for school transport and who complete the application process on time are accommodated on school transport services where such services are in operation. Children who are eligible for school transport but for whom no service is available may be offered the Remote Area Grant towards the cost of making private transport arrangements.

Children who are not eligible for school transport, but who complete the application process on time, are considered for spare seats that may exist after eligible children have been facilitated; such seats are referred to as concessionary seats. Where the number of applications from ineligible children exceeds the number of spare seats available, tickets are allocated using an agreed selection process.

Families wishing to avail of school transport services for the 2019/20 school year should ensure that their applications are submitted online at www.buseireann.ie. The closing date for receipt of applications for the 2019/2020 school year is Friday 26th April 2019.

School Funding

190. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will continue to keep the summer works scheme and minor works grant scheme as a permanent source of annual funding for all schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10428/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The announcement of the major package of investment in education under Project Ireland 2040 confirmed that all primary schools will receive the Minor Works Grant in either December or early January of each school year.

The 2019 Summer Works scheme is based on the assessment of projects in three priority categories – Windows, Curricular requirements and Structural improvements. In total, 307 school projects are being funded with a projected expenditure of €40 million in 2019 and successful schools were informed in December 2018. A new Summer Works Scheme will open for applications in the first quarter of 2019 for projects to be delivered from Summer 2020 onwards.

School Curriculum

191. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of his plans to have the subject of computer science made available as an option to all schools from September 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10434/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): From the beginning of the 2020/21 academic year, the new Leaving Certificate Computer Science subject will be made available to all interested schools, should they wish to offer it as an option for their Leaving Certificate programme for incoming 5th years in September 2020.

A communication circular outlining the application/expression of interest process for the national rollout will be issued to all second-level schools early in the 2019/2020 school year.

In order to facilitate the national rollout, it is essential that schools who opt to provide the subject are in a position to begin teaching of the subject in September 2020. The Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) will provide an intense programme of Continuous Professional Development for teachers involved in delivering the new subject in these schools.

In addition to the above, a circular on Curriculum-related developments at Senior Cycle issued from the Department in December 2018 advising schools, inter alia, of the new specifications being introduced from September 2020. Schools have been advised that should they wish to introduce Computer Science they should ensure they have in place the appropriately qualified teaching personnel, digital devices and infrastructure required for their implementation. Schools can, in this regard, deploy some of the ICT Infrastructure grants paid under the Digital Strategy for Schools towards this purpose. The circular is available at: https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/c10083_2018.pdf

School Enrolments

192. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding enrolment policies of secondary schools; his views on whether feeder schools may be considered as a fair method of allocating secondary school places; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10473/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): In relation to enrolment generally, it is my Department's responsibility to ensure that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all pupils seeking school places in an area. Parents can choose which school to apply to and where the school has places available the pupil should be admitted.

It is the responsibility of the managerial authorities of all schools to implement an enrolment policy in accordance with the Education Act, 1998. In schools where there are more applicants than places available a selection process may be necessary. In this regard a Board of Management may find it necessary to prioritise enrolment of children from particular areas or particular age groups or on the basis of some other criterion, including giving priority to applicants who have attended a particular primary school known as a feeder school. The criteria to be applied by schools in such circumstances are a matter for the schools themselves.

The selection process used by schools and the enrolment policy on which it is based must be non-discriminatory and must be applied fairly in respect of all applicants. However, it may result in some pupils not obtaining a place in their school of first choice.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018 was signed into law by the President on the 18th July 2018.

The overall objective of the Act is to provide a new framework for school enrolment that is designed to ensure that every child is treated fairly and that the way in which schools decide on applications for admission is structured, fair and transparent.

The measures provided for in the Act will make the admissions process more equitable and consistent for all. Schools that are not oversubscribed must continue to accept all applicants and this will be further enforced by the Act when it is commenced.

School Patronage

193. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if consideration is being given to the divestment of a school (details supplied) in Dublin 9; if so, the stage at the which the divestment process is at; if divestment will lead to amalgamation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10509/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The Programme for Government commits to increasing the number of multi-/non-denominational schools to 400 such schools by 2030. As the Deputy will be aware, my Department has developed the Schools Reconfiguration for Diversity process, the Identification Phase of which is currently underway in 16 initial areas nationwide, to help to deliver on this commitment through transferring existing schools from denominational to multi-/non-denominational patronage, in line with the choices of local parents and school communities.

This process, which involves the transfer of live schools as opposed to the amalgamation and closure model of the patronage divesting process, is aimed at significantly increasing patron diversity.

While the Schools Reconfiguration process structures are being progressed, my Department

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is continuing to work to progress delivery of diversity in areas already identified as part of the 2012 and 2013 surveys under the patronage divesting process.

In addition to the process outlined above, the “early movers” provision of the Schools Re-configuration process enables school communities which have already decided to seek a transfer of patronage (independent of the Identification Phase process) to request their existing patron to apply to the Minister for a direct transfer of patronage under section 8 of the Education Act.

I would encourage any school community which is seeking a transfer of patronage under the “Early Movers” provision to contact their school patron directly in the first instance.

My Department has not received correspondence from the school Patron in relation to divesting the school to which the Deputy refers.

EU Funding

194. **Deputy Louise O’Reilly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 267 of 4 May 2016, if the structures and systems necessary to certify expenditure under the European Union regulations and have them verified by a designated body to a level acceptable to the European Commission in order to draw down youth employment initiative funding were ever implemented; if not, the amount of funding which was lost; and the reason the system was never implemented. [10531/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): The Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) is one of the main EU financial resources to support the implementation of the EU youth guarantee. The YEI is integrated into European Social Fund (ESF) programming as a dedicated priority axis within the ESF Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning 2014-2020 (PEIL). The specific YEI allocation for Ireland of €68m (for 2014 and 2015) is matched by equal amounts from our ESF allocation and from the Exchequer, giving an overall total allocation of €204m. All ESF activities, including YEI activities, are fully funded up-front by the Exchequer with the EU (ESF/YEI) funding being claimed in arrears.

Following the designation of the Irish ESF authorities, the first payment application in respect of the PEIL, which included €112m in respect of YEI activities, was submitted to the European Commission last November. Receipts of €67m were received from the Commission in respect of the YEI/ESF cofinancing contributions towards the YEI activities concerned.

There has been no loss of EU funding and the ESF authorities will continue to ensure that sufficient payment applications are submitted to fully drawdown the YEI funding allocations.

School Accommodation Provision

195. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding an application for an extension and associated building works by a school (details supplied) to the school capitals appraisal section, planning and building unit; if his attention has been drawn to the need for an efficient decision to be returned in order that the school can apply for planning permission in advance of the next academic year when it will facilitate an extra class; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10545/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I wish to advise the Deputy that the school in question submitted an application for major capital funding to undertake significant works to the school building including the provision of an additional classroom to ac-

commodate an additional teaching post.

My Department's current priority is the provision of essential classroom accommodation where an additional teaching post has been sanctioned and where there is no suitable accommodation available within the existing school. In this regard, my Department approved a devolved grant to the school for the construction of an additional mainstream classroom and to replace an existing prefab.

The school subsequently applied for further capital grant to construct a General Purpose Room. As my Department's current priority is the provision of essential classroom accommodation, it is not possible to consider the school's request at this time. I can confirm that the school has been advised accordingly.

The Deputy will be aware that under the National Development Plan (NDP), increased funding has been provided for the school sector capital investment programme. This funding allows for a continued focus on the provision of new permanent school places to keep pace with demographic demand and also provides for an additional focus on the refurbishment of existing school buildings.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

196. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the process by which the National Council for Special Education fulfils its statutory function to plan and coordinate the provision of education and support services to children with autism spectrum disorder includes a mechanism to determine the number of places needed nationally on an annual basis in advance of the school year. [10578/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The National Council for Special Education (NCSE), an independent agency of my Department, is responsible for planning, coordinating and advising on education provision for children with special educational needs in consultation with the relevant education partners, the Health Service Executive (HSE) and Parents.

This includes identifying the number of children that will require special classes or special school placements. The NCSE, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), plans on an annual basis and long term basis to ensure that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all children who have been identified as needing special class placements.

Individual school boards of management are responsible for the establishment of special classes. It is open to any school to make application to the NCSE to establish a class. In deciding where to establish a special class in an area, the NCSE takes account of the current and projected demand and the available school accommodation both current and planned. In this regard, the SENO may approach individual schools to discuss the matter with a view to finding the optimal location in terms of convenience and sustainability.

When the NCSE sanctions a special class in a school, the school can apply to my Department for capital funding to reconfigure existing spaces within the school building to accommodate the class and/or to construct additional accommodation.

Special Education Needs Organisers (SENOs) who are locally based are available to assist and advise parents whose children have special needs. Where Parents have been unsuccessful in enrolling their child in a school, they should update their local SENO to inform the planning

process.

SENOs are also available to assist and advise schools on special education supports and planning.

There are now 1,459 special classes in place, compared to 548 in 2011. Of these 1,196 are ASD special classes.

124 special schools also provide specialist education for those students with complex special educational needs.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

197. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason the allocation for special education teaching hours was not increased in a school (details supplied) in County Wexford which will soon enrol an additional two children with complex needs; his views on whether the allocation of special education teaching hours for the school is fair; the areas in which special education teaching hours will be allocated when a school nearby closes at the end of June 2019; if additional supports will be provided to schools in the area in view of the closure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10585/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I wish to advise the Deputy that this Government is investing heavily in supporting our children with special educational needs, with €1.8bn being spent annually, about €1 in every 5 of the education budget.

All mainstream schools are provided with special education teachers based on the profiled needs of their school.

There are currently almost 14,000 special education teachers in schools, an increase of 37% since 2011.

From September 2017, a new model for allocating special education teachers was introduced. This model allocates special education teachers to schools based on the profiled needs of schools, as opposed to the assessed needs of individual children.

The profiled allocations initially made to schools in 2017 have now been revised to take account of more up to date profiling data, including updated enrolments.

As reprofiling occurs, some schools will gain additional allocations, where the profile indicator data indicates these schools have additional needs. Some schools will receive slightly reduced allocations, where the data indicates less need.

The data on which the revised allocations are based are set out in my Department's Circulars 007/2019 for primary schools and 008/2019 for post-primary schools.

The provision of a profiled allocation is designed to give a fair allocation for each school which recognises that all schools need an allocation for special needs support, but which provides a graduated allocation which takes into account the level of need in each school.

Schools are frontloaded with resources, based on each school's profile. The allocations to schools include provision to support all pupils in the schools, including where a child receives a diagnosis after the allocation is received by a school, or where there are newly enrolling pupils to the school.

Notwithstanding this, adjustments can be made for schools which achieve rapidly developing status due to significantly increased enrolments, or where exceptional needs arise in a school.

In the event of a significant adjustment to the school profile occurring, for the school referred to in the Deputy's question, or for other local schools in the area, which may arise from a school closure in the region, this can be taken into account.

As considerations are ongoing with regard to potentially amalgamating the closing school with another school in the area, it is not yet clear where the pupils from this school will enrol next September.

However, if there is a significant effect on the enrolments of a local school, from September 2019, account can be taken of this adjustment.

DEIS Status

198. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the DEIS status of a school (details supplied). [10607/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): As the Deputy is aware, and as I previously advised on this matter, the school in question is in the DEIS programme. The list of schools included in the DEIS programme is available at the following link:

https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools-/deis_school_list.xls

School Curriculum

199. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason for the demotion of geography as a core junior certificate subject; and if the decision will be reversed. [10661/19]

200. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on whether the demotion of geography as a core junior certificate subject at a time when climate change is accelerating and posing an ever increasing threat to the future of human life on the planet could undermine efforts to curb global warming in addition to efforts to mitigate climate change here. [10662/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I propose to take Questions Nos. 199 and 200 together.

The Department has every confidence that, through the implementation of the Framework for Junior Cycle the place of Geography will be retained and given a new impetus across the junior cycle curriculum. As part of the rollout of the new Framework for Junior Cycle, Geography was one of five new subject specifications that were introduced to schools in September 2018.

The new Framework for Junior Cycle gives students the opportunity to develop a wider range of knowledge and skills – to equip them for further learning, for work, for responsible and active citizenship, and for healthy living. It gives students better learning opportunities, and rewards and recognises non-academic performance and achievements, with a central focus

on the student's quality of life, well-being and mental health.

Prior to the introduction of the new Framework for Junior Cycle the status of Geography in junior cycle varied by school type. Geography was only a core subject in voluntary secondary schools (52% of schools).

The new Framework for Junior Cycle, currently being rolled out, focusses on active and collaborative learning. It gives greater flexibility and autonomy to schools in terms of subject selection, and new short courses, to tailor a student's learning to achieve better outcomes for that student. Students are able to study up to 10 subjects for certification through the new Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement.

It is important to note that currently some 92% of students across all schools choose to study Geography at Junior Cycle, although it is not compulsory in all schools.

This is a clear indication that in respect of subjects like geography, schools make curricular decisions in the absence of directives and we expect this to continue.

We have a dedicated cohort of geography teachers in our post-primary schools, who will be promoting the inclusion of their subject within programmes provided to students by their schools. There is every reason to be confident that through the implementation of the Framework for Junior Cycle 2015 the curricular significance of Geography will be retained and given a new impetus across the junior cycle curriculum.

The direction of Junior Cycle reform is consistent with practice in other high-performing education systems such as New Zealand, Queensland, Estonia and Finland, where schools have been given greater autonomy and flexibility in developing the programmes they offer.

I hope you find this information useful.

School Accommodation

201. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a school (details supplied) in County Kerry will be able to proceed with its new building. [10738/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): My Department will be issuing written confirmation to the school in question shortly confirming the level of approved accommodation. As soon as the approval letter is received the school authority may progress the project.

Third Level Courses Availability

202. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to provide more courses on pharmacy in Dublin apart from an existing institution (details supplied); if his attention has been drawn to the difficulties for students in accessing pharmacy courses in Dublin due to a limited number of places available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10787/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Universities in Ireland are autonomous institutions under the Universities Act 1997. As such, the management of their academic affairs, including the selection and delivery of courses, are matters for individual institutions. Neither I nor the Department has any role in relation to such matters.

In Dublin, Trinity College Dublin and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland provide fully integrated five-year degree programmes which are accredited by the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (PSI) – the Pharmacy Regulator. Both programmes lead to the award of MPharm and, in the case of Trinity College Dublin, may be accessed through direct entry and graduate entry routes. University College Cork also delivers a PSI accredited degree in pharmacy.

In 2017, The Department of Health published Working Together for Health: A National Strategic Framework for Health and Social Care Workforce Planning. Existing and future demand for health and social care workers will be examined under this framework and appropriate supply responses formulated with the higher education institutions where necessary.

Schools Building Projects Status

203. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress being made on the new school building for a school (details supplied); the date a school will move into the existing school; the timeframe for both; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10790/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I wish to advise the Deputy that the major building project to which he refers is at an advanced stage of architectural planning, Stage 2b (Detailed Design). All statutory approvals have been secured.

The Stage 2(b) report was submitted to my Department in late December 2017 and following an initial review was deemed incomplete. Revisions and Addendums have been submitted by the Design Team throughout 2018. These incomplete reports have also been returned to the Design Team for revision, along with guidance comments from my Department. The Design Team is currently completing work on a revised submission. In order to expedite the progress, pre-qualification of contractors is being carried out in tandem.

Upon receipt and review of the revised Stage 2(b) report, my Department will advise the Board of Management of the timeline for the progression of this project to tender and construction.

In view of the above, it is not possible at this point to indicate when the existing school will be vacated.

Schools Data

204. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to increase the number of secondary school places in Gorey, County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10799/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): In order to plan for school provision and analyse the relevant demographic data, my Department divides the country into 314 school planning areas and uses a Geographical Information System, using data from a range of sources, to identify where the pressure for school places across the country will arise. With this information, my Department carries out nationwide demographic exercises to determine where additional school accommodation is needed at primary and post-primary level.

Major new residential developments in a school planning area have the potential to alter demand in that area. In that regard, as part of the demographic exercises, my Department engages with each of the local authorities to obtain the up-to-date data on significant new residential

development in each area. This is necessary to ensure that schools infrastructure planning is keeping pace with demographic changes as there is a constantly evolving picture with planned new residential development, including additional residential developments arising from the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF).

Where data indicates that additional provision is required, the delivery of such additional provision is dependent on the particular circumstances of each case and may, depending on the circumstances, be provided through either one, or a combination of, the following:

- Utilising existing unused capacity within a school or schools,
- Extending the capacity of a school or schools,
- Provision of a new school or schools.

As the Deputy may be aware, the Government recently announced plans for the establishment of 42 new schools over the next four years (2019 to 2022). This announcement follows nationwide demographic exercises carried out by my Department into the future need for primary and post-primary schools across the country and the 4-year horizon will enable increased lead-in times for planning and delivery of the necessary infrastructure.

In addition to the new schools announced, there will be a need for further school accommodation in other areas in the future through either planned capacity increases in existing schools or additional accommodation or extensions to existing schools.

As the Deputy will be aware, a new 1,000 pupil post-primary school was established in 2011 in Gorey and moved into its permanent accommodation in 2014 and the school has capacity to meet demand in the area.

While the announcement did not include a new post-primary school for the Gorey school planning area, the requirement for new schools will be kept under on-going review and in particular will have regard for the increased rollout of housing provision as outlined in Project Ireland 2040.

Departmental Legal Costs

205. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount spent to date by his Department and agencies under his remit appealing the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10821/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Leaving Certificate examination candidate Rebecca Carter appealed the result of her Business examination which she sat in June 2018. She claimed that a calculation error in the marking of her paper, which she viewed under the State Examinations Commission's (SEC) script viewing process on 31 August 2018, resulted in her receiving less marks than she should have received. She was advised by the SEC that the results of her appeal would be available on 10 October 2018, beyond UCD's deadline of 30 September 2018.

Following this, the claimant sought relief by way of a High Court judicial review, which sought to order that the SEC expedite her appeal and that UCD put a stay on their allocation of places in Veterinary Medicine pending the outcome of the judicial review. Judgement in the case was delivered on 26 September.

The SEC legal team submitted their costs to the Commission on 31 October 2018 for the

judicial review case taken by Ms Carter. They totalled €69,265.44 and have been paid in full. Whilst Ms Carter was awarded her costs, these have not yet been agreed upon so no payment has been made to date.

Elements of the judgement delivered are being appealed by both the Minister for Education and Skills and the State Examinations Commission.

The appeal is being taken in the public interest and will have no implications for the Plaintiff, financial or otherwise, who has now secured her place in university.

The legal costs of my Department in the appeal will comprise counsel fees. There is no solicitor legal fee due to the fact that the Chief State Solicitor's Office provides the solicitor service at no charge to the Department. No fee notes have been received to date.

Schools Health and Safety

206. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will engage with an organisation (details supplied) in order to facilitate the distribution of an information pack on scoliosis to schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10828/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): My officials will contact Scoliosis Ireland to discuss this request and to determine the appropriate action to be taken.

School Curriculum

207. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on making home economics compulsory for students up to junior certificate level with a view to reducing levels of childhood obesity; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10840/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The NCCA initiated a debate on the nature of junior cycle in 2010, with an initial discussion paper entitled Innovation and Identity: Ideas for a New Junior Cycle. The mandatory nature of subjects was considered in this debate. Following consultation and consideration, the decision was made that English, Irish and Mathematics would be 'core' subjects which all students would experience in junior cycle. Given the multiplicity of views around what other subjects, if any, should be core, the NCCA created the 24 Statements of Learning to reflect the main priorities for learning for all students which emerged from the feedback and introduced short courses to keep the door open for 'new' areas of learning to be introduced in schools. Some of these statements for learning are relevant to the health and well-being of students, for example one of the statements of learning is 'takes action to safeguard and promote her/his wellbeing and that of others'.

My Department is active in the area of promotion of health and well-being in schools. The issue of promoting healthy eating is addressed in schools through subjects such as Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), and Home Economics as well as in Physical Education. The aim is to equip students with such skills and knowledge to enable them to make appropriate choices for healthy lifestyles.

Healthy Lifestyles guidance issued to post-primary schools in 2015 and primary schools in 2016. This guidance was drafted in consultation with the Department of Health and my Department would like to acknowledge the commitment of schools in promoting healthy lifestyle choices for students in a number of ways, through the curriculum, through schools policy including healthy lunch policies and by the use of resources and programmes chosen by the

school.

Schools are strongly encouraged to have a formal healthy eating policy that has been developed in consultation with students and parents.

The NCCA has developed a new home economics specification which was introduced for new junior cycle entrants from September 2018.

Schools Health and Safety

208. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the action he plans to take to ensure there are no vending machines serving unhealthy food options in schools; the action he will take to ensure no schools are dependent upon income generated from vending machines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10847/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): My Department is active in the area of promotion of health and wellbeing in schools. The issue of promoting healthy eating is addressed in schools through subjects such as Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), and Home Economics as well as in Physical Education. The aim is to equip students with such skills and knowledge to enable them to make appropriate choices for healthy lifestyles. Schools are strongly encouraged to have a formal healthy eating policy that has been developed in consultation with students and parents. My Department issued a circular to all post primary schools in September 2015 on the Promotion of Healthy Lifestyles in Post Primary Schools (circular number 0051/2015) and to all primary schools in February 2016 (circular number 0013/2016).

It is primarily a matter for the Management in each school to decide their policy in relation to the use of vending machines. Findings from the 2015 Lifeskills survey show that virtually every primary schools stated that they do not facilitate the sale of fizzy drinks, sweets and crisps in school, either through vending machines or a school shop. This is the same response as in 2012.

92% of primary schools reported that they had a healthy eating policy in place. This is similar to the level reported in 2012. 3% reported that they were in the process of developing a healthy eating policy, and 5% reported having no healthy eating policy in place.

Some 27% of Post Primary schools reported having a vending machine or school shop which sells 'junk food'. (The Healthy Ireland Healthy Food for Life food pyramid defines this type of food as that which is high in fat, sugar and salt.) This represents an improvement on the position in 2012 when 30% of schools were in this category, and in 2009 when 35% of schools in this category. Some 74% of those schools that responded have a facility for the sale of fresh fruit. This is a significant improvement on the position reported in 2009 and 2012 when 64% of schools had such a facility in place.

School Patronage

209. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 233 of 26 February 2019, the timeframe for the provision of an Educate Together primary school in Dungarvan, County Waterford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10853/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The patronage divesting pro-

cess arises from the recommendations of the 2012 report of the Advisory Group to the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector, following which the Department undertook surveys of parental preferences in 43 areas of stable population in 2012 and 2013 to establish the level of parental demand for a wider choice in the patronage of primary schools within these areas. Analysis of the parental preferences expressed in each area surveyed indicated that there was sufficient parental demand to support changes in school patronage in 28 areas, including in Dungarvan.

Under the patronage divesting process, a school can be opened where a school building became, or was due to become available as a result of an amalgamation/closure of an existing school. In some areas, including in the case of Dungarvan, in responding to demand for diversity where existing patrons were unable make school properties available, my Department also included an examination of properties held in public ownership.

To date, it has not been possible to secure a school property to facilitate a new school being established in Dungarvan. However, my Department is continuing its efforts in relation to identifying a suitable solution under the patronage divesting process, which would facilitate a new Educate Together school being established to serve the Dungarvan area. It is not possible at this stage, however, to give a timeframe for the establishment of such a school.

Home Tuition Scheme

210. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if home tuition will be made available to a child (details supplied) in their crèche in view of the fact that their rented accommodation is unsuitable for such tuition; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10892/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): The purpose of the Special Education Home Tuition Grant Scheme is to provide a compensatory educational service for children who, for a number of reasons such as chronic illness, are unable to attend school. The scheme also provides a compensatory educational service for children with special educational needs seeking an educational placement and provision is made for early educational intervention for children with autism.

Where there is no Early Intervention class placement available, my Department will consider applications under the Home Tuition Grant Scheme, where a child can receive up to 20 hours home tuition per week as an interim measure until a placement becomes available.

Children who receive tuition under the Department's Home Tuition Grant Scheme typically receive this tuition in their home on an individual basis.

The scheme also provides parents with an option to enter into a group arrangement with other parents of children for whom home tuition has been approved. Parents wishing to enter into such an arrangement must notify my Department in advance for approval and providers selected by these parents must comply with additional terms and conditions which reflect the general provision of the scheme. and which apply equally to all such providers.

To date, no application for home tuition, for the child referred to by the Deputy, has been received by my Department.

Education and Training Boards Data

211. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of external training contractors running courses in County Clare under the Clare education board; the number of in-house training courses in the county in 2017, 2018 and 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10902/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): I am informed by Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board (LCETB) that they typically use contracted training to deliver specific courses that LCETB either does not have the technical expertise to deliver in-house, or the approved facilities to deliver. Typical examples are artic truck driver, delivery driver and HGV driver training. LCETB also uses contracted training to deliver courses where the demand is intermittent. Examples of such courses would include forklift training, warehousing and accounts and payroll courses.

LCETB have provided the following table which gives a breakdown of the numbers for contracted and in-house courses for 2017, 2018 and those planned for 2019 in LCETB. A breakdown of apprenticeship, evening, and Skills to advance courses in LCETB is also included in this table. These are delivered through the FET Centre in the Shannon Campus in Co. Clare.

-	2017	2018	2019
Contracted Training Courses	25	15	20
In-House Courses	4	8	9
Apprenticeship	20	22	22
Evening Provision	46	60	70
Skills to Advance	N/A	N/A	24

Schools Facilities

212. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if provision for the inclusion of a playschool in the planning of all new primary schools will be ensured; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10916/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): My Department does not have any remit for the provision of accommodation for playschools and therefore has no plans for the inclusion of playschools in the planing of new primary schools.

International Conventions

213. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when he expects Ireland to ratify the Istanbul Convention on domestic abuse; the legislative measures this will require; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10253/19]

230. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to ratify the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, known as the Istanbul Convention, immediately following the enactment of the Criminal Law (Extraterritorial Jurisdiction) Bill 2018 which is currently before the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Justice and Equality; if there are other remaining obstacles to ratifying the Convention; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10472/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Ques-

tions Nos. 213 and 230 together.

This Government is fully committed to combatting the scourge of violence against women. The Istanbul Convention is a significant legal instrument and its ratification is a Government priority. Ratifying the Convention will send an important message that Ireland does not tolerate this violence.

On 26 February 2019, the Government approved the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, subject to the enactment of the Criminal Law (Extraterritorial Jurisdiction) Bill. This legislation was the last legislative action required under the Istanbul Convention.

On 28 February, the Criminal Law (Extraterritorial Jurisdiction) Bill 2019 completed its passage through the Oireachtas and has since been signed by the President.

Implementing the provisions of the Istanbul Convention involves a charge on public funds, so the approval of the Dáil to its ratification must be obtained under Article 29.5.2 of the Constitution. The Dáil today approved ratification of the Convention, which will allow arrangements to be made to deposit an Instrument of Ratification, signed by the Tánaiste, with the Council of Europe in Strasbourg in the coming days.

Garda Accommodation

214. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the provision of the new Garda regional headquarters in County Sligo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10371/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, there has been unprecedented investment in An Garda Síochána in recent years, in support of the Government's commitment to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and deter crime.

The resources provided by Government to An Garda Síochána have reached unprecedented levels, with an allocation for 2019 of €1.76 billion. Very significant capital investment is also being made, including investment of €342 million in Garda ICT infrastructure between 2016 and 2021; and investment of €46 million in the Garda Fleet over the same period.

In terms of investment in the Garda estate, the Garda Building and Refurbishment Programme 2016-2021 is an ambitious 5-year programme based on agreed Garda priorities, which continues to benefit over 30 locations around the country, underpinned by significant Exchequer funding across the Garda and OPW votes. There has been some good progress on the programme, as well as in other major projects in relation to the Garda estate, including in particular the completion and entry into operational use in 2018 of 3 new Divisional and Regional Headquarters at Wexford, Galway and Kevin Street (Dublin), which collectively required funding of over €100 million. The clear goal of this investment is to address deficiencies in the Garda estate and provide fit-for-purpose facilities for Garda members and staff as well as the public interacting with them.

The Deputy will appreciate that the programme of replacement and refurbishment of Garda accommodation is progressed by the Garda authorities working in close cooperation with the Office of Public Works (OPW), which has responsibility for the provision and maintenance of Garda accommodation.

The Public Private Partnership arrangement included in the Building and Refurbishment Programme is intended to deliver new stations at Macroom, Clonmel and Sligo as well as a new custody suite at the Garda Station at Anglesea Street Cork.

Site acquisition for this PPP bundle has been complex and time-consuming. I am informed by the OPW and the Garda authorities that the OPW acquired sites for the development of the new stations in Macroom and in Sligo in 2015 and 2018 respectively. The site in Clonmel is a portion of the former Kickham Barracks and has at all material times been in state ownership. Having previously been transferred from the Department of Defence to Tipperary County Council, I am informed by the OPW that all difficulties in relation to completion of transfer of the site from the Council to the OPW are resolved and that contracts have been agreed and exchanged for closing signature, which brings us to the position that ownership of all three sites will be vested in the OPW.

The development of PPP projects is progressed under the auspices of the National Development Finance Agency (NDFA). My Department is working to progress the matter further, with the input and assistance of the NDFA.

It is not possible at this point to provide a timeframe for the completion of these projects, including the new Garda station at Caltragh, Sligo. However I can assure the Deputy that delivery of the new Garda stations at Clonmel, Macroom and Sligo through this PPP arrangement is being pursued as a priority.

Garda Resources

215. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the active number of gardaí at the Roscrea Garda station, County Tipperary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10266/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): 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.

Since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, almost 2,400 Garda recruits have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide, including 800 trainees who passed out from the college during 2018.

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 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 Tipperary Division.

Roscrea Garda Station is in the Tipperary Division. The Garda strength of the Tipperary Division from 2009 to 31 December 2018 as provided by the Garda Commissioner is as set out in the attached table. We hope to have these figures updated on the website by the end of this week at the link shown below.

For more general information on Garda Facts and Figures please see the link below:

http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/An_Garda_Siochana_facts_and_figures

[Tables].

Garda Resources

216. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí transferred out of County Tipperary in each of the years 2014 to 2018 under headings (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10267/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for the distribution of resources, including personnel, among the various Garda Divisions and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter.

I am informed by the Commissioner that the deployment of Garda personnel is continually monitored and reviewed in the context of crime trends and policing priorities to ensure the optimum use of Garda resources. A dynamic distribution model of resource allocation, known as the Cohort model, has been in use by Garda management since 2015 for the allocation of personnel, including newly attested probationer Gardaí from the Garda College. The allocation and transfer of Garda Personnel using the Cohort Model is determined by a number of factors, including crime and non-crime workload, minimum establishment, population, area, policing arrangements and operational strategies. When allocations are taking place, comprehensive consultation is carried out with local management during which all factors are taken into consideration.

I am advised by the Commissioner that it is not possible to provide the information requested for the number of Gardaí that have transferred out of the Tipperary Division on promotion, to a specialist unit or without replacement. Whilst there is a policy not to transfer a Garda from a Division without provision of a replacement, in order to deliver an effective policing service, it is essential that Garda management has the flexibility to deploy Garda resources to meet operational policing needs taking account of the Cohort model of resource allocation.

Courts Service Data

217. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of bench warrants issued for fines not paid under the Fines Act 2010 by county in each of the years 2014 to 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10268/19]

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

However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has provided information in the manner in which the statistics are readily available.

The Fines (Payment and Recovery) Act 2014 was enacted in 2014 and commenced on 11th January 2016. The Act provided that when a Judge imposed a fine, he or she could fix the amount and the time allowed for payment. If the fine remained unpaid the fined person had to be brought back to court where the judge could then make an order for attachment of earnings, for community service or (if the fine was greater than €500, a recovery order). If the fined person did not appear for the enforcement hearing, the judge could issue a bench warrant.

Because of the extensive technical changes that had to be made to Courts Service systems, the first enforcement hearings (i.e. hearings for fixing a default because the fine wasn't paid) were not scheduled until late 2017. Therefore no bench warrants relating to the Fines Act were issued in 2014, 2015 or 2016.

The number of bench warrants does not equate to the number of fines. A fined person might be summoned back to court on the same day for multiple fines. If the fined person does not appear for the hearing, one bench warrant will issue. There will not be a separate bench warrant for each fine.

Report on the number of bench warrants issued under the Fines Act

Note: A bench warrant may cover a number of offences for that defendant but report only displays one offence.

Jan - Dec 2017

Office	No of Bench Warrants issued under the fines act
ATHLONE DISTRICT COURT OFFICE	13
CARLOW DISTRICT COURT OFFICE	27
CARRICK-ON-SHANNON OFFICE	1
CAVAN DISTRICT COURT OFFICE	3
CLONAKILTY DISTRICT COURT OFFICE	31
CLONMEL DISTRICT COURT OFFICE	11
CORK DISTRICT COURT OFFICE	4
DONEGAL DISTRICT COURT OFFICE	2
KILKENNY DISTRICT COURT OFFICE	82
LETTERKENNY DISTRICT COURT OFFICE	6
LONGFORD DISTRICT COURT OFFICE	19
MALLOW DISTRICT COURT OFFICE	19
MONAGHAN DISTRICT COURT OFFICE	6
MULLINGAR DISTRICT COURT OFFICE	13
NENAGH DISTRICT COURT OFFICE	16
SLIGO DISTRICT COURT OFFICE	2
WEXFORD DISTRICT COURT OFFICE	2
Total	257

Jan – Dec 2018

Court Offices	No of Bench Warrants under the fines act
ATHLONE DISTRICT COURT OFFICE	211
BALLINA DISTRICT COURT OFFICE	29
BLANCHARDSTOWN DISTRICT COURT OFFICE	217
BRAY DISTRICT COURT OFFICE	387
CARLOW DISTRICT COURT OFFICE	260
CARRICK-ON-SHANNON OFFICE	39
CASTLEBAR DISTRICT COURT OFFICE	28
CAVAN DISTRICT COURT OFFICE	245
CLONAKILTY DISTRICT COURT OFFICE	49
CLONMEL DISTRICT COURT OFFICE	279
CLOVERHILL COURTHOUSE OFFICE	27
CORK DISTRICT COURT OFFICE	1,261
CRIMINAL COURTS OF JUSTICE	450
DONEGAL DISTRICT COURT OFFICE	56
DUBLIN METROPOLITAN DISTRICT	2,059
DUNDALK DISTRICT COURT OFFICE	23
DUNLAOGHAIRE DISTRICT COURT OFFICE	243
ENNIS DISTRICT COURT OFFICE	398
GALWAY DISTRICT COURT OFFICE	791
KILKENNY DISTRICT COURT OFFICE	676
LETTERKENNY DISTRICT COURT OFFICE	217
LIMERICK DISTRICT COURT OFFICE	1,784
LONGFORD DISTRICT COURT OFFICE	342
LOUGHREA DISTRICT COURT OFFICE	127
MALLOW DISTRICT COURT OFFICE	163
METROPOLITAN CHILDREN'S COURT OFFICE	1
MONAGHAN DISTRICT COURT OFFICE	204
MULLINGAR DISTRICT COURT OFFICE	405
NENAGH DISTRICT COURT OFFICE	194
PORTLAOISE DISTRICT COURT OFFICE	67
ROSCOMMON DISTRICT COURT OFFICE	71
SLIGO DISTRICT COURT OFFICE	161
SWORDS DISTRICT COURT OFFICE	166
TULLAMORE DISTRICT COURT OFFICE	134
WATERFORD DISTRICT COURT OFFICE	208
WEXFORD DISTRICT COURT OFFICE	518
YOUGHAL DISTRICT COURT OFFICE	76
Total	12,566

Court Judgments

218. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if legislation will be introduced to allow for unpaid court fines to be recouped from the income of the person fined regardless of the source of the income; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10269/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Fines (Payment and Recovery) Act 2014, which was commenced in January 2016, represented major reform of the

fine payment and recovery system in the State and implemented a Government commitment to provide for attachment of earnings orders for the collection of fines. The new system seeks to ensure that fines imposed are collected and also to reduce to a minimum the number of people committed to prison for non-payment of fines.

Under the new system there is flexibility for the payment of fines and there is no automatic imposition of a custodial sentence in default of payment of a fine. Key features of the new fine payment and recovery system, as provided for in the 2014 legislation, are as follows:

- When setting the level of the fine the court is obliged to consider the person's financial circumstances;

- Those on whom a fine of over €100 is imposed can opt to pay the fine by instalments over a period of 12 months;

- Where a person fails to pay a fine, the court may make an attachment order in respect of work earnings or an occupational pension, a recovery order in respect of personal property, or a community service order;

- The employer to whom an attachment order is directed is obliged to comply with the terms of the order and make the necessary deductions from the wages or pension of the person concerned. Failure to comply with an attachment order can result in a fine of up to €5,000 or a term of up to 12 months in prison, or both.

- Where an attachment order or recovery order is made but the fine or a portion of it remains outstanding, the court may make a community service order;

- Where a community service order is not complied with, the court may commit the person concerned to prison for a specified period commensurate with the amount of the fine outstanding.

Visa Applications

219. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in the determination of an appeal for a visa in the case of a person (details supplied); when the appeal is likely to be concluded; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10286/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the application referred to was refused on appeal by the Visa Office in Dublin. The decision was communicated to the applicant on 28 February 2019.

It is open to the applicant to submit a fresh visa application at any time. However, they should bear in mind the reasons for refusal and address them in any new application.

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

220. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the locations in which the 2,400 newly qualified gardaí since September 2014 have been assigned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10301/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for the distribution of resources, including personnel, among the various Garda Divisions and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. Garda management keeps this distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the optimum use is made of these resources.

Since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, almost 2,400 Garda recruits have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide.

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 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.

In so far as the allocation of newly attested Gardaí is concerned, this is a matter for the Commissioner. I am assured by the Commissioner that the needs of all Garda Divisions are fully considered when determining the allocation of resources. However, it is important to keep in mind that newly attested Gardaí have a further 16 months of practical and class-room based training to complete in order to receive their BA in Applied Policing. To ensure that they are properly supported and supervised and have opportunities to gain the breadth of policing experience required, the Commissioner's policy is to allocate them to specially designated training stations which have the required training and development structures and resources in place, including trained Garda tutors and access to a permanently appointed supervisory Sergeant who is thoroughly familiar with their responsibilities under the training programme.

This focus on investment in personnel is critical. The moratorium on recruitment introduced in 2010 resulted in a significant reduction in the strength of An Garda Síochána. We are now rebuilding the organisation and providing the Commissioner with the resources needed to allow the deployment of increasing numbers of Gardaí across every Garda Division.

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 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.

The information requested by the Deputy as provided by the Garda Commissioner, is as set out in the attached table. We hope to have these figures updated on the website by the end of this week at the link shown below.

For more general information on Garda Facts and Figures please see the link below:

http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/An_Garda_Siochana_facts_and_figures

Divisional Probationer Garda Allocations by Division - 2015 to Jan 2019						
Divisions	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Total
D.M.R. EAST	10	19	38	30		97
D.M.R. NORTH	20	32	69	77		198

Divisional Probationer Garda Allocations by Division - 2015 to Jan 2019						
Divisions	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Total
D.M.R. NORTH CENTRAL	23	45	70	73		211
D.M.R. SOUTH	19	34	66	56		175
D.M.R. SOUTH CENTRAL	20	43	78	61		202
D.M.R. WEST	30	35	73	81		219
CAVAN / MONAGHAN	10	7	23	35		75
CLARE	10	5	10	15		40
CORK CITY	7	6	26	23		62
CORK NORTH	0	5	15	13		33
CORK WEST	5	0	15	11		31
DONEGAL	10	5	13	26		54
GALWAY	5	5	10	16		36
KERRY	10	0	17	14		41
KILDARE	15	20	47	30		112
KILKENNY/CARLOW	10	10	30	12		62
LAOIS / OFFALY	9	20	42	22		93
LIMERICK	9	17	19	34		79
LOUTH	11	17	34	32		94
MAYO	4	0	14	0		18
MEATH	5	19	30	19		73
ROSCOMMON / LONGFORD	0	5	10	3		18
SLIGO / LEITRIM	5	5	8	6		24
TIPPERARY	5	14	21	13		53
WATERFORD	14	10	30	36		90
WESTMEATH	5	5	22	4		36
WEXFORD	15	10	34	26		85
WICKLOW	10	0	19	21		50
Totals	296	393	883	789		2361

* As of 18 January 2019

*Figures provided to the Department of Justice and Equality by An Garda Síochána

Please note:

The allocation of newly attested Gardaí is a policing matter to be determined by the Commissioner.

Newly attested Gardaí are allocated to specially designated training stations which have the required training and development structures and resources in place, including trained Garda tutors and access to a permanently appointed supervisory Sergeant who is thoroughly familiar with their responsibilities under the training programme.

Questions - Written Answers
Citizenship Applications

221. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in the determination of an application for citizenship in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10345/19]

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.

Residency Permits

222. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current and-or expected residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10359/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department the person concerned has been granted permission to reside on Stamp 1 conditions for one year. Correspondence informing the person concerned of this decision was issued on 27 February, 2019. Following receipt of this permission letter the person concerned may register this permission at their local Immigration Office.

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

Garda Resources

223. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number and percentage of the Garda fleet in the Cork city Garda division that are over ten years of age as of 18 February 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10365/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will be aware that there has been unprecedented investment in Garda resources across the State in recent years.

In relation to Garda vehicles, €46 million has been provided by the Government for investment in the Garda fleet between 2016 and 2021, in addition to the investment of almost €30 million in the period 2013 to 2015. This continuing investment is intended to ensure that An Garda Síochána has a modern, effective and fit-for-purpose fleet and that Gardaí can be mobile, visible and responsive on the roads and in the community to prevent and tackle crime. And I am pleased to confirm that a capital allocation of €10 million is available to An Garda Síochána for the purchase of Garda vehicles in 2019.

As the Deputy will appreciate, in accordance with Section 26 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005, as amended, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for managing and controlling generally the administration and business of An Garda Síochána. Further, the allocation of Garda resources is a matter for the Commissioner, in light of the availability of resources and his identified operational demands. This includes responsibility for the allocation of Garda vehicles among the various Garda divisions. As Minister, I have no direct role in that matter. I understand however that Garda management keeps the distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that their optimum use.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that the following tables set out the type and number of vehicles assigned to Cork City Garda Division as well as information on the age range of these vehicles on a Divisional basis, as at 18 February 2019. Responsibility for the efficient deployment of vehicles in each Division is assigned to the Divisional Officer, who may allocate vehicles between stations in accordance with operational need.

	Cars	Vans	Motorcycles	4 x 4	Others	Total
CORK CITY DIVISION (Total)	92	19	8	3	9	131
ANGELSEA STREET DISTRICT	57	13	7	3	4	84
GUR-RANABRAHER DISTRICT	11	1	0	0	1	13
MAYFIELD DISTRICT	11	4	1	0	4	20
TOGHER DISTRICT	13	1	0	0	0	14

Age	No. of Vehicles	% of Cork City Division Fleet (rounded)
<1yr	8	6.10%
1-2yrs	13	9.92%
2-4 yrs	41	31.30%

Age	No. of Vehicles	% of Cork City Division Fleet (rounded)
4-6 yrs	49	37.40%
6-10 yrs	5	3.83%
10 + yrs	15	11.45%
Total	131	100.00%

Prisoner Releases

224. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if sex offenders are entitled to one third remission if they engage in an incentivised regime and otherwise fulfil the criteria for entitlement. [10385/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Prison Service that all prisoners with a sentence to which remission applies including sex offenders qualify for one quarter remission on the basis of good behaviour. In addition, all prisoners including sex offenders who have engaged in authorized structured activity may apply to receive enhanced remission of greater than one quarter but not exceeding one third of their sentence.

There is no automatic entitlement to enhanced remission as such. The principles governing the awarding of enhanced remission are contained under Rule 59 of the Prison Rules 2007 to 2014 (S.I. No. 52 of 2007 and S.I. No. 385 of 2014).

In order for a prisoner to be granted enhanced remission, the Minister for Justice of the day must be satisfied that the prisoner is less likely to re-offend and is better able to re integrate into the community.

All applications are assessed having regard to a range of criteria set out in the legislation including:

- the manner and extent to which the prisoner has engaged constructively in authorised structured activities;
- the manner and extent to which the prisoner has taken steps to address his or her offending behaviour;
- the nature and gravity of the offence to which the sentence of imprisonment being served by the prisoner relates;
- the sentence of imprisonment concerned and any recommendations of the Court that imposed the sentence;
- the period of the sentence served by the prisoner;
- the potential threat to the safety and security of members of the public (including the victim of the offence to which the sentence of imprisonment being served by the prisoner relates);
- any offence of which the prisoner was convicted before being convicted of the offence to which the sentence of imprisonment being served by him or her relates;
- the conduct of the prisoner while in custody or during a period of temporary release;
- any report or recommendation made by the Governor, the Garda Síochána, Probation Of-

ficer or any other person whom the Minister considers would be of assistance in enabling him or her to make a decision on such an application.

Citizenship Status

225. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will address concerns that Irish passport holders who travelled to engage in combat or support for the so-called Islamic State, or Daesh, will be permitted to return to the State; if he has raised security concerns regarding such proposals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10392/19]

226. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will revoke the citizenship of Irish passport holders or citizens who engaged in combat or other support for so-called Islamic State or Daesh; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10393/19]

243. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his position in relation to the citizenship of Irish citizens who are members of ISIS and subsequently wish to return; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10845/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 225, 226 and 243 together.

Protecting the State and the people from terrorism and supporting international peace and security are among the highest priorities for the Government. Ireland, like many other open and democratic states, faces a threat from international terrorism.

The expert assessment of the terrorist threat to Ireland is that, while an attack is possible, it is not considered likely. The authorities here remain nonetheless very vigilant and the level of threat is kept under constant and active review by An Garda Síochána. The Garda Authorities supported by the Defence Forces have in place robust response and prevention capabilities and the authorities here work continually with their international counterparts to identify and manage threats.

Deputies will appreciate that among the issues facing states is the question of suspected foreign terrorist fighters. The shared challenges arising have been a consistent focus of discussion with my EU colleagues at meetings of Justice and Interior Ministers. The return to states in the EU of persons who are suspected of having been active in conflict in Iraq or Syria or residing in conflict areas presents complex challenges, including questions of public protection, the prosecution of offences, the protection of citizens' rights, particularly the rights of non-combatants, and de-radicalisation, none of which matters lend themselves to easy resolution.

While it would not be appropriate to comment on the detail of the security arrangements in place or, indeed, individual cases, I can assure the House that all measures necessary and consistent with the law will be taken to protect the State and the people from harm and to vindicate the rights of individuals.

With regard to the specific question of citizenship, it is clear that the State and all citizens are both bound by the rights and obligations that accompany citizenship. These matters are considered on their merits on a case by case basis but the House will understand that this area of the law is governed by the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Acts 1956 to 2004 which set out in detail the arrangements in place in this regard, including in respect of the revocation of certificates of naturalisation where that may be considered necessary in individual cases.

Public Service Vehicles

227. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of PSV licences revoked in 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10467/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): You will appreciate that I, as Minister for Justice and Equality, have no role in the administration of small public service vehicle (SPSV) licences, which is a matter for An Garda Síochána.

However, to be of assistance, I have asked An Garda Síochána for the statistics you have requested. I will forward the information to you directly, as soon as it is received.

Road Traffic Offences Data

228. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of disqualified drivers who failed to surrender their licence in 2018 and were summoned to court for the offence; the number of drivers who were convicted of this offence; the value of the fines imposed by the court; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10470/19]

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

However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has informed me that Court outcomes indicate that eight people were summoned to Court for failing to surrender their driving licences and in relation to the summons, no convictions are recorded.

Road Traffic Offences Data

229. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of drivers who were summoned to court in 2018 for the offence of driving while disqualified; the number who were convicted of this offence; the penalty imposed by the court in each case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10471/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy is aware, under the provisions of the Courts Service Act 1998, management of the courts is the responsibility of the Courts Service, which is independent in exercising its functions, and this includes the provision of information on the courts system.

I have requested information from the Courts Service and An Garda Síochána in relation to this matter and I will contact the Deputy directly as soon as I have the information to hand.

Question No. 230 answered with Question No. 213.

Garda Station Refurbishment

231. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if funding will be

made available in 2019 for the refurbishment of a Garda station (details supplied); if so, when this work will commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10500/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, there has been unprecedented investment in An Garda Síochána in recent years in support of the Government's commitment to ensure a strong and visible police presence throughout the country in order to maintain and strengthen community engagement and provide reassurance to citizens and deter crime.

The allocation to An Garda Síochána for 2019 is €1.76 billion and very significant capital investment is also being made in An Garda Síochána, including investment of €342 million in Garda ICT infrastructure between 2016 and 2021; and investment of €46 million in the Garda Fleet over the same period.

Considerable capital investment is also being made in the Garda estate. The Deputy will appreciate that the programme of replacement and refurbishment of Garda accommodation is progressed by the Garda authorities working in close cooperation with the Office of Public Works (OPW), which has responsibility for the provision and maintenance of Garda accommodation. As Minister, I have no direct role in these matters.

The Garda Station Building and Refurbishment Programme 2016-2021 is an ambitious 5-year programme based on agreed Garda priorities, which continues to benefit over 30 locations around the country. The clear goal of this investment is to address deficiencies in the Garda estate and provide fit-for-purpose facilities for Garda members and staff as well as the public interacting with them.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that the programme, which is based on agreed Garda priorities, does not include plans for refurbishment of Ronanstown Garda Station.

I am further informed by the Garda authorities that a determination on the need to refurbish Ronanstown or any other Garda station will be considered by An Garda Síochána in the context of the overall accommodation priorities, bearing in mind the ongoing expansion of the Garda workforce and in the context of the Report of the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland.

Irish Prison Service

232. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding mental health awareness training within the Irish Prison Service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10646/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have been advised by the Irish Prison Service that mental health training for staff was introduced by the Irish Prison Service in September, 2016.

A bespoke Mental Health Awareness Programme has been developed and is delivered by training staff, nurses and assistant psychologists. The programme makes staff aware of some of the more fundamental causes of mental health issues and also the appropriate actions to take if a member of staff recognises any of the symptoms.

Since September 2016, over 1,500 staff have been trained and the programme continues to be rolled out to remaining staff.

Prisoner Health

233. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a full-time doctor will be appointed to a location following a report (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10647/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have been advised by the Irish Prison Service that all persons in custody are provided with a range of healthcare services based on an equivalence of care to that which is provided under the General Medical Scheme in the community. Those services are based on a primary care model which includes general practitioner services made available to all persons in custody.

The Irish Prison Service is currently giving consideration to the model of delivery of General Practitioner services at a prison level, including at Castlerea Prison. Currently, an effective General Practitioner service is provided by engaging a locum doctor who attends the prison five mornings per week, and also provides on-call General Practitioner cover at the weekend. This service is engaged by way of its contract agreement for the provision of locum General Practitioner services across the prison estate.

Electronic Tagging

234. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if electronic tagging for repeat offenders is being introduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10655/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will be aware that provisions in respect of electronic monitoring of persons on bail are currently contained in section 6B of the Bail Act 1997, but were not commenced. Section 7 of the Criminal Justice Act 2017, amends these existing provisions for the electronic monitoring of persons on bail to facilitate the focused and targeted use of monitoring in appropriate cases. The Act provides that electronic monitoring may be imposed as a bail condition if the prosecution applies to the court for such a condition.

Extensive preparations are underway to ensure these provisions can be implemented and more importantly, to ensure they can be effective. My Department is chairing a Working Group on Electronic Monitoring which includes the Irish Prison Service, the Probation Service, the Courts Service, An Garda Síochána and the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP). The Working Group submitted a report to my Department's Management Board and these recommendations were considered.

Following on from this, my Department has been engaging with the Office of the Government Procurement (OGP) to try and identify a suitable expert to advise the Department on Electronic Monitoring pre-market consultations. Discussions between the Department and the OGP in this regard remain ongoing.

Garda Data

235. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of members of the drug squad allocated to Tallaght and Rathfarnham Garda stations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10691/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The information is in the following tables:

National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau 2015-2019	
Year	Strength
2015	107
2016	105
2017	114
2018	112
2019	111

Drugs Unit Personnel by Division 2008 -2019												
DIVISION	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Dec-18	Jan-19
D.M.R. EAST	10	9	13	15	13	13	10	10	9	11	9	9
D.M.R. NORTH	25	31	34	32	31	27	16	25	21	19	19	20
D.M.R. NORTH CENTRAL	15	16	15	18	20	13	20	20	30	14	15	18
D.M.R. SOUTH	28	26	30	31	30	23	17	16	17	14	16	17
D.M.R. SOUTH CENTRAL	22	18	19	16	13	11	19	19	13	9	12	12
D.M.R. WEST	32	35	36	35	28	26	24	26	20	17	11	11
D.M.R. NSS	0	0	0	2	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
CARLOW / KILDARE	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KILDARE	0	5	6	7	2	2	6	7	8	9	11	11
LAOIS / OF-FALY	10	10	13	6	3	0	3	0	0	5	5	4
MEATH	3	10	10	7	6	4	4	5	8	5	6	6
LONGFORD / WEST-MEATH	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
WEST-MEATH	0	7	9	9	7	7	6	5	6	6	6	6
WICKLOW	11	11	11	11	3	4	4	4	11	0	4	4
CAVAN / MONAGHAN	11	10	11	8	5	0	0	0	0	5	4	4
DONEGAL	8	10	8	12	10	10	8	7	4	4	2	1
LOUTH	8	6	7	6	7	6	6	6	6	5	2	9
SLIGO / LEITRIM	8	8	2	7	8	6	8	7	7	14	6	6
WATERFORD / KILKENNY	15	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KILKENNY/ CARLOW	0	8	11	8	7	7	5	7	4	5	5	5
TIPPERARY	14	10	10	9	8	7	7	8	9	12	8	9
WATERFORD	0	12	12	10	10	9	5	5	5	6	6	6
WEXFORD	13	12	12	11	6	4	1	6	6	5	5	9
CORK CITY	26	25	27	24	26	29	28	15	20	17	18	18
CORK NORTH	8	8	9	7	9	9	5	5	5	5	5	5

Questions - Written Answers

Drugs Unit Personnel by Division 2008 -2019												
DIVISION	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Dec-18	Jan-19
CORK WEST	6	5	6	7	5	4	3	4	3	5	4	4
KERRY	11	11	10	10	6	8	10	9	7	9	10	12
LIMERICK	14	19	22	20	12	11	12	14	12	11	12	8
CLARE	6	6	9	9	7	6	7	5	5	5	4	3
GALWAY	8	13	12	12	11	12	8	12	9	9	9	9
MAYO	6	6	7	5	5	5	5	5	5	6	5	5
ROSCOMMON / GALWAY EAST	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
ROSCOMMON / LONGFORD	0	8	7	7	6	7	6	6	6	4	3	5
TOTAL	341	355	378	361	310	270	253	258	256	236	222	236

Passport Applications

236. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to amend the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956 to allow non-birth Irish mothers who are registered as parents in their country of residence to apply for an Irish passport on behalf of their child; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10757/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have been advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service of my Department that there are no immediate plans to amend the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956.

The administration of the foreign birth register, as set out in Section 27 of the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, is a matter for the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

I am aware that questions have been raised with regard to clarifying the entitlement to an Irish passport of children born abroad to same sex couples, one of whom is an Irish citizen. My Department is currently examining these issues and is engaging with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, with a view to clarifying the position in this complex area.

Visa Data

237. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of non-EU student visas issued in 2017 and 2018; the average length of time it has taken to process these visas; his plans to improve the system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10760/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that decisions regarding the grant or refusal of study visas are made in a number of INIS Visa Offices overseas and the Visa Office in Dublin.

11,407 study visas were approved in 2017, and 11,443 in 2018. This represents an overall approval rate (the number of successful applications out of the total number of applications) of 86.1% and 88.8% for each year respectively.

The processing time at each office and location worldwide is determined by a number of

factors such as the volume and complexity of applications, the completeness and sufficiency of information or documentation provided by the applicant, whether investigation is required or not, individual circumstances, peak application periods, seasonal factors, and the resources available. While every effort is made to process applications as quickly as possible, processing times inevitably vary as a result.

The current time for processing study visa applications in the Dublin Visa Office for example is around 4 weeks. Processing times for other Visa Offices vary but are generally within this time-frame also.

More generally, a number of measures have been put in place to deal with the increased demand for visas to come to Ireland. This has included the assignment of additional staff to help process applications, and the streamlining of visa processes where possible. In addition, there is regular engagement between INIS and the education sector on student visa requirements and what can mutually be done to improve the processing time with particular attention being paid to peak demand during the busy summer period.

The central concern in deciding on visa applications, as with all visa services worldwide, is to strike an appropriate balance between protecting the country's vital national interests by maintaining an effective immigration regime while at the same time facilitating travel for those who meet the criteria. Each visa application is therefore decided on its own merits taking all factors into account.

Commencement of Legislation

238. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 will be commenced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10804/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 provides a modern statutory framework to support decision-making by adults with capacity difficulties. The Act was signed into law on 30 December 2015 but has not yet been fully commenced. New administrative processes and support measures, including the setting up of the Decision Support Service within the Mental Health Commission (a body under the Department of Health), must be put in place before the substantive provisions of the Act can be commenced.

A number of provisions of the 2015 Act were commenced in October 2016 in order to progress the setting up of the Decision Support Service. The Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 (Commencement of Certain Provisions) Order 2016 (S.I. No. 515 of 2016), brought Part 1 (Preliminary and General) and Part 9 (Director of the Decision Support Service) of the Act, other than sections 3, 4 and 7 in Part 1 and sections 96 and 102 and Chapter 3 in Part 9, into operation on 17 October 2016. These provisions were brought into operation in order to enable the recruitment of the Director of the Decision Support Service.

The commencement of Part 8 of the Act, which provides a legislative framework for advance healthcare directives, is a matter for the Minister for Health. The Minister for Health, under the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 (Commencement of Certain Provisions) (No. 2) Order 2016 (S.I. No. 517 of 2016), brought some provisions of Part 8 of the Act into operation on 17 October 2016. The provisions commenced in Part 8 were the definition of "Minister" in section 82; the definitions of "code of practice" and "working group" in section 91(1); and section 91(2). The commenced provisions provide for the establishment by the

Minister for Health of a multi-disciplinary group to make recommendations to the Director of the Decision Support Service in relation to codes of practice on advance healthcare directives.

The Minister for Health commenced the remainder of section 91 on 17 December 2018 (S.I. No. 527 of 2018) to enable the Director of the Decision Support Service to progress the preparation of the codes of practice as soon as the multi-disciplinary group submits its recommendations to the Director.

A high-level Steering Group comprised of senior officials from the Department of Justice and Equality, the Department of Health, the Mental Health Commission and the Courts Service, together with the Director of the Decision Support Service, is overseeing the establishment and commissioning of the Decision Support Service and this work is ongoing. The key preparations are being put in place under the oversight of the Steering Group to allow for further commencement orders for the provisions of the 2015 Act to be made when the Decision Support Service is ready to roll out the new decision-making support options.

The Decision Support Service is not yet operational but every effort is underway to ensure that the Decision Support Service has all necessary capacity to open for business as soon as possible. While the Decision Support Service has been working towards being operational and ready for the commencement of the main provisions of the Act in 2020, the situation is being kept under review as the preparatory work on implementation moves forward.

The 2019 Revised Estimates Volume provides for an allocation of €3.5 million in the Justice and Equality Vote for the establishment of the Decision Support Service.

Northern Ireland

239. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding the implementation of legislation arising from commitments in the Stormont House Agreement and the Fresh Start Agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10808/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that work is at an advanced stage on legislative measures to contribute to delivery on the Government's commitments, in relation to the framework of initiatives to address the legacy of the Troubles, agreed in the 2014 Stormont House Agreement.

In November 2017, the Government approved the drafting of the Criminal Justice (International Co-operation) Bill. This Bill will further facilitate co-operation with the Historical Investigations Unit (HIU), which is to be established by the British Government to investigate unsolved Troubles-related killings, and other inquiry mechanisms. It should be noted that the Authorities here are already in a position to co-operate with the HIU, once established, in its criminal investigations through existing mutual legal assistance arrangements.

In addition, the Bill will provide for measures to further enhance ongoing cooperation with the Northern Ireland Coroner in Troubles-related inquests. The general scheme of the Bill is available on my Department's webpage and drafting is at a very advanced stage. I expect to be in a position to publish this Bill before the summer recess.

My Department, with close co-operation from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, is also working on a General Scheme for a Bill to establish the Independent Commission on Information Retrieval (ICIR). The ICIR will be a cross-Border institution which will be established to receive information on Troubles-related deaths and to prepare a report on the

circumstances of the death for the families of the victims. The ICIR will require legislation to be enacted in both jurisdictions with parallel provisions. The Deputy will be aware that the British Government is currently analysing the submissions received during last year's public consultation process on the Stormont House Agreement legacy framework. My officials are in contact with their counterparts in Northern Ireland on the outcomes of this exercise. Nonetheless, I would expect to seek the approval of the Government to draft our ICIR legislation in the near future.

Dealing with the legacy of the troubles on this island is a difficult and complex task. The Government remains fully committed to giving effect to the measures agreed in the Stormont House Agreement. While the political impasse in Northern Ireland has delayed the roll-out of these measures, the Government will continue to work with the British Government and the parties in Northern Ireland to seek the re-establishment of the Executive.

Crime Levels

240. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his attention has been drawn to the upsurge in the street gang activity by young persons in areas (details supplied); if his attention has been further drawn to attempts by community projects and Dublin City Council to tackle the causes and consequences of this behaviour; and if funding will be made available through the LCDC to sustain the work. [10834/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am very conscious of the impact that anti-social behaviour has on the quality of life for residents in our communities. Gardaí are working to tackle this, and all forms of criminality, in our communities to make them safer for all members of society.

While the allocation of all Garda resources, including personnel, is a matter for the Garda Commissioner, I am advised by the Garda authorities that in early February 2019, as a result of an upsurge in anti-social activity by young persons in the Ballyfermot area, increased patrols were implemented by An Garda Síochána. Assistance was also provided by a number of the youth projects and local Councillors in the area. Due to a combined effort between An Garda Síochána and a variety of youth groups and local Councillors, working with the youths allegedly involved in this activity, I am advised that the problem appears to be currently under control, but Gardaí will continue to monitor this situation closely.

Similarly, An Garda Síochána has also identified hotspots in Drimnagh for public order offences including areas where youths congregate. I understand these locations are subject to regular and active Garda patrols.

I might add that a range of strong legislative provisions are available to An Garda Síochána to combat anti-social behaviour, including provisions under the Criminal Justice (Public Order) Acts, the Criminal Damage Act and the Intoxicating Liquor Acts. There are also the incremental provisions contained in the Criminal Justice Act 2006 which provide, in Part 11, for warnings and civil proceedings in relation to anti-social behaviour by adults and, in Part 13 of the Act, for warnings, good behaviour contracts and civil proceedings in relation to anti-social behaviour by children.

In relation to funding, I can advise the Deputy that the Irish Youth Justice Service, which operates under the auspices of my Department, provides funding to support the operation of 106 Garda Youth Diversion Projects.

Funding support for youth justice community interventions is based on evidence that diver-

sion programmes, in the form of high-quality preventative intervention, can do more to reduce crime than more costly custodial options. The projects are managed by a range of Community-Based Organisations (CBO) which are required to ensure that best practice is followed in terms of quality of service and financial accountability.

The projects aim to bring about the conditions whereby the behavioural patterns of young people towards law and order can develop and mature through positive interventions. They are primarily targeted at 12-17 year old “at risk” youths in communities where a specific need has been identified.

However, while An Garda Síochána will continue to tackle problems in relation to anti-social behaviour head-on, they cannot eradicate the problem alone.

Specifically in relation to young offenders, it is also up adults, particularly parents and guardians, to ensure that children are raised to be respectful and law-abiding. These lessons begin in the home, are further reinforced in our schools and then by society in general. We must all work together to ensure that such behaviour is never normalised and is tackled immediately

To be of assistance, I am providing the Deputy with a list of Garda Youth Diversion Programmes operating in the areas highlighted in his question. Similarly, I am also providing him with a list of projects aimed at tackling drug-related problems in communities which are funded by the Department of Health.

Garda Youth Diversion Projects in Ballyfermot, Drimnagh, Basin Street and St. Theresa’s.

Ballyfermot

ABLE

CODY

Drimnagh

Clay

BRÚ*

Basin Street

DÁN

St. Theresa’s

DÁN

The above five projects are currently engaged with approximately 85 young people which include young people from the above mentioned areas.

**Note while the BRÚ projects catchment area does not include Drimnagh they would engage with a high number of young people from the area due to the nature of work done and location of the project.*

Drugs Task Force	Drugs Task Force Type	Project Code	Project Name	Agency	Allocation 2019
Ballyfermot LDATF	LDATF	BF2B-3	Familibase	CDYSB	51,201.00

Drugs Task Force	Drugs Task Force Type	Project Code	Project Name	Agency	Allocation 2019
Ballyfermot LDATF	LDATF	BF2-10	Ballyfermot Social Intervention Initiative	CDYSB	97,742.00
Ballyfermot LDATF	LDATF	BF2-14	Matt Talbot Community Trust	CDYSB	106,503.00
Dublin South Inner City LDATF	LDATF	SIC-5	Westland Row CBS After-school Project	CDYSB	9,295.00
Dublin South Inner City LDATF	LDATF	SIC2-6	Poolbeg Training	CDYSB	114,975.00
Dublin South Inner City LDATF	LDATF	SIC2-12	Whitefriar Aikido Club Juniors	CDYSB	3,143.00
Dublin South Inner City LDATF	LDATF	SIC2B-12	School St Youth Project	CDYSB	48,630.00
Canal Communities LDATF	LDATF	CC2-1	St Michael's Youth Project Ltd Skills based Co-ordinator	CDYSB	57,130.00
Canal Communities LDATF	LDATF	CC2-2	Bluebell Youth Project	CDYSB	49,365.00
Canal Communities LDATF	LDATF	CC2-24	St Michael's Family Resource Centre Regeneration Worker	CDYSB	42,392.00
Canal Communities LDATF	LDATF	CC2B-6	YEAH Project	CDYSB	60,622.00
Canal Communities LDATF	LDATF	CC2-5	Prison Outreach Worker	D/JLR (P&W)	47,667.00
Canal Communities LDATF	LDATF	CC2-9	Community Prison Links Worker	D/JLR (P&W)	47,478.00
Canal Communities LDATF	LDATF	CC2-31	Community Development Post	DCC	11,317.00
Canal Communities LDATF	LDATF	CC2-32	Community Development Post	DCC	11,317.00
Canal Communities LDATF	LDATF	CC2-33	Community Development Post	DCC	11,317.00
Dublin 12 LDATF	LDATF	D2-6	Drug Education Worker	CDYSB	53,090.00
Dublin 12 LDATF	LDATF	D2-20	ARC Under 18 Programme	CDYSB	7,606.00
Dublin 12 LDATF	LDATF	D2-11b	Crumlin Youthreach: Literacy Project	CDYSB	9,701.00

Garda Training

241. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the training members of An Garda Síochána receive in relation to identifying cases of coercive control; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10843/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for carrying on and managing and controlling generally the administration and business of An Garda Síochána, including by arranging for the training of its members and civilian staff and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter.

The recently commenced Domestic Violence Act significantly strengthens the civil and legal protections available to victims. The offence of coercive control recognises that domestic violence is more than physical as it can also involve emotional abuse, humiliation or intimidation.

I am advised by the Commissioner that on the 19 February 2018 and the 26 February 2019 training was provided at Templemore Garda College to members of the Divisional Protective Services Units and Inspectors with the Domestic Abuse portfolio by Dr. Jane Monckton Smith, University of Gloucestershire, in relation to Domestic Homicide and their link to coercive control. This was part of a three day domestic abuse modular training programme for DPSUs and Domestic Abuse Inspectors that took place in the Garda College from 19/21 February 2019 and 26/28 of February 2019.

I am further advised that in terms of training and awareness, members of an Garda Síochána are currently undergoing train-the-trainer training in the area of coercive control which will aid in the creation and delivery of organisational training. In addition training lectures are being delivered to Probationer Gardaí at the Garda College in Templemore by members of the Garda National Protective Services Bureau, prior to their postings. These presentations cover all aspects of domestic abuse and the key aspects of the new Domestic Violence Act, including coercive control, will be added to same. This means that every new member leaving the Garda College for their permanent stations will be familiar with the new Act.

Garda Deployment

242. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí stationed in Malahide, Balbriggan, Swords and Skerries Garda stations in each year since 2011, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10844/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): 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. I am informed by the Commissioner that 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 resources.

Since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, almost 2,400 recruits have attested as members and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide, of whom 198 have been assigned to the D.M.R. North Division.

The Government has increased the budget by 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 he also intends to recruit 600 Garda Civilian Staff. This Garda Staff recruitment will allow

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the Commissioner to redeploy a further 500 fully trained Gardaí from administrative duties to frontline policing in 2019.

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 2019 and beyond.

The Garda strength of the D.M.R. North Division from 2009 up to 31 January 2019, as provided by the Garda Commissioner, is as set out in the table in the link.

For additional and more general information on Garda Facts and Figures please see the link below:

http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/An_Garda_Siochana_facts_and_figures

[Tables]

Question No. 243 answered with Question No. 225.

Garda Transport Data

244. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda vehicles based in Malahide, Balbriggan, Swords and Skerries in each year since 2011, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10846/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will be aware that there has been unprecedented investment in Garda resources across the State in recent years.

A total of €46 million has been provided by the Government for investment in the Garda fleet between 2016 and 2021, in addition to the investment of almost €30 million in the period 2013 to 2015. This continuing investment is intended to ensure that An Garda Síochána has a modern, effective and fit-for-purpose fleet and that Gardaí can be mobile, visible and responsive on the roads and in the community to prevent and tackle crime. And I am pleased to confirm that a capital allocation of €10 million is available to An Garda Síochána for the purchase of Garda vehicles in 2019.

As the Deputy will appreciate, in accordance with Section 26 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005, as amended, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for managing and controlling generally the administration and business of An Garda Síochána. Further, the allocation of Garda resources is a matter for the Commissioner, in light of the availability of resources and his identified operational demands. This includes responsibility for the allocation of Garda vehicles among the various Garda divisions. As Minister, I have no direct role in that matter. I understand however that Garda management keeps the distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that their optimum use.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that Skerries and Balbriggan Garda Stations are in Balbriggan District. Swords and Malahide Garda Stations are in Coolock District. I am further informed that both Balbriggan and Coolock Districts are part of DMR North Division.

For the Deputy's information, the following table, which has been provided to me by the

Questions - Written Answers

Garda authorities, sets out the number of vehicles allocated to the various Garda Districts within DMR North from 2011 to date.

2019 (*as at 28.2.2019)	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total
	Cars	Vans	Motor- cycles	4x4	Others	
BAL- BRIG- GAN-Y	9	1	0	0	1	11
BALLY- MUN	26	10	0	1	2	39
CO- OLOCK-R	18	3	0	0	0	21
RAHENY- J	16	4	0	0	0	20
DMR NORTH DIVISION	69	18	0	1	3	91
	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total
2018	Cars	Vans	Motor- cycles	4x4	Others	
BAL- BRIG- GAN-Y	9	1	0	0	1	11
BALLY- MUN	33	17	1	1	3	55
CO- OLOCK-R	21	3	0	0	0	24
RAHENY- J	16	4	0	0	0	20
DMR NORTH DIVISION	79	25	1	1	4	110
	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total
2017	Cars	Vans	Motor- cycles	4x4	Others	
BAL- BRIG- GAN-Y	9	2	0	0	0	11
BALLY- MUN	33	19	1	1	3	57
CO- OLOCK-R	22	2	0	0	0	24

RAHENY-J	19	4	0	0	0	23
DMR NORTH DIVISION	83	27	1	1	3	115
	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total
2016	Cars	Vans	Motor-cycles	4x4	Others	
BAL-BRIGGAN-Y	8	2	0	0	0	10
BALLY-MUN	36	24	2	1	5	68
CO-OLOCK-R	23	3	0	0	0	26
RAHENY-J	19	4	0	0	0	23
DMR NORTH DIVISION	86	33	2	1	5	127
	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total
2015	Cars	Vans	Motor-cycles	4x4	Others	
BAL-BRIGGAN-Y	10	3	0	0	0	13
BALLY-MUN	36	21	0	2	2	61
CO-OLOCK-R	26	2	0	0	0	28
RAHENY-J	16	3	0	0	1	20
DMR NORTH DIVISION	88	29	0	2	3	122
	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total
2014	Cars	Vans	Motor-cycles	4x4	Others	
BAL-BRIGGAN-Y	8	3	0	0	0	11
BALLY-MUN	35	17	3	2	1	58
CO-OLOCK-R	27	2	0	0	0	29

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RAHENY-J	18	2	0	0	1	21
DMR NORTH DIVISION	88	24	3	2	2	119
	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total
2013	Cars	Vans	Motor-cycles	4x4	Others	
BAL-BRIGGAN-Y	5	3	0	0	0	8
BALLY-MUN	30	16	3	3	1	53
CO-OLOCK-R	26	3	0	0	0	29
RAHENY-J	15	3	0	0	1	19
DMR NORTH DIVISION	76	25	3	3	2	109
	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total
2012	Cars	Vans	Motor-cycles	4x4	Others	
BAL-BRIGGAN-Y	8	2	0	0	0	10
BALLY-MUN	33	18	4	3	1	59
CO-OLOCK-R	26	4	0	0	0	30
RAHENY-J	16	2	0	0	1	19
DMR NORTH DIVISION	83	26	4	3	2	118
	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total
2011	Cars	Vans	Motor-cycles	4x4	Others	
BAL-BRIGGAN-Y	8	2	0	0	0	10
BALLY-MUN	35	17	7	3	1	63
CO-OLOCK-R	26	3	0	0	1	30

RAHENY-J	18	1	0	0	2	21
DMR NORTH DIVISION	87	23	7	3	4	124

Immigration Policy

245. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if an immigration levy is payable for non-EEA national students with children attending State schools; if so, the amount; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10886/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that INIS does not administer an immigration levy for non-EEA students with children attending State schools. It should be noted that non-EEA students generally cannot avail of family reunification, including for children, during their residence in the State as students.

Direct Provision Data

246. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of asylum seekers who have died in each of the years 2003 to 2018 and to date in 2019, while being provided with accommodation by the RIA in direct provision centres by location. [10901/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton) (Deputy David Stanton): The Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) of the Department of Justice & Equality has no official role in the collation of statistics on deaths of asylum seekers living in State Provided Accommodation. All records of deaths in Ireland are held in the General Register Office, which is the central civil repository for records relating to Births, Marriages and Deaths in Ireland.

Protection applicants access health services in the same way as Irish citizens - through the GP, primary care and hospital system. RIA has no role in the provision of these services. The details of a protection applicant’s medical condition is a confidential matter between the patient and his or her medical practitioner.

In most cases, the deaths of residents occur in hospitals. Where information may be provided to centre managers by residents or friends of the deceased, it indicates that the causes of deaths ranged from cancer, heart conditions, traffic accidents to suspected cot deaths. Such information is based on informal information and is not an official record of death.

Not all persons in the protection process accept the offer of State provided accommodation which is made when they apply for international protection. In circumstances where an applicant chooses not to accept such accommodation, my Department has no knowledge of the health of such persons.

Where a person dies while they are being provided with accommodation by RIA, RIA will work closely with the centre manager to assist the family in accessing the supports provided by the State, and to ensure that any residents affected by the death are assisted in accessing services that can support them.

Brexit Supports

247. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the level of state aid that will be made available in the event of a no-deal Brexit; the provisions provided for same in the Revised Estimates; if she has sought permission from the European Commission for aid to specific sectors; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10764/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Across Government Departments significant work is ongoing to ensure all necessary supports will be available to enterprise regarding a wide variety of Brexit implications. Provision in the revised estimates for financial support is a matter for my colleague the Minister for Finance.

In relation to state aid, my Department and its agencies together with the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine have been working closely with the EU Commission and DG Competition since November 2017 through the Irish/EU Technical Working Group on State Aid. The objective of the Group is to scope and design schemes to support enterprises across various sectors, impacted by Brexit in line with State Aid rules. Much has been achieved by this Working Group. It has examined and explored a range of opportunities within State Aid rules including the development of the Future Growth Loan Scheme under GBER rules, the expansion of Ireland's Rescue and Restructuring Scheme to include Temporary liquidity aid, and to increase the budget for the Scheme to €200 million. Through the mechanism of the Technical Working Group, Ireland has fully utilised the provisions of the State aid framework to enable the investment by Enterprise Ireland of €74 million in Brexit impacted businesses in 2018. The work of the Group is ongoing and it met most recently last week in Brussels.

In conjunction with DG Competition, the Group is currently working closely with DG Agriculture to explore the range of opportunities under the Agriculture and Forestry State aid guidelines, and as part of this State Aid approval was received in February for capital investment by Enterprise Ireland in an Irish cheese producing company, Carbery Food Ingredients Ltd, to help the company towards financing a diversification project to mitigate the impacts of Brexit.

On 24th January 2019, I met with the European Commissioner for Competition, Margrethe Vestager. The focus of the meeting centered around the severe challenges that Irish businesses will face when the UK leaves the EU and the need for appropriate and timely State supports. It was agreed that Irish officials will continue to work closely with the Commissioner's team in addressing any State aid issues that may arise to ensure a rapid and appropriate response as the ultimate shape of Brexit and its firm-level implication become known. The Commissioner emphasised that the Commission stands ready to act urgently in mitigation against the impacts of Brexit on Irish firms.

Work Permits Data

248. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of employment permits issued for chefs in each of the years 2015 to 2018 and to date in 2019; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10247/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The information requested by the Deputy regarding the number of employment permits issued for chefs in each of the years 2015 to 2018 and to date in 2019 is set out below.

The employment permits system is managed through the operation of the Highly Skilled Eligible Occupations List (HSEOL) and the Ineligible Categories of Employment List (ICEL).

These lists are reviewed twice yearly to keep pace with rapid labour market changes and to be proactively identifying and addressing shortages as they arise.

In March 2018, following a review of the Highly Skilled and Ineligible lists of Employment earlier in 2018, which included a public consultation, I announced the removal of certain chef grades from the ineligible occupation list subject to a quota of 610 Employment Permits, with a maximum of two new Employment Permits per establishment within this quota. This quota relates to new chefs only, renewal Employment Permits do not count towards this quota.

As at 27th February 2019, 263 permits have issued out of the total quota of 610 (this figure is included in the statistics in the following table).

A review of the Q4 2018 occupation lists is being currently being finalised and my officials, in consultation with officials from a number of lead policy Government Departments, are actively considering the submissions received. I expect, in the very short term, to receive proposals, based on the evidence presented and extensive consultation with the Interdepartmental Group on Economic Migration, for changes to both the ineligible and highly skilled occupational lists.

The number of Employment Permits issued for chefs from 2015 - to date are as follows:

Employment Permits Issued for Chefs

Year	Number
2015	144
2016	287
2017	282
2018	409
Jan - 27th Feb 2019	93

EU Agreements

249. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if the EU has a free trade agreement with South Korea; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10380/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The EU-South Korea Free Trade Agreement (FTA) was signed in October 2010 and has been provisionally applied since July 2011. The FTA was approved by Dáil Éireann on 21st July 2011 and was formally ratified by the EU in December 2015. At the time it was the most ambitious trade agreement ever negotiated by the EU and the first with an Asian country.

The majority of import duties were removed in 2011 on provisional application. With the exception of a limited number of agricultural products, the remaining tariffs were phased out over a 5-year period which concluded on 1st July 2016. The phasing out of tariffs on the remaining agricultural products is being carried out over a longer period of up to 18 years except for a small number of sensitive products which are addressed by quotas.

Ireland's trade with Korea has increased significantly since the FTA was first applied. Irish exports of goods to Korea have more than doubled from €289m in 2010 to €590m in 2018. Ireland's exports of services to Korea have more than quadrupled during the same time from €209m to €846m. The FTA has been mutually beneficial with Korea's exports to Ireland also increasing.

The EU-Korea FTA is overseen by the EU-Korea FTA Trade Committee co-chaired at ministerial level where the EU is represented by Trade Commissioner Cecilia Malmström. The main committee is supported by seven specialised committees, seven Working Groups and an Intellectual Property (IP) Dialogue.

EU Agreements such as the EU-Korea FTA are very important for Ireland. With a small domestic market, further expansion in other markets is essential to our continued economic growth. In this regard Ireland will continue to support the EU's ambitious programme of negotiating new FTA's, opening new markets for Irish companies and increasing export and investment opportunities.

My Department will publish a study later this year which examines the economic opportunities and impacts for Ireland arising from FTAs, both currently in place and in negotiation, including the EU-Korea FTA. The objective is to deepen our understanding of how Ireland can best take advantage of these opportunities, and ensure that our businesses are prepared to access new markets.

Health and Safety Authority Expenditure

250. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the estimated full year cost of hiring an additional 60 full-time health and safety inspectors for the Health and Safety Authority; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10491/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Health and Safety Authority has 104 FTE staff in the inspector grades who work across all sectors in the economy.

In 2018, the HSA was allocated additional funding of €1.1m, including €400,000 for Brexit related posts and €300,000 for the operation of the Irish National Accreditation Board, which is part of the HSA. For 2019 it has been allocated additional funding of €508,000, including €412,000 to fund extra Brexit related posts. I am satisfied that the Health and Safety Authority is adequately resourced to deliver on its current mandate.

The estimated full year cost of hiring an additional 60 full-time inspectors (based on a mix of technical skills and grades) for the Health and Safety Authority would be in the region of €3,951,000. It should be noted that, the hiring of this number of additional inspectors would lead to an additional requirement for operational supports in terms of ICT, HR, Legal and other administrative services. It is estimated that 7 staff would also be needed to cover this operational resource requirement at a further cost of €292,000.

Job Creation

251. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation when the future jobs strategy will be published. [9518/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): In response to the challenges we face, the Government agreed to the development of Future Jobs Ireland, the composition and implementation of which is being led jointly by my Department and the Department of the Taoiseach. The development has included extensive consultation to help shape the ambitions for 2019 and thereafter. Future Jobs Ireland is a whole of Government, multi-annual framework designed with the aim of integrating innovation and resilience

into our economy. It will ensure our enterprises and workers are well positioned to adapt to the technological and other transformational changes our economy and society will face in the years ahead.

Future Jobs Ireland focuses on five pillars namely:

1. Embracing Innovation and Technological Change
2. Improving SME Productivity
3. Enhancing Skills and Developing and Attracting Talent
4. Increasing Participation in the Labour Force
5. Transitioning to a Low Carbon Economy

The launch and publication of Future Jobs Ireland 2019 will be on 10th March next.

Enterprise Support Schemes

252. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the funding streams available in a case (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10727/19]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) are the ‘first-stop-shop’ for advice and guidance, financial assistance and other supports for entrepreneurs and businesses that intend to start or grow.

The LEOs can offer direct grant aid to microenterprises (10 employees or fewer) in the manufacturing and internationally traded services sectors which, over time, have the potential to develop into strong export entities. Subject to certain eligibility criteria, the LEOs can provide financial assistance within three main categories: Feasibility Grants (investigating the potential of a business idea); Priming Grants (to part-fund a start-up); and Business Development Grants for existing businesses that want to expand.

For anyone interested in starting or growing a business, the LEOs may be able to offer ‘soft’ support in the form of training (e.g. a Start Your Own Business course); a mentor to work with the business proposer; or targeted programmes such as Lean for Micro (to help boost business productivity and competitiveness).

Micro-enterprises may also avail of the Trading Online Voucher Scheme (TOVS) from the LEOs. The Scheme offers the opportunity for businesses to develop their website or digital marketing strategy by availing of vouchers of up to €2,500 or 50% of eligible expenditure.

Anyone with a viable business proposal can also use the LEO to make an application to MicroFinance Ireland, which offers support in the form of loans of up to €25,000 to start-ups with viable business propositions that do not meet the conventional risk criteria applied by the banks. Successful applicants can avail of a more favourable interest rate from MFI if they make their application through the LEO.

I should also draw your attention to the ‘Supporting SMEs’ Online Tool, which is a cross-governmental initiative to help start-ups navigate the range of Government business supports for which they could be eligible. The tool is available at www.supportingsmes.ie By answering the eight questions in the Online Tool, a small business will, in one location, be able to:

- find out which of the over 170 Government business supports from 27 different Government Departments, Agencies and Initiatives are available to them;
- obtain information on the range of Government supports for accessing credit;
- identify their nearest Local Enterprise Office where they can discuss the outcomes of the guide further;
- download all these filtered results into a document for their further use.

InterTradeIreland (ITI) – which is jointly funded by my Department and its Northern Ireland counterpart – offers a range of business supports to SMEs designed to encourage enterprise development on an all-island basis. ITI helps businesses explore new cross border markets, develop new products, processes and services and become investor ready. Through its suite of programmes and supports, ITI provides funding, advice and contacts which help SMEs across the island that are looking to grow their business. Given its mandate to develop North South Trade, ITI is also particularly well-placed to assist businesses in preparing for the challenges associated with Brexit. ITI provides a range of Brexit supports through its Brexit Advisory Service, including a “Start to Plan” voucher which enables companies to access professional advice to help them plan for Brexit. Further information on ITI’s supports and programmes is available on their website <https://intertradeireland.com/>

Labour Court Recommendations

253. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health if retired nurses are included in the pay deal offered to nurses recently; if they will be impacted by the proposed deal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10298/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The recent Labour Court Recommendations issued on foot of industrial action taken by members of the nursing organisations are still being considered by the parties. It would be inaccurate to describe these recommendations as a ‘pay deal’. Management has met with representatives of the INMO, SIPTU and the PNA to consider the recommendations and their implications in detail. As this engagement is still ongoing, it would be inappropriate to comment on how a particular cohort of nurses such as retired nurses, may be impacted at this time.

Hospital Appointments Administration

254. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment will be scheduled for an angiogram for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10216/19]

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

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for sched-

uled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

Hospital Appointments Status

255. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive cataract surgery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10217/19]

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

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

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

Hospital Appointments Administration

256. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment will be expedited for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10229/19]

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

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

257. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10242/19]

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

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

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

Hospital Car Parks

258. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if the Regional Hospital Mullingar will be directed to provide disabled parking spots for the warfarin clinic (details supplied). [10246/19]

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

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

259. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Health when Spinraza will be made available for children with spinal muscular atrophy. [10257/19]

292. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the application for the approval of the orphan drug Spinraza; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10411/19]

314. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Health if the delays associated with the supply of Spinraza will be examined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10489/19]

324. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Health the reason Spinraza has yet to be approved here in view of the fact it has been approved for reimbursement in 25 other European countries (details supplied); if he will request the HSE to re-enter discussions with a company; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10606/19]

372. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the position with regard to Spinraza; if there will be a review of the latest decision by the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10852/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 259, 292, 314, 324 and 372 together.

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The Health Service Executive has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013.

The Act specifies the criteria to be applied in the making of reimbursement decisions which include the clinical and cost effectiveness of the product, the opportunity cost and the impact on resources that are available to the HSE.

I am advised by the HSE that an application for the reimbursement of Nusinersen (Spinraza) was considered by HSE Leadership at its meeting on 12 February 2019.

Following detailed consideration of the application, the HSE Leadership made the decision that it was unable to recommend reimbursement of Spinraza and concluded that the evidence for clinical effectiveness is still quite limited and that the current price proposed by the manufacturer was not a cost-effective use of resources.

The HSE has written to the company involved and informed them of the proposal to refuse reimbursement at the current price offering. Under the requirements of the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013 the company now has 28 days to respond or make representations to the HSE's proposed decision.

The HSE remains open to considering any new evidence or information which emerges regarding the clinical effectiveness or price of this medicine.

Health Services

260. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that it is proposed to merge services (details supplied) with the offices being relocated in Tallaght. [10258/19]

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.

Research Funding

261. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if funding will be allocated for research (details supplied); the status of the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10272/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Research Board (HRB) is a statutory body under the aegis of the Department of Health and is the lead agency in Ireland supporting and funding health research. My Department provides funding in the region of €40 million annually to the HRB.

Decisions on funding allocation for specific applications made to the HRB are reached through a rigorous international peer review process. Only those applications that are deemed of high scientific quality through that independent process receive funding.

As Minister for Health it would be inappropriate for me or indeed the HRB to interfere in the decision making process and allocation of funding for research project applications.

The Deputy may wish to note that the HRB does not ring-fence funding for specific diseases or health areas, and welcomes applications in any area, including rare diseases, through all of their funding schemes.

In addition, the HRB supports research in rare diseases via their Medical Research Charities Group (MRCG) Co-fund scheme. Again, only projects that are deemed scientifically robust and of high quality by an independent international peer review panel are funded through this scheme.

Hospital Appointments Status

262. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied). [10279/19]

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

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

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

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

263. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 547 of 6 November 2018, the status of the reimbursement of Translarna from a company (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10291/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Service Executive has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013.

The Act specifies the criteria to be applied in the making of reimbursement decisions which include the clinical and cost effectiveness of the product, the opportunity cost and the impact on resources that are available to the HSE.

I am advised by the HSE that the application for Translarna (Ataluren) was approved at the January HSE Leadership Team meeting. The company is being contacted to finalise the implementation arrangements for reimbursement.

Pension Provisions

264. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 143 of 19 January 2011 if a person (details supplied) is on a pension; the reason there is a difference of €10,000 in the period 17 September 1996 to 31 March 1998 in the amount they were actually paid and the amount the Health Service Executive says they were paid; if the irregularities of that time will be investigated and resolved; if payments due to this person from that time will be paid; if copies of the pension documents signed by the person will be made available to them; if their pension entitlements will be outlined to them; if payment to them will continue under pension group 038; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10303/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): It is an operational matter for the HSE to provide the answer sought by the Deputy. However, the HSE are unable to provide a response as insufficient information has been provided regarding the individual in question.

Efforts have been made by my Department to contact Deputy McGuinness's office for the necessary information and on receipt of further details the HSE will provide the information requested.

Ambulance Service

265. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health when the 2018 health sector national staff survey carried out by a company (details supplied) in relation to the National Ambulance Service will be released to all staff; if he has received a copy of the survey results; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10309/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the first part of this question concerns the release of results to HSE staff, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy on this matter. In relation to the survey results, I understand that my Department has not yet received a copy.

Hospital Appointments Administration

266. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment in the case of a person (details supplied) will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10310/19]

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

267. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health his plans to provide adult intellectual disability and autism spectrum disorder speech and language therapist posts to cover an area (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10313/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath) (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives.

This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

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

Cross-Border Health Initiatives

268. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if a cross-border directive refund will be awarded to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10315/19]

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

National Dementia Strategy

269. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to a mapping project (details supplied) that was produced in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10316/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In 2016 and 2017, the HSE's National Dementia Office partnered with the Alzheimer Society of Ireland on a project to map dementia-specific community-based services and supports. The project did not look at the generic services that people with dementia and their families and carers may use, or the quality of the identified services. However, it offers a useful snapshot and baseline study into what, where and when services are being offered. The study has also been used to inform a service finder hosted on the National Dementia Office's website. This allows people to search for dementia-specific community services in their area.

The report, entitled 'Dementia Specific Services in the Community: Mapping Public and Voluntary Services', found gaps in access to services and a large variance in what services are provided across the country. The National Dementia Office has met with senior HSE officials in each Community Healthcare Organisation region to highlight gaps in each area and to develop local action plans to improve service provision.

The National Dementia Office has developed a needs analysis framework to support local dementia service planning and development. This framework is a mechanism to help the Office

direct time, energy and resources into dementia care that most appropriately meets the needs of people with dementia. It will be used to make dementia service development more responsive and consistent across the country.

The mapping exercise was conducted to complement the implementation of the National Dementia Strategy, which seeks to improve dementia care, deliver improved services and supports, and allow people with dementia to live well for as long as possible in their own homes and communities. While there continue to be gaps in the provision of services, the Strategy's implementation has improved supports and understanding of the challenges faced by people with dementia through the provision of dementia-specific intensive homecare packages, a programme that helps GPs and primary care teams diagnose and manage cases of dementia, and a nationwide public awareness campaign.

The Department of Health also secured €6.26 million through the 2016, 2017 and 2018 Dormant Accounts Fund Action Plans to develop a number of projects which are designed to expand public awareness of dementia and to improve care for people with dementia. Projects receiving funding include the delivery of post-diagnostic supports; a dementia diagnostic service for people with intellectual disability; a national network of memory technology resource rooms; the development of a model for a national dementia registry; the national rollout of a Dementia Training Programme for HSE homecare staff; the development of Dementia Resource Centres; funding for a dementia community activation coordinator; an evaluation of services for people with early onset dementia; and community support projects for people with dementia.

The Department of Health and the HSE are committed to the full implementation of the National Dementia Strategy, and to using available resources in the best way possible to support people with dementia, their carers and families.

Health Services Provision

270. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the case of an organisation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10317/19]

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.

HSE Legal Cases

271. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Health the progress of the expert group established to consider alternative mechanisms to the court process for resolving clinical negligence claims; the position regarding the expected publication of the final report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10318/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Government agreed in June this year to the establishment of an Expert Group to review the law of torts and the current systems for the management of clinical negligence claims. They agreed that High Court Justice Charles Meenan would chair the Group which would advise on whether there are alternative mechanisms to the current court process for resolving clinical negligence and personal injury claims.

Judge Meenan's Expert Group will especially examine the system from the perspective of

the person who has made the claim to explore if there is a better way to deal effectively yet more sensitively with certain cases. In this process the Group will also look at the impact of tort legislation on the overall patient safety culture and open disclosure.

Judge Meenan submitted an Interim Report to the Minister for Health and the Minister for Justice and Equality on the 9 January 2019 and the Final Report is expected in June 2019. I am currently arranging for the publication of the Interim Report.

Pharmacy Regulations

272. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding restrictions on the role of pharmaceutical assistants who have contributed to the smooth running of pharmacies here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10324/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Pharmacy Act 2007 established the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (PSI) and the functions of the Society are set out in the Act. The functions of the PSI are carried out on its behalf by the Council of the Society.

Section 30 of the Pharmacy Act 2007 provides for an exception to the general provision in the Act which requires the sale and supply of medicines at a pharmacy to be conducted under the personal supervision of a registered pharmacist, and specifies that no offence is committed where a registered pharmaceutical assistant “acts on behalf of a registered pharmacist during the temporary absence of the registered pharmacist”.

Section 30 also permits the Council to make rules as to:

1. What may or may not be done by a registered pharmaceutical assistant when acting on behalf of a registered pharmacist; and
2. What constitutes the temporary absence of a registered pharmacist.

Following a period of public consultation, the Council of the PSI considered the proposed draft Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (Temporary Absence of Pharmacist from Pharmacy) Rules 2018 at its meeting of 20 September 2018, where the Council approved the draft rules without amendment. Following this, the PSI undertook to redraft the Rules in relation to what may or not be done by a registered pharmaceutical assistant when acting on behalf of a registered pharmacist.

On 6 December, the Council of the PSI approved a revised draft of the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (Temporary Absence of Pharmacist from Pharmacy) Rules 2018 for issuance for public consultation. This public consultation commenced on 13 December 2018 and ran until 11 January 2019, affording any interested party the opportunity to make representations on the matter directly to the PSI.

Following completion of the public consultation phase, the Council of the PSI considered the proposed draft Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (Temporary Absence of Pharmacist from Pharmacy) Rules 2018 at its meeting on 14 February 2019.

My role in relation to this process is limited to the consideration of any such Rules once submitted for my consent. I must consider any Rules presented to me from a fair and impartial perspective, without prejudice or prejudgment.

I await the receipt of the Rules for my consideration from the PSI and, until that time, I am unfortunately not in a position to comment any further on the matter raised.

Ambulance Service

273. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the 2018 survey carried out by a company (details supplied) on the National Ambulance Service has not been issued to all staff; and if the results of the survey will be issued to staff. [10330/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this concerns the release of results to HSE staff, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy on this matter.

Hospital Appointments Status

274. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment will be expedited for a person (details supplied). [10333/19]

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.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme

275. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter in regard to the fair deal scheme (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10335/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The proposed policy change to the Nursing Homes Support Scheme (NHSS), to cap contributions from farm assets at 3 years where a family successor commits to working the productive asset, has been approved by Government. My Department is working on the development of draft Heads of Bill while considering a number of complex ancillary policy and operational matters which may need to be addressed in the proposed legislation.

It is intended that this proposed policy change, the 3 year cap, will be extended to eligible existing participants in long term residential care so that they are not disadvantaged, but that there would be no retrospective recoupment of contributions for those who have paid contributions over and above the 3 year period.

A draft General Scheme of a Bill is currently with legal advisers for advice and legal quality control review. There is a current delay in accessing legal responses due to the demands of

the emergency Brexit legislation. Subject to legal advice, I expect to bring the heads of bill to Government soon. The changes to the Scheme will come into effect in 2019 subject to the legislative process.

Hospital Appointments Status

276. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive an appointment for Letterkenny University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10337/19]

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

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

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

Hospitals Building Programme

277. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of the provision of a new-build emergency department and surgical block with 147 single rooms at Sligo University Hospital. [10338/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of healthcare infrastructure projects, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly in relation to this matter.

Abortion Services Provision

278. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of general practitioners who have signed contracts to provide termination-of-pregnancy services; the number who are accepting referrals from a service (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10339/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Deputy's question relates to a service matter, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

HSE Staff Data

279. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of HSE employees on administrative leave; the duration of the leave; and the cost of covering the leave, in tabular form. [10340/19]

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

HSE Planning

280. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the amount spent on the winter plan; the amount spent on advertisement and public relations, in tabular form; the achievements of the plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10341/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Deputy will be aware, the Winter Plan came into effect on 1 December 2018 and will continue until 31 March 2019. The Plan seeks to ensure that the health system is as prepared as possible for the increase in demand on services over the coming months, within existing capacity and financial parameters.

Key actions are now underway, as part of the Winter Plan, and a €30 million investment has been made to improve services for patients during this period of peak demand including: the opening of additional beds, the use of private hospital capacity, frailty intervention teams in Emergency Departments, additional homecare packages and transitional care beds along with additional diagnostics in hospitals and for GPs.

Four public information, patient focused campaigns were undertaken by the HSE as part of the Winter Plan 2018/19 and funding of €700,000 was allocated.

The four campaigns were:

- Winter Wellness - to unify all public health messages across all platforms;
- Flu Vaccine - to promote the uptake of flu vaccine among at-risk groups;
- Under the Weather - to provide advice for people for common illnesses; and
- Promotion of the 11 Injury Units including clinical spokesperson highlighting the services available and providing information on Emergency Departments.

According to provisional figures, we have observed increased attendances at Emergency Department, increased admission and a 14% reduction in trolley figures this winter, between December 2018 and February 2019, compared to same months last year.

A review and lessons learned process to inform on the details of the actions, outputs and outcomes of the Winter Plan, including a breakdown of the amounts spent for the various aspects of the plan, will take place at the end of the winter period. The review will aim to highlight areas of success and areas for improvement, in order to inform the planning process for winter 2019/20.

Autism Support Services

281. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the counties in which applied behavioural analysis, ABA, programmes are being made available to families of children with autism, in tabular form; the number of hours under the programme delivered in each of the

years from 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019; the number of children receiving ABA supports by county in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10344/19]

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.

Hospital Appointments Status

282. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment will be expedited for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10346/19]

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.

Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland

283. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health his views on the CEO recruitment process in the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland; if he has been briefed on the departure of the previous interim CEO and the dismissal of their interim successor by the president of the board (details supplied); and if his attention has been drawn to the ethical reasons that forced the interim successor into this situation. [10363/19]

284. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the appointment of the CEO of the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland by the board without following a similar recruitment process to that followed when a person (details supplied) was appointed to the interim role; and the reason the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland does not appear to have advised the public on its website as to the name of the current incumbent. [10364/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 283 and 284 together.

The appointment of a Chief Executive Officer is a matter for the Board of the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland.

Section 28 of the Nurses and Midwives Act 2011 states that the Board shall appoint a Chief Executive Officer in accordance with the Public Service Management Act 2004. It further provides that should the position of CEO be vacant the functions of CEO may be performed by an employee of the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland (NMBI) designated by the Board.

I understand that the position is currently filled on a temporary basis and that the NMBI will advertise the post shortly.

Staff in my Department hold regular meetings with the NMBI to monitor compliance with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies. Matters of employment law are the responsibility of the NMBI.

Medical Card Applications

285. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the status of a new application for a medical card by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10369/19]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

286. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health the changes to the rules for phased dispensing of medications by pharmacists to qualifying patients made in recent months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10373/19]

301. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health if the rules governing phased dispensing by pharmacists to older patients will be reviewed in view of the fact it is one of a number of factors that will keep them away from the acute system and long-term nursing home care; if the phased dispensing on the recommendation of a general practitioner will be allowed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10445/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 286 and 301 together.

Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Appointments Status

287. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive an appointment; the waiting time for such appointments in counties Roscommon and Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10378/19]

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

Medical Card Reviews

288. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the status of the review of a medical card for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10379/19]

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

Drug and Alcohol Task Forces

289. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health the number of drug and alcohol task forces that have had a HSE review; the amount the reviews have cost to date including a task force (details supplied); and the person or body that decides if a particular task force is to be reviewed. [10383/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Pharmaceutical Sector

290. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Health his views on the role of pharmaceutical assistants in the operations of pharmacies throughout Ireland; if his attention has been drawn to the threat that their qualifications could be voided and that 365 pharmaceutical assistants, almost all of them women in their 50s, could end up being made redundant; his plans to address this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10396/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Pharmacy Act 2007 established the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (PSI) and the functions of the Society are set out in the Act. The functions of the PSI are carried out on its behalf by the Council of the Society.

Section 30 of the Pharmacy Act 2007 provides for an exception to the general provision in the Act which requires the sale and supply of medicines at a pharmacy to be conducted under the personal supervision of a registered pharmacist, and specifies that no offence is committed where a registered pharmaceutical assistant “acts on behalf of a registered pharmacist during the temporary absence of the registered pharmacist”.

Section 30 also permits the Council to make rules as to:

1. What may or may not be done by a registered pharmaceutical assistant when acting on behalf of a registered pharmacist; and
2. What constitutes the temporary absence of a registered pharmacist.

Following a period of public consultation, the Council of the PSI considered the proposed draft Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (Temporary Absence of Pharmacist from Pharmacy) Rules 2018 at its meeting of 20 September 2018, where the Council approved the draft rules

without amendment. Following this, the PSI undertook to redraft the Rules in relation to what may or not be done by a registered pharmaceutical assistant when acting on behalf of a registered pharmacist.

On 6 December, the Council of the PSI approved a revised draft of the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (Temporary Absence of Pharmacist from Pharmacy) Rules 2018 for issuance for public consultation. This public consultation commenced on 13 December 2018 and ran until 11 January 2019, affording any interested party the opportunity to make representations on the matter directly to the PSI.

Following completion of the public consultation phase, the Council of the PSI considered the proposed draft Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (Temporary Absence of Pharmacist from Pharmacy) Rules 2018 at its meeting on 14 February 2019.

My role in relation to this process is limited to the consideration of any such Rules once submitted for my consent. I must consider any Rules presented to me from a fair and impartial perspective, without prejudice or prejudgment.

I await the receipt of the Rules for my consideration from the PSI and, until that time, I am unfortunately not in a position to comment any further on the matter raised.

Hospital Appointments Status

291. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for a scan will be expedited for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10410/19]

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. 292 answered with Question No. 259.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

293. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that a publicly funded youth mental health organisation (details supplied) plans to amalgamate its services which will result in the eventual removal of access to local mental health services for youth in Clondalkin and the surrounding area; the impact this will have on young persons in the Dublin mid-west area which has the second highest number of referrals to men-

tal health services nationally; if the HSE, as funder, can intervene to insist that local services remain in place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10416/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Hospital Appointments Status

294. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive an appointment for surgery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10418/19]

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.

Home Care Packages Provision

295. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if a home care package will be expedited for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10420/19]

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.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Staff

296. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health the number of counsellors at grade code 391T employed in each CAMHS unit, in tabular form. [10427/19]

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 Provision

297. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health his plans to fast track the delivery of primary healthcare centres that are needed in communities but appear to be delayed in various stages of the procurement, design and planning processes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10435/19]

298. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the number of primary healthcare centres that were delivered and are fully operational in 2016, 2017 and 2018, in each CHO area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10436/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 297 and 298 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.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Applications

299. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if a fair deal application by a person (details supplied) will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10441/19]

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.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

300. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health when a psychological report will be carried out on a child (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10442/19]

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.

Question No. 301 answered with Question No. 286.

Departmental Contracts

302. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health if the contractor awarded a HSE contract (details supplied) is paid fully and up to date and millions of euro are not out-

standing for the supply of product under the contract and a related contract; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10453/19]

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

Departmental Contracts

303. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health if an assurance will be given that HSE contracts (details supplied) are not in imminent danger of collapse due to payment or other difficulties known to him or the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10455/19]

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

Departmental Contracts

304. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health his views on whether the pricing model for the delivery of product under a HSE contract (details supplied) is logical, sustainable and in alignment with the original tender; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10457/19]

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

Departmental Contracts

305. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health if the extension of two HSE contracts (details supplied) are fully compliant with all aspects of Irish and EU procurement rules; if the extensions rely on special clauses, powers or situations for their legal implementation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10459/19]

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

Public Procurement Contracts

306. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health the reason the HSE could allow a procurement tender in which a carton to be delivered for the HSE under previous versions of a HSE contract (details supplied) would be charged at a rate of €58.50 plus VAT in view of the fact the maximum standard pricing in the marketplace is circa €5 to €6; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10461/19]

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

Departmental Contracts

307. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health the rating in terms of service performance in relation to a HSE contract (details supplied); the way in which it compares to other contracts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10463/19]

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

Vaccination Programme

308. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health when the HSE will roll out the HPV vaccine programme for boys; if there will be a catch-up programme for all school age boys over the age prescribed by the programme; if priority is given to boys who are homosexual or bisexual; if it is recognised by the HPV school programme that boys who are homosexual or bisexual are in a higher risk group than heterosexual boys; if there is another HPV vaccine programme or clinic in which teenage boys and young men who are homosexual or bisexual can receive the HPV vaccine; and if so, the cost of same. [10464/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In December 2018 the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) completed a health technology assessment (HTA) in relation to extending the national immunisation schedule to include the human papilloma virus (HPV) vaccination of boys. As the HPV vaccine is preventative it is intended to be administered, if possible, before a person becomes sexually active, that is, before a person is first exposed to HPV infection.

The HTA recommended that the HPV immunisation programme be extended to include boys with the introduction of a 9-valent HPV vaccine. Inclusion of a catch-up programme for males in sixth year in school as part of a gender-neutral programme was not considered a cost-effective option and therefore not recommended. However, a policy decision was made to extend the HPV immunisation programme to include boys and introduce a 9-valent HPV vaccine starting in September 2019.

The HSE National Immunisation Office are currently working towards preparing a gender-neutral HPV programme. Information materials and training on this will be available for parents and healthcare professionals in advance of the start of the gender-neutral programme.

HPV vaccination of boys provides direct protection against HPV-related disease that are attributable to boys. It also provides indirect herd protection to girls who have not been vaccinated. Another important factor includes the additional protection provided by a gender-neutral programme to vulnerable groups (for example, men who have sex with men).

HPV vaccination has been offered to HIV positive men and women under the age of 26 since 2016 through HIV clinics and, since January 2017, HPV vaccination has been offered to men who have sex with men (MSM) aged 16 to 26 through publicly-funded sexually transmitted infection (STI) clinics in Ireland.

Services for People with Disabilities

309. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the number of new emergency places provided to persons with a disability in CHO area 9 in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10466/19]

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

The Programme for Partnership Government states that the Government wishes to provide more accessible respite care to facilitate full support for people with a disability.

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

Hospital Appointments Status

310. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive urgently required surgery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10469/19]

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

311. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) who has been diagnosed with ASD and has no access to transport will be facilitated in their home town rather than in Listowel, which is 27 km from their home; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10475/19]

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.

Hospitals Data

312. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of elective surgeries and procedures cancelled in each hospital nationally for each month in 2017 and 2018, by specialty; the reason for the cancellation, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10487/19]

313. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of elective surgeries and procedures cancelled in each hospital nationally in each of the years 2011 to 2018, by speciality; the reason for the cancellation, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10488/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 312 and 313 together.

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

Question No. 314 answered with Question No. 259.

Pharmaceutical Sector

315. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Health if proposed regulations to reduce the use of pharmaceutical assistants nationally will be clarified; the expected number of job losses nationally among the profession; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10504/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Pharmacy Act 2007 established the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (PSI) and the functions of the Society are set out in the Act. The functions of the PSI are carried out on its behalf by the Council of the Society.

Section 30 of the Pharmacy Act 2007 provides for an exception to the general provision in the Act which requires the sale and supply of medicines at a pharmacy to be conducted under the personal supervision of a registered pharmacist, and specifies that no offence is committed where a registered pharmaceutical assistant "acts on behalf of a registered pharmacist during the temporary absence of the registered pharmacist".

Section 30 also permits the Council to make rules as to:

1. What may or may not be done by a registered pharmaceutical assistant when acting on behalf of a registered pharmacist; and
2. What constitutes the temporary absence of a registered pharmacist.

Following a period of public consultation, the Council of the PSI considered the proposed draft Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (Temporary Absence of Pharmacist from Pharmacy) Rules 2018 at its meeting of 20 September 2018, where the Council approved the draft rules without amendment. Following this, the PSI undertook to redraft the Rules in relation to what may or not be done by a registered pharmaceutical assistant when acting on behalf of a regis-

tered pharmacist.

On 6 December, the Council of the PSI approved a revised draft of the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (Temporary Absence of Pharmacist from Pharmacy) Rules 2018 for issuance for public consultation. This public consultation commenced on 13 December 2018 and ran until 11 January 2019, affording any interested party the opportunity to make representations on the matter directly to the PSI.

Following completion of the public consultation phase, the Council of the PSI considered the proposed draft Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (Temporary Absence of Pharmacist from Pharmacy) Rules 2018 at its meeting on 14 February 2019.

My role in relation to this process is limited to the consideration of any such Rules once submitted for my consent. I must consider any Rules presented to me from a fair and impartial perspective, without prejudice or prejudgment.

I await the receipt of the Rules for my consideration from the PSI and, until that time, I am unfortunately not in a position to comment any further on the matter raised.

Hospitals Data

316. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of elective surgeries and procedures cancelled at Louth County Hospital; and Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda by specialty by month in each of the years 2017, 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10505/19]

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

Hospitals Data

317. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Health the number of elective surgeries and procedures cancelled by specialty at Tallaght University Hospital by month in 2017, 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10508/19]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

318. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10544/19]

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

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing sched-

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

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

Services for People with Disabilities

319. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Health if there is a speech therapist in a location (details supplied); if not, the reason therefore; when a speech therapist will be put in place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10560/19]

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.

Services for People with Disabilities

320. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) who applied for an assessment of needs in March 2017 has only received notice from the HSE in February 2018; his plans to improve the waiting lists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10561/19]

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.

Hospitals Data

321. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health the number of elective surgeries and procedures cancelled by specialty at the Midlands Regional Hospital, Portlaoise and the Midlands Regional Hospital, Tullamore for each month in 2017, 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10570/19]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

322. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if a hospital appointment will be expedited for a person (details supplied). [10582/19]

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

323. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the statement by the HSE regarding Spinraza, which contains figures that are at least six months out of date (details supplied); the steps he will take to request the HSE takes the updated information into account; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10605/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the pricing and reimbursement of medicines; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Question No. 324 answered with Question No. 259.

Hospital Services

325. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Health the status of a request to provide an outreach x-ray service for West Kerry Community Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10608/19]

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 Administration

326. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health his plans to make herbal products available to those on medical cards (details supplied). [10609/19]

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.

Services for People with Disabilities

327. **Deputy Fergus O’Dowd** asked the Minister for Health the status of the Autism Spectrum Disorder Bill 2017; when he envisages the Bill will progress through Dáil Éireann; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10645/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): Simultaneous with the publication of Senator Reilly’s Bill in 2017, Minister Harris asked the HSE to prepare a report detailing models of good practice across the Health Service. The HSE Report was published in December 2018 by the Minister alongside a Department of Health research paper on the prevalence of Autism in Ireland. As outlined by the Minister in the Seanad second stage debate, these are key steps in developing an autism strategy as envisaged by the Bill.

The Minister has instructed the HSE to proceed with the establishment of a Programme Board who will further the implementation of the recommendations of the Review.

The HSE 2019 National Service Plan reflects this commitment and an Autism Plan is to be published in 2019.

Tony Canavan, Chief Officer will lead a national working group focused on the implementation. This builds on the substantial work already commenced in relation to improving Autism services, and the assessment process in particular.

Key priorities for the group include The Establishment of a Programme Board, Programme of Awareness Raising/Engagement and Guidance to Clinicians and Service Development.

As was also pointed out by the Minister during the debate on the Bill, the multi service needs of people with Autism are broader than the remit of the Department of Health. The Department of Justice and Equality has responsibility for providing a focal point for the promotion and co-ordination of disability policy, including the development of the National Disability Strategy. In this context, the Department of Justice oversees the implementation of the Strategy and the accompanying Programme of Additional Actions on Autism.

Because of the actions already outlined above which will deliver an autism plan in 2019 and the unique context and nature of the current legislative programme, it is not considered necessary to advance the Senator’s Bill at this stage.

Hospital Waiting Lists

328. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) can expect a hospital appointment. [10649/19]

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.

Proposed Legislation

329. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health when he expects the legislation to give effect to the proposed changes in the fair deal scheme will come before the Houses of the Oireachtas; the full extent of these changes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10692/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The proposed policy change to the Nursing Homes Support Scheme (NHSS), to cap contributions from farm assets at 3 years where a family successor commits to working the productive asset, has been approved by Government. My Department is working on the development of draft Heads of Bill while considering a number of complex ancillary policy and operational matters which may need to be addressed in the proposed legislation.

It is intended that this proposed policy change, the 3 year cap, will be extended to eligible existing participants in long term residential care so that they are not disadvantaged, but that there would be no retrospective recoupment of contributions for those who have paid contributions over and above the 3 year period.

A draft General Scheme of a Bill is currently with legal advisers for advice and legal quality control review. As the Deputy is aware, there is presently a focus on matters relating to Brexit, including planning and preparing in a legal and legislative context. Unfortunately, this is having some impact on progressing this particular matter at this time. However, subject to legal advice, I expect to bring the heads of bill to Government soon. The changes to the Scheme will come into effect in 2019 subject to the legislative process.

Hospitals Funding

330. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 428 of 26 February 2019, if the tender documents for the diabetic centre at Sligo University Hospital have issued to the contractors; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the project went to tender mid-2017 and a contractor was selected mid-2018; if capital funding

will be approved in view of the fact that the current unit being used for children with diabetes is perceived as dangerous for both staff and patients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10719/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I understand the HSE has recently responded to you directly to advise that the tender documents for the Diabetic Centre at Sligo University Hospital have been finalised and are ready to issue to the contractors, subject to the availability of capital funding.

My Department and the Health Service Executive are currently engaged in a process to finalise the HSE Capital Plan for 2019. The HSE Capital Plan will determine the projects that can progress in 2019 and beyond having regard to the total available capital funding and the relevant priority of each project. All Health capital projects, currently at various stages of development, such as the Diabetic Centre at Sligo University Hospital, are included as part of this process.

Once the HSE has finalised its Capital Plan for 2019, it will then be submitted to me for consideration.

Drug and Alcohol Task Forces

331. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health the status of the revision of the task force handbook; and when the new handbook will be ready. [10730/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): Drug and alcohol task forces play a key role in implementing the national drugs strategy, by assessing the extent and nature of the drug problem in local communities and in initiating appropriate responses, so that there is a coordinated approach involving all sectors.

The Department established a working group to review and update the handbook for drug and alcohol task forces in September 2018. The working group is considering the remit of the task forces to promote community involvement and to coordinate service provision in partnership with the statutory, community and voluntary sectors and the requirements for governance, financial management, decision-making and accountability.

The working group has representatives from task forces, the community and voluntary sector, the Department of Health and the HSE, along with an independent expert.

The working group is continuing its deliberations. It is anticipated that its work will be completed in quarter 2, 2019.

I look forward to receiving the report of the working group in due course.

Drug and Alcohol Task Forces

332. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health his views on whether the former emerging needs fund which catered for a quick response to local issues and needs was productive in assisting drugs and alcohol task forces; and his plans to reinstate the fund. [10731/19]

333. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health if extra funding will be provided to drugs and alcohol task forces to meet the challenge of drug-related gangs in Dublin

in view of the recent upsurge in serious drug-related anti-social behaviour in areas (details supplied). [10732/19]

334. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health the funding being provided to drug and alcohol task forces in 2019; the equivalent figures in each of the years 2014 to 2018; his plans to increase funding for same during 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10733/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): I propose to take Questions Nos. 332 to 334, inclusive, together.

The Department of Health allocated funding of almost €100 million to the HSE for addiction services in 2019. The HSE National Service Plan 2019 sets out the type and volume of addiction services to be provided, having regard to the funding allocated.

In addition, the Department provides a further €28 million to Drug and Alcohol Task Forces through various channels of funding, including the HSE.

Implementing the health-led national drugs strategy continues to be a Government priority. Task forces have an important role in delivering the strategy at the local level.

I am committed to providing additional resources to enhance service provision under the national drugs strategy. I consider that resources should be directed towards those interventions which are most likely to lead to a reduction in problem substance use and positive improvement in public health, safety and well-being.

Within the limited envelope of resources available for drug and alcohol services in 2019, I am considering options for the provision of additional funding for addiction services and task forces. I will shortly be engaging with the task forces to outline my plans for additional funding for community initiatives to tackle the misuse of drugs and alcohol.

A table follows outlining the allocations to Drug and Alcohol Task Forces from 2014 to 2019.

Funding allocations to drug and alcohol task forces 2014 to 2019

[Funding]

Health Services

335. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) will be provided with a pair of new shoes as per the request of the person's general practitioner. [10735/19]

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.

Ambulance Service

336. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the contents of the 2018 survey carried out by a company (details supplied) in relation to the national ambulance service has yet to be released to all staff; and if he will make

a statement on the matter. [10749/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this concerns the release of results to HSE staff, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy on this matter.

Cross-Border Health Initiatives

337. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the number of patients who have availed of the cross-border initiative; the procedures they underwent; if they have been reimbursed; the overall cost of each procedure in 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10750/19]

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

Ministerial Hospital Visits

338. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health if he will confirm a date to visit Kerry University Hospital as agreed (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10756/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In December, I was pleased to meet with Deputies from Kerry to discuss University Hospital Kerry (UHK) and other healthcare services in the area. At the meeting, I accepted an invitation to again visit the hospital and some local health projects. My office is currently finalising my upcoming schedule and will provide notice before my visit.

Hospital Accommodation Provision

339. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health the status of the reopening of a ward at a hospital (details supplied); the recruitment that has taken place to date in regard to same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10758/19]

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

Increasing capacity is therefore a priority for the Government. Over the past 18 months, an additional 241 beds have been opened.

A Capacity Programme for 2019 has been agreed, which provides for the following increases to capacity, as set out in the National Service Plan 2019:

- 78 additional beds are planned for 2019, including the 40-bed modular build in South Tipperary General Hospital, the 30-bed ward in Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital Drogheda, 4 HDU beds in Cork University Hospital and 4 HDU beds in the Mater Hospital;

- 75 acute beds and 70 community beds to come on stream in 2019 as part of the Winter Plan 2018/19, of which 43 acute beds have already opened. This includes 5 beds in Letterkenny

University Hospital which are due to open in Q1 of 2019;

- preparation of 202 beds, of which 16 are critical care, by quarter 4 2019 with a view to bringing this extra capacity into operation in the first quarter of 2020, including additional beds in Letterkenny University Hospital.

In relation to the Deputy's query on the status of recruitment of staff and other operational matters, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to reply to the Deputy directly.

Home Care Packages

340. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) who was granted four additional hours of homecare assistance per week in October 2018 is still waiting for the assistance; when they will receive same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10763/19]

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.

Traveller Community

341. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 437 of 29 January 2019, the status of the work undertaken in recommendation 73 of the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy; if this action incorporates specific measures to address Traveller suicide; and if he will report on the issue [10765/19]

342. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 437 of 29 January 2019, when a detailed action plan based on the findings of the All Ireland Traveller Health Study will be finalised; when it will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10766/19]

344. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health if a planning advisory body for Traveller health to deliver the national Traveller health action plan will be established; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10768/19]

345. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the reason the national Traveller health advisory committee has not been convened since 2012. [10769/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 341, 342, 344 and 345 together.

Health and well-being are not evenly distributed across society. There are socially excluded groups who experience extreme health inequalities. Such groups include Travellers, homeless people, refugees and asylum seekers and people with addiction issues. Inequalities in health

are reflected in the mortality and morbidity rates of the population. Rates of chronic diseases are another indicator of health inequalities. A social gradient is also apparent in mental health.

The Department has undertaken significant measures across the health service to address the health needs of Travellers, including funding for the All Ireland Traveller Health Study. There is ongoing and extensive engagement with Traveller organisations on their health needs.

The Department and the HSE participate in various official structures which monitor the provision of healthcare services for Travellers. These include the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy Steering Committee and the Traveller Health Advisory Forum. The Department's Healthy Ireland Network also has Traveller representatives.

The National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (NTRIS) sets out over 30 actions to address the health needs of Travellers and Roma. The Department and the HSE report regularly on the implementation of these actions to the NTRIS steering group, chaired by Minister David Stanton. One of the NTRIS actions is for the HSE to develop and implement a detailed action plan to continue to address the specific health needs of Travellers, using a social determinants approach.

I am fully committed to improving the health outcomes for Travellers and I look forward to receiving from the HSE its Traveller health action plan in due course.

Traveller Community

343. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 581, 582 and 584 of 15 January 2019, the status of the work of the oversight group working on the refresh of the A Vision for Change national mental health policy; the specific terms of reference for the group that place a particular emphasis on the Traveller community; when the group will report; if the report will be published; and if he will report on the issue. [10767/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The Oversight Group are currently working on finalising the refreshed National Mental Health Policy 'Vision for Change' and it is expected that the final draft report will be complete before the end of quarter 1,2019.

The draft report will then need to be costed and agreed with key departments who have responsibility for implementing recommendations. It is expected that the final document will be published in quarter 2,2019.

The Terms of reference for the Oversight group follow. The refreshed policy is aligned SlàinteCare priorities and takes a whole of population approach to accessing mental health services and seeks to meet the mental health needs of all individuals

'1(g) proposing policy changes that will benefit all those engaging with mental health services. A particular emphasis on social inclusion and the needs of vulnerable groups should be incorporated with a focus on reducing stigma and discrimination'.

Therefore the Oversight Group proposes that policy changes will benefit all those engaging with mental health services. The Terms of Reference for the Group place a particular emphasis on social inclusion and the needs of vulnerable groups, including the Traveller community, which will be incorporated into the final report with a focus on reducing stigma and discrimination. As a result, the report will not include a 'traveller specific' section.

I expect to table the final report for discussion in Dáil Éireann when the policy is finalised.

Terms of Reference for Oversight Group

A Vision for Change - Part II

1. Review and update the existing mental health policy *A Vision for Change* (2006) having regard to the Expert Evidence Review of international best practice, progress on current service developments in Ireland and the requirement of the Public Spending Code, with a particular focus on:

- (a) primary prevention, early intervention and positive mental health, including having regard to the work underway with the Pathfinder Project and the Youth Mental Health Taskforce;
- (b) integration of care and delivery systems between primary and secondary services taking account of the move to appropriate 24/7 service supports;
- (c) development of E mental health responses;
- (d) workforce planning, forecasting and skill-mix including mechanisms to attract and retain staff within existing national HR policy;
- (e) emerging needs of vulnerable groups, people with co-morbidities and specialist needs informed by the relevant clinical programmes; and
- (f) development of research, data and evaluation capability to ensure achievement of best mental health outcomes can be demonstrated with the resources available.
- (g) proposing policy changes that will benefit all those engaging with mental health services. A particular emphasis on social inclusion and the needs of vulnerable groups should be incorporated with a focus on reducing stigma and discrimination.

2. Identify and consult on cross-sectoral and cross-societal responsibilities in the context of (1) above.

3. Align as far as possible the refreshed policy with existing national policies and implementation arrangements that have been developed since the publication of *A Vision for Change* (2006).

4. Conduct a consultative process with key stakeholders to inform proposals.

5. Produce, for submission to the Department of Health, an updated draft policy framework which sets out current and future service priorities within a time-bound implementation plan, for consideration by Government as a successor policy to *A Vision for Change* (2006).

In accordance with the Public Spending Code, all Irish public bodies are obliged to treat public funds with care, and to ensure that the best possible value-for-money is obtained whenever public money is being spent or invested. The Public Spending Code imposes obligations, at all stages of the project/programme life-cycle, with the stages of the project defined as follows:

- Appraisal: assessing the case for a policy intervention

- Planning/Design: a positive appraisal should lead on to a considered approach to designing how the project/programme will be implemented

- Implementation: careful management and oversight is required for both capital and current expenditure. Ongoing evaluation should also be a feature of current programmes

- Post-Project or Post-Implementation Review: checking for delivery of project objectives, and gaining experience for future projects.

Questions No. 344 and 345 answered with Question No. 341.

Traveller Community

346. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 415 of 26 February 2019, the way in which the annual spend by the HSE for targeted measures to improve the health of the Traveller community is allocated, in tabular form; and the portion of the funding allocated annually specifically to deliver on suicide prevention services and supports. [10770/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Animal Welfare

347. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Health the number of animals and the species that will be used in a large animal test facility (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10771/19]

348. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Health the foreseen testing purposes for the use of animals in a large animal test facility (details supplied) other than those already outlined; the definition of new animal model systems; if the development of new lines of genetically-modified animals for research purposes is foreseen; if the creation of genetically-modified animals that are able to carry specific human diseases is foreseen; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10772/19]

349. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Health if his attention or that of the HSE have been drawn to and whether it is considering the human relevant humane alternative approaches to pharmaceutical and other testing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10773/19]

350. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Health the success rates of animal experimentation and testing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10774/19]

351. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Health if he has taken into consideration his responsibility to promote the development and uptake of alternatives to the use of animals under article 47 of Directive 2010/63/EU for the protection of animals used for scientific purposes. [10775/19]

352. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Health if the animals in a test facility (details supplied) will be sold on to other facilities here or abroad; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10776/19]

353. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Health the locations in which medical device preclinical trials are being carried out here in view of the comment in a tender (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10777/19]

354. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Health the number of medical devices tested on animals here each year; the percentage of tests legally required by the EU; the number of tests that lead on to human clinical trials; the success rates of the tests; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10778/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 347 to 354, inclusive, together.

The Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) is the competent authority in Ireland responsible for the implementation of EU legislation for the protection of animals used for scientific purposes. The Deputy's questions have been referred to the HPRA for a detailed response, and I have asked my officials to respond directly to the Deputy once that response is received in the Department.

Tender Process

355. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Health the expected cost of a project (details supplied); the expected cost of the feasibility report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10779/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this question refers to a request for tender issued by the HSE, it has been referred to the agency for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Appointments Status

356. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) can expect to receive a date for surgery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10788/19]

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

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

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

Mental Health Services Data

357. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 706 of 7 September 2018, the number of adult services without seven over seven mental health supports; the locations involved; the number of staff recruited to provide seven over seven mental health supports since 17 May 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10789/19]

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.

Health Services Funding

358. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health his views on the reduced funding to Cork Kerry Community Healthcare from €2.2 million in 2018 to €1.6 million in 2019 for the management of emergency cases in the region; his further views on the fact that Cork Kerry Community Healthcare received no funding for the development of services in 2018 taking into account the increase in service needs by service users and that the known level of need exceeds the funding available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10798/19]

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.

Personal Injury Claims

359. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health the way in which a person (details supplied) can pursue compensation and justice from his Department in relation to complications regarding an operation post-childbirth in 1967; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10801/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The State Claims Agency has a statutory remit to manage personal injury claims, including claims in respect of clinical negligence, on behalf of Delegated State Authorities, DSAs, including the Health Service Executive.

The Clinical Indemnity Scheme, CIS, is the main scheme under which the State Claims Agency (SCA) manages all clinical negligence claims taken against healthcare enterprises, hospitals and clinical, nursing and allied healthcare practitioners covered by the scheme. Where an individual wishes to make a claim for clinical malpractice or negligence, they or their solicitor should submit a letter of claim to the State Claims Agency.

Medical Records

360. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Health the reason a hospital is refusing

to supply medical records to a person (details supplied) that requested them over 14 months ago; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10810/19]

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.

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

General Practitioner Services

361. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the base fees and payments from public funds made to persons (details supplied). [10811/19]

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.

Hospital Services

362. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health when services will be rolled out at a hospital (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10817/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The establishment of hospital groups has enabled a better configuration of hospital services with benefits relating to safety, quality, access, cost and sustainable medical staffing. The structure ensures that hospitals working together in a group will be able to support each other, providing a stronger role for smaller hospitals in delivering less complex care, and ensuring that those who require emergency or complex planned care are managed safely in larger hospitals.

The Smaller Hospitals Framework focuses in particular on the future role of smaller hospitals and outlines the wide range of services that can be provided within these smaller hospitals.

I am committed to securing and further developing the role of our smaller hospitals, including Model 2 hospitals such as Monaghan Hospital, with the expansion of services delivered in these hospitals, especially in services such as day surgery; ambulatory care; medical services and diagnostics.

The planning and management of future health expenditure is considered as part of the annual estimates and budgetary process which seeks to balance available funding across all service areas to achieve the best possible outcomes for the greatest number of service users and prioritise areas of greatest need.

In response to the particular query raised, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to you as soon as possible outlining any specific investment plans at Monaghan Hospital.

Hospital Appointments Status

363. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health the options available to the parents

of a child (details supplied) with dyspraxia that has been referred for physiotherapy on two occasions only but none since Christmas 2018.## [10818/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I understand that the Deputy will provide additional necessary information to enable me to respond to this question.

Hospital Appointments Status

364. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment will be scheduled for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10824/19]

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

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

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

Hospitals Data

366. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of spinal fusion surgeries that have been carried out in each year since 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10826/19]

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

Health Screening Programmes

367. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health his plans to reinstate a national scoliosis screening programme similar to that which existed prior to 2011 in order to allow for the effective detection, monitoring and treatment of scoliosis patients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10827/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): There are well established international criteria to be met before a national population- based screening programme can be recommended.

The Office of the Chief Medical Officer has informed me that the current position in the NHS arising from an evidence review conducted by the UK National Screening Committee and that is that a population screening programme for adolescent idiopathic scoliosis is not recom-

mended.

Arising from a recommendation from the Scally Report (2018) a National Screening Committee (NSC) will be established and become operational in Ireland during the course of 2019. The NSC will be responsible for advising the Minister and Department of Health on all new proposals for screening. However, currently there is insufficient evidence to support the introduction of population screening for adolescent idiopathic scoliosis in Ireland at this time.

Legislative Measures

368. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the status of the work to draft new legislation which would replace the Dentists Act 1985; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10829/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My Department is developing new legislation to replace the Dentists Act 1985. While other competing legislative priorities have limited the amount of time officials have been able to spend working on the dental Bill, drafting of the Scheme of the Bill has begun.

The Regulated Professions (Health and Social Care) (Amendment) Bill, which is a large and complex Bill containing 169 sections, was published in February. The primary purpose of this Bill is to amend all health profession regulatory Acts, including the Dentists Act, as a consequence of the transposition of the Modernised Professional Qualifications Directive (2013/55/EU), and to address a number of other issues.

It is expected that work on the dental Bill will gain momentum once the Regulated Professions (Health and Social Care) (Amendment) Bill has completed its passage through both Houses of the Oireachtas, and the Bill has been enacted.

Hospital Services

369. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if hospitals are to be reimbursed for the payment of transitional care or convalescent respite within the nursing home setting in view of the perceived delay in the fair deal process in being granted a long-term bed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10831/19]

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.

Cross-Border Health Services Provision

370. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an application for a cross-border scheme refund by a person (details supplied) will be expedited. [10833/19]

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

Medicinal Products Availability

371. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Health when he expects PrEP to be made available here; the actions that must be completed to allow it to be made available here; the action he plans to take to tackle the number of persons contracting HIV; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10841/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): I am pleased to advise the Deputy that at the request of the Department of Health and the HSE, the Health Information Quality Authority (HIQA) is carrying out a Health Technology Assessment (HTA) of introducing a PrEP programme in Ireland. The aim of the HTA is to establish the clinical and cost effectiveness of providing a PrEP programme in Ireland with a commitment to rolling out a PrEP programme in 2019. The current timeline available is that a final HTA will be sent for approval by the HIQA Board at its May meeting and that the Department of Health will shortly thereafter receive advice formally from HIQA.

The HSE Health Protection Surveillance Centre advises that the weekly HIV notification reports for 2018 are provisional. I remain concerned about these provisional figures that show a rise in HIV infection.

The HIV Annual Report for 2017 from the Centre was published before Christmas. It is the latest annual trend data for HIV in Ireland. The report referred to 492 new diagnoses of HIV in Ireland in 2017, a rate of 10.3 per 100,000 population, representing a slight (2%) decrease between 2016 and 2017.

When those with a previous HIV diagnosis abroad were excluded, the number of new diagnoses decreased by 4% in 2017 compared to 2016.

The HIV Annual Report for 2017 referred to 223,609 HIV tests carried out in 13 laboratories in Ireland, giving a testing rate of 47.0 per 1,000 population. This compares to 40.5 per 1,000 in 2016 with data being provided by an extra laboratory in 2017.

HIV testing is available in Ireland through a variety of services, such as opt-out antenatal and sexual health services, emergency departments, NGO's, drug and homeless services and primary care.

Over the past 2 years, community HIV testing is expanding, in order to reach those most at risk of HIV and identify those living with undiagnosed HIV. The KnowNow community HIV testing model has expanded since the pilot in 2016, and organisations in Dublin, Cork, Limerick and Galway have been funded to provide community HIV testing to populations at higher risk for HIV, such as Men who have Sex with Men (MSM) and migrants.

The HSE Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme have a multi-faceted communications approach in response to the rise in HIV notifications. This includes the development and implementation of national campaigns such as Respectprotect on Twitter for young audiences 18-30 years and the Man2Man (.ie) website for MSM.

Finally, the website sexualwellbeing (.ie) was launched in April 2018. This website aims to be the trusted source of information on sexual health and wellbeing in Ireland. The website speaks to all people living in Ireland, regardless of their sexual orientation or age/stage of adult life.

Question No. 372 answered with Question No. 259.

373. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if a review (details supplied) has taken place; the plans of the HSE to publish the review; if so, when same will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10861/19]

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.

Healthcare Policy

374. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the role of his Department in the implementation of Sláintecare. [9460/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I obtained Government approval in July for the Sláintecare Implementation Strategy to deliver the vision outlined for our health system in the Sláintecare Report produced by the Future Healthcare Committee.

The Implementation Strategy recognises that strong leadership and clear governance will be essential to success and it clearly sets out the implementation and governance structures for Sláintecare. The Minister for Health is accountable to the Oireachtas for implementation and will report regularly on progress. The Cabinet Committee on Health, chaired by the Taoiseach will provide overall strategic direction and will oversee implementation, ensuring leadership at the highest level.

The Sláintecare Programme Implementation Office was established in the Department of Health, and drives the implementation of the Strategy. The office is led by an Executive Director with vast experience of large scale change and is resourced with a team with the appropriate skill mix to deliver the reform programme. The Office is establishing the programme of reform as approved by Government and putting in place the governance arrangements, processes, structures and resources to implement it.

Cross-Border Health Services Provision

375. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an application for inclusion on the cross-border scheme by a person (details supplied) will be expedited. [10884/19]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

376. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment will be scheduled for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10900/19]

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

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing sched-

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

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

Home Care Packages Provision

377. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health the status of a homecare package application by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10905/19]

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.

Food Wise 2025 Strategy

378. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the way in which he plans to place climate mitigation at the centre of the successor strategy to Food Wise 2025; his views on the main changes and priorities required in the next strategy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10701/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Food Wise 2025 is a ten-year strategy agreed by a range of stakeholders, both public and private, and adopted by the Government as an overarching policy for the Irish agri-food sector. It underlines the agri-food sector's unique and special position within the Irish economy and illustrates the potential for further development.

It is the latest in series of strategies that are renewed every five years and preparations for a new strategy to 2030 are underway. Its development will involve: an analysis of a range of cross-cutting themes and the various sub-sectors of the agri-food industry; a formal public consultation; and the establishment of a committee to develop the strategy.

Without pre-empting the work of the new committee and the eventual content of the 2030 strategy, it is clear that the cross-cutting themes contained in Food Wise (environmental sustainability, market development, competitiveness, innovation, and human capital) will continue to be highly relevant. It is likely that environmental sustainability, and in particular the contribution that agriculture can make to climate action, will need significant consideration and prominence.

In this regard, my Department is currently developing an environmental sustainability roadmap for the agri-food sector to ensure that the future development of agriculture and the land-use sector, including forestry, will be built upon and contribute fairly to Ireland's climate targets. This roadmap will be published later this year and will form a key element of the 2030 strategy. In parallel, my Department is also working on the development of Ireland's CAP Strategic Plan, which in line with the EU Commission's proposals, will recognise that greater environmental and climate ambition is required.

Forestry Sector

379. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if felling licences have been issued to carry out recent tree felling nationally in both urban and rural areas. [10275/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I am aware of very recent media attention given to this matter and I'm glad to have the opportunity to clarify this issue. The Forestry Act 2014 is quite clear on the requirements to obtain a tree felling licence, prior to commencing certain tree felling operations. This is regardless of whether a tree or trees are on public or private property.

There are a number of exemptions provided for in Section 19 of the Act that mean, in specific circumstances, a tree felling licence is not required. For example, if a tree is located outside of a forest area and within an urban area (as defined by the Forestry Act 2014) then a tree felling licence is not required. Also, if the felling of a tree or trees is being carried out by a public authority in the course of their statutory functions, then a tree felling licence is not required.

There are also exemptions from the requirement to obtain a tree felling licence in rural areas. For example the removal of a tree within 10 metres of a public road and which, in the opinion of the owner (being an opinion formed on reasonable grounds), is dangerous to persons using the public road on account of its age or condition does not require a felling licence.

It is worth noting that it is the responsibility of the landowner or the person felling the tree to ensure that they are acting within the law. None of the exemptions under Section 19 of the Forestry Act 2014 serve to remove any restriction on the felling or removal of trees under (a) the Planning and Development Acts 2000 to 2013, (b) the Wildlife Acts 1976 to 2000, and in particular section 40 of the Wildlife Act 1976, or (c) any other enactment.

Tree felling that is carried out by public authorities is a matter for the attention of that authority and outside the remit of my Department. Hedges or overhanging trees between neighbouring houses is a civil matter between the house holders concerned.

At all times, I would advise any land owner, regardless of their location to satisfy themselves of the need to obtain a felling licence and where they are unsure, to seek advice from the Felling Section of Forestry Division, within my Department. I would like to remind land owners that it is a criminal offence to fell trees without a valid tree felling licence, that are not exempted from the requirement and serious financial penalties can result on conviction.

Decisions on forestry licence applications, including tree felling licences, are published three times weekly on my Department's website. Furthermore, a site notice must be erected at the location where tree felling will take place, before operations commence.

Brexit Issues

380. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he has had discussions with the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation regarding submitting a formal request to the EU Commission to increase state aid thresholds as set out in Regulation EU No. 1407/2013 in order to support agri-food enterprises and exporters in the event of a hard no-deal Brexit; if a formal request to adapt Regulation EU No. 1407/2013 will be submitted before 29 March 2019; and if not, the reason therefor. [10248/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I should point

out that the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation is the lead Department in relation to the development of Ireland's response to supporting enterprises impacted by Brexit in line with State Aid rules. As regards proposals to temporarily adapt the threshold ceilings under EU Regulation 1407/2013, the general de minimis regulation, this falls within the remit of the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation.

I and my officials have been working very hard for quite some time to sensitise other Member States and the European Commission to the potentially very severe impacts of Brexit on the Irish agri-food and fisheries sectors, and to the likelihood of specific supports being required in order to deal with these impacts. The institutions of the European Union are very well aware of the likelihood of a significant impact of a disorderly Brexit on Ireland's economy because this has been part of the discussion from the beginning, and indeed this is explicitly recognised in the Commission's own communication on contingency planning.

Most recently, I held a bilateral meeting with Commissioner Hogan at the end of January to discuss the potential impact of a disorderly Brexit on the Irish agri-food and fisheries sectors. We discussed the unique exposure of these sectors to the threat of a disorderly Brexit, and the challenges that it could present. I stressed the need to be ready to deploy a range of measures to mitigate the potential impacts on farmers and processors, including through traditional market supports and exceptional aid under the CAP's Single Common Market Organisation regulation, as well as increased flexibility under State Aid regulations, which has already been the subject of discussions with the Commission. Commissioner Hogan reiterated the EU's readiness to respond and support Ireland, and we will remain in contact on these issues as the situation evolves.

As regards state aid limits, my Department operates the State aid rules and regulations governing the agriculture sector, where the state aid limits under the agriculture de minimis regulation are currently set at €15,000 per undertaking over a rolling three year period.

I welcome the announcement by the European Commission, with effect from 14 of March 2019, that the maximum threshold limits under the agriculture de minimis regulation will increase from €15,000 up to €25,000. This will allow for greater flexibility and efficiency, notably in times of crisis and situations demanding a swift response by the public authorities.

I have said that the State will not be found wanting when it comes to supporting the Irish agri-food sector and farmers to deal with the impact of Brexit. The increase in the agriculture de minimis limits is a very important first step in this regard.

Also, my Department, working in close co-operation with the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation and Enterprise Ireland, has received approval from the EU Commission for an Irish state aid application, allowing an Irish company to receive state aid funding for the diversification of its activities. The potential for this approval to act as a template for assistance for agri-food enterprises and exporter within state aid rules and regulations is currently being examined.

State Aid

381. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the recent changes at EU level regarding the increase in de minimis aid to primary producers; and if the new threshold of €25,000 can be fully drawn down in year one of a three year period for approved participants in schemes that are applicable. [10249/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Under the

recent revised rules on state aid in the agriculture sector (the so-called de minimis aid), aid of up to €20,000 can be paid on a rolling three year basis i.e. the current fiscal year and the two previous fiscal years. Once a beneficiary has reached this limit they may not receive any further aid in excess of this limit under de minimis rules within the rolling time period.

In order to avoid any potential distortion of competition, each EU country has a maximum national amount which they cannot exceed. Each national ceiling will be set at 1.25% of the country's annual agricultural output over the same three-year period (up from 1% in the current rules). This is an increase in the national ceiling of 25%.

If a country does not spend more than 50% of its total national aid envelope on one particular agricultural sector, it may increase even further the de minimis aid per farm to €25,000, and the national maximum to 1.5% of the annual output. This represents a 66% increase in the ceiling per farmer and a 50% increase in the national ceiling.

Basic Payment Scheme Data

382. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of eligible and ineligible farmers, respectively, enrolled in the basic payments scheme; the number of eligible farmers that have received a 2018 BPS payment by ranges (details supplied), in tabular form; the number that have not received the payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10250/19]

383. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the value of expenditure for persons paid under the 2018 basic payment scheme including greening by payment range (details supplied) by the breakdown format provided in Parliamentary Question No. 465 of 6 February 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10251/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 382 and 383 together.

The details requested by the Deputy are as set out in the following table.

RANGE	Applications	Eligible Applications	Applications Paid	Amount Paid
Between €0 and €4,999.99	51,026	51,026	51,026	€139,365,049.00
Between €5,000 and €9,999.99	33,694	33,694	33,694	€240,367,411.00
Between €10,000 and €19,999.99	24,872	24,872	24,872	€348,327,517.00
Between €20,000 and €29,999.99	7,890	7,890	7,890	€190,524,565.00
Between €30,000 and €39,999.99	2,752	2,752	2,752	€94,355,717.20

RANGE	Applications	Eligible Applications	Applications Paid	Amount Paid
Between €40,000 and €49,999.99	1,216	1,216	1,216	€53,858,065.50
Between €50,000 and €59,999.99	588	588	588	€31,999,236.50
Between €60,000 and €69,999.99	321	321	321	€20,710,431.90
Between €70,000 and €79,999.99	186	186	186	€13,893,405.70
Between €80,000 and €89,999.99	139	139	139	€11,740,853.60
Between €90,000 and €99,999.99	75	75	75	€7,114,630.15
Between €100,000 and €109,999.99	40	40	40	€4,182,642.37
Between €110,000 and €119,999.99	35	35	35	€4,004,425.64
Between €120,000 and €129,999.99	23	23	23	€2,883,717.45
Between €130,000 and €139,999.99	16	16	16	€2,163,915.45
Between €140,000 and €149,999.99	12	12	12	€1,749,432.87
Over €150,000	30	30	30	€5,404,423.57
NOT PAID	7,375*	343**	0	
TOTAL	130,290	123,258	122,915	€1,172,645,439.90

* Number of applications not currently eligible.

** Number of eligible applications not yet paid. These applications are currently eligible in that they have an allocation of entitlements under the BPS. However, in these cases there is also another outstanding query, which in many cases require further information from the applicant.

Brexit Preparations

384. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of SPS and fisheries control officials that will be operational on 30 March 2019

out of the planned recruitment of 116 staff for SPS and fisheries controls as agreed on 18 September 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10280/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department is participating very actively in the Whole-of-Government approach to preparedness and contingency planning for Brexit. The Government has already sanctioned in the region of €4m for the commencement of a phased process for the recruitment of additional staff across a range of skill sets to carry out increased volumes of import controls and export certification arising from Brexit.

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.

In general, regarding staffing requirements, my Department will use a combination of options including recruitment, redeployment and temporary flexible solutions where appropriate and as necessary. My Department continues to work with our recruitment partners, the Public Appointments Service to engage Veterinary Inspectors, Portal Inspectors, Plant Health Inspectors and Administrative support staff. Mechanisms to temporarily redeploy experienced people within my Department have also been initiated and the engagement of contracted temporary service arrangements is also being progressed.

The final staffing numbers to be engaged in response to Brexit contingencies will depend on the nature of Brexit and the trading relationship with the UK that ensues. Should a hard Brexit be confirmed as the probable contingency to be addressed, my Department will, through the mechanisms I have outlined, have the scope to deploy appropriate levels of Phytosanitary and fishery control officials as may be required. Overall, I remain confident that both the State, and my Department, will be in a position to deliver the services required in terms of both imports and exports at the appropriate time, be that at the end of March or any other point in the future.

The deployment options being used by the Department are intended to be as flexible as possible, taking the inherent unpredictability of the situation and the need to be prepared for multiple contingencies into account.

I expect my Department to have in the region of 230 staff available for redeployment as part of its Brexit Response. This number will comprise new recruits, redeployed staff and people on temporary contracts.

Dublin Port will be staffed on a 24/7 basis. Rosslare ports will operate on the basis of two shifts per day, based on ferry activity.

All of these resource levels will be kept under review and will be adjusted in light of developments up to and post-29 March 2019.

Brexit Preparations

385. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of full and part-time staff veterinary officers and inspectors, respectively, employed at the end of December 2018 by Civil Service grade and division; and the number of veterinary staff that will be operational on 30 March 2019, in tabular form. [10281/19]

386. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of portal inspectors, plant health inspectors and administrative support staff

employed at the end of December 2018 by Civil Service grade and division; and the number of such staff that will be operational on 30 March 2019, in tabular form. [10282/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 385 and 386 together.

There are over 300 veterinary officers in my Department, the vast majority of which are full time officials. Veterinary staff work in a variety of roles within my Department including food safety, animal health and welfare, certification of exports and provision of laboratory services.

The following table disaggregates this figure on a grade-by-grade basis.

Grade	Full Time	Part Time
Chief Veterinary Officer	1	-
Deputy Chief Veterinary Officer	1	-
Research Officer	18	2
Senior Research Officer	13	-
Senior Superintending Veterinary Inspector	9	-
Superintending Senior Research Officer	4	-
Superintending Veterinary Inspector	37	-
Veterinary Inspector	199	10
Wholetime Temporary Veterinary Inspector	9	-
Grand Total	291	12

My Department will have in the region of 230 staff available for deployment as part of its Brexit Response in such a hard Brexit context. This number will comprise new recruits, redeployed staff and people on temporary contracts.

All of the aforementioned resource levels will be kept under review and will be adjusted in light of developments up to and post-29 March 2019.

Overall, I remain confident that both the State, and my Department, will be in a position to deliver the services required in terms of both imports and exports at the appropriate time, be that at the end of March or any other point in the future.

Bord Bia Funding

387. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the amount of funding allocated in 2018 and 2019 to the marketing intensification programme of An Bord Bia. [10283/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): A total grant sum is allocated annually to Bord Bia by my Department and voted on by the Oireachtas in conjunction with the estimates process. In the context of Budget 2019, I was pleased to announce the allocation of a further €5.3million to Bord Bia for 2019, bringing its total grant in aid to €46.6 million for 2019, a 40% increase in funding for Bord Bia since 2016.

The detailed allocation of non-pay (operational funds) by Bord Bia contained within its voted grant-in-aid is an operational matter for Bord Bia.

However, Bord Bia's Marketing Intensification Programme (MIP) was introduced as a once-off measure of limited duration (two years), with the total paid over the course of the two programmes in 2016 and 2017 amounting to €1,084,739. The programme provide targeted supports to companies with a high dependency on the UK market in 2016 when, in particular, currency markets were very volatile.

Funding for this programme was provided by my Department, in conjunction with a larger package of additional dedicated Brexit funding I granted to Bord Bia in 2016 and 2017, consequent on the Brexit vote in June 2016.

Additional supports by Bord Bia to client companies exporting to the UK, to address the challenges of Brexit, are now encompassed in the market prioritisation strategy and strategic market promotion and supports, in the UK, other EU and international markets. Funding has been also made available for a two year MSc in Insight and Innovation in NUI Maynooth which was recently launched by Bord Bia.

Bord Bia Data

388. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the location and number of full-time and part-time staff employed in each international An Bord Bia office; and the cost of offices and staffing by each office in each of the years 2016 to 2018, in tabular form. [10284/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): As this is an operational matter for An Bord Bia, I have asked them to respond directly to the Deputy with the information requested.

Brexit Preparations

389. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of companies that have completed the Brexit barometer to date since it was launched by company turnover in tabular form. [10285/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): There have been two publications of Bord Bia's Brexit Barometer, the first in March 2017 and the second one in June 2018.

As completion of the Brexit Barometer is an operational matter for Bord Bia, my Department has asked Bord Bia to contact the Deputy directly with the relevant information.

Commonage Management Plans

390. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of commonages in County Donegal that have not received agricultural payments to date; the details of these commonages; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10311/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The submission of a Commonage Management Plan or a Commonage Farm Plan is a requirement for GLAS participants with a commonage action. 4,286 farmers in Co. Donegal are active participants in GLAS of which 4,003 have received their 2018 advance payment. Out of the remaining 283 applications, 43 have commonage.

There are 834 Donegal commonages associated with the GLAS action, of which 829 plans have been fully submitted. Four commonage plans are under review by the Commonage Implementation Committee at the request of the GLAS Commonage Advisor while there is also a case where the Department has been in direct contact with both the shareholder and advisor as a plan has not yet been finalised.

Renewable Energy Incentives

391. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if consultations have been held with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment on the introduction of grant support for anaerobic digesters; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10320/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Indigenous renewable energy plays a vital role in our domestic fuel mix and will become even more important in the context of reducing our reliance on imported fuels and in meeting our challenging renewable energy targets for 2020 and 2030.

My Department is committed to working closely with the Department for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, which is the lead Department in this area, to ensure that the supply of domestic fuels available in the forest and agriculture sectors are mobilised to support energy generation from a range of bioenergy technologies including Anaerobic Digestion.

The Anaerobic Digestion (AD) industry in Ireland is at a nascent stage of development compared to more established industry in many European countries. Potential for the growth of the AD sector in Ireland is strong but it should be seen as a long term development. There are currently ten anaerobic digesters producing biogas in operation nationally that are approved and are under licence by my department.

My Department continues to support research, development and demonstration in this particular area. As recently as October 2018, two projects were approved for funding from the European Innovation Partnerships Initiative (EIP), under the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020. The Biorefinery Glas (small scale farmer-led green biorefineries) and Irish Bioenergy Association (IrBEA) (small biogas demonstration programme) have both been awarded funding of over €900,000 each.

Hen Harriers Threat Response Plan

392. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when an application for entry into the hen harrier scheme by a person (details supplied) will be processed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10331/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Hen Harrier scheme is operationally independent of my Department and is run by the Hen Harrier Project team. However I have passed on the Deputy's query to the Project Team and have asked

them to respond directly to him on this issue.

Beef Data and Genomics Programme

393. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) will receive payment under the beef data and genomics programme; the reason for the delay in issuing same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10334/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Beef Data and Genomics Programme provides for six years of payments to farmers for completion of actions which deliver accelerated genetic improvement in the Irish national herd and improvement of its environmental sustainability.

The application from the person named was the subject of a recent inspection which has now been finalised. Payment has been processed and it will appear in his bank account shortly.

Brexit Supports

394. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when the low-cost loan scheme will open; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10391/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The €300 million Brexit Loan Scheme developed in cooperation with the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (DBEI) and the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI), provides working capital support to enable eligible Irish businesses to implement the 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. To date it has provided in excess of €17m in finance to over 80 SMEs, including those operating in the food sector. Further information may be found via the following link:

<https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/agri-foodindustry/agri-foodandtheeconomy/agri-foodbusiness/brexitloanscheme/>

The Future Growth Loan Scheme has been developed by my Department and DBEI in partnership with the Department of Finance, the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) and the European Investment Fund (EIF). It will be delivered through participating finance providers and make up to €300 million of investment loans available to eligible Irish businesses, including farmers and the agri-food & seafood sectors.

This is a long-awaited source of finance for young and new entrant farmers, especially the cohort who do not have high levels of security. It will also serve smaller-scale farmers, who often do not have the leverage to negotiate for more favourable terms with their banking institution.

The loans will be competitively priced, will be for terms of 8-10 years and will support strategic long-term investment in a post-Brexit environment. There is a minimum loan amount of €100,000 for SMEs or €50,000 for primary agriculture. The maximum loan amount is €3,000,000 and loans of under €500,000 will be made on an unsecured basis.

There will be €50 million to €60 million available initially for farmers, within an overall agri-food package of €120 million. Should demand exceed these levels, this can be reviewed.

The Scheme features a two-stage application process whereby initial application is made through the SBCI website. Successful applicants are issued an eligibility reference number which can then be used in an application to one of the participating finance providers. Approval of loans is subject to the finance providers' own credit policies and procedures. Further information including a FAQ document may be accessed on the DAFM website via the following link: <https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/agri-foodindustry/agri-foodandtheeconomy/agri-foodbusiness/futuregrowthloanscheme/>

SBCI recently issued an open call inviting banks and other lenders to become lending partners and this closed on 11 February. SBCI advise that a period of due diligence, which will include the EIF, is now under way. I have urged SBCI to operationalise the Scheme as soon as possible. The Scheme will run for three years from its launch date and further announcements in this regard will be made shortly.

Customs and Excise Controls

395. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding his submission to the European Commission seeking the designation of Rosslare Europort as a border inspection post; when a response will be received from the EU in relation to the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10474/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The dossier requesting the approval of facilities located around Rosslare Port as a border inspection post was sent to the European Commission by my Department on the 14th of February.

The Commission is now reviewing the submission with a view to assessing if it is acceptable with regards to regulations and legislation governing the approval of border inspection posts and have already been in contact with my officials seeking further clarification on the proposals.

State Aid

396. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the lobbying that was undertaken by him and-or other Ministers regarding recent changes by the European Commission to de minimis and state aid rules that will allow higher State payments to farmers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10527/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I and my officials have been working very hard for quite some time to sensitise other Member States and the European Commission to the potentially very severe impacts of Brexit on the Irish agri-food and fisheries sectors, and to the likelihood of specific supports being required in order to deal with these impacts. The institutions of the European Union are very well aware of the likelihood of a significant impact of a disorderly Brexit on Ireland's economy because this has been part of the discussion from the beginning, and indeed this is explicitly recognised in the Commission's own communication on contingency planning.

Most recently, I held a bilateral meeting with Commissioner Hogan at the end of January to discuss the potential impact of a disorderly Brexit on the Irish agri-food and fisheries sectors. We discussed the unique exposure of these sectors to the threat of a disorderly Brexit, and the challenges that it could present. I stressed the need to be ready to deploy a range of measures to mitigate the potential impacts on farmers and processors, including through traditional market supports and exceptional aid under the CAP's Single Common Market Organisation regulation,

as well as increased flexibility under State Aid regulations, which has already been the subject of discussions with the Commission. Commissioner Hogan reiterated the EU's readiness to respond and support Ireland, and we will remain in contact on these issues as the situation evolves.

As regards state aid limits, my Department operates the State aid rules and regulations governing the agriculture sector, where the state aid limits under the agriculture de minimis regulation are currently set at €15,000 per undertaking over a rolling three year period.

In 2017, the European Commission commenced a review of the agriculture de minimis regulation. This review took place following calls from Member States, including Ireland, for the Commission to consider increasing the agriculture de minimis threshold limits.

As part of its review, the Commission launched an Inception Impact Assessment in 2017. It highlighted the fact that European farmers had been experiencing market difficulties across the different agricultural product sectors for the previous 3 years, which led several Member States to use agriculture de minimis aid to help farmers overcome temporary liquidity gaps. As a result, certain Member States were close to breaching their de minimis ceilings and requested an increase to those ceilings.

In 2018, the Commission consulted Member States and stakeholders to provide input by way of a Public Consultation on the revision of the de minimis rules. Those contributions were taken into account when the Commission was finalising the amendments to the Regulation. Officials from my Department contributed to this Public Consultation and also attended meetings of the Commission's Advisory Committee on State Aid during 2018 where agreement on the new threshold limits was achieved.

I have said that the State will not be found wanting when it comes to supporting the Irish agri-food sector and farmers to deal with the impact of Brexit. The increase in the agriculture de minimis limits is a very important first step, and I very much welcome the recent announcement by the Commission that the threshold will increase from €15,000 up to €25,000 from 14 March 2019. This will allow for greater flexibility and efficiency, notably in times of crisis and situations demanding a swift response by the public authorities.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Applications Data

397. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of farmers that have completed the AEOS in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10557/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The number of farmers that completed their AEOS3 contracts in 2018 is 2,138. This was the final year of the AEOS scheme.

All AEOS participants were given the option of joining the GLAS scheme should they have wished to do so. The GLAS scheme is now fully subscribed with GLAS 3 participants in their third year of participation in the five year GLAS scheme.

GLAS Applications

398. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when the GLAS will reopen for new applicants; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[10558/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Green Low-Carbon Agri-Environment Scheme (GLAS) opened in three tranches commencing in 2015. As GLAS is now fully subscribed with its aim of over 50,000 approved participants met well ahead of target and as the Rural Development Programme as a whole is on target to more than spend its entire allocation, there are no plans to re-open this scheme to new applications.

Agri-environment policy is included in the CAP reform negotiations currently under way and any future schemes will be dependent on the outcome of these negotiations.

Brexit Preparations

399. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans for designating Rathmullan pier as a designated port for third country landings; his plans for the proposed designation in a post-Brexit scenario; if his attention has been drawn to the importance of Rathmullan pier as a landing port for pelagic, whitefish and vivier crab vessels due to its northern location and proximity to fishing grounds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10586/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Under EU regulations, vessels from a non-EU country may only land fish at a limited number of ‘designated’ ports. This is to aid control and compliance and to deter illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing activity.

There are currently two Irish ports that have been designated for landings by vessels from a third country: Killybegs in Donegal and Castletownbere in Cork.

When the UK formally becomes a third country and the Common Fisheries Policy no longer applies to it, UK registered vessels will be restricted to landing fish at those two ports. The vast majority of current UK fish landings are to those ports. Consequently, at the moment there are no plans to designate additional ports.

However, if, as I very much hope will be the case, the Withdrawal Agreement is concluded, a transition period will apply where there will be no change to current practices for Irish or UK vessels for at least 2 years.

If, in the worst case scenario, no agreement is reached and there is a disorderly Brexit, then the UK will leave on the 29th of March 2019. In that scenario, UK vessels would be restricted to landing in the two designated ports only from that date.

Agriculture Scheme Eligibility

400. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a matter relating to the maximum eligible area of a farm (detail supplied) will be examined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10654/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The provisions of Article 32 (2)(b) of EU Regulation 1307/2013 refer to land which was eligible and gave a right to payment in 2008, and which has since become ineligible as a result of the implementation of the directives referenced in the detail provided with this question.

On examination of the lands in question it was found that the ineligible features were present in 2008 since which time no further ineligible features have developed. Therefore, the ineligible features in question cannot in this instance be attributed to the implementation of the relevant Directives. While payment issued in previous years, this does not infer an ongoing status of eligibility for all future years.

Taking the above into account, the Maximum Eligible Area attributed to the land in question is correct.

Aquaculture Licence Applications

401. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will address a matter regarding oyster licences (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10672/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department received an application from the Company referred to by the Deputy in December 2017 to add the cultivation of oysters to an existing bottom mussel aquaculture licence.

A wide range of scientific and technical advisers were consulted on the application as well as various Statutory Consultees. The process also included a period of public consultation.

The Statutory and Public Consultation phase in respect of this application is now concluded. Every effort is being made to expedite a decision on this application having regard to the complexities involved.

As this application is under active consideration as part of a statutory process it would not be appropriate to comment further on the matter at this time.

TAMS Eligibility

402. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason a device (details supplied) is not on the approved list for TAMS; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10754/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The list of investment items under TAMs was compiled at the commencement of the Rural Development Programme which was subsequently approved by the European Commission. The type of equipment mentioned is not included in the list of available items. Requests for the inclusion of additional investment items are subject to full evaluation and consideration but additional items can only be included in the context of the overall budgetary position which is being closely monitored.

On farm investment policy is included in the CAP negotiations currently under way and any future schemes will be dependent on the outcome of these negotiations.

Work Permits Data

403. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on recent reports by four UN rapporteurs that atypical worker permits for migrant

fishery workers were leaving those workers vulnerable to serious abuses in view of the fact that the permits tie workers to individual ships and their owners; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10848/19]

404. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the fact that the atypical worker visa scheme in the fisheries industry leaves fishery workers liable to exploitation as indicated by an organisation (details supplied), the State Department of the United States of America, the Council of Europe and the reports of four UN rapporteurs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10850/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 403 and 404 together.

As this matter is sub judice, I am not in a position to comment at this time.

Meat Processing Plant Inspections

405. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the regularity with which officials carry out spot checks on carcass grades on a given day to ensure that the mechanical grading machine is working within its required parameters; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10887/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2017/1184 of 20 April 2017 governs the monitoring of carcass classification. It specifies that on-the-spot checks shall be carried out in all slaughterhouses applying compulsory carcass classification and that the performance of the grading methods shall be checked on the spot and without prior warning by a body independent of the slaughterhouses, the classification agencies and the qualified classifiers.

In 2018, my Department conducted almost 550 unannounced, on-the-spot inspections in 32 factories on classification and carcass presentation. There were 616 inspections in 2016 and 628 in 2017. There were on average of 20 inspections per factory per year, which significantly exceeds the legal minimum requirement of 8 inspections per year. At each inspection 100 carcasses on average are checked in one time period; the majority in sequence on the slaughter line with the remainder in the chills.

Tuberculosis Incidence

406. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 442 of 26 February 2019, the number of the 1,808 herds currently restricted due to tuberculosis officially classified as feedlots; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10888/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): 159 of the herds that were restricted on the 26th of February were feedlots.

Tuberculosis Eradication Programme Administration

407. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the different rules, regulations or procedures that normal herdowners must adhere to

when they are restricted due to tuberculosis compared to those operating herds with feedlot status will be clarified; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10889/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): When TB is disclosed in any type of herd, that herd:

- is immediately restricted and cannot sell animals on the open market;
- may move animals direct to slaughter;
- must isolate the reactor animals from the rest of the herd;
- must remove reactor animals to slaughter within 30 days of disclosure;
- must disinfect the premises;
- must undergo two clear herd tests, 60 days apart, in order for the restriction to be lifted and to allow open market sales to resume.

Non-feedlot herds restricted under the TB Regulations may not purchase in animals until one clear test has been completed.

Due to the nature of some farming enterprises, the keeper may wish to buy in more cattle before a test has been carried out. Insisting that this is done may entail the testing of, in some cases, over a thousand cattle that, in any event will shortly be sent direct for slaughter. This could be considered as a wasteful exercise in terms of resources, both human and financial, and also in terms of disease control. To allow the enterprise to continue to function as a commercial entity, the TB programme makes provision for such herds to apply for a particular type of category which is referred to as 'Feedlot Status'.

Herds which are granted feedlot status are restricted under the TB Regulations and may be granted permission to continue to purchase animals prior to a test taking place once a special supervisory protocol is in place, which includes enhanced biosecurity. The retest requirements will be determined by the Regional Veterinary Office (RVO) based on an assessment of the disease situation. Feedlot herds remain restricted until two clear tests have been completed. Once a herd has been derestricted, the status of "Feedlot" under the TB programme no longer applies, since this is a status applicable only to restricted herds.

Feedlot status is only granted when there is no evidence that within-herd transmission or spread of disease is occurring. Where there is evidence of within-herd spread, the feedlot status is withdrawn and the usual rules apply.

Feedlot herds when restricted for TB are not eligible for compensation while, in general, non-feedlot herds are eligible for compensation.

Afforestation Programme

408. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on a proposal supported by local communities (details supplied). [10917/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Afforestation Grant and Premium Scheme is a voluntary and demand led scheme. While national targets exist, there are no county or regional targets. This is a national programme and therefore does not distinguish between beneficiaries on the basis of the location of the land to be planted.

This has been a feature of all national Forestry Programmes to date i.e. that every landowner in the country is treated the same under the Terms and Conditions of the relevant scheme.

The scheme is entirely exchequer funded and operates under State Aid rules. The legal basis for the scheme is the Forestry Programme 2014 – 2020. To halt the issuing of licences in a particular county would represent a change to the Forestry Programme. Furthermore, any person applying for approval to plant would have a legitimate expectation that they may be permitted to do so and that they would receive the same treatment as all other applicants. There are also existing applications at all stages in the planning system where applicants have invested time and resources in the preparation of these. Such applications were submitted in good faith and must be treated the same as any other application. In view of these considerations, it would not be appropriate or reasonable to halt the issuing of licences in any county.

In terms of overall afforestation policy, I await with interest the outcome of the study on afforestation in Co. Leitrim, which was announced recently by my colleague, Minister of State, Andrew Doyle, and which will inform the local community, policy-makers and other interested parties.

Renewable Energy Incentives

409. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if grant funding is provided for anaerobic digesters; if not, his plans to introduce same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10319/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The REFIT3 support scheme, which is funded by the public service obligation paid by electricity consumers, has supported the development of anaerobic digestion facilities via a high-efficiency combined heat and power tariff. This scheme closed for new applications on 31 December 2015. The Support Scheme for Renewable Heat has been developed to financially support the adoption of renewable heating systems by commercial, industrial, agricultural, district heating and other non-domestic heat users not covered by the EU Emissions Trading System. The first phase of the scheme, an installation grant for heat pumps, opened for applications on 12 September 2018. The second phase of the scheme, an operational support for biomass boilers and anaerobic digestion heating systems, is expected to open for applications early this year, subject to the state aid process that is underway with the European Commission.

Under Project Ireland 2040, the National Development Plan sets out an allocation of €300 million for the rollout of the scheme for the period up to 2027.

Electricity output from anaerobic digesters will also be eligible for support under the forthcoming Renewable Electricity Support Scheme. The high level design of this scheme was approved by Government in July 2018 and will also require State aid approval.

In November, I announced the seven successful projects from the first Call for Applications under the Climate Action Fund. One of the successful projects, the Gas Networks Ireland GRAZE Gas project, involves the installation of a Central Grid Injection facility for renewable gas produced from the anaerobic digestion of wastes, including agriculture wastes such as slurry.

My Department is also examining potential options to support the production of biomethane from anaerobic digestion and its injection into the gas grid.

Climate Change Policy

410. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the engagement he has had with Met Éireann in regard to the language used by weather forecasters on climate change; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10222/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): Met Éireann, Ireland's National Meteorological Service, comes under the remit of the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, as a line division of that Department. Met Éireann is the leading provider of weather information and related services in the State with its mission to monitor, analyse and predict Ireland's weather and climate and to provide a range of high quality meteorological and related information to the public and to specific customers in, for example, the aviation and agricultural sectors. My Department works closely with Met Éireann in the area of climate change and our National Meteorological Service is very supportive in this regard in terms of implementing national climate adaptation policy through its observation, forecasting and climate research and modelling activities. Ireland's National Adaptation Framework (NAF) which was published in 2018 identifies Met Éireann as a key provider of technical and advisory support and climate services at national level. Met Éireann is also represented on the national adaptation steering committee, which is chaired by my Department and which coordinates climate adaptation policy at both national and local level.

The NAF recognises that the availability of accurate, consistent and authoritative data, information and analysis specific to Ireland is crucial to how effective we are in developing our climate resilience. Both my Department and Met Éireann are keenly aware of the need to communicate such information so that it is understandable, consistent and meets the requirements of a specific target audience, including the general public. My Department will continue to liaise with Met Éireann and be guided by their expertise in relation to these matters.

Broadband Service Provision

411. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if a school (details supplied) will receive fibre optic broadband; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10245/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The school 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. The procurement process to appoint a bidder for the State intervention network is now at the final stage. I will bring a recommendation to Government in relation to the NBP in the coming weeks.

The Deputy makes reference to the school's proximity to a nearby commercial deployment of high speed broadband. This deployment is part of eir's commercial roll out of high speed broadband to 300,000 predominantly rural premises, in line with a Commitment Agreement signed with my Department in April 2017.

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 the Commitment Agreement, it is not funded by the State and it is not planned, designed or directed by my Department in any capacity.

Decisions made by private telecommunication operators relating to the roll out and siting of infrastructure to provide high speed broadband services throughout Ireland are undertaken on a commercial basis. I have no statutory role or function in such commercial decisions of private operators, and therefore cannot direct operators regarding infrastructure installation or delivery of services.

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.

Energy Schemes

412. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if, further to the current pilot, it is planned to roll out the SEAI warmth and wellbeing scheme nationally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10276/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Warmth and Wellbeing Scheme was established in 2016 as a joint energy and health policy initiative with the Department of Health and cross Government support from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. The scheme was designed to objectively measure and validate the health and wellbeing impacts of improving the living conditions of vulnerable people living in energy poverty with chronic respiratory conditions, demonstrating the multiple benefits of energy efficiency.

The scheme was piloted in HSE Community Healthcare Organisation (CHO) 7, specifically Dublin 8, 10, 12, 22 & 24. Over 900 homes in the pilot area have now been upgraded with an investment of €20m. An independent analysis of the health and wellbeing impacts is being carried out by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, in collaboration with the Health Service Executive. Interim findings will be available this year, which will inform decisions on the future of the scheme.

National Broadband Plan

413. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on the State-led intervention under the national broadband plan; when a decision on the procurement process will be made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10384/19]

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 through 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. Today, 74% of premises can access high speed

broadband.

The NBP procurement process is now at the final stage. My priority is to bring the procurement process to a fair and impartial conclusion and I intend to bring a recommendation to Government in relation to the NBP in the coming weeks.

Inland Fisheries

414. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if a further bye-law will be introduced to give protection to wild brown trout in seven State-owned salmonid lakes in view of the court ruling on Bye-Law No. 964 of 2018; the timeframe for the introduction of a new bye-law; the changes which will be made to the revised bye-law; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10529/19]

415. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if a new bye-law is to be introduced following the court decision on Bye-Law No. 964 of 2018; if Inland Fisheries Ireland will have no capacity or capabilities to do stream enhancements programmes; the way in which the bye-law designation can be fulfilled; the way in which invasive species such as pike, perch and roach can enjoy equal protection to that of native species of trout, sea trout and Atlantic salmon; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10530/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 414 and 415 together.

I have asked my Department to reflect over the coming period on legal advice and on the outcome of proceedings in the context of intended Bye-laws going forward. I have requested a report on the options to be considered going forward in relation to the Bye Law.

The Lakes in question have long been designated, as a matter of policy, for management primarily for the benefit of wild brown trout and that policy designation remains. I am advised by IFI that Stock Management Plans in respect of these lakes for 2019 have been approved by the Board of IFI.

Salmon are afforded specific protection via established fisheries policy and annual conservation legislation. Ireland's protection of salmon is considered best in class internationally. Ireland closed its mixed stock fisheries at sea in 2007 to align fully with the EU Habitats Directive and the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organisation (NASCO) principles. Management is based on:

- Annual scientific and management assessments of each distinct genetic salmon stock;
- Ensuring harvest (by angling or commercial means) of salmon is only permitted from rivers with sustainable reproductive capacity;
- Closing rivers to salmon which are below sustainable reproductive capacity;
- Opening rivers to catch and release angling to ensure catch records contribute to annual assessments;
- Licensing of salmon angling and commercial fishing and tagging of harvested salmon and recording/reporting of catches (angling and commercial);
- Annual legislation which defines the status of each river and what if any surplus is avail-

able;

- Annual legislation to regulate salmon angling and separately to regulate commercial fisheries.

In addition, Ireland is at the forefront within NASCO of ensuring that protection measures are in place by international agreement in distant feeding grounds to which salmon migrate.

The salmon management regime also applies to sea-trout over 40cms in length and the potential to extend similar or other protections to other game species could be considered in the light of concerns as regards affording equal protection to such species.

While management of salmon (and sea-trout over 40cms) involves multiple secondary legislation of national and local application, there is one Bye-law in relation to Pike which establishes a daily bag limit and one further Bye-law as regards coarse fish which was introduced principally to address biosecurity matters. Pike populations are managed by IFI under the long standing policy designation of certain waters. All management interventions must prudently take account of scientific assessments as is the case in salmon and sea-trout management.

I am advised by Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) that the latest research, published in August 2018, reveals that pike appear to have changed their prey preference and now predominately eat roach. Researchers in Scotland and England have also found similar changes in pike diet. It is considered that the changes in diet are due to the invasion of roach in these waters.

The research also found that pike and brown trout could live together within relatively large deep lakes with strong stream connectivity however in small, low-complex systems pike introductions could potentially impact on resident brown trout populations. The practice of pike removal and the impact it has on brown trout stocks was also examined. The findings suggest that pike removal may only be effective in protecting brown trout populations in systems where trout are the only available prey but may have little effect in systems where other prey, such as roach, is available.

I am confident in IFI's capacity to deliver priority instream project works. IFI continues to deliver the more strategic, complex projects itself using, where necessary, appropriate external expertise. IFI takes on an enabling and supervisory role in less complex projects and this approach recognises the interest angling clubs have in habitat development.

To that end, my Department has separately funded project officers for IFI to promote capacity building and a collaborative approach within the sector and to address shortfalls in expertise within voluntary organisations delivering projects. This addresses a key element of the National Strategy for Angling Development (NSAD) to build capability and improve governance across the sector and also addresses the issues and challenges raised by stakeholders at the NSAD roadshows held in 2017.

The officers engage with these groups to progress projects through governance and into delivery phase. IFI has also established a pre-approved panel of experts that may be accessed by third parties who wish to engage in necessary habitat enhancement projects.

During 2018 IFI and the Office of Public Works (OPW) signed an agreement to build on existing good practices and develop a framework to support high level collaboration. Both organisations have obligations to implement European and national legislation and policy. The agreement will deliver the Environmental River Enhancement Programme and focus on scientific investigations; impacts of arterial drainage maintenance on the biota and habitat with the river corridor; the potential for current strategies to provide environmental gain while securing adequate channel conveyance. All if this is to be undertaken in the context of the EU Water

Framework Directive.

Prospecting Licences

416. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the details of all town lands in which a prospecting licence for minerals exploration has been granted or renewed between 2011 and February 2019; and the details of all town lands in which a prospecting licence is to be granted or renewed. [10547/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): In the case of every public consultation on a Prospecting Licence grant or renewal, the full list of townlands to be encompassed by the Prospecting Licence Area is published in the newspaper advertisement. Details of all the Prospecting Licences are included in the Six Monthly Reports which are submitted to the Oireachtas in accordance with Section 77 of the Minerals Development Act, 1940 and Section 8 of the Minerals Development act, 1979. The current practice is to identify the number of the Prospecting Licence Area relating to each Prospecting Licence Area provided in the Report, and no details are provided in relation to townlands. As these Prospecting Licence areas could in some cases include as many as 50 townlands, and there are over 600 Licences currently in existence, it is not possible for the purposes of this Parliamentary Question to provide a list of all townlands included in all Prospecting Licence Areas licensed since 2011. If, however, the Deputy has any queries on specific Prospecting Licence Areas listed in the relevant Reports, my Department would be happy to follow up on these.

Details of the reports can be found at the Oireachtas Library. Details of all Prospecting Licence Areas can also be found on the map viewer on the Department's website at the link beneath and it is possible to identify townlands as required.

<http://spatial.dcenr.gov.ie/ExplorationAndMining/SpatialViewer/index.html>

Energy Policy

417. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if there is a policy on importing fracked shale gas in view of the recent ban on fracking; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10549/19]

418. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the policy on building new fossil fuel infrastructure; if past support for LNG infrastructure will be reassessed in view of the recommendations of a recent report by an organisation (details supplied) and increasing climate court cases here, in Europe and internationally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10550/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 417 and 418 together.

Successive governments have underlined the commitment to move from a fossil fuel-based electricity system to a low-carbon power system. Almost two thirds of renewable energy used in Ireland comes from renewable electricity.

It is widely recognised that Ireland needs to make a step change in its climate ambitions and 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 achieve this and I am working 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 in sustaining the transition. 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.

In relation to LNG projects, commercial developers have proposed a number for development, including the Shannon LNG project and another project in Cork. Final investment decisions for these projects and compliance with any legal and regulatory requirements in relation to consents or permits are the responsibility of the project promoters.

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

Mining Licences

419. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the public consultation processes in place for mining objections; if further mining will be permitted in areas where a community has expressed its opposition to same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10551/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): Applications for Mining licences/leases are subject to a consultation process under Section 18 the Mineral Development Acts 1979. The Minister is required to publish a notice in at least one national daily newspaper and in so far as practicable to give every person, that may appear to have an interest in the proposal, the opportunity of making representations. A notice must also be published for 2 successive weeks in the *Iris Oifigiul*. The Minister may refer any representation to the Mining Board for their consideration. The Mining Board may hold an enquiry where the persons making the representations have the opportunity to be heard. Mining licences/leases are also subject to consultation process under Planning and Development legislation and Environmental Impact Assessment legislation as applicants are required to obtain planning permission from the relevant local authority.

In the case of Prospecting licences (for the exploration or searching for minerals), a 21 days' notice period is provided for the public notification of the intention of the Minister to grant a Prospecting licence and for the receipt of any objections (Section 7 of the Minerals Development Acts 1940 to 1999 (as amended)). As a matter of best practice, the Department applies a 30 day notice period.

Under Section 7(2) of the Minerals Development Acts 1940 to 1999 (as amended), the Minister will not exercise his right to grant a Prospecting licence until he:

(a) has published, in one or more newspapers circulating in the locality, notice of his intention to do so, and

(b) has deposited in the office of the Geological Survey, Dublin and in one or more places in the locality, a map showing the boundaries of such land.

It is the Department's practice to notify the public of the intention to grant a Prospecting Licence in the following ways:

- (a) publication in a local newspaper;
- (b) notice deposited in the office of the Geological Survey, Dublin,
- (c) notice deposited in the Local Authority/County Council office;
- (d) notice deposited in the local Garda Station;
- (e) notice placed on the Department's website.

It is specified in the public notice that further information, statutory notice and the Minister's determination is available from the Department. Contact details provided include the Department's website address; the Department's postal address; and Exploration and Mining Division's direct phone number and email address. Where requests are made by a member of the public for maps, these are facilitated and made available electronically or by post by the Department.

At the conclusion of the process, if the Minister considers it appropriate and a Prospecting Licence is granted, the company must seek the permission of each relevant landowner to gain access to land to carry out their prospecting activities.

Broadband Service Provision

420. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on whether rural areas continue to be sidelined in view of the fact that only 58% of households in County Leitrim have broadband access compared to 86% in Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10577/19]

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, including those in rural Ireland. This is being achieved through 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.

The procurement process to appoint a bidder for the State intervention network is now at the final stage. I will bring a recommendation to Government in relation to the NBP in the coming weeks.

Waste Management Regulations

421. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment further to Parliamentary Question No. 495 of 26 February 2019, if a more comprehensive response will issue which deals with the matters raised directly. [10579/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): Further to my reply to Parliamentary Question No. 495 of 26 February, there is nothing which expressly prohibits a service fee being charged as part of a pricing plan used by a

household waste collector. The measure to further incentivise the prevention and segregation of waste through phasing out flat rate fees for household waste collection during 2017 and 2018 is one of a number of initiatives which aim to increase the level of recycling and reduce the volume of waste remaining for disposal. Other such initiatives supported by my Department include:

- a national standardised list of items that can go into the recycling bin;
- a 'Master Recycling' programme, in partnership with environmental NGOs, which rolled out over 650 workshops nationwide;
- the Stop Food Waste programme, which provides comprehensive information about the food that is wasted and how to prevent it to both householders and businesses;
- information on how to use the organic bin appropriately, at www.brownbins.ie.

To further assist in the provision of information to the public, my Department, in conjunction with the Regional Waste Management Planning Offices, launched a new website in November 2018, www.mywaste.ie. This website has been developed by the Regional Waste Management Offices with support from my Department, to provide consumers with a single information resource on all aspects of domestic waste management in Ireland and in particular it focuses on the provision of advice on managing waste more responsibly and efficiently.

EU Directives

422. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment further to Parliamentary Question No. 499 of 26 February 2019, if his attention has been drawn to a perceived anomaly in the response concerned (details supplied); he will retract his previous response; and the reason Ireland did not object to the position of the council of delaying the 90% separate collection target by five years. [10594/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Commission document published on 28 May 2018 contained a 90% collection rate for plastic bottles by 2025, as pointed out by the Deputy. However, this changed very early on during negotiations between Member States in the Council to 2030, which became the de facto working date for negotiations. The Deputy will be well aware that negotiations such as these can be both difficult and sensitive. This is particularly true of this proposal which was supported by all Member States and led to negotiations being concluded quickly. That said, some Member States, of which Ireland was not one, indicated that the target of 90% by 2025 was unworkable. Ireland was of the view throughout that the ambition of the Directive had to be achievable by all Member States in order to be effective. It was also important that the Directive would be acceptable to and agreed by all Member States as a priority so that a new collection rate target for plastic bottles would be agreed and would deliver tangible results for European citizens before the end of the term of the current European Parliament and Commission.

In that context, I was pleased to see that both a political agreement was achieved by the Member States and the European Parliament before the end of 2018 and also that the collection target has been brought forward from 2030 to 2029, as indicated in my response to Question No 499 of 2019. I recently commissioned a national study to assess how Ireland can achieve this target as soon as possible.

EU Directives

423. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment further to Parliamentary Question No. 500 of 26 February 2019, (details supplied), his views on the perceived disproportionate consultation with a company by his Department in relation to the single use plastics directive; his further views on whether there is a potential conflict of interest in view of the fact the company, a producer led EPR system, would have vested interests in preventing the set up of deposit refund schemes as provided for in article 9 of the directive; and the reason the draft report from the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Communications, Climate Action and Environment, which was noted as strictly confidential, was shared and the CEO and executive manager for strategy and policy of the company invited to discuss it and propose amendments thereto. [10693/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): Repak were not the only experts consulted in relation to the proposed EU directive on single use plastics. In consideration of the above proposal, relevant experts were consulted as the need arose. For the purpose of developing negotiating positions and ensuring we had all the relevant knowledge, short, relevant extracts were forwarded to necessary experts. I believe this is common practice among all Member States and particularly in technical discussions of this type.

In relation to consultation with Repak, the Deputy should note that Repak operates under an approval from the Minister to act as a national compliance scheme for packaging. Producers of packaging have obligations under the EU Packaging Directive, as transposed in Ireland by the European Communities (Packaging) Regulations 2014. Repak is a not for profit organisation, which carries out these regulatory obligations on behalf of their members.

Under the terms of their approval, they are tasked with ensuring Ireland meets its EU targets under the Packaging Directive and to report to the Minister annually on progress. They are also obliged to keep updated on relevant regulatory developments at a national and EU level and to assist, advise and contribute to the development of Ireland's position on such regulatory matters.

In relation to the Joint Oireachtas Committee Report, this was shared with Repak in the interest of ensuring that the information contained therein was accurate.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

424. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 505, 507 and 508 of 19 February 2019 and 501 and 502 of 21 February 2019 (details supplied), if the revision of the EU nationally determined contribution to 55% at the summit in Sibiu will be endorsed; and if not, the reason therefor. [10694/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am conscious that Ireland remains substantially short of the targets which have been set previously. I have secured government approval to develop an all of government plan, which will set out the actions which need to be taken in order for us to step up our level of ambition. The plan will focus on implementation, the actions which need to be taken, with strict timelines for implementation assigned. The engagement I am having in developing the all of government plan will inform the engagement I will have in discussing with EU colleagues how we can be more ambitious.

Energy Data

425. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the most up to date figures on Ireland's energy mix, including percentages for the national provenance of energy in tabular form; the progress of Ireland in relation to 2020 and 2030 renewable energy targets including the current percentage of renewable energy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10695/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) is the official source of energy data for Ireland. They develop and maintain comprehensive National and sectoral statistics for energy production, transformation and end-use. According to their 'Energy in Ireland 2018 Report', the 2017 energy mix for Ireland was:

TPER Fuels	2017 - ktoe	2017- % share
Coal	1,099	7.6
Peat	695	4.8
Oil	6,948	48.0
Natural Gas	4,315	29.8
Renewables (Total)	1,347	9.3
Hydro	59	0.4
Wind	640	4.4
Biomass	378	2.6
Other Renewables	270	1.9
Wastes (NR)	126	0.9
Electricity Imports	-58	-0.4
Total	14,473	

Detailed information in relation to renewable energy is contained in their report Renewable Energy in Ireland (2019 report) published on 4 March 2019 which shows (2017 figures), inter alia,

- Overall renewable energy supply was 10.6% of gross final consumption. Ireland has a binding EU target of 16% by 2020.

- The share of renewable transport energy was 7.4%. Ireland has a binding EU target of 10% by 2020.

- The share of renewable heat (RES-H) was 6.9%. Ireland has a national target of 12% by 2020.

- The share of renewable electricity was 30.1%. Ireland has a national target of 40% by 2020.

- Almost 90% of our renewable energy comes from wind, solid biomass and liquid biofuels.

- There was 4.2 MtCO₂ in avoided in 2017 which is equivalent to removing 70% of private cars off the road.

Copies of both reports are available on the SEAI website at www.seai.ie.

It is clear that we need to step up our ambition. The window for opportunity is closing and

we must respond urgently. The all of government Climate Plan will be published shortly. This will show a range of actions across sectors of society with clear timelines. Our focus will be on implementation and lifting Ireland's ambition.

Energy Policy

426. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the possibility of Ireland committing to a fossil fuel phase out date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10699/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am leading on the development of 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 involves working with colleagues across Government to develop new initiatives which will allow Ireland to set a clear pathway to reducing our dependency on fossil fuels across the economy and to meet our targets, under the EU Effort Sharing Regulation, to reduce emissions in the non-ETS sectors of the economy by 30% relative to 2005 levels by 2030. Ireland also has in place a strong long-term decarbonisation policy objective, through the National Policy Position on Climate Action and Low Carbon Development, adopted in 2014. This includes an objective to achieve an aggregate reduction in carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions of at least 80% (compared to 1990 levels) by 2050 across the electricity generation, built environment and transport sectors and, in parallel, an approach to carbon neutrality in the agriculture and land-use sector, including forestry, which does not compromise capacity for sustainable food production.

Through the National Development Plan, the Government have already made specific commitments to phasing out fossil fuels in certain sectors, including ending the burning of coal at Moneypoint by 2025, ending the use of peat for power generation at the latest by 2028, and a commitment that no new non-zero emission vehicles will be sold in Ireland after 2030.

As the Deputy will also be aware, the Fossil Fuel Divestment Act 2018 imposes an obligation on the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF) to divest from fossil fuel undertakings. This is one the first such statutory public divestment obligations put in place globally.

Waste Management

427. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the modulation of fees within the extended producer responsibility systems such as a company (details supplied) in order to effect a tangible decrease in the level of packaging waste and avoid EPR contributions being seen as a participation tax by producers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10700/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Waste Framework Directive was amended in 2018 and introduced a new requirement for EPR schemes to modulate the financial contributions paid by producers by 2023. The objective of this new provision is to provide an incentive to producers to design products that contribute to waste prevention and facilitate recycling by taking into account their durability, reparability, re-usability and their recyclability and the presence of hazardous substances. EU guidance on modulated fees is expected later this year. The EPR Scheme in question is considering how to address this obligation as part of their Plastic Packaging Recycling Strategy 2018-2030 and is working with my Department to ensure modulated fees are brought in as quickly as practicable to drive changes to ensure packaging is easily recyclable.

Climate Change Policy

428. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the way in which the €22 billion of the €116 billion investment package within Project Ireland 2040 will go towards the objective of transitioning to a low carbon and climate resilient society; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10702/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware, I am currently preparing an All of Government Climate Plan which will set out the actions which must be taken to make Ireland a leader in responding to climate change. I am working with colleagues across Government to develop new initiatives across electricity, transport and heat, as well as a range of other sectors. The All of Government Plan will build on the previous actions and framework put in place by both the National Mitigation Plan and the National Development Plan (NDP), and is to be completed by the end of March this year.

National Strategic Outcome 8 of the NDP sets out the key investments which will be made in the transition to a low-carbon and climate-resilient society. The following commitments are included for implementation by this Department over the lifetime of the NDP:

- energy efficiency upgrades of 45,000 homes per annum from 2021 and providing support for a major roll-out of heat pump technologies;

- delivering energy upgrades to BER 'B' level in all public buildings and a minimum of one third of commercial buildings;

- implementing the new renewable electricity support scheme to deliver an additional 3,000-4,500 MW of renewable energy, with the initial focus on shovel ready projects which could contribute to meeting our 2020 targets;

- the roll-out of the Support Scheme for Renewable Heat (SSRH) and national smart metering programme;

- transitioning the Moneypoint plant away from coal by the middle of the next decade;

- putting in place charging infrastructure to support growth to at least 500,000 electric vehicles on the road by 2030; and

- a Climate Action Fund of €500m to leverage investment by public and private bodies in climate action measures that contribute to the achievement of Ireland's climate and energy targets.

National Clean Air Strategy

429. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the actions he plans to include in the national clean air strategy; and the expected breakdown of funding. [10704/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): Recent scientific evidence indicates that air pollution is more damaging at lower concentrations than was previously understood. With that in mind, I am committed to bringing forward Ireland's first national Clean Air Strategy. The strategy, which I intend to publish this year, will include a range of specific actions to reduce the health and environmental impacts

of air pollution, and will address pollution from a range of sectors. As part of this renewed emphasis on the importance of air quality, I am funding the Ambient Air Quality Monitoring Programme (AAMP) which is being delivered by the Environmental Protection Agency. The AAMP will more than double the number of ambient air quality monitoring stations in Ireland by 2022, and enhance the provision of real time air quality data to the public. My Department has committed funding of some €5 million over the lifetime of the programme.

In relation to funding of other measures, a key element of the strategy is that it will be integrative in nature, ensuring that air quality considerations are taken into account in decision making across government and in wider society.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

430. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if a connection to the fibre optic network in an area will be arranged for a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10720/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): Faithlegg National School is in the AMBER area on the National Broadband Plan (NBP) High Speed Broadband Map, which is available on my Department's website at www.broadband.gov.ie. The AMBER areas represent the target areas for the proposed State led Intervention under the NBP. This intervention is the subject of an ongoing procurement process. The procurement process to appoint a bidder for the State intervention network is now at the final stage. I will bring a recommendation to Government in relation to the NBP 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

National Broadband Plan Implementation

431. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of high-speed broadband in an area (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10722/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The premises referred to by the Deputy is in the AMBER area on the National Broadband Plan (NBP) High Speed Broadband Map, which is available on my Department's website at www.broadband.gov.ie. The AMBER areas represent the target areas for the proposed State led Intervention under the NBP. This intervention is the subject of an ongoing procurement process. The procurement process to appoint a bidder for the State intervention network is now at the final stage. I will bring a recommendation to Government in relation to the NBP 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.

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State Bodies

432. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the oversight responsibilities his Department has towards ESB International and its investment projects abroad; and if he will report on the projects of ESB International taking into consideration compliance with the Paris Agreement. [10819/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): ESB is a commercial State body with its own Board. Investment projects by ESB and its subsidiaries are an operational matter for ESB. In terms of oversight, my role, as Minister, is to ensure that ESB is compliant with the 2016 Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies and the statutory framework underpinning ESB.

I have asked ESB to respond directly to the Deputy in relation to compliance with the Paris Agreement in the context of projects undertaken by ESB International.

Radio Broadcasting

433. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will address a matter regarding radio legislation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10374/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): National and local radio makes an enormous contribution to the lives of individuals and communities in this country. I fully appreciate the difficulties faced by the independent broadcasting sector and my Department is working to ensure that positive changes are put in place. To date, independent radio stations have benefited from the Sound and Vision Scheme, funded from the licence fee, which provided over €494,000 towards 77 different radio projects for broadcast on independent commercial stations in 2018.

In addition, the Broadcasting (Amendment) Bill contains a provision to allocate funding to the BAI from TV Licence receipts. This would provide up to a maximum of 50% of the annual cost of the BAI levy, in turn reducing the levy on broadcasters by up to 50%. The proposed amendment is currently at an advanced drafting stage. My Department continues to work closely with the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel in order to progress this work and ensure it is robust, with a view to having the Bill published in Q2 this year.

Food Poverty

434. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if measures will be introduced to prevent food waste by supermarkets in order that usable food can be diverted to those in need; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10893/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): While supermarkets are directly responsible for the disposal of only 2% of food waste, their influence across the supply chain makes them central actors in combatting our national food waste problem. Recognising this, my Department and the EPA have sought to involve major supermarkets in reducing food waste. Aldi, BWG, Lidl, Musgrave and Tesco have all participated in my Department's Action Group on Food Waste. This has involved:

- signing up to the 'Food Waste Charter' thereby creating a long-term partnership between the retailer and the EPA's food waste prevention programme supported by my Department;
- collecting and sharing food waste data to measure and manage food waste, and
- signing up to the food donation network 'Foodcloud'.

'Foodcloud' is an online platform that connects retailers and charities. Using a smartphone app, charities are alerted to the availability for collection of surplus food in local shops. This arrangement helps charities save on their food costs and ensures food is not wasted; benefiting communities and the environment. The National Waste Prevention Programme of the EPA which is funded by my Department provided key funding to Foodcloud in its start-up phase.

Food donation is an important part of the response to our food waste problem as it recognises the value of food in society beyond its economic price. Given the scale of food wasted across production and consumption, donation will only ever be part of the solution and this is acknowledged by the UN, the EU and domestic stakeholders, including the charity sector.

Recent revisions of EU waste legislation put increased emphasis on food waste prevention and measurement. The European Commission is exploring further food waste measures with Member States and Ireland is participating fully in emerging initiatives.

Broadcasting Sector

435. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to implement the recommendations of the report of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Communications, Climate Action and Environment on the future funding of public service broadcasting; if a public service broadcast fund for the independent radio sector will be established; the timeline for the introduction of such measures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10915/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Working Group on the Future Funding of Public Service Broadcasting was set up by government decision in July 2018 to examine options for the reform of TV licence collection, taking account of recommendations set out in the Report of the Joint Oireachtas Committee. The Group's work is ongoing and it is scheduled to report to me at the end of this month.

As I noted in the Debate on local radio in the Dail last Thursday, state aid rules have to be considered regarding the issue of a public service broadcast fund for the independent radio sector.

The independent radio sector already benefits from the BAI Sound and Vision Scheme which is funded from 7% of the net TV Licence fee receipts. The Scheme provided over €494,000 towards 77 different radio projects for broadcast on independent commercial stations in 2018.

Dublin Bus Fleet

436. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the use of diesel buses will be phased out from the Dublin Bus fleet. [10696/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Procurement of vehicles for Dublin Bus and other PSO bus fleets is a matter for the National Transport Authority. As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have made clear my intent, and that of the Government, to transition from diesel fuelled buses towards greener fuels and technologies, for the great potential such technologies offer to reduce carbon and other harmful air pollutant emissions, and importantly, placing the public transport system in a leadership role. As the Deputy will be aware, the National Development Plan commits Ireland to purchasing no new diesel-only buses for the urban public bus fleets after July 2019.

To further Ireland-specific data and information gathering regarding these technologies my Department is currently undertaking a series of low emission bus trials, supported by the Green Public Transport Fund, on a broad range of fuels and technologies, including electric, diesel-electric hybrid, hydrogen, compressed natural gas/biogas and two diesel buses retrofitted to Euro VI-class standard. It is expected that the trials will conclude in April 2019 and will help to inform future purchasing decisions.

It is also noteworthy that over the past few years, the oldest and most polluting buses (Euro III- and Euro IV-classes) in the PSO fleets have been incrementally phased out and replaced with cleaner Euro VI-class buses as part of the ongoing fleet renewal programme, with corresponding decreases in emissions from the fleet as a whole. Those older diesel vehicles still remaining in the fleet will naturally be the first to be replaced as we transition towards lower emitting alternatives following July 2019.

Noting its responsibility with regards to this matter, I have referred your questions to the NTA for consideration and direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Ports Development

437. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the date of his last meeting with the board of the Dublin Port Company; and if the minutes of same will be provided. [10231/19]

438. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the date of his last meeting with the board of the Port of Cork Company; and if the minutes arising of same will be provided. [10232/19]

439. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the date of his last meeting with the board of the Shannon Foynes Port Company; and if the minutes arising of same will be provided. [10233/19]

440. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the date of his last meeting with the board of the Port of Waterford Company; and if the minutes from same

will be provided. [10234/19]

443. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the date of his last meeting with the board of the Galway Harbour Company; and if the minutes of same will be provided. [10237/19]

444. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the date of his last meeting with the board of the New Ross Port Company; and if the minutes of same will be provided. [10238/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 437 to 440, inclusive, and 443 and 444 together.

Dublin, Cork, Galway, New Ross, Shannon Foynes and Waterford Port/Harbour Companies currently operate under the aegis of my Department.

My last meeting with board members from each of the following Port Companies took place on the following dates;

- Dublin Port Company- 10th November 2017
- Galway Harbour Company- 15th July 2016
- New Ross Port Company- 09th April 2018
- In addition to these meetings, I frequently have informal contact with board members, Chief Executives and other members of their teams.
- I have not yet had an opportunity to meet formally with the boards of Port of Cork, Shannon Foynes Port Company and Port of Waterford Company however, my officials are in regular contact with all port companies and are designated by me to meet with these companies on a regular basis.

Ports Development

441. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the date of his last meeting with the board of the Drogheda Port Company; and if the minutes of same will be provided. [10235/19]

442. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the date of his last meeting with the board of the Dún Laoghaire Harbour Company; and if the minutes of same will be provided. [10236/19]

445. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the date of his last meeting with the board of the Wicklow Port Company; and if the minutes of same will be provided. [10239/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 441, 442 and 445 together.

In line with National Ports Policy, Wicklow Port Company was dissolved on the 30 August 2016 and the harbour was transferred to the control of Wicklow County Council. S.I. 462 of 2016 gave effect to this.

Drogheda Port Company transferred to the control of Louth County Council on the 2 Octo-

ber 2017. S.I. 424 of 2017 gave effect to the transfer.

Dun Laoghaire Harbour Company was dissolved on the 3 October 2018 and the harbour transferred to the control of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council. S.I. 391 of 2018 refers.

These bodies no longer operate under the remit of my Department and I have no role in their corporate governance.

Questions Nos. 443 and 444 answered with Question No. 437.

Question No. 445 answered with Question No. 441.

Vehicle Registration

446. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to introduce legislation and safety regulations for the testing of driverless cars here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10240/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): My Department is currently working with industry stakeholders, other Government Departments and State agencies to develop guidelines for the testing of autonomous vehicles on Irish roads. The guidelines make clear that any vehicles being tested on public roads must obey all relevant road traffic laws, and that tests should be underpinned by a safety plan setting out the safety assurance and risk management strategies in place.

Preparatory work has begun within my Department on a national Connected and Autonomous Vehicle (CAV) roadmap and plan. This will set out at a strategic level the considerations associated with the introduction of CAVs onto Irish roads, and the need for future legislation will be explored as part of this work.

Vehicle Registration

447. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to introduce legislation with regard to electric scooters; if he has examined the specific issues relating to these vehicles to date; and if legislation will be introduced to bring Dublin in line with other European cities similar to European standard EN15194 with regard to electric bicycles. [10241/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I am aware of the increasing use of eScooters, electrically/powered skateboards etc. on our roads. I have requested the Road Safety Authority to research how such vehicles (classified as mechanically propelled vehicles in the Road Traffic Acts) are dealt with (i.e. regulated) in other countries, particularly other Member States. I am keen to understand the road safety implications of the use of such vehicles on public roads, especially when interacting with other vehicles.

I will make a decision on whether or not to amend existing legislation when I have received the outcome of the Authority's research.

Electric bicycles are a different issue from eScooters. Where a bicycle has an electric motor attached which may be used as an alternate means of propulsion, the vehicle is defined as a mechanically propelled vehicle under the Road Traffic Acts whether or not the motor is being used. However, under Article 1 (h) of EU Directive 2002/24/EC E-bikes are defined as "cycles

with pedal assistance which are equipped with an auxiliary electric motor having a maximum continuous rated power of 0.25 kW, of which the output is progressively reduced and finally cut off as the vehicle reaches a speed of 25 km/h, or sooner, if the cyclist stops pedalling". Legal advice obtained by the Department confirms that as bikes of this type require continuous effort on the part of the cyclist, they are considered to be pedal cycles.

Pedal assisted cycles with a maximum continuous rated power of more than 0.25 kW and E-bikes that can be exclusively propelled by the motor are classified in the Directive as low-performance mopeds, i.e. vehicles with pedals, with an auxiliary engine of power not exceeding 1 kW and a maximum design speed not exceeding 25 km/h. Such vehicles are subject to Road Traffic legislation, with the rider obliged to have registration, tax, insurance, and an appropriate driving licence where the vehicle is to be used in a public place.

Travel Trade Sector

448. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the Directive (EU) 2015/2302 on package travel and linked travel arrangements will commence here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10256/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Directive (EU) 2015/2302 on package travel and linked travel arrangements was adopted by the European Parliament and Council on 25 November 2015. Officials in my Department have drafted a Statutory Instrument which will amend existing national legislation in order to transpose the Directive. The S.I. is currently with the Office of Parliamentary Counsel for settling.

It has taken longer than had been anticipated to finalise the S.I. primarily because of the complexity of integrating the provisions of the Directive into the existing national legislation in the area. This work is now almost complete and, subject to any unforeseen developments, I expect that it will be signed into law in the coming weeks.

Taxi Regulations

449. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the regulations as published for approval of community transport services as defined by Part 7 of the Taxi Regulation Act 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10288/19]

450. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on a National Transport Authority form (details supplied); if the form is valid; if not, if a copy of the most recent valid form will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10289/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 449 and 450 together.

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 addition, the regulation of the small public service vehicle (SPSV) industry, is a matter for the NTA under the provisions of the Taxi Regulation Act 2013.

Noting this I have forward the Deputy's Questions to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Rail Passengers Data

451. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of passengers commuting daily from each of the stations from Heuston to Newbridge inclusive in each of the years 2004 to 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10325/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue raised is a matter for Iarnród Éireann and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the company for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Legislative Programme

452. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to update the Road Safety Authority Act 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10367/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): It is my intention to examine the Road Safety Authority Act 2006, in consultation with the Road Safety Authority, to determine if amendments are required, and if so, to prepare the necessary legislation.

Driver Test Waiting Lists

453. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a maximum waiting time will be introduced for driver tests; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10370/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Driver Testing Service is provided by the Road Safety Authority. The Authority's target for a national average waiting time for a driving test is no longer than ten weeks. The current average wait time is just over nine weeks.

Road Projects Status

454. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of works being carried out on the N71 in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10376/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the planning, improvement and maintenance of individual national roads is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland

(TII) in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Noting the above position, I have referred the question to TII for a direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

National Driver Licensing Service

455. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on whether it is appropriate that the National Driver Licence Service charges a fee of €35 to replace stolen licences in cases in which the holder of the licence has a crime reference from gardaí; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10388/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): This is a matter for the Road Safety Authority. I have referred the question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response is not received within ten days.

Brexit Negotiations

456. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has made representations in order to ensure that Irish licence holders will continue to be able to drive legally in Northern Ireland. [10400/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The United Kingdom, including Northern Ireland, has indicated it will continue to recognise EU driving licences after Brexit, which of course will include Irish licences.

Further information from the UK side is available here: www.gov.uk/government/publications/prepare-to-drive-in-the-eu-after-brexit

Coast Guard Services

457. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will reverse his decision to disallow the Irish Coast Guard from using blue lights and sirens when responding to an emergency call out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10401/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): There is no change in the policy in relation to use of blue lights and sirens on Coast Guard vehicles. Under SI 694 and 695 of 2011, Coast Guard vehicles can be fitted with blue lights and warning devices. Arising from a safety review internally, the Coast Guard issued a clarification to its volunteers in relation to how these blue lights and warning devices (sirens) should be used on public roads. This instruction sets out the existing position as regards their use while driving on public roads and it mirrors best practice in other Emergency Services for untrained “Blue-light” drivers. The issue of training Coast Guard volunteers and full-time staff in the correct and safe use of Blue Lights and sirens is being addressed as part of the Coast Guard’s Safety and Risk Work Plan.

Any legislative changes in relation to the use of blue lights and sirens would require a policy assessment which would have to take account, *inter alia*, of the need to balance the safety of staff, whether full-time or voluntary, members of the public as well as those to whom the Coast Guard is responding.

National Driver Licensing Service

458. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if additional resources will be made available to the National Driver Licence Service in order to address increased demand for licence swaps in view of the decision of the UK to withdraw from the European Union. [10405/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): This is a matter for the Road Safety Authority. I have referred the question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response is not received within ten days.

Brexit Issues

459. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has discussed with an organisation (details supplied) or another body the possibility of amending legislation or introducing new legislation in order to ensure that UK licences continue to enjoy the same status as they currently receive. [10406/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I have not discussed the introduction nor amendment of legislation on this matter with the Automobile Association nor any other lobby group, whether Irish or foreign.

Brexit Preparations

460. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to introduce legislation to ensure that holders of UK driver licences will be able to drive here legally and will retain the possibility of exchanging their licence for an Irish licence, even if the United Kingdom exits the European Union in March 2019. [10407/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): My Department is reviewing potential arrangements for the exchange of UK driving licences if the UK exits the European Union. These arrangements may involve a formal foreign driver licence exchange agreement and the implementation of the relevant legislation.

Bus Éireann Services

461. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he in conjunction with the NTA can investigate the possibility of allowing the 101 Bus Éireann service to pick up passengers between Dorset Street and Dublin Airport (details supplied); and if the ways in which the service could be rolled out across other routes within Dublin city will be investigated. [10417/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issues raised are a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA), in conjunction with Bus Éireann, and I have forwarded the Deputy's questions to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Park and Ride Facilities

462. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to identify a bus park and ride facility on the N7 near Rathcoole, County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10429/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The National Transport Authority (NTA) have statutory responsibility for the development and implementation of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area, including the provision of Bus Park and Ride facilities.

Noting their responsibility in relation to this matter, I have forwarded your query to the NTA for their consideration and direct reply. Please notify my office if you have not received a reply within 10 working days.

Coast Guard Services

463. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason a ban on the use of emergency blue lights and sirens by Irish Coast Guard teams is being implemented; and if this decision will be revised in view of the risk it poses to persons in need of emergency attendance by the coast guard. [10447/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): There is no change in the policy in relation to use of blue lights and sirens on Coast Guard vehicles. Under SI 694 and 695 of 2011, Coast Guard vehicles can be fitted with blue lights and warning devices. Arising from a safety review internally, the Coast Guard issued a clarification to its volunteers in relation to how these blue lights and warning devices (sirens) should be used on public roads. This instruction sets out the existing position as regards their use while driving on public roads and it mirrors best practice in other Emergency Services for untrained “Blue-light” drivers. The issue of training Coast Guard volunteers and full-time staff in the correct and safe use of Blue Lights and sirens is being addressed as part of the Coast Guard’s Safety and Risk Work Plan.

Any legislative changes in relation to the use of blue lights and sirens would require a policy assessment which would have to take account, *inter alia*, of the need to balance the safety of staff, whether full-time or voluntary, members of the public as well as those to whom the Coast Guard is responding.

Coast Guard Services

464. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason the Irish Coast Guard has never been placed on a statutory footing particularly in view of the fact that Ireland is an island nation. [10448/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): On 15 February 2017 as a Commencement Matter in the Seanad, I comprehensively addressed the matter of Coast Guard Services and the proposition that the Coast Guard should be designated as a stand-alone primary response agency. Legislating for a stand-alone agency is an inherently complex task and the volunteer dimension of the Coast Guard’s activities adds to that complexity. The test for any such designation, given the complexity of the legislation and associated costs, is the added value it would bring. The Coast Guard is functioning very effectively as a Division of my Department and its role is supported through various legislative instruments. For that reason, I advised at the time that it was difficult to identify any benefit or added value for legislation of this nature.

An Irish Coast Guard Authority Bill was proposed by Deputy Troy during 2018. Once the Bill has been progressed further, I will be happy to consider the matter once again and provide my views.

Coast Guard Services

465. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the request by an organisation (details supplied) to implement an urgent review of coast guard management and personnel will be agreed to. [10449/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Coast Guard has no knowledge of the existence of the group named in the PQ other than through an anonymous email circulated to Oireachtas members. As matters stand there is only one body in place to represent the interests and concerns of the Coast Guard volunteers which is the Coast Unit Advisory Group (CUAG). This group was established over 20 years ago. It comprises 6 volunteers elected by the volunteers. It has functioned as a sounding board for concerns from the volunteers and provides a platform for raising issues in relation to equipment, training, procedures, etc. The CUAG has not called for a review of the Coast Guard.

On the broader question of reviewing the Coast Guard, there are various processes currently underway to address recommendations arising from the recent MCIB report into the fatal accident involving a Coast Guard boat in Kilkee and the recommendations arising from the recent AQE Report on the oversight of SAR aviation operations - all of which are relevant to the management and operation of the Irish Coast Guard.

In November, I established a Search and Rescue Framework Review Group under an external chairperson to undertake a review of the current SAR Framework document, including follow-up to the relevant MCIB recommendations. This document sets out the roles and responsibilities of those organisations involved in SAR in Ireland and the relationships between them. External expertise has been procured to assist the Review. This work is progressing well and should be completed this Summer.

Rail Services

466. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated amount it would cost Iarnród Éireann if the number of security contracted staff increased by a further 20% based on 2018 figures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10468/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue raised is a matter for the Iarnród Éireann and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the company for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

Sports Organisations

467. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of competing karate governing bodies to date; and if he will ensure that no athlete affiliated to either body is forced to miss an upcoming Olympic qualification event as a result of the present situation. [10494/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Sport Ireland, which is funded by my Department, is the statutory body with responsibility for the promotion, development and co-ordination of sport in Ireland. This includes responsibility for the recognition of sporting organisations as National Governing Bodies.

I have referred the Deputy's question to Sport Ireland for direct response. I would ask the Deputy to inform my office if a reply is not received within ten days.

Light Rail Projects

468. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if there has been a detailed cost-benefit analysis of the impact of the closure of the Luas green line for the purposes of upgrading it to become part of MetroLink. [10496/19]

476. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated cost of the proposed MetroLink route between Charlemont and Sandyford. [10648/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 468 and 476 together.

The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the development and implementation of public transport infrastructure projects in the Greater Dublin Area, including MetroLink.

Noting their responsibility in relation to this matter, I have forwarded your query to the NTA for their consideration and direct reply. Please notify my office if you have not received a reply within ten working days.

Public Transport Subsidies

469. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the way in which the subsidy for Dublin Bus is calculated; if it is based on the number of buses advertised that is intended to be run rather than the number of buses that are actually run; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10507/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue raised is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Driver Licensing Exchange Agreements

470. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason Canadian driver licences are recognised and exchanged here from four Canadian provinces and not from the remaining Canadian provinces and territories; and if this does not reflect the fact that Canadian licences are issued to a national standard despite the province. [10518/19]

471. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to ensure that driving licences issued from the Canadian province of New Brunswick can be exchanged for an Irish driving licence upon arrival here; if his attention has been drawn to the

fact that Irish driving licences are fully recognised in New Brunswick and can be swapped immediately for a local licence; and his plans to ensure this anomaly is rectified. [10519/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 470 and 471 together.

Irish driver licensing law operates within a framework of EU law. In the case of non-EU jurisdictions, Ireland may make bilateral agreements on licence exchange. This is not a straightforward matter, there is a process to be followed and it does take some time. Canadian licences are issued by the government of the province or territory in which the driver is residing. As a result, specific regulations relating to driving licences varies from province to province, though overall they are quite similar.

Licence exchange agreements can be made only when the relevant authorities in each jurisdiction have studied and compared the two licensing regimes, so that each side can be satisfied that they are compatible. On the Irish side, this task is undertaken by the Road Safety Authority (RSA).

We are currently finalising an exchange agreements with Alberta and Saskatchewan. This will bring to 6 the number of agreements in place with Canada. Work will continue to bring in agreements with the remaining provinces.

Coast Guard Services

472. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the fact that there are grave concerns among the 950 Irish Coast Guard volunteers resulting from a decision of management of the Irish Coast Guard to stop volunteers using blue lights and sirens while responding to rescue calls; if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that such a measure could result in delays in responding to life and death situations; if he will intervene to examine if this decision can be reversed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10523/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): There is no change in the policy in relation to use of blue lights and sirens on Coast Guard vehicles. Under SI 694 and 695 of 2011, Coast Guard vehicles can be fitted with blue lights and warning devices. Arising from a safety review internally, the Coast Guard issued a clarification to its volunteers in relation to how these blue lights and warning devices (sirens) should be used on public roads. This instruction sets out the existing position as regards their use while driving on public roads. The issue of training Coast Guard volunteers and full-time staff in the correct and safe use of Blue Lights and sirens is being addressed as part of the Coast Guard's Safety and Risk Work Plan.

Any legislative changes in relation to the use of blue lights and sirens would require a policy assessment which would have to take account, inter alia, of the need to balance the safety of staff, whether full-time or voluntary, members of the public as well as those to whom the Coast Guard is responding.

Ports Development

473. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the sale of the Port of Cork property at Custom House Quay, Cork, (details supplied) by the Port of Cork company of which he and the Minister for Finance are the sole sharehold-

ers; if transfer of ownership has taken place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10553/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Following a detailed review of the Ringaskiddy re-development funding options the Directors of the Port of Cork Company, in line with Section 15 of the Harbours Act 1996, decided that the Custom House property located at Custom House Quay in the centre of Cork Docklands, would be advertised on the open market for sale.

One party expressed a keen interest in purchasing the property and the Port of Cork Company Board of Directors agreed to proceed with negotiations. An agreement for the sale of the Custom House was signed on 20 April 2017, subject to a number of conditions including receipt of planning.

The Port Company has a target to vacate the Custom House before 31 July 2020.

Services for People with Disabilities

474. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if provisions will be made for a wheelchair accessible bus on the 480 bus route from Ballyshannon to Sligo; his views on whether having to give 24 to 48 hour notice to book a place on an accessible bus is unfair; if he will implement the 16 recommendations contained in the Accessibility of Public Transport for People with Disabilities report in order to achieve equal access for all; if adequate funding and a clear policy plan will be provided to move towards full accessibility on all public transport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10569/19]

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. However, I am not involved in the day-to-day operations of public transport.

I have explained to the House previously, that under the Dublin Transport Authority Act 2008, the National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for promoting the development of an integrated, accessible public transport network.

In light of the NTA's responsibilities in this matter, I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply to you. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

The Report of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Transport, Tourism and Sport, "Accessibility of Public Transport for People with Disabilities", was debated in the House on 21 February 2019. I was pleased to contribute to that Debate and also at the launch of the Committee's Report on 14 November 2018. In addition, I debated with Members of the Joint Committee and other Members of the Oireachtas, on 07 February 2018 as part of the Committee's work in preparing its Report. On each of these occasions, I outlined my policy and provided updates in relation to accessible public transport.

Accessibility features, such as wheelchair access, are built into all new public transport infrastructure projects and vehicles from the design stage. Looking to the future, investment in public transport will be accelerated under the national development plan, (NDP). In line with recommendations in the Committee's Report, and as with all new and recently developed public transport projects, all these new programmes and projects will be fully accessible as part of the normal design.

As part of the Capital Plan Review announced in conjunction with Budget 2018, I secured an allocation of almost €28 million for the Accessibility Retro-fit Programme for the four year period 2018 - 2021. This represented a trebling of the previous allocation. Of this amount €7 million is allocated for 2019. The Accessibility Retro-fit programme funds an ongoing programme of accessibility improvements to older existing public transport infrastructure and facilities, and it is managed by the NTA. The increase in funding for the retro-fit programme will facilitate the continued roll-out of the programmes to install accessible bus stops, upgrade train stations to make them accessible to wheelchair users and provide grant support for the introduction of more wheelchair accessible vehicles into the taxi fleet.

Last year I asked the NTA to provide information on (i) the accessibility status of existing public transport infrastructure, (ii) the cost of making public transport services wheelchair accessible and (iii) the accessibility improvements planned with the available funding for the 4 year 2018-2021 under the Retro-fit programme. The information provided by the NTA, and other related information, is available on my Department's website at <http://www.dttas.gov.ie/public-transport/english/accessibility>. For the assistance of the Deputy, I have outlined in the table the cost figures provided by the NTA, of making public transport services wheelchair accessible.

Bus Stations	Buses/Coaches (PSO Services)	Bus Stops (PSO coach services)	Train Stations	Taxis/Hackneys	Total
€16.35 m	€22.5 m	€10 m	€76 m	€214 m	€339 m

I would emphasise that the figures provided by the NTA are estimates, due for example to complexities in relation providing accessible bus stops in rural/regional areas. In addition, the figures relate to Public Service Obligation (PSO) services only, and to Exchequer funding rather than industry costs in the case of Taxi/Hackneys.

I also advised the House recently that one of my priorities is to complete a review of existing public transport policy as committed to under the Programme for a Partnership Government. This review is a significant and substantial resource commitment and my Department has commenced and substantially completed the research and analysis required to inform the proposed period of public consultation which I expect to launch in the near future.

I would urge everyone, including members of the Oireachtas, to take the opportunity to contribute to this public consultation and outline their views on all aspects of public transport policy, including in relation to accessible public transport.

Bus Éireann Staff

475. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the fact that taxi drivers may not continue contract work with Bus Éireann once they reach 70 years of age despite a continuing demand for drivers; the background to this policy; and if taxi drivers who wish to carry on such contract work can be allowed to do so. [10642/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue raised is a matter for Bus Éireann and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the company for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Question No. 476 answered with Question No. 468.

Driver Test Data

477. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of persons who sat their driver test in County Wicklow in 2018; the percentage pass rate for male and female drivers, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10652/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): This is a matter for the Road Safety Authority. I have referred the question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response is not received within 10 days.

Driver Licence Renewals

478. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the issue of driver licences being renewed and issued before their expiry dates have passed causing applicants to miss out on up to three months of validity if they choose to renew their licences early. [10658/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): This is a matter for the Road Safety Authority. I have referred the question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response is not received within 10 days.

Public Service Vehicles

479. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if there are grants available in a scenario (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10663/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The regulation of the small public service vehicle (SPSV) industry is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the provisions of the Taxi Regulation Act 2013.

The NTA administers two grant schemes for this sector - the Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle (WAV) Grant Scheme and the Electric Small Public Service Vehicle (eSPSV) Grant Scheme.

Given the role of the Authority in these matters, I have referred your question to the NTA for direct reply to you. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

Parking Regulations

480. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a proposal to extend the validity period of disabled parking permits from two years to five years will be supported; if a renewal process akin to that of driver licences for persons over 70 years of age will be examined (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10762/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The statutory basis for the disabled parking permit is laid out in the Road Traffic (Traffic and Parking) Regulations

1997, as amended, which state that a permit shall be valid for 2 years from its date of issue.

In the early years of the scheme one of the organisations responsible for issuing the permits made a case that permits be issued for a 5-year period to holders of primary medical certificates, a request that was subsequently considered in detail as part of this Department's review of the disabled parking scheme in 2011. The review ultimately decided that extending the validity period would increase the opportunity for cards that are no longer needed to be used fraudulently, and recommended that that the period be kept at 2 years.

I appreciate that a longer validity period would prove more convenient to the user. This convenience, however, pales in comparison to the serious challenge posed to the entire disabled parking scheme by the fraudulent use of permits, a growing problem highlighted by the implementation of Operation Enable in 2017. Disabled parking permit fraud is selfish and illegal and has a considerable negative knock-on effect on legitimate permit holders and on their ability to access everyday services. In order to combat this scourge and ensure that disabled parking bays are available to those who genuinely need them, it is crucial that every permit be carefully tracked and any unused permit be taken out of circulation. It is for this reason that any extension of the validity period has been ruled out for the time being.

The Deputy's proposal that a separate renewal process be introduced for applicants over the age of 70 is also unworkable as it is not in keeping with the principles of the scheme. Disabled parking permits are issued strictly on the basis of mobility impairment, not age, and introducing a separate renewal process would risk sending out the wrong message that the permit is an age-related entitlement.

Bus Services

481. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the ongoing public transport issues in County Limerick particularly with regard to the bus service and its lateness and incorrect real time information both at bus stops and through the app; his plans to tackle the issue; if County Limerick is to receive a BusConnects plan; if so, the timeframe for delivery of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10800/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The National Transport Authority (NTA) have statutory responsibility for the implementation and development of public transport infrastructure, including both Real Time Passenger Information and BusConnects.

Noting their responsibility in relation to this matter, I have forwarded your query to the NTA for their consideration and direct reply. Please notify my office if you have not received a reply within 10 working days.

Public Transport

482. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has examined the possibility of introducing free public transport; if there are costings on same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10835/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I have no immediate plans to introduce free public transport for all users, which would require substantial additional

funding by the taxpayer or from other sources.

The National Transport Authority (NTA) has the statutory responsibility for the regulation of fares in relation to public passenger transport services and also has statutory responsibility for securing the provision of public transport services by way of public transport services contracts in respect of services that are socially necessary but commercially unviable. The funding of those services comprises both the fares paid by passengers and the subvention payments from the Exchequer. The main purpose of the subvention payment is to meet the gap between income from fares and the cost of operating services.

In 2017 (the most recently published figures available) passengers paid about €580 million in fares on subsidised bus and rail services. Therefore, if such services were to be provided free to passengers, then the expected cost to the Exchequer would be in excess of the €580m collected in fares in 2017. This amount would be additional to the 2019 Exchequer allocation of €287.5m for Public Service Obligation support and the further amount (€95m allocation for 2019) that the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection pays to public transport providers in respect of its Free Travel Scheme, which provides free transport to almost 1 million people in the State, including all people aged over 66 living permanently here, along with some other qualifying people. So taking round approximate figures, the cost to the taxpayer would be in the region of €600 million per year, in addition to the €400 million that the Exchequer already spends on public transport services. This is just the cost of the actual services; it does not count the Exchequer investment in public transport infrastructure which in 2019 is about €350 million and will be rising sharply over the coming years.

The NTA has advised that the estimates of the full year cost of providing free public transport do not factor in the cost of providing the additional fleet, depots, drivers, etc. to meet the likely resultant substantial increase in passenger numbers if fares were reduced or eliminated.

Parking Regulations

483. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if concessions will be offered in cases in which more than one family member requires a disabled parking disc owing to their poor mobility; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10885/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As I explained to the Deputy in response to Question 9239/19 of the 26 February 2019, my Department is responsible for the legislative basis for the Disabled Parking Scheme but not for its day-to-day management. Operational or pricing matters such as this one fall under the remit of the issuing bodies, the Irish Wheelchair Association (IWA) and the Disabled Drivers Association of Ireland (DDAI).

National Transport Authority Data

484. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the capital cost of each category of vehicle purchased by the NTA or bodies funded by the NTA including trains and buses of all types of seat capacity and size; and the cost of all types of electric vehicles in tabular form. [10890/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The National Transport Authority (NTA) have statutory responsibility for the development and implementation of public transport infrastructure including PSO fleet acquisition.

Noting their responsibility in relation to this matter, I have forwarded your query to the NTA for their consideration and direct reply. Please notify my office if you have not received a reply within 10 working days.

Affordable Childcare Scheme

485. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to ensure that community childcare and early years facilities are not left in a disadvantaged position due to the new affordable childcare scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10710/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Community Childcare settings provide a valuable service to children and families across the country, including the provision of vital services to vulnerable families in areas of disadvantage.

Over the last four budgets, my Department has increased funding for early learning and care and school age childcare by 117%. A significant proportion of this funding has been targeted at families who use community childcare services, thus assisting with the sustainability issues faced by some services. The Affordable Childcare Scheme will further increase investment in childcare and will reduce the top-up many parents have to pay for their childcare. This will have corresponding benefits especially for community providers. The Affordable Childcare Scheme is also expected to increase demand for services, thereby supporting community services to operate efficiently and at full capacity.

A core design feature of the Affordable Childcare Scheme is that “money follows the child”. Once a parent has been approved for a subsidy, they should be able to choose any registered childcare provider participating in the scheme, subject to availability, and the subsidy would then be paid directly to that provider. There could be concerns that this could reduce the sustainability of community services by increasing choice of provider. However, the underlying reasons for financial stability problems faced by some community providers does not rest with the nature of the funding model but with a wide range of other factors. Examples of these include the current inability of some parents to pay the level of fees asked of them, the broader range of family supports provided by some services in disadvantaged communities and the particular business models operated by certain services. By creating a clearer, more flexible and more user-friendly scheme, which explicitly links funding to parental income and to the costs of provision, it is intended that the Affordable Childcare Scheme will offer a vehicle for addressing some of these concerns.

For services which are facing financial sustainability, my Department oversees an integrated Case Management system operated by Pobal. This Case Management service provides non-financial assistance or support in the first instance. Financial supports are also available for community services facing certain challenges which may also be accessed through Case Management following a financial assessment.

In addition, my Department is currently undertaking a sustainability review which is examining the financial situation of a range of community childcare services in some of the most disadvantaged areas in Ireland. This review is also taking account of the future introduction of the Affordable Childcare Scheme. The review is expected to be completed in the second quarter of the year and will serve to inform any further sustainability measures or supports which may be required.

Child and Family Agency Services

486. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her views on a matter (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10299/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Deputy will be aware that it would be inappropriate for me to comment on individual cases.

I have referred the matter to Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, and asked for confirmation that the case is being dealt with appropriately.

Children in Care

487. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of children who have been removed from their parent or parents following the family falling into homelessness and in which the fact of the family's homelessness is the reason for the removal in each of the years 2011 to 2018; and her views on whether paying private companies up to €58,000 per child to place homeless children in foster care is a better use of public money than assisting the family to find accommodation. [10348/19]

488. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if a comparative analysis has been performed by Tusla of the rate at which children are removed from homeless families compared with the rate of removal from families that have not fallen into homelessness with a view to establishing whether the housing crisis is causing the break-up of otherwise functional families. [10349/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 487 and 488 together.

Children who are homeless are entitled to have the same level of safeguarding as any other child. Child protection concerns will be dealt with by Tusla with the same degree of diligence, care and promptness for any child in need, regardless of whether they or their family are experiencing homelessness.

Any decision to take a child into care will be based on the child's need for protection from harm and will take place in accordance with the thresholds set out in the Child Care Act 1991 (as amended). I would like to emphasise, as would Tusla, that homelessness is not a determining factor for children coming into care.

The decision to place a child in a foster care placement with a private fostering agency, as opposed to a foster care placement provided directly by Tusla, is not determined by their housing situation prior to entering care but rather by the imperative to place the child in a foster care placement which best meets his or her needs.

Tusla have informed me that they have not undertaken comparative analysis of the numbers of children being taken into care in circumstances where their families are or are not experiencing homelessness. Tusla information systems collate data under the categories of harm set out in Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children; that is, neglect, physical abuse, and so on. Tusla does not collect data on the housing situation of children prior to entry into care.

This Government recognises that homelessness is an extremely distressing situation for any family, and living in emergency accommodation is not conducive to normal family life. While

ultimate responsibility for managing homelessness rests with the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, my Department and Tusla are working to provide supports for families in emergency accommodation in order to mitigate the challenges faced by parents and children in this situation.

Foster Care Data

489. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of children in private foster care in each month of 2018. [10350/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I can inform the Deputy that Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, publish figures monthly on the number of children placed with privately provided placements, by placement type. The most recent date for which information is available is November 2018. Table 1, below, lays out the number of children in private placements for January to November 2018. It should be noted that the figures published in monthly performance activity reports are provisional figures and subject to ongoing validation.

Tusla's local fostering committee are the approval body for all foster care placements, including those recruited by private foster care companies. Children placed with private foster care companies are allocated a Tusla social worker.

Table 1. Children in Private Placements, at end November 2018

Month	Foster Care	Residential Care	Other Care Types	Total
January	395	206	20	621
February	390	212	18	620
March	387	217	16	622
April	381	221	21	623
May	394	218	19	631
June	393	217	13	623
July	383	210	16	609
August	392	211	23	626
September	390	222	29	641
October	397	222	31	650
November	398	222	30	650

Foster Care Data

490. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of private providers engaged in sourcing foster care here; the amount paid to each private provider in 2018; and the number of children placed in foster care by each provider in the same year. [10351/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Deputy may be aware that private providers do not place children in foster care. All children in foster care, regardless of provider, are in the care of the Child and Family Agency. If Tusla cannot source a placement within its own pool of foster carers, a private provider may be approached to provide a placement. All foster carers providing a foster care service, including those em-

ployed by private foster care companies, are assessed by Tusla's Foster Care Committee, prior to commencing placements.

As regards the number of children placed in foster care in 2018, I have written to Tusla to request the figures to which the Deputy refers.

Oireachtas Joint Committee Recommendations

491. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if the value for money review of the use of private foster care companies recommended by the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs in 2017 has been concluded; and if so, if a copy of the findings will be published. [10352/19]

492. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of the implementation of the 2017 recommendation by the Oireachtas Joint Committee for Children and Youth Affairs that funds be diverted away from private foster care companies and into the recruitment of foster carers and social workers in order that the same work can be done by Tusla; and the sum that has been redirected to date. [10353/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 491 and 492 together.

Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, has a statutory responsibility to provide alternative care services, including foster care services, under the provisions of the Child Care Act, 1991, the Children Act, 2001, and the Child Care (Amendment) Act, 2007. The majority of alternative care services are provided directly by Tusla.

When a child comes into care the most important issue for Tusla is identifying a foster carer who can meet the unique needs of that child. This can result in a child being placed with a foster carer from a non-statutory fostering service, where this is in their best interests. The majority of foster carers in Ireland, 89% or 3,851, are recruited, assessed and supported by Tusla. There are currently 5,554 children in foster care in Ireland, of which 10% are placed with non-statutory foster care agencies. It should be noted that Tusla's local fostering committees are the approval body for all foster care placements, including those recruited by private foster care companies. Children placed with private foster care companies are allocated a Tusla social worker.

Tusla utilises the services of private providers for different reasons. In some Tusla areas there may be a shortage of foster carers for demographic reasons, or there may be a need for specialist services to meet the needs of an individual child. These factors can result in the need to source foster placements from private fostering agencies.

In my formal response to the Chair of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the publication of the report on foster care, I noted that Tusla is carrying out a procurement exercise to ensure that the private foster care services have been procured in accordance with procurement objectives, which incorporate value for money as well as service quality objectives.

In 2018 a procurement process was initiated to ensure that the commissioning of the service was in line with financial regulations and represented best value for money. The process, however, failed to deliver any providers. Tusla has initiated a new tendering process for private foster care overall, including provision of a link worker, supervision of staff etc.

It is recognised by Tusla that best value will lie in the ability of the Agency to recruit foster carers in suitable locations with the appropriate capacity to care for the small number of chil-

dren not currently fostered within the statutory provision.

Recruitment of foster carers is an ongoing and prioritised activity within the Agency. This work is resourced by Tusla and includes funding fostering services in 17 Tusla areas, funding of recruitment material (such as leaflets, posters) and also media campaigns (radio, newspaper advertisements). In 2018, work was carried out to review this recruitment activity nationally, and to ensure that future recruitment is evidence informed about what works best in identifying potential foster carers. To further enhance this work, four additional posts are being funded, in addition to existing fostering resources, to support the recruitment of foster carers. A national working group has also been established to review all recruitment activity across the country, to ensure all efforts are being taken to recruit a diverse range of foster carers to meet the diverse range of needs for children requiring foster care.

Childcare Services

493. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her views on the crises facing community childcare services due to issues arising from recent Pobal compliance visits and audit issues; if her attention has been drawn to their concerns; if she will consider the proposals set out in the correspondence (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10356/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Assisting families to access high quality, affordable early learning and care and school age childcare is a priority for me as Minister and hence I take these matters very seriously.

My Department funds a number of early learning and care and school age childcare programmes. Given the large amount of public money that is used in funding these programmes, there needs to be an appropriate level of oversight and accountability. The Department of Children and Youth Affairs believes that our approach to compliance and supporting services strikes a necessary and appropriate balance. Our approach involves setting out the rules for the receipt of State funding, supporting providers to deliver services, and at the same time, the approach offers assurances to the taxpayer that the funding assigned is being spent as it was intended.

A high level of compliance with the rules of the various childcare schemes is vital to maintaining existing investment as well as ensuring future investment. It is a requirement that services operating the early learning and care and school age childcare programmes funded by my Department must be compliant with the 'Rules for DCYA childcare funding programmes', the most recent of which was published on 9th August 2018. Compliance with these Rules is overseen by Pobal on behalf of my Department. Because subsidies for the early learning and care and school age childcare programmes are paid based on attendance (and not enrolment), this is a vital governance component of the funding for which my Department is responsible.

I very much appreciate that community childcare settings, such as that referenced, provide a critical service to children and families across the country. I also appreciate their stated concerns regarding their sustainability. Hence, significant support is available to them to bring their service onto a more sustainable footing, whilst being necessarily compliant with scheme rules.

My Department oversees an integrated Case Management system operated by Pobal through which a dedicated team assesses services facing challenges. This Case Management service provides non-financial assistance or support in the first instance. Financial supports are also available for services facing certain challenges which may also be accessed through Case Man-

agement following a financial assessment.

Results from Pobal compliance visits for the first part of the programme year 2018/2019 show some issues in relation to non-compliance which needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency. I am encouraged however that most services have engaged constructively with the process so far. I would recommend all other services to get in contact with Pobal or their local City / County Childcare Committee if they need support or advice, or if they believe a sustainability issue arises.

I should also emphasise that as an FRC, some activities may be eligible for funding from elsewhere, rather than from childcare programmes per se, for example after school work related to literacy and numeracy may be eligible for funding under the Schools Completion Programme.

The existing targeted childcare schemes will be replaced later this year with the Affordable Childcare Scheme. In the coming weeks my Department will begin to roll out a major national information campaign in relation to how this new scheme will operate. A significant amount of time will be invested in working with services to ensure that they are ready for it. The new scheme will not have a snapshot window. Its attendance rules will seek to reflect the reality of children and parents' lives and the need for services to operate as businesses. The attendance rules will reflect a certain degree of flexibility whilst honouring the requirement to ensure that Exchequer funding is used for the purposes it was intended.

The Deputy will be aware that investment in childcare has increased by an unprecedented 117% over the last four budgets, now totalling €575m per year. Community services access much of this growing investment. Turnover for many services has increased quite substantially (given that the number of services operating has increased only slightly) assisting services to review their business model to meet compliance requirements. The Affordable Childcare Scheme will mark another significant milestone for early learning and care and school age childcare in this country, creating an infrastructure from which Government can further increase investment in services over the next decade. This is in line with the commitment made in First 5, the Whole of Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families, I published last November.

Early Childhood Care and Education

494. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the preschool options available to a family with a child that will be two years and seven months in September 2019, missing the ECCE first year by one month and that cannot afford to pay privately for the service; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10409/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): From September 2018, all children meeting the minimum age requirement of 2 years and 8 months are eligible for a full two programme years on the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme. This measure refines developments introduced in 2016 and increases the duration of each registered child on ECCE from a previous average of 61 weeks, to a potential duration of 76 weeks (two programme years) delivering fully on a commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government that is good for children, families and Early Years providers.

This new measure addresses the previous situation with regard to multiple entry points whereby there was a broad fluctuation in the number of free preschool weeks a child could avail of (between 61 and 88 weeks depending on the date of birth of the child) and will ensure a programme that is equitable for all children. The situation where there was more than one entry

point created a perception of inequality to some parents when they considered the variance in the number of weeks of ECCE provision, dependant on their entry point.

The minimum age was chosen based on national experience and a review of international practice. It also had regard to the regulatory environment for early learning and care in this country and issues such as child development readiness and adult-child ratios. The upper age limit for the ECCE programme remains the same (i.e. a child is not eligible if they will be 5 years and 6 months before the end of the programme year).

It must be noted that age limits have been used to determine eligibility since the inception of the ECCE programme in 2010.

Some children will not be able to commence their ECCE in September of the programme year as they will not have reached the age of 2 years and 8 months on or before 31st August. However, they will be able to commence ECCE the following September and continue for a further year from September of the next programme year. Parents of children born around this time of the year may prefer for their children to start school at age 4 rather than 5 years and may therefore choose to avail of one year of ECCE only. However, it is important to note that this is a parental choice and that the overall policy change has ensured that two programme years are available to all children.

My Department does its best to ensure, in so far as possible, the equitable treatment of all children and families who apply for childcare funding under the ECCE Programme. In order to ensure objectivity and fairness, it is essential that clear rules exist for the scheme and that they are applied evenly. An essential component of the ECCE programme rules is an eligibility start date to ensure that the programme can be administered and budgeted for in an appropriate manner.

There are no immediate plans to revise the ECCE rules beyond the changes which were introduced in September 2018.

Youth Services Funding

495. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the level of funding provided to the youth advocate programme Ireland from 2011 to 2018, by county in tabular form; the locations in which services will no longer continue to operate; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10421/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I can inform the Deputy that my Department has not provided direct funding to the named organisation, Youth Advocacy Programme (YAP) Ireland, in the years specified by the Deputy.

However, Tusla, the Child and Family Agency has an annual Service Level Agreement in place with the organisation. As the matters to which the Deputy refers are operational, I have requested Tusla to respond to the Deputy directly.

Child and Family Agency Services

496. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will direct Tusla to provide urgent psychology hours as deemed necessary to a child (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10524/19]

497. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will direct Tusla to follow up on a case (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10525/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 496 and 497 together.

I can advise the Deputy that I have referred the matter to Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, for their appropriate attention.

The Deputy may wish to note that I am not in a position to intercede directly as there is an obligation that Tusla performs its functions independently. I am also precluded from giving a direction to Tusla that interferes with the exercise of professional judgement in a particular case. These aspects are referred to in section 8(11) and section 47(5), respectively, of the Child and Family Agency Act 2013.

Affordable Childcare Scheme Eligibility

498. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the reason children in community childcare settings will be restricted to 15 hours per week if their parents are not in full-time employment or education; her views on whether this will have a serious negative impact on vulnerable children that rely on their childcare settings for hot meals; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10708/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Affordable Childcare Scheme (ACS) is a new, national scheme of financial support for parents towards the cost of childcare. The development of this Scheme is a significant move forward in delivering quality, accessible, affordable childcare to families throughout Ireland.

The Scheme entails a fundamental shift away from subsidies grounded in medical card and social protection entitlements, and towards a comprehensive and progressive system of universal and income-based subsidies. By making this shift and by tangibly reducing the cost of quality childcare for thousands of families across Ireland, the Scheme aims to improve children's outcomes, support lifelong learning, make work pay and reduce child poverty. It is also designed to have a positive impact on gender equality in relation to labour market participation and employment opportunities.

The Scheme will ultimately replace the existing targeted childcare schemes with a single, streamlined and user-friendly scheme, providing both universal and targeted childcare subsidies. To make the transition to the new scheme as smooth as possible, families can choose to make the switch to the new Scheme once it launches (targeted for October 2019) or can remain on their current childcare subsidy programme for one final year.

With regard to income-based subsidies awarded under the Scheme, parents who are working, studying or who meet certain other conditions will qualify for an enhanced-hours subsidy (up to a maximum of 40 hours per week). The definitions of 'work' and 'study' will be set out in regulations made under the Childcare Support Act 2018 and will be comprehensive, covering differing types of work and study arrangements, such as part-time, week on/ week off and zero hour contract arrangements.

Parents who do not qualify for an enhanced hours subsidy may still qualify for a standard-hours subsidy (up to a maximum of 15 hours per week). This approach reflects the evidence on the strong benefits of early childhood care and education for young children and, particularly,

those from disadvantaged backgrounds but also, the evidence that these benefits are – in most cases – realised with part-time participation. The cap of 15 hours will provide for continuity between the Affordable Childcare Scheme and the ECCE scheme, whereby it will be possible for a child to commence subsidised sessional care before the age of 3 and to continue in such care without disruption or a change of hours as they transition into the ECCE scheme.

Families with high levels of need, who require childcare for child welfare, child protection or family support reasons, may be referred for childcare support by a specified “sponsor” body. Where such a referral is made, the family will automatically qualify for a subsidy for the number of hours considered appropriate by the sponsor without having to satisfy the scheme’s eligibility, income or enhanced hours requirements. There is no general minimum or maximum age limit for a child who is the subject of a referral by a sponsor. However, sponsor bodies will adhere to strict criteria for qualification for referral as set out in Agreements made under section 14 of the Childcare Support Act 2018.

Finally, my Department is currently undertaking a Sustainability Review of a range of community childcare providers in some of the most disadvantaged areas in Ireland. The impact of the standard hours subsidy limit of 15 hours is one of the items being considered as part of this review. The review is due to be completed in quarter 2 of this year and will inform any future policy developments in this area.

Early Childhood Care and Education

499. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the reason Pobal is trying to recategorise childcare and early years settings as half day facilities due to the fact that children may be collected early; her views on whether this will have a detrimental effect on facilities in terms of funding and on children that will not be entitled to a meals if facilities are forced to become half day services; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10709/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Assisting families to access high quality, affordable early learning and care and school age childcare is a priority for me as Minister and hence I take these issues raised in your question very seriously.

My Department funds a number of early learning and care and school age childcare programmes. Given the large amount of public money that is used in funding these programmes, there needs to be an appropriate level of oversight and accountability. The Department of Children and Youth Affairs believes that our approach to compliance and supporting services strikes a necessary and appropriate balance. Our approach involves setting out the rules for the receipt of State funding, supporting providers to deliver services, and at the same time, the approach offers assurances to the taxpayer that the funding assigned is being spent as it was intended. DCYA also wishes to ensure that as many children and families as possible can benefit from State childcare funding and that funding is accessed in a fair, equitable and transparent manner.

A high level of compliance with the rules of the various childcare schemes is vital to maintaining existing investment as well as ensuring future investment. It is a requirement that services operating the early learning and care and school age childcare programmes funded by my Department must be compliant with the ‘Rules for DCYA childcare funding programmes’, the most recent of which was published on 9th August 2018. Compliance with these Rules is overseen by Pobal on behalf of my Department. Because subsidies for the early learning and care and school age childcare programmes are paid based on attendance (and not enrolment),

this is a vital governance component of the funding for which my Department is responsible.

I very much appreciate that childcare services provide a valuable service to children and families across the country. I also appreciate concerns raised by providers regarding the potential impact of compliance findings and the associated re-registrations on their operations, including the provision of meals. Significant support is available to them to bring their service onto a more sustainable footing, whilst being necessarily compliant with scheme rules.

My Department oversees an integrated Case Management system operated by Pobal through which a dedicated team assesses services facing challenges. This Case Management service provides non-financial assistance or support in the first instance. Financial supports are also available for community services facing certain challenges which may also be accessed through Case Management following a financial assessment.

Results from Pobal compliance visits for the first part of the programme year 2018/2019 show some issues in relation to non-compliance which needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency. I am encouraged however that most services have engaged constructively with the process so far. I would recommend all other services to get in contact with Pobal or their local City / County Childcare Committee if they need support or advice, or if they believe a sustainability issue arises.

The existing targeted childcare schemes will be replaced later this year with the Affordable Childcare Scheme. In the coming weeks my Department will begin to roll out a major national information campaign in relation to how this new scheme will operate. A significant amount of time will be invested in working with services to ensure that they are ready for it. The new scheme will not have a snapshot window. Its attendance rules will seek to reflect the reality of children and parents' lives and the need for services to operate as businesses. The attendance rules will reflect a certain degree of flexibility whilst honouring the requirement to ensure that Exchequer funding is used for the purposes it was intended.

The Deputy will be aware that investment in childcare has increased by an unprecedented 117% over the last four budgets, now totalling €575m per year. Community services access much of this growing investment. Turnover for many services has increased quite substantially (given that the number of servicers operating has increased only slightly) assisting services to review their business model to meet compliance requirements. The Affordable Childcare Scheme will mark another significant milestone for early learning and care and school age childcare in this country, creating an infrastructure from which Government can further increase investment in services over the next decade, This is in line with the commitment made in First 5, the Whole of Government Strategy for Babies , Young Children and their Families, I published last November.

Rape Crisis Network Funding

500. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the funding provided to a centre (details supplied) in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10711/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Under the Child and Family Agency Act, 2013, Tusla, the Child and Family Agency has statutory responsibility for the care and protection of victims of domestic, sexual or gender based violence whether in the context of the family or otherwise.

Tusla funds 16 Rape Crisis Centres which provide a range of services to victims of sexual

violence including:

- a helpline to support callers, answer questions and provide information,
- counselling and support,
- advocacy,
- provision of a trained person to accompany clients to a doctor or Sexual Assault Treatment Unit,
- presentations/talks to various groups and students at second and third level,
- awareness raising activities.

Funding allocated to Rape Crisis Centres since the establishment of Tusla in 2014 is highlighted in Table 1.

Table 1: Funding Allocation to Rape Crisis Centres 2016-2019

No.	Organisation	2016	2017	2018
1	Rape Crisis North East	€159,110	€169,110	€187,110
2	Donegal Sexual Abuse and Rape Crisis Centre	€142,000	€168,500	€230,000
3	Rape Crisis Centre Midwest	€346,400	€361,400	€407,400
4	Mayo Rape Crisis Centre	€168,400	€188,400	€201,400
5	Rape Crisis Centre Kerry	€208,000	€214,000	€221,000
6	Rape Crisis Centre Wexford	€210,800	€216,900	€221,300
7	Galway Rape Crisis Centre	€363,000	€400,805	€404,250
8	Rape Crisis Centre Sligo, Leitrim and West Cavan	€168,300	€184,300	€252,550
9	Dublin Rape Crisis Centre	€1,087,892	€1,141,627	€1,229,214
10	Carlow and South Leinster Rape Crisis Centre	€163,500	€165,500	€249,310
11	Waterford Rape Crisis Centre	€240,200	€240,200	€241,200
12	Tipperary Rape Crisis Centre	€166,100	€170,100	€167,350
13	Athlone (Midlands) Rape Crisis Centre	€106,300	€113,100	€113,500
14	Tullamore Rape Crisis Centre	€84,300	€116,900	€120,300

No.	Organisation	2016	2017	2018
15	Sexual Violence Centre Cork	€290,500	€290,500	€293,000
16	Kilkenny Rape Crisis Centre	€174,900	€179,500	€175,900
	Total Funding	€4,079,702	€4,320,842	€4,714,784

Funding cited for 2014-2018 represents the total funding provided, which includes core funding for the year and any additional resources that were required due to service demands.

Tusla has advised that funding for 2019 has yet to be finalised.

Rape Crisis Network Funding

501. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the funding provided to the 16 services of the State for victims of sexual violence in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form; the amount of this funding that has been allocated to rape crisis centres; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10712/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Under the Child and Family Agency Act, 2013, Tusla, the Child and Family Agency has statutory responsibility for the care and protection of victims of domestic, sexual or gender based violence whether in the context of the family or otherwise.

Tusla funds 16 Rape Crisis Centres which provide a range of services to victims of sexual violence including:

- a helpline to support callers, answer questions and provide information,
- counselling and support,
- advocacy,
- provision of a trained person to accompany clients to a doctor or Sexual Assault Treatment Unit,
- presentations/talks to various groups and students at second and third level,
- awareness raising activities.

Funding allocated to Rape Crisis Centres since the establishment of Tusla in 2014 is highlighted in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Funding Allocation to Rape Crisis Centres 2016-2019

No.	Organisation	2016	2017	2018
1	Rape Crisis North East	€159,110	€169,110	€187,110
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No.	Organisation	2016	2017	2018
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13	Athlone (Midlands) Rape Crisis Centre	€106,300	€113,100	€113,500
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	Total Funding	€4,079,702	€4,320,842	€4,714,784

Funding cited for 2014-2018 represents the total funding provided, which includes core funding for the year and any additional resources that were required due to service demands.

Tusla has advised that funding for 2019 has yet to be finalised.

Child and Family Agency Services

502. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the average waiting times for counselling services at each of the 16 State funded rape crisis centres in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10713/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla, the Child and Family Agency has statutory responsibility for the care and protection of victims of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence.

As the matters to which the Deputy refers are operational, I have requested Tusla to respond to the Deputy directly.

Child and Family Agency Data

503. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of persons waiting to access rape crisis counselling services in County Louth; the length of time these persons have been waiting; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10714/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla, the Child and Family Agency has statutory responsibility for the care and protection of victims of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence.

As the matters to which the Deputy refers are operational, I have requested Tusla to respond to the Deputy directly.

Rape Crisis Network Funding

504. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 244 of 6 December 2018, the status of the engagement of Tusla in a needs analysis project in the Border region to identify gaps in service provision and to prioritise the development of sexual violence services; the stage at which the engagement is at; if a report will be made available; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10715/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that I have secured additional funding of €1.5m for Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence services in 2019, which brings the total available funding for these services this year to €25.3m.

As part of its commissioning approach to the development of services, Tusla is currently engaged in a needs analysis project in the Border region to identify gaps in service provision and to prioritise the development of sexual violence services. This project has commenced, and is progressing. All future service developments will be informed by Tusla's commissioning approach.

Tusla has commissioned a consultant who will be responsible, amongst other tasks, for the preparation of a final report on the needs with regard to sexual violence services in the Border region. The anticipated delivery date for the report is Quarter 3, 2019. An advisory group is also in place with this needs analysis, and it has convened on a number of occasions.

It is important that the needs of victims and survivors of sexual violence are met in the best way possible. I strongly support the work of Tusla, and I am committed to supporting the Agency in meeting the needs of individuals who experience sexual violence.

Child and Family Agency Services

505. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her views on recent media reports that waiting times for rape crisis counselling have increased in view of the fact that funding has stagnated; and if a review of the assessment of service demands carried out by Tusla which determines the distribution of funding to individual rape crisis centres will

be undertaken. [10716/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Under the Child and Family Agency Act, 2013, Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, has statutory responsibility for the provision of care and protection to victims of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence. In discharging its statutory responsibility, Tusla supports 16 Rape Crisis Centres by providing services for individuals who have experienced sexual violence.

Since taking up office, in 2016, as Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, I have prioritised the development of Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence (DSGBV) services. This has been reflected in the level of additional funding provided to Tusla for these services.

In 2017, Tusla provided €22.1 million in funding to domestic, sexual and gender based violence services, an increase of €1.5m over 2016 funding. This level of funding was increased by €1.7m in 2018, bringing the total level of funding for DSGBV services to €23.8m. This funding was increased again in 2019, this time by €1.5m bringing the total level of funding to €25.3m.

Additional funding in 2019 will support the development of enhanced domestic, sexual and gender based violence services, including continued implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) and the Second National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence (2016 – 2021).

Tusla is responsible for the provision of services, and allocates funding to individual DSGBV organisations throughout the country. The distribution of funding to individual Rape Crisis Centres is determined by Tusla following an assessment of service demands throughout the country. Tusla has conducted, and continues to conduct, regional needs analysis projects in order to ascertain the greatest needs within a particular area for DSGBV services.

Tusla has advised me that it has a mechanism in place to enable services to apply for additional funding to increase their service provision. The mechanism requires that a business case is made and evidence is provided for both the need for additional service provision, and the organisation's capacity for additional service development. Applications are considered within budget constraints and in line with commissioning priorities. Tusla has advised that it also engages proactively with funded organisations to allocate resources for service developments.

Tusla has developed considerable expertise in this area and I support the continued development of sexual violence services in Ireland, as evidenced by the increased funding provided since 2016.

Childcare Services

506. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the position regarding the matter being categorised as a national crisis by many not-for-profit, community managed and operated childcare providers following recent compliance audits by Pobal (details supplied); if she has satisfied herself that the sector will not sustain mass closures and a reduction in services; the steps she has taken to avert such a situation and ensure that these services and supports will remain available to disadvantaged parents and children; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10793/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Assisting families to access high quality, affordable early learning and care and school age childcare is a priority for me as Minister and hence I take these issues raised in your question very seriously.

My Department funds a number of early learning and care and school age childcare programmes. Given the large amount of public money that is used in funding these programmes, there needs to be an appropriate level of oversight and accountability. The Department of Children and Youth Affairs believes that our approach to compliance and supporting services strikes a necessary and appropriate balance. Our approach involves setting out the rules for the receipt of State funding, supporting providers to deliver services, and at the same time, the approach offers assurances to the taxpayer that the funding assigned is being spent as it was intended.

A high level of compliance with the rules of the various childcare schemes is vital to maintaining existing investment as well as ensuring future investment. It is a requirement that services operating the early learning and care and school age childcare programmes funded by my Department must be compliant with the 'Rules for DCYA childcare funding programmes', the most recent of which was published on 9th August 2018. Compliance with these Rules is overseen by Pobal on behalf of my Department. Because subsidies for the early learning and care and school age childcare programmes are paid based on attendance (not enrolment), this is a vital governance component of the funding for which my Department is responsible.

I very much appreciate that community childcare settings, provide a valuable service to children and families across the country. I also appreciate their stated concerns regarding their sustainability. Hence, significant support is available to them to bring their service onto a more sustainable footing, whilst being necessarily compliant with scheme rules.

My Department oversees an integrated Case Management system operated by Pobal through which a dedicated team assesses services facing challenges. This Case Management service provides non-financial assistance or support in the first instance. Financial supports are also available for services facing certain challenges which may also be accessed through Case Management following a financial assessment.

Results from Pobal compliance visits for the first part of the programme year 2018/2019 show some issues in relation to non-compliance which needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency. I am encouraged however that most services have engaged constructively with the process so far. I would recommend all other services to get in contact with Pobal or their local City / County Childcare Committee if they need support or advice, or if they believe a sustainability issue arises.

The existing targeted childcare schemes will be replaced later this year with the Affordable Childcare Scheme. In the coming weeks my Department will begin to roll out a major national information campaign in relation to how this new scheme will operate. A significant amount of time will be invested in working with services to ensure that they are ready for it. The new scheme will not have a snapshot window. Its attendance rules will seek to reflect the reality of children and parents' lives and the need for services to operate as businesses. The attendance rules will reflect a certain degree of flexibility whilst honouring the requirement to ensure that Exchequer funding is used for the purposes it was intended.

The Deputy will be aware that investment in childcare has increased by an unprecedented 117% over the last four budgets, now totalling €575m per year. Community services access much of this growing investment. Turnover for many services has increased quite substantially (given that the number of services operating has increased only slightly) and co-payments / top-up payments made by parents has decreased, both measures assisting many services to strengthen their sustainability and review their business model to meet compliance requirements.

The Affordable Childcare Scheme will mark another significant milestone for early learning

and care and school age childcare in this country, creating an infrastructure from which Government can further increase investment in services over the next decade. This is in line with the commitment made in First 5, the Whole of Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families, I published last November.

Childcare Services Data

507. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of children under the childcare support scheme that are serviced by not-for-profit, community managed and operated childcare providers by county; the number of not-for-profit, community managed and operated childcare providers which are operational in designated disadvantaged community areas by county; the number of not-for-profit, community managed and operated childcare providers operating quality childcare or early learning services which are in receipt of support by county; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10794/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Community and not for profit childcare services are eligible for funding for the Early Childhood Care and Education programme; the Community Childcare Subvention programmes (including the Universal subsidy); and Training and Employment Childcare programmes.

As well as the childcare programmes, community services are also eligible to apply for DCYA capital funding programmes. The current Capital Grant programme has three strands: Strand A is for the creation of new places for 0 - 3 year olds; Strand B is for Fire Safety improvements for community early learning and care services; and Strand C is for the creation of new school age places. Applications are currently being accepted up until the closing date of 27th March 2019. Community services may apply for funding under all three strands.

County	No. of Approved Children in Community Services under ECCE/TEC/CCS/CCSP 2018 Programmes	No. of Community Services in receipt of funding under ECCE/TEC/CCS/CCSP 2018 Programmes or 2018 Early Years Capital / School Age Childcare	No. of Community Services in receipt of funding under 2018 Early Years Capital or School Age Childcare.
Carlow	1,198	17	1
Cavan	1,400	26	13
Clare	1,605	30	7
Cork	1,560	137	18
Donegal	2,797	73	14
Dublin	10,078	237	34
Galway	3,083	81	10
Kerry	2,737	56	5
Kildare	519	12	1
Kilkenny	1,283	24	4
Laois	1,236	18	3
Leitrim	844	20	6
Limerick	2,624	53	11
Longford	923	14	1
Louth	1,126	19	0
Mayo	1,699	56	5
Meath	1,353	20	2

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County	No. of Approved Children in Community Services under ECCE/TEC/CCS/CCSP 2018 Programmes	No. of Community Services in receipt of funding under ECCE/TEC/CCS/CCSP 2018 Programmes or 2018 Early Years Capital / School Age Childcare	No. of Community Services in receipt of funding under 2018 Early Years Capital or School Age Childcare.
Monaghan	1,970	33	5
Offaly	617	19	2
Roscommon	860	25	9
Sligo	1,359	29	12
Tipperary	1,961	45	6
Waterford	2,147	37	3
Westmeath	1,068	22	2
Wexford	2,086	45	7
Wicklow	750	21	4
Grand Total	52,883	1,169	185

Community Services /County Level of disadvantage as per Trutz Hasse Deprivation index:

County	Extremely Disadvantaged	Very Disadvantaged	Disadvantaged	Marginally below average	Grand Total
Carlow			1	14	15
Cavan			5	18	23
Clare			3	15	18
Cork		4	12	55	71
Donegal		1	16	54	71
Dublin		1	53	69	123
Galway			7	36	43
Kerry			3	31	34
Kildare			1	4	5
Kilkenny			2	10	12
Laois			3	14	17
Leitrim			2	15	17
Limerick	1	8	6	27	42
Longford			4	10	14
Louth				16	16
Mayo			11	32	43
Meath				13	13
Monaghan			2	27	29
Offaly			1	16	17
Roscommon			3	18	21
Sligo				25	25
Tipperary			14	26	40
Waterford		2	5	18	25
Westmeath			2	18	20
Wexford			9	31	40
Wicklow			3	7	10
Grand Total	1	16	168	619	804

Child and Family Agency Funding

508. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 584 of 26 February 2019, if her Department or Tusla perform an oversight function of private care providers to ensure that the public funding being given to those providers is being used for the purposes for which it is intended and excessive sums are not being paid to company directors in dividends and so on. [10802/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department does not have an oversight function in regard to private care providers. I am referring the Deputy's question to Tusla, the Child and Family Agency for direct reply.

Family Resource Centres

509. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to introduce a family resource centre at a location (details supplied); the way in which an application can be made in relation to same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10822/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Family Resource Centre (FRC) Programme is administered by Tusla, the Child and Family Agency.

I am aware that an application for inclusion in the Programme was made by an organisation in the location to which the Deputy refers, last year. This organisation was not selected as one of the final eleven new Family Resource Centres in 2018.

I have secured an increase of €1.5 million in additional funding for the further investment and development of the Family Resource Centre Programme this year. However, there are currently no plans to establish any new Family Resource Centres in 2019.

Tusla will continue to support the organisation to which the Deputy refers through its local office.

Tusla identifies and monitors the need for the delivery of family support services based on population demographics and presenting needs across the country, including the Cavan-Monaghan area. Tusla plans to allocate future funding according to the results of needs analysis projects across the country.

Tusla continues to work with Family Resource Centres and other family support organisations throughout the country and will discuss service needs and funding resources with centres, where appropriate. Tusla is committed to using all available resources for children and families in the most efficient, equitable, proportionate and sustainable way.

Childcare Costs

510. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will engage with the Minister for Finance with a view to introducing measures which would reduce commercial rates for childcare providers with the objective of facilitating providers in passing on a cost reduction to families who avail of their services; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10836/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The matter of rates payments for the early learning and care sector does not fall under the remit of my Depart-

ment, nor does my Department have a role in determining which properties are rateable. The levying of commercial rates is the responsibility of the Valuations Office, which falls under the aegis of the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government.

In this regard, I understand that the Valuation Act, 2001 as amended by the Valuation (Amendment) Act 2015 provides that all buildings used or developed for any purpose, including constructions affixed thereto, are rateable unless expressly exempted under Schedule 4 of the Act. Under Schedule 4, paragraph 22, community childcare facilities are exempt from commercial rates, by virtue of the fact that they operate on a not-for-profit basis. The Valuations Office have also advised that, under Schedule 4 paragraph 10, facilities who provide the Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme (ECCE) only are exempt from commercial rates. All other childcare providers are, therefore, rateable.

The issue of commercial rates is one that has been raised by the early learning and care sector, in particular through the National Early Years Forum, which I established in 2016. My Department has therefore taken a number of steps to pursue this matter, including meeting with relevant officials to explore the possibility of obtaining an exemption of the application of commercial rates to private childcare providers, on the basis that they are educational facilities and, seeking legal advice in relation to same.

My Department has therefore taken a number of steps to pursue this matter, including meeting with relevant officials to explore the possibility of obtaining an exemption of the application of commercial rates to private childcare providers, on the basis that they are educational facilities and, seeking legal advice in relation to same.

Most recently I contacted the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, requesting reconsideration of the position of private childcare facilities in respect of their rateability for commercial rates. It was confirmed that there are no proposals under consideration for a discount of commercial rates for private childcare providers, and that the Commissioner of Valuation has no discretionary latitude to grant exemptions not covered by Schedule 4 of the Act.

My Department and I have made every effort to raise the concerns of the early learning and care sector in this respect, however as the matter falls outside the remit of my Department, I am constrained in the role I can play. My Department will, however, continue to monitor this matter.

Childhood Obesity

511. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the action she has taken to advance the recommendations of the report of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs on tackling childhood obesity; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10839/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The report that the Deputy is referring to falls under the remit of the Department of Health. The question is therefore more appropriate for my colleague Simon Harris TD, Minister for Health.

Early Childhood Care and Education Programmes

512. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if a child

(details supplied) will be permitted to avail of the access and inclusion model under the early childhood care and education programme; if an appeal can be made following a decision to the effect that this application was late in view of the fact that their parent has no alternative supports in place at this time to advance their early education and welfare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10891/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): According to the details supplied by the Deputy, the child in question is not within the eligible age range to avail of the ECCE programme at this time, but will be eligible from September of this year. AIM supports are currently only available to children participating in the ECCE programme. Pobal has advised that no application for AIM supports has yet been made on behalf of the child in question. Applications for AIM usually open in the May preceding enrolment to ECCE and I would advise the Deputy to ask the family to make contact with Better Start before or around this time as it is advisable that applications for AIM supports are made in good time to ensure that the relevant supports are in place when required.

The Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) is a programme of supports designed to enable children with a disability to access and meaningfully participate in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme. It was introduced in June 2016 and is administered by Pobal on behalf of my Department. AIM is a child-centred model, involving 7 levels of progressive support, moving from the universal to the targeted, based on the needs of the child in the context of the pre-school setting they are attending.

Child and Family Agency Reports

513. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the person within the management of Tusla to whom a person (details supplied) released their report in May 2016. [10918/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I do not have the information requested by the Deputy. I am requesting Tusla to respond directly to the Deputy on this matter.

Child and Family Agency Reports

514. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if a copy of the minutes of Tusla national management team meetings at which a report (details supplied) was discussed will be provided in view of correspondence received. [10919/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Deputy will be aware that I have sought written clarification from Tusla, the Child and Family Agency in relation to a number of matters regarding the report referred to by the Deputy.

I am aware that an individual has asked the Chairperson of a sub-committee of the Tusla Board for the information to which the Deputy refers.

The sub-committee of the Board of Tusla has advised me that the matters raised by the Deputy will be part of the investigation, which is currently under way.

Child and Family Agency Reports

515. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the person or body that made the decision not to provide a report (details supplied) to the board of Tusla or to witnesses; and the reason the decision was made. [10920/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Deputy will be aware that I have sought written clarification from Tusla, the Child and Family Agency in relation to a number of matters regarding the report referred to by the Deputy.

The sub-committee of the Board of Tusla has advised me that the matters raised by the Deputy will be part of the investigation, which is currently underway.

Child and Family Agency Reports

516. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if it is customary for Tusla management to withhold reports dealing with serious and long-standing child protection issues from its board and her Department. [10921/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I would like to assure the Deputy that it is not customary for Tusla management to withhold reports dealing with serious and longstanding child protection issues from the Tusla Board or my Department.

As a State Body, and like other State bodies, Tusla management may commission and/or produce reports for its own purposes, which may not necessarily be shared with the Board or my Department.

Child and Family Agency Reports

517. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if there are existing finished reports in the possession of Tusla, its board or her Department which have not been shared with the next appropriate governance level or the public; and if so, the reason in each case for the failure to share same. [10922/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla, the Child and Family Agency has advised me that it is not aware of any existing finished reports in its possession which have not been shared with the appropriate level of governance.

I would also like to inform the Deputy that I am not aware of any such reports in my Department which have not been shared with the appropriate level of governance.

Child and Family Agency Policy

518. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if there is an agreed protocol, process and governing criteria among Tusla, its board and her Department in respect of the nature of information to be shared with and alerted to the next appropriate governance level within agreed timescales linked to the usual priorities of risk, range of risk, early warning, public interest and so on. [10923/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): There is currently a Communications, Collaboration and Accountability Protocol between the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. The purpose of this

protocol is to ensure that there are lines of communication, accountability and decision making between the Tusla Executive, the Tusla Board, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs.

Child and Family Agency Reports

519. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the reason a report (details supplied) was not forwarded to or requested by the board of Tusla or her Department prior to May 2018 in view of the fact that the former Minister for Health treated the level and age of risk identified in the midlands in 2015 as very serious and communicated their concern both privately to the CEO of Tusla and the media. [10924/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Deputy will be aware that Tusla, the Child and Family Agency has informed me that the report referred to was commissioned by Tusla management with the purpose of informing them in relation to certain events, and was accordingly described as an internal management report.

The Deputy will also be aware that I have sought written clarification from Tusla in relation to a number of matters regarding the report.

The sub-committee of the Board of Tusla has advised me that the matters raised by the Deputy will be part of the investigation, which is currently under way.

As you have highlighted, the former Minister for Children and Youth Affairs took matters in the Midlands very seriously. I also take child protection matters very seriously. Internal and external assurances were sought and continue to be sought regarding the safety of children and young people.

Animal Welfare Bodies

520. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if the option of establishing a national inspectorate of independent vets to carry out inspections in respect of animal cruelty will be examined in view of the conviction for animal cruelty at a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10261/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Seán Canney): My Department has policy responsibility for matters pertaining to the Dog Breeding Establishment Act 2010.

In July 2018, my Department published new Guidelines for dog breeding establishments. These came into effect on 1 January 2019 and are available on my Department's website at the following link:

<https://drcd.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/Guidelines-for-DBEs-.pdf>

These Guidelines were developed through consultation with both industry experts and the public. Some of the issues raised, including the issue referenced in the Deputy's question, related to matters beyond the scope of the guidelines and they are now being considered as part of a wider review of the legislation, in order to identify any necessary legislative amendments that may be required in the Act to further improve standards.

The enforcement of animal welfare standards for all animals, including dogs, is a matter for

the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine under the Animal Health and Welfare Acts. Both Departments work closely with each other to ensure a coordinated approach is taken in this area.

Community Enhancement Programme

521. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development when the 2019 community enhancement programme will be finalised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10430/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I launched the Community Enhancement Programme for the first time in May 2018. It provides funding to community groups to help them to enhance facilities in disadvantaged areas.

The details of the 2019 Programme are currently being finalised by my Department and I expect that it will be launched before the end of March.

Tidy Towns Committees Funding

522. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if he has considered allocating ring-fenced funding to tidy towns committees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10431/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Tidy-Towns competition was originally launched by Fáilte Ireland over 60 years ago. Since its inception, the competition has grown from 52 entrants in 1958, to 883 entrants in 2018.

As Minister for Rural and Community Development, I was delighted to be in a position to announce grant funding to TidyTowns Committees of €1.4 million for each of the years 2017 and 2018, to mark the 60th anniversary of the competition. This funding has allowed the Committees to prepare better for the annual competition through the purchase or upgrade of small equipment and other materials.

While there is no specific funding ring-fenced for TidyTowns Committees, it should be noted that TidyTowns Committees can apply, as community groups, for funding to other schemes within my Department, such as the Community Enhancement Programme. This programme is administered through the Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs), and allows applications for funding for the management and maintenance of estates.

In 2018, 158 applications were approved for funding of €536,816 to TidyTowns Committees under the Community Enhancement Programme.

CLÁR Programme

523. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development when the next round of CLÁR funding will be announced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10497/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The CLÁR programme provides funding for small scale projects in rural areas that have experienced sig-

nificant levels of depopulation. The programme has been very successful since I reintroduced it in 2016, following a number of years when it was closed for new applications. It now forms part of my Department's Project Ireland 2040 Programme for Rural Regeneration.

Although the amounts available to projects under CLÁR are relatively modest, the impact of the funding is very significant. I have visited many of the projects myself and I have seen first-hand the difference they make to local communities.

I launched the 2019 CLÁR programme on 28 February last. The measures being funded under the programme this year are:

Measure 1: Support for Schools/Community Safety measures

Measure 2: Play Areas (including Multi-Use Games Areas)

Measure 3: Community Wellbeing Supports (new in 2019), comprising of:

(a) First Response Support

(b) Mobility and Cancer Care Transport

(c) Sensory Gardens

The "Community Wellbeing Support" measure encompasses the assistance given in previous years for voluntary first-response organisations and for mobility and cancer care supports.

This measure will also, for the first time, provide funding for the development of specialist sensory gardens and complementary play equipment. These gardens are designed to stimulate the senses and can be of particular benefit in enhancing the quality of life for people with a diverse range of life challenges.

School Meals Programme

524. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her views on a matter in relation to the school meals scheme (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10336/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The school meals programme provides funding towards the provision of food to some 1,580 schools and organisations benefitting 250,000 children at a total cost of €57.6 million in 2019 representing an increase of €3.6 million over the previous year. The objective of the scheme is to provide regular, nutritious food to children who are unable, due to lack of good quality food, to take full advantage of the education provided to them.

As part of Budget 2019, it was announced that my department would commence a pilot scheme from September 2019, providing Hot School Meals in 36 schools for an estimated 7,200 children at a cost of €1m for 2019 and €2.5m in a full year.

The Programme is an important component of policies to encourage school attendance and improved educational achievement by children.

Research shows us the value of the provision of adequate and nutritious meals for a child's health, learning, attention and educational achievement. That is why I am providing funds to establish a pilot programme for a hot meals scheme in primary schools.

For schools already participating in the School Meals Programme, it is intended that the hot meal will replace the lunch option for the duration of the pilot i.e. the school year commencing in September 2019.

Eligible primary schools will shortly be issued with an invitation to submit an Expression of Interest to participate in the pilot from September 2019. Funding of €2.90 per meal will be provided and it will not be permitted to seek an additional contribution from families to provide the meals. Schools will identify a supplier who will supply (prepare and deliver) the hot meals in line with HACCP and food safety regulations in compliance with the Healthy Ireland nutrition standards for school meals.

In recent years entry to the School Meals Scheme has been confined to DEIS schools or schools deemed by the Department of Education and Skills to be in need of school meals support. The school concerned applied for funding for a Dinner Club for the 2018/2019 academic year but were refused on the basis that they are not a DEIS school and are not deemed by DES to be in need of school meals support. They do receive funding from my Department, through a major charity, for breakfast for a small number of children. The school will shortly receive an expression of interest letter for the hot school meal pilot.

I trust that this clarifies the position.

Legislative Reviews

525. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to update the Minimum Notice and Terms of Employment Acts 1973 to 2001; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10381/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): As with all employment legislation, my Department continues to monitor the effectiveness of the Minimum Notice and Terms of Employment Acts so as to ensure that it is fit for purpose and meets the requirements of employers and employees.

The Deputy will note that the Employment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2018 was signed by the President on 25 December 2018 and came into force yesterday, the 4th March 2019.

The main provisions of the Act are that -

- Employers shall give employees basic terms of employment within five days;
- Zero hour contracts are prohibited except in situations of genuine casual employment and where they are essential to allow employers to provide cover in emergency situations or to cover short-term absence;
- Employees called in to work but sent home again without work are entitled to a new minimum payment;
- Banded Hours provisions are introduced: a new right for employees whose contract of employment does not reflect the reality of the hours they habitually work whereby they will be entitled to be placed in a band of hours that better reflects the hours they have worked over a 12 month reference period; and
- there are strong anti-penalisation provisions for employees who invoke their rights under this legislation.

The introduction of this important legislation will improve the security and predictability of working hours for employees on insecure contracts.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

526. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10816/19]

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.

Full-time care and attention does not necessarily mean 24 hours in each day. Full-time care and attention can be considered to apply where there is an ongoing and daily commitment by the carer and which also generally results in the carer not being able to support him/herself through normal full-time employment.

I confirm that my Department received applications for carer's allowance (CA) from the person concerned on 16 October 2018.

The evidence submitted in support of this application was examined and the deciding officer decided that although the person concerned is providing a certain level of care, they are not providing full-time care and attention.

The person concerned was notified on 12 February 2019 of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

My Department have received and forwarded a request for appeal to the Social Welfare Appeals Office for their necessary action.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Waiting Times

527. **Deputy Seán Barrett** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason it is taking a minimum of 16 weeks for a carer's allowance application to be processed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10904/19]

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.

My Department is committed to providing a quality service to all its customers. This includes ensuring that applications are processed and that decisions on entitlement are made as quickly as possible.

In general, social welfare schemes with a number of complex qualifying conditions can take longer to process. Before a decision can be made on entitlement to CA, evidence must be

provided in respect of the care recipient's care requirement, the level of care the carer provides and the carer's means.

While the average processing time is still higher than it should be, the re-assignment of staff from other areas of the Longford Centralised Schemes Office to claims processing in October has resulted in a significant reduction in the number of claims awaiting decision and the processing time has already started to improve from an average of 17 weeks at the end of December 2018 to 16 weeks at the end of January 2019.

I expect the average processing time to further reduce over the coming months.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension Applications

528. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a person (details supplied) in County Leitrim will receive a decision in relation to an application for an invalidity pension; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10220/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Invalidation pension (IP) is a payment for people who are permanently incapable of work because of illness or incapacity and who satisfy the pay related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions.

The department received a claim for IP from this gentleman on 22 August 2018. His claim was disallowed on the grounds that the medical conditions for the scheme were not satisfied. He was notified on 22 November 2018 of this decision, the reasons for it and of his right of review and appeal.

He requested a review of this decision and submitted further medical evidence on 17 December 2018 in support of his request. Following a review of all the information available it has been decided that there is no change to the original decision. He was notified on 28 February 2019 of the outcome of the review.

I am informed by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an Invalidation Pension appeal was registered on 4th December 2018, and in accordance with the statutory requirements, the Appeals Office contacted the person concerned and asked him to set out the complete grounds of his appeal.

No reply was received from the person concerned and his appeal was subsequently withdrawn on 14th February 2019.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Community Welfare Services Provision

529. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the community welfare service at the Intreo centre at Bishop's Square is moving from being a walk-in service to appointment only; the reasons for same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10262/19]

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

Over the last number of years the Department has developed a new integrated income and employment support service called Intreo. The aim of this development is to streamline and integrate the delivery of all services to the customer, eliminating duplication and enabling them to access all services in a single location. In the Intreo Centre customers can access job-seeking advice, information on vacancies, income support services including Community Welfare Services all in the one place. The main point of access for all services in Bishops Square Intreo Centre will be via the reception area.

With effect from Monday the 4 March 2019, access for a customer to see a Community Welfare Officer (CWO) will be by scheduled appointment. However, information on the services provided by the CWS and relevant application forms, will now be available in the Intreo Centre at reception where it will also be possible to make an appointment.

If it is appropriate for a customer to meet with a Community Welfare Officer they will be given an appointment to do so and this will enable the customer to complete much of the claims application documentation in advance. There will, of course, be facility for a customer to have access to the CWS in an emergency situation.

The new service approach will be available Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday from 10am to 12.30pm and Thursday from 10.30am to 12.30pm, providing a more flexible, structured and accessible service to customers. It will also eliminate the waiting times that are currently being experienced by the drop in service, thus providing a better customer service experience to our customers.

If, due to incapacity or other reason, a customer cannot access the service at the Intreo Centre, a Community Welfare Officer will be available to carry out a home visit. This element of the service was always available and will continue to be so.

There will be no changes to current payment arrangements for customers as a result of this change and all current customers of the service have been notified of the change.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Rent Supplement Scheme Data

530. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of recipients of rent supplement in each of the years 2011 to 2018 and to date in 2019, by county, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10277/19]

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 23,300 recipients for which the Government has provided €132.4 million for 2019.

End of year statistics for rent supplement recipients by county for the years 2011 to 2018 and to date in 2019, are provided in the attached tabular statement. The 2019 figure, similar to that for 2018, is predicated on current trends associated with Housing Assistance Payment Scheme (HAP) and the underpinning macroeconomic conditions for next year.

The aim of 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 Accommo-

ation Scheme between 2016 and 2021. Part of this commitment will be the transfer of those with long term housing needs out of rent supplement and on to HAP with a targeted completion date for these transfers of the end of 2020.

Tabular Statement:

Rent Supplement Recipients by County 2011 - End of January 2019

County	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Jan 19
Carlow	1,440	1,239	1,108	1,086	962	593	398	225	209
Cavan	843	519	455	414	403	391	297	200	195
Clare	1,961	1,722	1,547	1,336	1,024	423	177	114	111
Cork	10,732	9,878	9,020	8,273	6,822	4,958	3,578	2,791	2,712
Donegal	2,977	2,411	2,047	1,812	1,202	415	146	89	84
Dublin	34,423	32,584	29,541	26,453	23,758	20,561	16,309	12,489	11,995
Galway	4,615	4,134	3,983	3,591	3,326	2,506	1,724	1,139	1,094
Kerry	2,278	2,037	1,888	1,736	1,633	1,554	1,141	780	760
Kildare	4,447	4,338	4,135	3,698	3,396	2,579	1,874	1,143	1,030
Kilkenny	1,619	1,365	1,210	1,011	554	319	181	113	111
Laois	1,178	1,097	1,085	1,008	978	871	552	240	222
Leitrim	440	374	354	324	331	281	180	96	89
Limerick	3,833	3,323	2,984	2,461	1,441	954	739	506	486
Longford	623	511	507	476	384	401	252	142	128
Louth	2,734	2,549	2,422	2,211	1,462	859	456	217	192
Mayo	2,928	2,435	1,900	1,619	1,528	1,074	623	358	341
Meath	2,723	2,143	1,941	1,726	1,528	1,001	546	304	292
Monaghan	488	438	395	352	269	188	141	110	110
Offaly	1,349	1,240	1,124	1,041	812	563	233	92	85
Roscom- mon	1,275	997	802	687	611	566	378	219	215
Sligo	698	591	542	451	478	289	131	77	74
Tipperary	2,609	2,199	2,094	1,961	1,674	901	434	246	237
Waterford	2,098	1,773	1,556	1,443	958	590	188	116	125
Westmeath	1,671	1,592	1,588	1,533	1,426	1,299	840	629	614
Wexford	4,102	3,700	3,179	2,700	2,296	1,960	1,326	790	752
Wicklow	2,719	2,495	2,381	2,130	1,991	1,945	1,534	1,078	1,044
Total	96,803	87,684	79,788	71,533	61,247	48,041	34,378	24,303	23,307

Disability Allowance Appeals

531. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if an appeal has been received against a decision to refuse an application for disability allowance in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10292/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 24th January 2019. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant papers and comments by or on behalf of the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. These papers were received in the Social Welfare Appeals Office on 8th February 2019 and the case

will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Scéimeanna Fostaíochta

532. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Pearse Doherty** den Aire Gnóthaí Fostaíochta agus Coimirce Sóisialaí an gceapfar cinnire ógra úr ar scéim fostaíochta pobail (sonraí tugtha) i nDún na nGall; an sealbhóir reatha ar tí éirí as an phost; muna gceapfar, an dtuigeann sí nach mbeidh aon duine ar fáil ina háit chun an tseirbhís don óige a riaradh; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [10293/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Is éard a bhíonn i Scéimeanna Oibre amhail an Fhostaíocht Phobail (FP) ná tionscnaimh dhearfacha a chuireann ar chumas na ndaoine a bhíonn dífhostaithe go fadtéarmach a gcion a dhéanamh ar mhaithe lena bpobail le linn dóibh cur lena scileanna féin chun ullmhú i gcomhair na fostaíochta ionchais san am le teacht. Tá sé tábhachtach a thabhairt faoi deara, áfach, go bhfuil an rannpháirtíocht sna scéimeanna seo ceaptha le maireachtáil go ceann téarma shocraithe shealadaigh agus ní poist inbhuanaithe lánaimseartha iad na háiteanna atá á dtairiscint. Críochnóidh an duine lena mbaineann i scéim Oileán na nÓg, Club Óige Chríost Rí, a teidlíocht ar 156 seachtaine sa scéim i Meitheamh 2019. Iarrfar an tráth sin duine chun teacht in ionad an duine reatha maidir leis an bpost atá á shealbhú aici faoi láthair. Fógrófar iarratais ar an bpost ar Jabanna Éireann (Jobsireland) agus tarlóidh an gnáthphróiseas earcaíochta i gcomhar le grúpa coimircíochta na Fostaíochta Pobail agus le seirbhís INTREO áitiúil na Roinne Gnóthaí Fostaíochta agus Coimirce Sóisialaí.

Jobseeker's Allowance Payments

533. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a review will be undertaken of the case of a person (details supplied) with a view to backdating payment of a jobseeker's allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10294/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): In this instance it would not be appropriate for my Department to undertake a review as it is a matter for the Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO) which operates independently of the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

The person concerned can request the SWAO to review the decision of appeal 17/09672 which covers the decisions of Jobseekers Allowance applications registered on 20 January 2017 and 20 April 2017.

There is no appeal registered with the SWAO of the decision based on the Jobseekers Allowance application of 14 December 2017.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Local Employment Service

534. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of referrals made to the local employment service in 2018, by office. [10322/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Local Employment Services (LES) engages primarily with long-term unemployed jobseekers, but may also engage with short-term unemployed jobseekers where a local need arises. Jobseekers are referred directly to the LES by Intreo offices.

The following table reflects the numbers of activation customers who attended/engaged with the Local Employment Service, by provider, in 2018. The engagement period can last for up to 12 months. The Department records when a customer attends/engages with the LES service and some of the numbers below may include those persons who were referred towards the end of 2017, but who attended/engaged with the service in 2018. The numbers are reflective of the volume of customers who will have received activation assistance from the LES service in 2018 represents an increase of just over 2000 customers compared to 2017.

LES CONTRACT	Activation - Clients Engaged 2018
Northside	1,737
Ballymun	1,528
Dublin City NW	1,900
Blanchardstown	1,542
Dublin SWIC	531
Docklands/Eastside	1,130
Dublin South City	466
Dublin 12	731
Ballyfermot	735
Clondalkin	1,746
Tallaght	2,477
Southside	1,129
Kildare	2,102
Bray	953
Monaghan	770
Dundalk & Drogheda	1856
Mayo	935
Galway	944
Limerick	2,371
Cork	1,781
South Kerry	780
Tralee	1,250
Waterford City	1,006
Waterford County	547
Wexford	1,659
Total	32606

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Community Employment Schemes Eligibility

535. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will consider extending the three year rule for those aged over 55 years of age engaged in community employment in which they are providing a service in their community that otherwise would not be available; if there is discretion in such cases; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10323/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): As the Deputy will be aware, the Government agreed to establish an Interdepartmental Group (IDG) to explore how these social inclusion schemes might best be organised into the future including which Department should hold lead responsibility for sponsoring CE schemes focused on social Inclusion. The deliberations of the group will inform any further consideration to review participation limits including those who are over 55 in conjunction with other labour market issues that should inform any decision on participation limits on active labour market programmes.

Social Welfare Appeals

536. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10355/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 18th January 2019. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant papers and comments by or on behalf of the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. These papers were received in the Social Welfare Appeals Office on 4th February 2019 and the case will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Appeals

537. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a disability allowance for a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10377/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Disability allowance (DA) is subject to periodic reviews. This gentleman's entitlement to DA was recently reviewed and it was established that he had means not previously disclosed to this Department. These means are derived from a blind welfare allowance (BWA) which is paid by the health service executive (HSE).

DA is a statutory means-tested payment and the provisions governing the assessment of means are set out in legislation. When deciding on entitlement of DA, a deciding officer has no discretion regarding the application of this legislation. The deciding officer implemented their decision from a current date resulting in no retrospective debt being raised against the person concerned.

This gentleman has lodged an appeal with the independent social welfare appeals office (SWAO). All the relevant papers requested by that Office were prepared and submitted by this Department. The SWAO will be in touch with the person concerned in due course in relation to the progress of their appeal.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility

538. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 553 of 13 November 2018, if the payment will be disregarded in the means test for social welfare payments for those that were in receipt of a payment before she approved disregarding it in view of the fact the payment is still being taken as means from social welfare payments (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10382/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Northern Ireland Victims and Survivors Service delivers funding and support to survivors of the Conflict / Troubles on behalf of the Executive Office of Northern Ireland. They have remit to assist all victims and survivors identified in the Victims and Survivors (Northern Ireland) Order 2006, providing support to those who have been injured (physically or psychologically), those who care for people who have been injured, and those who have been bereaved by the Conflict / Troubles.

I have recently approved the introduction of a disregard for payments from Northern Ireland Victims & Survivors Service for social welfare means testing purposes, and I was pleased to sign Regulations to this effect on December 21 2018, with the disregard being effective from this date.

My officials have been in contact with the Deputy about the specific case he raised and the claimant in question has since had their means reassessed in line with the disregard.

Disability Allowance Applications

539. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application for a disability allowance by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10386/19]

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 12 November 2018. Their application, based upon all the evidence submitted, was refused on medical grounds as it was not found that this gentleman was substantially restricted in taking up employment.

The person concerned was notified in writing of this decision on 5 February 2019 and was also notified of their right to request a review of this decision or to appeal it to the independent

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Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO). No request for an appeal or review has been received to date.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the deputy.

Disability Allowance Applications

540. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application for a disability allowance by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10387/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): I can confirm that my department received an application for disability allowance (DA) from this gentleman on 14 December 2018.

On 13 February 2019 the person concerned was requested to supply supporting documentation required by the deciding officer in order to make a decision on his eligibility. On receipt of this information a decision will be made on his DA application and the person concerned will be notified of the outcome.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications

541. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application for a domiciliary care allowance by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10389/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): This lady was notified on the 27th February 2019 that her Domiciliary Care Allowance has been awarded on appeal with effect from 1st April 2018.

Arrears due for this period will issue along with her March 2019 payment on the 19th March 2019.

I hope this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Appeals

542. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an appeal by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10390/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 2nd 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.

Carer's Benefit Eligibility

543. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the case of a person (details supplied) in County Sligo will be reviewed; if this condition can be waived in the circumstances; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10413/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's benefit (CARB) is a payment made to insured people who leave the workforce to care for a child or an adult in need of full-time care and attention. An increased payment can be made where full-time care is being provided to two people.

Under the provisions of the legislation a person claiming CARB must be in remunerative full time employment (for a minimum of 16 hours in the week or 32 hours in the fortnight) for eight weeks out of the previous 26 week period immediately prior to the first day on which a claim is made.

The evidence submitted in support of this application was examined and the deciding officer decided that this evidence did not indicate that this requirement was satisfied.

There is no provision in legislation to waive this requirement, however the person concerned may wish to apply for increase for qualified adult (IQA) on her spouse's state pension contributory (SPC) and in addition carer's allowance (CA) which pays at half rate when a carer is in receipt of another social welfare payment such as IQA on SPC.

The person concerned may also wish to apply for the carer's support grant (CSG) formerly known as the respite care grant. This annual payment is for carers, who look after a person in need of full-time care and attention and is made regardless of the carer's means, it is however subject to the same caring conditions as CA.

If the person concerned wishes to make an application to any of the above mentioned schemes, she should complete and return the application form(s) that I have arranged to issue to them.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Community Employment Schemes Administration

544. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason her Department is delaying a person (details supplied) from taking up a community employment scheme position in a company; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10414/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): There was no delay in processing the Community Employment (CE) position for the person concerned. The (CE) eligibility form was received by CE Unit on the 6th February 2019 and

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the person concerned commenced CE on the 4th March 2019.

The average timeframe for processing a CE application from receipt of eligibility form from the CE project to a customer commencing a scheme is 15 working days. However, this is dependent on forms being received on / before Wednesday in any given week with forms received on Thursdays and Fridays pushing processing times out by a further week.

I trust this clarifies matters for the deputy.

Disability Allowance Applications Waiting Times

545. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason there is a 14 week wait for answers in relation to disability allowance applications. [10423/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): My Department is committed to making decisions on entitlement as quickly as possible.

In general, social welfare schemes with a number of complex qualifying conditions can take longer to process. Before a decision can be made on entitlement to disability allowance (DA), evidence must be provided in respect of the person's medical condition, the extent to which it restricts them from taking up employment, their means and their habitual residency.

The target processing time for the DA scheme is to process 75% of new claims within 12 weeks. In January 2019, the average waiting time for new DA applications was 14 weeks.

My Department recognises that the current processing times for DA must be improved and is working to achieve this. The current processes in place and resources assigned to this area of my Department, along with the number of Medical Assessors available to provide medical opinions are kept under constant review to ensure that any delays are minimised.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Payments

546. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when arrears of a carer's allowance will issue to a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10490/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): An application for carer's allowance (CA) was received from the person concerned on 20 July 2018.

The application was awarded to the person concerned on 7 January 2019 with effect from 2 November 2017 and the first payment for 3 January 2019 issued to her nominated bank account on 10 January 2019.

Arrears of carers allowance due from 2 November 2017 to 2 January 2019 will issue to the bank account of the person concerned on 7 March 2019.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

JobPath Programme

547. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 613 of 5 February 2019, timeframe for the publication of the econometric review of JobPath which was due to be published at the end of January 2019; if she has read the report; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10503/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): This evaluation of the JobPath public employment service is being carried out in the context of a partnership between my Department and the Directorate for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

The final outputs of the project will be

- (1) the publication of a DEASP report;
- (2) the publication of a joint DEASP-OECD report which will present both further results and further enhancements to the evaluation methodology; and
- (3) regular quarterly publication by my Department of updated outcome statistics for JobPath participants using the same methodology as in the published reports.

One of the features of JobPath is that any long-term unemployed jobseeker is potentially eligible for referral for as long as he or she remains unemployed. As a result, the probability of being referred, as well as the likely employment outcome, changes over time. This means that developing a counterfactual model to accurately estimate the impact of JobPath on participants' labour market prospects represents a significant technical challenge.

To address this challenge, my Department has developed a new extendable econometric modelling framework, in collaboration with the OECD. This framework represents a major step forward in terms of both the quality of the evaluation data and methodology, and the comprehensiveness of the outcome measures. Furthermore, the evaluation approach is designed to facilitate regular statistical updates on the outcomes of JobPath participants, and to enable the development of comparable reporting on other labour market programmes. The technical complexity of the project has meant a longer time to completion than first envisaged.

I understand my officials will present the evaluation report to me shortly, prior to its publication.

JobPath Data

548. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons referred to JobPath to date; the number of persons referred for a second time to date; and if a person has been referred more than twice. [10510/19]

549. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons engaged with the JobPath companies. [10511/19]

550. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons that have commenced employment through JobPath to date; the number of these jobs that were sustained for 13, 26, 39 and 52 weeks, respectively. [10512/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 548 to 550, inclusive, together.

The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection provides a range of activation supports catering for long-term unemployed jobseekers and those most distant from the labour market to secure and sustain full-time paid employment. These supports include the JobPath service.

My Department selects clients for the JobPath service by means of a random selection process and protocols for selection currently preclude the selection of anyone who has already completed 52 weeks with the JobPath service within the previous four months. If, however, at the end of this period the jobseeker has not engaged in other activation supports and services they then become eligible for selection for a subsequent period of activation on the JobPath programme.

To date just over 21,000 jobseekers have commenced a second engagement period with the service, having availed of the service previously and 25 people have commenced a third engagement period.

Jobseekers referred for a subsequent referral will start working with a Personal Advisor, who will review their development during their previous engagements with the service and together they will prepare a new personal progression plan to build on that progress. The actions and tasks agreed will be based on their previous engagements, with particular focus on the identified barriers, which are preventing the person moving into full-time suitable employment.

To date, some 47,000 jobseekers have commenced employment during their engagement period with JobPath as set out in table 1. It should be noted that the figures presented are representative of the entire cohort of JobPath clients between July 2015 and February 2019 and all job starts in the same period. Many clients who are currently engaged with JobPath are still in the first phase of the service and will not have had sufficient time with the service to have gained employment nor sustain that employment for up to 52 weeks. Performance will improve as more clients complete their engagement with the service and have a chance to reach 52 weeks in employment.

I trust that this clarifies matter for the deputy. Table 1:

-	Nos.
Jobseekers referred	209,538
Jobseekers with a second referral	21,846
Jobseekers with a third referral	25
Currently engaged	77,252
Commenced employment	47,482
Jobs sustained for 13 weeks to date	28,582
Jobs sustained for 26 weeks to date	21,363
Jobs sustained for 39 weeks to date	16,152
Jobs sustained for 52 weeks to date	12,137

Rent Supplement Scheme

551. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a facility (details supplied) is being used for housing allocation or emergency accommodation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10520/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Rent supplement continues to play a vital role in housing families and individuals, with the

scheme supporting approximately 23,300 recipients for which the Government has provided €132.4 million for 2019.

The Department can confirm that rent allowance is being paid to residents in the facility referred to by the Deputy, in appropriate accommodation of their choosing.

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 Housing Assistance Payment (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.

Disability Allowance Applications

552. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to the fact that a person (details supplied) has submitted an application for disability allowance; when it is expected that the application will be processed; when it is expected that a decision will be made on the application; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10522/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): I confirm that my department received an application for disability allowance from this gentleman on 7 February 2019. On completion of the necessary investigations on all aspects of the claim a decision will be made and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

The processing time for individual DA claims may vary in accordance with their relative complexity in terms of the three main qualifying criteria, the person’s circumstances and the information they provide in support of their claim.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Departmental Advertising Expenditure

553. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the amount spent on promoting the services of welfare.ie on all social media platforms in the past two years to date by amounts spent, social media platform and year; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10546/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): For the purpose of this response, I am working on the assumption that the Deputy was referring to the promotion of MyWelfare.ie services across all social media platforms.

My Department is committed to ensuring that members of the public are aware of the welfare supports and services that are available to them and that many of these services are accessible easily online at MyWelfare.ie. MyWelfare.ie provides easy online access to a range of welfare services, anytime, anywhere.

Public information campaigns are developed and targeted carefully, using the best mix of media formats, to ensure that the Department's messages reach members of the public effectively while offering value for money. Therefore advertising includes both digital and social media platforms.

In 2019 to date, we have a committed spend of €5,000 ex. VAT for the promotion of MyWelfare.ie services on social media (Twitter). My Department is currently awaiting the invoice for this advertising activity. This promotion is part of a larger MyWelfare.ie campaign designed to raise awareness of the range of online services now available online- including easy online applications for maternity and paternity benefit, jobseekers payments, appointments and useful statement services like social insurance (PRSI) contribution statements.

There was no MyWelfare.ie related social media advertising expenditure during 2017 and 2018.

Disability Allowance Applications

554. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application for a disability allowance by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10641/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): I confirm that my department received an application for disability allowance (DA) from this gentleman on 15 February 2019. On completion of the necessary investigations on all aspects of the claim a decision will be made and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

The processing time for individual DA claims may vary in accordance with their relative complexity in terms of the three main qualifying criteria, the person's circumstances and the information they provide in support of their claim.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Departmental Staff

555. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the appointment of the new data protection officer for her Department satisfies the General Data Protection Regulation, GDPR, requirement that the officer be independent in the exercise of their function under Article 38 (6); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10643/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Article 38 of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) deals with the position of the Data Protection Officer (DPO). All public authorities and bodies including Government Departments are required to designate a DPO. My Department has assigned the DPO role to a senior manager at Principal level and has also assigned considerable staff resources to support the DPO.

As Deputy is aware, Article 38 (6) provides:

“The data protection officer may fulfil other tasks and duties. The controller or processor shall ensure that any such tasks and duties do not result in a conflict of interests for the DPO.”

The DPO does not have tasks or duties that result in a conflict of interests. Further, my Department does not interfere in any way with the DPO's independent functions, nor does it instruct the DPO in the exercise of DPO responsibilities.

Public Services Card

556. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the precise physical location of the public services card home unit of client information services office in her Department; the location of the office of the new data protection officer of her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10644/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Client Identity Services has responsibility for SAFE registration, which may result in a Public Services Card being issued. Client Identity Services is based in Shannon Lodge, Carrick on Shannon, Co. Leitrim.

The Data Protection Officer is also based in the Department's offices in Carrick on Shannon as are a range of other services of the Department.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Benefit Eligibility

557. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a carer's benefit review for a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10653/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's benefit (CARB) is a PRSI based payment, made to persons who are providing full-time care and attention to a person who has such a disability that they require that level of care.

Before a decision can be made on entitlement to carer's benefit (CARB), evidence must be provided in respect of the care recipient's care requirement, the level of care the carer provides, the carer's hours of employment and their PRSI record.

A person can be considered to be providing full-time care and attention where they are engaged in employment, self-employment or on training courses outside the home for a maximum of 15 hours per week, provided that they can show to the satisfaction of a deciding officer that adequate care has been provided for the care recipient in their absence.

It is also a condition for receipt of a CARB that the person being cared for must have such disability that they require full-time care and attention.

This is defined as requiring from another person, continual supervision and frequent assistance throughout the day in connection with normal bodily functions or continual supervision in order to avoid danger to him or herself.

The application for CARB was disallowed on the grounds that the evidence submitted did not indicate that the requirement for full-time care was satisfied.

The person concerned requested a review of this decision and submitted additional evidence in support of their claim with respect to establishing that the care recipient requires full

time care and attention.

The person concerned recently changed employer and a request for additional information issued to him on 28 February 2019 in respect of the number of hours they are currently working.

Once the required information has been received and the review completed, the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension Applications

558. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application by a person (details supplied); when a decision will be made; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10659/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Invalidation pension (IP) is a payment for people who are permanently incapable of work because of illness or incapacity and who satisfy the pay related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions.

The department received a claim for IP for the gentleman referred to on 08 November 2018.

His claim was disallowed on the grounds that the medical conditions for the scheme were not satisfied. He was notified on 21 February 2019 of this decision, the reasons for it and of his right of review and appeal.

He requested a review of this decision and submitted further medical evidence on 27 February 2019 in support of his request. The review will be processed as quickly as possible and he will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Employment Rights

559. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a person can take a case to the Workplace Relations Commission, WRC, under the Employment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2018, in cases in which their employer is not complying with the provisions of contracts and bands of hours worked; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10660/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Employment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2018 (the 2018 Act) was signed by the President on 25 December 2018. The Act came into force on 4 March 2019. The 2018 Act introduces a new right for employees whose contract of employment does not reflect the reality of the hours they habitually work. Such employees will be entitled to request to be placed in a band of hours that better reflects the hours they have worked over a 12 month reference period.

The Act provides that an employee may request in writing to be placed in the relevant band of hours. The employer has four weeks to consider the request. The Act provides reasonable defences for employers to refuse an employee's request for any one of the following reasons:

1. the facts do not support the employee's claim,

2. significant adverse changes have impacted on the business (e.g. loss of an important contract),
3. emergency circumstances (e.g. business has had to close due to flooding), or
4. where the hours worked by the employee were due to a genuinely temporary situation (e.g. cover for another employee on maternity leave).

Where the claim is disputed or refused, the employee can refer it to the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) for mediation or adjudication. If the Adjudication Officer finds in the employee's favour the redress will be that they are placed in the appropriate band of hours. No other form of redress is available. An appeal against an Adjudication Officer's decision will be to the Labour Court.

The Banded Hours provision will not apply to an employer who has entered into a banded hours arrangement through an agreement by collective bargaining with their employees. This is to recognise that in some sectors, the retail sector in particular, banded hours arrangements have been agreed between the employer and employees and have been working well. The new provisions will not interfere with these arrangements or with any such agreements that are collectively bargained in the future.

It is important to remember that an employer is not obliged to offer hours of work in a week where the employee was not expected to work or when the business is not open.

Current employees will not have to wait 12 months after commencement of this provision to seek to be placed on a band of hours. From 4 March 2019, an employee who believes their contract does not reflect the hours they have consistently worked over the previous 12 months of service with their employer may request to be placed by that employer in a band of hours that better reflects the hours they have worked regularly.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Applications

560. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a disability allowance claim by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10671/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): I confirm that an application from this lady for disability allowance (DA) was received by the Department on 22 January 2019.

The application has been referred to a Social Welfare Inspector (SWI) for a report on the person's means and circumstances. Once the SWI has submitted their report to DA section, a decision will be made on the application and this lady will be notified directly of the outcome.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Appeals

561. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason a person (details supplied) is waiting to have their claim put into payment;

and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10726/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Following a successful appeal, this lady has been awarded disability allowance (DA) with effect from 5 September 2018. The first payment will be made by her chosen payment method on 20 March 2019.

Arrears of payment due, which include the Christmas Bonus, will issue as soon as possible once any necessary adjustment is calculated and applied in respect of any overlapping payments.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Benefit Applications

562. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 625 of 19 February 2019, the status of a further application for a carer's benefit by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10729/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's benefit (CARB) is a payment made to insured people who leave the workforce to care for a child or an adult in need of full-time care and attention.

An application for CARB was received from the person concerned on 23 October 2018.

The evidence submitted in support of this application was examined and the deciding officer decided that although the person concerned is providing a certain level of care, they are not providing full-time care and attention.

The person concerned was notified on 28 January 2018 of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

A review of this decision was sought on 4 February 2019. The outcome of the review is that the original decision remains unchanged.

The person concerned requested an additional review of this decision on 14 February 2019 and the case has been referred to a local social welfare inspector (SWI) to establish the level of care being provided and whether the conditions for receipt of CARB are satisfied.

Once the SWI has reported and the review is complete, the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Community Employment Schemes Review

563. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she has finalised the terms of reference for the interdepartmental group on the future of community employment social inclusion schemes; and the programme for consultation that will take place during the review. [10734/19]

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

first meeting of the Interdepartmental Group (IDG) is arranged for 26th March 2019. The terms of reference are being finalised and it is expected that the IDG will consider and make practical proposals on which Department is best placed to host the social inclusion strand of the Community Employment (CE) scheme on a cost neutral basis.

During the deliberations of the IDG, consultation will take place with key stakeholders and community groups.

The IDG will report to Cabinet Committee B, dealing with Social Policy and Public Services with the outcome of the deliberations of the group prior to a final decision by the Government.

It is expected that the IDG will report to Cabinet by end Q2 2019.

Illness Benefit Eligibility

564. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a person who provides financial assistance to a family member who experienced delays in accessing illness benefit can be provided compensation under the exceptional needs payment; if a letter from the affected family member to confirm this was the case will be accepted by the community welfare office; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10737/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): As the Deputy is aware, payment issues had arisen in relation to the illness benefit scheme last year when my Department transferred administration of the scheme from an old legacy IT payment system to its core business IT platform which is already managing many of the Department's other scheme payments.

Any customer who has an urgent financial need as a result of a delay in their payment can apply to the Department's Community Welfare Service to receive an interim payment through the supplementary welfare allowance scheme. Customers in these circumstances are advised to make contact with the Community Welfare Service through their local Intreo Centre.

Where issues arise with illness benefit claims, these customers are paid the correct amount for the period of their illness once their claim is resolved.

For those supported by family members during a period of delay with an illness benefit entitlement, the claimant should be in a position to reimburse any family members who provided financial assistance once they receive their full entitlement.

Payment of supplementary welfare allowance would not be appropriate in the circumstances outlined in the Question. The scheme provides assistance to eligible people whose means are insufficient to meet their needs and those of their dependants. It is not intended to provide compensation.

I trust that this clarifies the position.

Jobseeker's Benefit Eligibility

565. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a person who is a PAYE worker and also self-employed is made redundant is eligible to apply for jobseeker's benefit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10755/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The main social welfare schemes for people who are unemployed are the jobseeker's benefit (JB) and jobseekers allowance (JA) schemes which provide income support for people who have lost work and are unable to find alternative full-time employment. Both of these schemes allow a person to work up to 3 days a week but they must be fully unemployed for 4 days in 7 consecutive days. The 2019 Estimates for my Department provide for expenditure this year on the jobseeker's schemes of €1.95 billion.

Jobseeker's benefit (JB) is a contingency based social welfare payment typically for employees who have suffered a substantial loss of employment and have sufficient social insurance contributions to qualify. The PRSI contribution classes that count towards qualifying for JB are PRSI Class A, H and P. Individuals who are self-employed cannot typically access JB as PRSI Class S contributions do not qualify a person for JB. The contribution conditionality for JB requires a jobseeker to have at least 104 weeks qualifying PRSI contributions paid since they first started work and 39 weeks qualifying PRSI contributions paid or credited in the relevant tax year or, 26 weeks qualifying PRSI paid in the relevant tax year and 26 weeks qualifying PRSI paid in the tax year immediately before the relevant tax year. The relevant tax year is the second last complete tax year before the year in which the JB claim is made. So, for claims made in 2019, the relevant tax year is 2017.

However, a self-employed person who has sufficient social insurance contributions as a PAYE employee could qualify for JB if they are engaged in self-employment for 3 days a week only, if they give up their self-employment or if their self-employment is considered to be subsidiary employment. To be considered as subsidiary employment the relevant employment should be in addition to the jobseeker's usual employment. Also, either the amount of earnings or profit from the occupation cannot exceed €144 per week (€7,500 over 12 months), or the jobseeker must have a minimum of 117 PRSI contributions, paid immediately preceding the date of the claim or in respect of the last 3 complete contribution years. However, the individual must still satisfy all conditions of the JB scheme, including being available for and genuinely seeking full-time employment.

If the jobseeker does not meet the qualifying contributions for JB they may be eligible for means tested JA or if engaged in farming they may qualify for means tested farm assist.

The new scheme for the self-employed, which I announced as part of the 2019 Budget measures, will extend a PRSI insurance based benefit to the self-employed who pay class S contributions and who lose employment. This measure which will be introduced later this year builds on other significant improvements for the self-employed in recent years such as access to invalidity pension and treatment benefits. This measure is part of the Government's stated aim of creating a supportive environment for entrepreneurship, including providing an income safety net to employees and the self-employed alike.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Pensions Data

566. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated value of unclaimed private pension funds in existence; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10795/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department does not collect data on the value of unclaimed private pension funds nor does it

have any way of estimating the value of such funds.

Neither the Department nor the Pensions Authority have powers under legislation to require the disclosure of such information from pension providers.

I hope that this clarifies matters for the Deputy.

Pension Fund Data

567. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated value of unclaimed life assurance funds in existence; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10796/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The issue raised by the Deputy is not relevant to my Department. It would be proper for the Deputy to raise this issue with my colleague, the Minister for Rural and Community Development.

Partial Capacity Benefit Scheme Administration

568. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the average waiting time for partial capacity benefit claims to be decided; if steps can be taken to improve the decision time in view of the reportedly long 12 week backlog; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10830/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Partial Capacity Benefit is a voluntary social welfare scheme which allows people to return to work or self-employment (if they have reduced capacity to work) and continue to receive a payment from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

If the person has been getting Illness Benefit (for a minimum of six months) or Invalidity Pension and wishes to return to work, they may qualify for Partial Capacity Benefit if their capacity for work is restricted due to a medical condition.

People qualify for Partial Capacity Benefit if their restriction on capacity for work is assessed as moderate, severe, or profound.

The current average time for eligibility to be decided is 12 weeks which includes a medical assessment on the person's restriction on capacity for work. My Department continues to review the length of time taken to process all its schemes with a view to reducing PCB processing times.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension Applications

569. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the position regarding an application for an invalidity pension by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10897/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Invalidity pension (IP) is a payment for people who are permanently incapable of work because

of illness or incapacity and who satisfy the pay related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions.

The department received a claim for IP from this gentleman on 20 February 2019.

The claim will be processed as quickly as possible and he will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Appeals Status

570. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if an appeal by a person (details supplied) will be expedited; the status of the matter; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10939/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 20th September 2018. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant papers and comments by or on behalf of the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. These papers were received in the Social Welfare Appeals Office on 28th January 2019 and the case will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Housing Aid for Older People Scheme

571. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the regulations for the housing aid for older people grant can be reviewed to allow for an application to be approved for persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10656/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The regulations governing the Housing Aid for Older People Scheme were reviewed and updated in 2014, to ensure the scheme's continued capability to support older people living in their own homes and communities with dignity and independence for as long as possible. If further details are provided directly to me in relation to the specific circumstances of the case referred to in the details supplied, I will consider further the necessity for a change to the current regulations.

Tree Remediation

572. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if a policy has been developed in respect of the removal of mature trees in

towns and villages nationally by local authorities; if a policy has been developed to assist landowners with concerns in relation to the safety of trees on their property in view of the extreme weather events; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10224/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department is the Lead Government Department for coordinating the response to severe weather events, including those involving high winds. One of the most widespread and potentially dangerous consequence of high wind is the risk of trees breaking and/or falling, posing a danger to motorists and pedestrians in the vicinity. This was the case with ex-Hurricane Ophelia on 16 October 2017, where trees down were reported in many areas across the country, with especially high numbers of roads blocked in the south and south-east regions.

Tragically, the three fatalities which occurred during ex-Hurricane Ophelia, were associated with falling trees and breaking branches. The fatalities underlined the public safety risk of this event which informed the decision of the National Emergency Co-ordination Group to advise the public against undertaking any non-essential activities or travel on 16 October 2017.

In its role as Lead Government Department, my Department has prepared a review report on the severe weather events which affected Ireland between August 2017 and September 2018. The review report includes recommendations for a risk management approach to address the issue of trees and public safety. This issue cuts across a number of public bodies and landowners. Under the Roads Act 1993, local authorities have responsibility for trees in public areas while trees on private lands, including lands adjoining public roads, are the legal responsibility of the land owner.

The inter-departmental recommendations of the review report on severe weather events in 2017/18, are under active consideration by the Government Task Force on Emergency Planning.

Water Quality

573. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the response of his Department to the letter of formal notice sent in July 2018 from the EU Commission for failing to fulfil its obligations under the drinking water directive (Council Directive 98/83/EC) and allowing exceedance of the parametric value for trihalomethanes. [10255/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): On 19 July 2018, the European Commission issued a Letter of Formal Notice to Ireland due to exceedances of trihalomethanes (THMs) levels in some drinking water supplies. The Commission requested that Ireland submit its observations within two months of receipt of the letter (i.e. by 20 September 2018) which was extended to 20 October 2018 at Ireland's request.

Ireland's response to the Letter of Formal Notice on 19 October 2018 highlighted the significant progress that has already been made in addressing THM exceedances at public water supplies. All exceedances in public drinking water supplies will have been addressed by the end of 2021, with the exception of Lough Talt, where there are particular planning issues. It pointed to the progress made in relation to the 24 group water supplies of which 11 (serving 12,173 persons) have now been addressed and the remainder which will be resolved by the end of 2020. The response also notified the Commission of the Irish Water procedures now in place for informing consumers served by supplies listed on the EPA Remedial Action List. This addresses the requirements of Article 8 of the Drinking Water Directive in relation to informing

the public about THM exceedences and providing the necessary advice on the precautions to be taken to protect public health.

My Department has not had any further formal correspondence from the Commission since the reply was issued.

Harbours and Piers

574. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if a matter will be addressed regarding the condition of a hand rail at a location (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10259/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): As Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, I have responsibility for policy, legislation and Oireachtas accountability in respect of the local government system. I also have policy responsibility in relation to certain functions and services of local authorities, particularly in areas such as housing, but local authorities also operate a range of functions within the policy, legislative and funding frameworks of other Government Departments. In this regard, while I have no function in the matter raised, I understand that Kerry County Council received grant funding from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine to carry out repairs at Brandon Pier in 2014.

Local Authority Housing Waiting Lists

575. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of persons on each local authority housing waiting list by single adults and those with children, respectively, by local authority, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10263/19]

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. 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 and can be found on my Department's website at the following link.

Report 2018

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

Housing Assistance Payment Data

576. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of persons in receipt of the housing assistance payment in each year since it was introduced by local authority; the annual figure spent for each county; the projected spend in 2019, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10278/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) is a flexible and immediate housing support that is available to all eligible households throughout the State. At the end of Quarter 4 2018, there were over 43,000 households having their housing needs met through HAP.

HAP is funded through a combination of Exchequer funding and tenant differential rents. Budget 2019 has increased the Exchequer funding for the HAP scheme to €422 million. This will allow for the continued support of existing HAP households and also enable the additional 16,760 households targeted under Rebuilding Ireland to be supported by HAP in 2019, as well as supporting the roll-out of the Homeless HAP Place Finder Support Service across the country.

Details on the number of tenancy setups and Exchequer funding for HAP from 2014 to 2018 are set out in the following table:

Year	Additional Households supported at end of year	Outturn €m
2014	485	€0.39m
2015	5,680	€15.64m
2016	12,075	€57.69m
2017	17,916	€152.69m
2018	17,926	€276.6m

Limerick City and County Council provides a highly effective HAP transactional shared service on behalf of all local authorities. This HAP Shared Services Centre (SSC) manages all HAP related rental transactions for the tenant, local authority and landlord. Accordingly, my Department does not recoup individual local authorities in respect of HAP rental payments in their administrative areas but rather recoups all landlord costs via the HAP SSC.

A breakdown of the number of households supported by HAP in each local authority area is available on my Department's website at the following link:

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

Foreshore Issues

577. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of foreshore licences which have been granted since 2004 under the Foreshore Act 1933; the number of these licences incomplete; the number of foreshore licences within this period which were for public developments; the number for private developers; if the same conditions apply to all foreshore licences granted under the Act; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10297/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The proposals that my Department receive for activities and developments on the foreshore vary greatly in terms of their nature, scale and complexity. The applications received range from the hand harvesting of seaweed to the construction of offshore windfarms or subsea cables. The type of applicants will also vary from private individuals and local groups to public sector bodies, local authorities and companies.

The conditions that are included with each consent will vary depending on the type of consent sought rather than on the type of applicant.

Details provided in the table include a breakdown of foreshore licences (and leases) by applicant type and by stage of completion.

Applicant Type Since 2004*

-	No. of Licences
Local Authority, Harbour Authority and Public Sector	304
Companies, Utility Companies and Organisations	307
Individuals	100
	711
Complete or Incomplete since 2004	
Licences and Leases Granted	488
In progress	148
Withdrawn, cancelled, not completed	75
	711

*Details from 1 January 2004 to 28 February 2019

Local Authority Housing Mortgages

578. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to problems being experienced with the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme in which, due to a lack of a national database of applicants, multiple applications have been made to different councils by the same persons; if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that this practice is delaying other applications by up to six months due to the fact those multiple applications stay on the system until they expire after six months, thus causing others to lose out; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that up to 50% of the loan offers are duplicated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10397/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): In accordance with the Regulations establishing the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan scheme, the local authorities are the statutory bodies responsible for approving and issuing mortgages under the scheme. Each authority has a credit committee, which is responsible for making the decisions, within its area, regarding loan applications. Applications for a Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan are not therefore transferable between local authorities. However, applicants are free to apply to any local authority they choose as long as they meet the eligibility criteria for a loan and my Department is aware that in some instances people have made applications to a number of authorities. The Housing Agency, which provides a central assessment service for loan applications on behalf of the local authorities, estimates that this has occurred in 18% of cases.

My Department undertook a review of the operation of the scheme late last year. Based on data supplied to it as part of that review, the Department has estimated that time frame for applicants receiving a decision from local authorities is in the region of 6 to 8 weeks.

A letter of loan offer is valid for a period of 6 months from date of issue, subject to the terms and conditions contained therein.

Social and Affordable Housing Data

579. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of build housing projects that have proceeded to construction in 2016, 2017 and 2018; the number provided by local authorities and approved housing bodies in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10424/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department collects, collates and monitors data relating to the delivery of housing under the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan 2016-2021 and publishes data on a quarterly basis relating to delivery across the plan’s component schemes.

Each quarter since Rebuilding Ireland commenced in 2016, my Department has published a Social Housing Construction Status Report outlining progress against targets along with a project level status report demonstrating social housing build activity across each local authority area. This is part of our ongoing commitment to ensure transparency; drive delivery and encourage solution focused discussion to achieve our mutual aim of delivering the maximum possible number of new build social homes. The Construction Status Report provides information on the most recent status of a project as it progresses through the various stages, including a status detailing “site start”.

Data captured is focused, in the main, on the number of homes completed rather than commenced.

A breakdown of the number of social houses provided across 2016, 2017 and 2018, by both local authorities and approved housing bodies, including voids and Part V delivery, is set out in the table.

Year	LA Build	AHB Build	Total Build
2016	2,628	337	2,965
2017	3,293	761	4,054
2018	3,423	1,388	4,811
Totals	9,344	2,486	11,830

Rental Accommodation Standards

580. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of rental property inspections carried out in each local authority in 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10432/19]

581. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the funding allocation for 2019 to be provided to local authorities to carry out rental property inspections; the number of rental inspections that will be carried out nationally in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10433/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 580 and 581 together.

The Strategy for the Rental Sector, published in December 2016, set out a series of measures to be introduced to ensure the quality of private rental accommodation by strengthening the applicable standards and improving the inspection and enforcement systems. On 1 July 2017, updated regulatory standards, the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2017, came into effect. These Regulations focus on tenant safety and include new measures covering heating appliances, carbon monoxide and window safety. In August 2017, my Department published guidance to assist and support local authorities in implementing the new Regulations.

All landlords have a legal obligation to ensure that their rented properties comply with these regulations and responsibility for the enforcement of the Regulations rests with the relevant local authority.

Between 2005 and 2017, over €36 million has been paid to local authorities to assist them in the performance of their functions under the Housing Acts, including the inspection of rented accommodation. Over 224,000 inspections were carried out during this period.

The Rental Strategy recognises the need for additional resources to be provided to local authorities to aid increased inspections of properties and ensure greater compliance with the Regulations. Provision has been made for €4.5 million of Exchequer funding to be made available to local authorities in 2019 for this purpose, with the intention of providing further increases each year in the period to 2021 to facilitate a targeted inspection coverage of 25% of rental properties annually at that stage.

Figures in relation to the number of inspections carried out by local authorities in 2018 are currently being collated by my Department and this information will be available on the Department's website by the end of quarter 1 2019.

Housing Data

582. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of habitable dwellings demolished in each local authority in each of the years 2015 to 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10437/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department does not hold data on the number of habitable dwellings demolished in each local authority area.

Vacant Properties Data

583. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of vacant properties that have been refurbished and have returned to the housing stock in each Dublin local authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10438/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Under Section 58 of the Housing Act 1966, the management and maintenance of local authority housing stock, including the implementation of planned maintenance programmes and carrying out of responsive repairs and pre-letting repairs to vacant properties, is a matter for each individual local authority.

Local authority housing stock becomes vacant and is refurbished and re-let on a continuous basis by the local authorities and my Department does not have information on such re-lets. My Department does provide some exchequer funding to support local authorities in tackling vacant social housing through the voids programme, particularly homes that would likely remain vacant for a significant period of time because of the scale of the works required. The programme assists local authorities in actively targeting such vacant properties, to minimise their turnaround and re-let times and return them to use in an energy efficient condition.

Information on numbers of vacant properties that were brought back to productive use in the Dublin local authorities is available to my Department solely in relation to those that received Departmental funding under the voids programme. These details in respect of 2018 are as follows:

-	SH Units Returned in 2018 under the voids programme
Dublin City	495
Fingal	48
South Dublin	61
Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown	50
Total	654

Vacant Properties Data

584. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the average target time for refurbishment of vacant properties in each local authority area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10439/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Vacant properties can be in varying states of disrepair and my Department encourages each local authority to bring these properties back to productive use as quickly as possible. Statistics in relation to social housing are compiled by the National Oversight and Audit Commission (NOAC) in its annual reports on Performance Indicators in Local Authorities. These statistics are set out by local authority and include the average time from date of vacancy to the date when a new tenancy commenced, with the most recent report relating to 2017. This report is available on the NOAC website at the following link:

<http://noac.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/NOAC-Performance-Indicators-Report-2017.pdf>.

Vacant Properties Data

585. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount each local authority spent on the refurbishment of vacant properties in its areas in 2016, 2017 and 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10440/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Under Section 58 of the Housing Act 1966, the management and maintenance of local authority housing stock, including the implementation of planned maintenance programmes and carrying out of responsive repairs and pre-letting repairs to vacant properties, is a matter for each individual local authority.

Local authority housing stock becomes vacant and is refurbished and re-let on a continuous basis by the local authorities and my Department does not have information on such re-lets or their cost. My Department does provide some exchequer funding to support local authorities in tackling vacant social housing through the voids programme, particularly homes that would likely remain vacant for a significant period of time because of the scale of the works required. The programme assists local authorities in actively targeting such vacant properties, to minimise their turnaround and re-let times and return them to use in an energy efficient condition.

The following table shows the funding provided by my Department under the voids programme for each local authority for the years 2016 to 2018.

	Funding 2016	Funding 2017	Funding 2018
Carlow	€69,450	€91,750	€555,874
Cavan	€307,530	€303,112	€270,779
Clare	€1,329,700	€966,203	€906,400
Cork City	€6,812,333	€1,485,357	€820,190
Cork County	€1,270,488	€1,130,977	€4,351,122
Donegal	€986,690	€1,866,898	€969,585
Dublin City	€8,757,848	€8,520,549	€8,299,452
Fingal	€1,725,774	€1,329,300	€589,150
South Dublin	€703,736	€718,446	€574,589
Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown	€183,092	€283,531	€436,845
Galway City	€346,650	€124,150	€0
Galway County	€472,552	€401,159	€763,853
Kerry	€917,549	€1,101,143	€1,132,446
Kildare	€485,130	€205,960	€639,867
Kilkenny	€351,278	€307,749	€212,293
Laois	€97,053	€33,170	€97,688
Leitrim	€712,404	€0	€387,427
Limerick	€384,250	€215,520	€272,177
Longford	€506,705	€0	€67,500
Louth	€91,523	€83,518	€166,794
Mayo	€233,089	€261,986	€204,474
Meath	€1,435,700	€769,005	€836,941
Monaghan	€667,944	€505,254	€496,283
Offaly	€846,198	€107,792	€102,929
Roscommon	€808,612	€44,324	€22,600
Sligo	€1,097,909	€909,395	€1,650,283
Tipperary	€1,204,318	€1,324,604	€771,582
Waterford	€1,135,973	€574,309	€0
Westmeath	€436,062	€329,113	€207,845
Wexford	€167,007	€428,015	€0
Wicklow	€245,887	€276,778	€452,145
	€34,790,434	€24,699,067	€26,259,113

Housing Assistance Payment Eligibility

586. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the basis, under Statutory Instrument No. 84 of 2011, of the decision not to grant HAP in a

case (details supplied); the elements within the statutory instrument that apply to this case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10444/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Applications for social housing support are assessed by the relevant local authority, in accordance with the eligibility and need criteria set down in section 20 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 and the associated Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011, as amended. In order to be eligible for HAP support, a household must first qualify for social housing support and be placed on a housing list.

The Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011 prescribe maximum net income limits for each local authority, in different bands according to the area concerned, with income being defined and assessed according to a standard Household Means Policy. The income bands and the authority area assigned to each band are based on an assessment of the income needed to provide for a household's basic needs, plus a comparative analysis of the local rental cost of housing accommodation across the country.

A household may apply for support to one housing authority only (the "housing authority of application"), which may be the authority for the area in which the household normally resides or with which it has a local connection, or where the authority agrees, at its discretion, to assess the household for support. In determining whether a household has a local connection with its area, a housing authority must have regard to whether a household member:

- lived in the area for a continuous 5 year period at any time in the past,
- is employed in the area or within 15 km of the area,
- is in full-time education, or attending specialist medical care in the area, or
- has a relative (defined in the Regulations) living in the area for 2 years or longer.

As Minister, I am precluded by the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 from intervening in relation to the decisions made by local authorities in the assessment of individual households, the allocation of particular dwellings and the provision of social housing supports.

Regional Development Initiatives

587. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the south-east regional spatial strategy will be finalised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10446/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Southern Region is currently on public display until 8 March 2019.

Following the consultation period, the Southern Regional Assembly must report on and consider all submissions received in the formulation of the final RSES, the adoption of which will require approval by the members of the Regional Assembly.

If the Assembly decides to make changes to the draft RSES that are considered 'material', those changes must be subject to environmental related assessments and be put on public display for a further consultation period of not less than four weeks, before being determined.

The draft RSES for the Southern Region is available on the Southern Regional Assembly's

website at the following link:

www.southernassembly.ie/regional-planning/public-consultation-on-the-issues-paper-for-the-regional-spatial-and-econom.

Planning Guidelines

588. **Deputy Darragh O’Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the position regarding the working group comprising officials from planning authorities and his Department, which was established to review and revise the 2005 planning guidelines on sustainable rural housing; if the review has concluded; if he has engaged with the European Commission on proposed changes to the guidelines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10465/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Following engagement between the European Commission and my Department regarding the European Court of Justice ruling in the “Flemish Decree” case, a working group was established to review and, where necessary, recommend changes to the 2005 Planning Guidelines on Sustainable Rural Housing, issued under section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended. The working group comprises senior officials from the Planning Division of my Department and senior officials from the Planning Divisions of local authorities, nominated by the local government sector. The objective is to ensure that rural housing policies and objectives contained in local authority development plans comply with the relevant provisions of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

Taking account of the engagement with the European Commission on the matter and subject to the completion of the ongoing deliberations by the working group, I will be in a position to finalise and issue to planning authorities revisions to the 2005 Rural Housing Guidelines that take account of the relevant ECJ judgment.

Housing Adaptation Grant Eligibility

589. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the reason the period of residence in a house is a criterion for having a stair lift installed by the council as in the case of a person (details supplied); the reason necessity is not the determining factor; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10476/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The detailed administration of the Housing Adaptation Grants for Older People and People with a Disability in private houses, including the assessment, approval and prioritisation of grants to applicants under the various measures, is the responsibility of the local authorities. Applications are prioritised on the basis of the medical needs of the applicant and on the urgency and necessity of the identified works.

My Department has made enquiries regarding the case in question and I understand that it is currently being reviewed at a higher level within the local authority.

Housing Provision

590. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Govern-

ment the number of units funded under the social housing current expenditure programme, SHCEP, at the end of 2018, in tabular form; the number of units that will end in the ownership of an approved housing body, AHB, or local authority; the annual cost of these leases in 2018; the number of units that will remain in the ownership of private interests; and the annual cost of these leases in 2018. [10498/19]

594. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the type of leases used in SHCEP leases of privately owned units; the length of time of the lease or range of times in use; if the leases allow the owner to withdraw from the lease before its due date; if so the grounds for same; whether the leases include an option to buy; and if so, the point at which such options can be included. [10575/19]

595. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of social housing current expenditure programme, SHCEP, leases brought on stream each year since the funding schemes inception by those units permanently in private ownership and those that will end up in the ownership of local authorities and approved housing bodies; and the annual cost of each category of lease. [10576/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 590, 594 and 595 together.

The Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme (SHCEP) supports the delivery of social housing by providing financial support to local authorities for the leasing of houses and apartments. Dwellings under the scheme come from a number of different sources including private owners, Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs), Part V and the NAMA Special Purpose Vehicle (NARPS).

Long term lease arrangements, including the enhanced lease, of privately owned dwellings can be entered into by either local authorities or AHBs. Under these arrangements the local authority or AHB acts as the landlord to the tenant. The terms of these agreements are set out in standard template agreements provided by my Department which must be used by all local authorities and AHBs. Agreements may be entered into for periods of between 10 to 25 years in duration; availability agreements under the CALF scheme can be up to 30 years in duration. There are no break clauses provided for in the lease and there are only limited circumstances in which the lease can be terminated by either party. These relate to the performance of the obligations set out in the lease clauses, e.g. a local authority can terminate a lease where the property is uninhabitable due to fire or flood damage; an owner can terminate a lease where the rent is not paid by the local authority.

Under the long term leasing arrangement, the dwelling can be sold by the owner during the lease term, subject to the leasehold interest and the consent of the local authority or AHB. As such, the owner of the property changes but the lease, and the tenant, are unaffected. There is no option to purchase the property under the long term lease or enhanced lease arrangements; however, an option to purchase may have been included in some long term leases by local authorities in the early stages of the leasing programme. It is a matter for each local authority if they wish to purchase the property at the end of the lease term, should it become available to buy.

Local authorities may also enter into availability arrangements with private owners whereby an owner makes their property available to tenants of the local authority for a defined period. Under this type of arrangement, the owner of the property acts as the landlord to the tenant and performs all the landlord obligations. These agreements are for periods of between 1 to 10 years and termination of the agreement is governed by the provisions of the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 (as amended). There is no option to purchase the property in these agreements; however, as with the long term lease, it is a matter for each local authority if they wish to purchase the

property at the end of the lease term, should it become available to buy.

Of the total number of dwellings supported under SHCEP at end 2018, 36% (or 4,210) were owned by a private owner and leased by either an AHB or a LA. The remaining dwellings funded under SHCEP at end 2018 are either owned by AHBs (36% or 4,195 dwellings) or by local authorities and NARPS (28% or 3,279 dwellings). Details of the total number of dwellings funded under SHCEP at end 2018, by ownership, and cost of each category of ownership in 2018 (a breakdown for prior years is not readily available), are set out in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1: Total operational dwellings supported under SHCEP 2018

Year	Private Ownership	LA Ownership	AHB Ownership	NARPS	TOTAL
End 2018	4,210	2,049	4,195	1,230	11,684

Table 2: SHCEP Spend 2018

Year	Private Ownership	LA Ownership	AHB Ownership	NARPS	TOTAL
2018	€33,472,522	€7,112,669	€46,312,548	€12,126,909	€99,024,648*

* Excludes administrative costs. The total SHCEP spend for 2018 was €100,392,780. This figure represents the ongoing contractual commitments of existing leases and availability arrangements at end 2017 together with the phased cost of new commitments that came into SHCEP in 2018.

Details of the dwellings included in each category of ownership are set out as follows:

- Private Ownership: dwellings secured by AHBs and local authorities under long term leases and availability arrangements; Part V leases (excluding NARPS Part V); the Repair and Leasing Scheme.

- LA Ownership: unsold affordable dwellings tenanted by social housing tenants and funded under the SHCEP.

- AHB Ownership: dwellings owned by AHBs including those that have benefited from an element of capital funded support, including CALF, MTR and the Housing Agency Acquisitions (HAA) programme.

- NARPS: dwellings leased to AHBs and local authorities from the NAMA SPV – NARPS.

Data in respect of additional dwellings delivered each year from 2014 to 2018 is set out in Table 3. Data in the format requested is not available before 2014.

Table 3: Dwellings delivered 2014-2018

Year	Private Ownership	LA Ownership	AHB Ownership	NARPS	TOTAL
2014	504	89	352	120	1,065
2015	518	96	430	433	1,477
2016	503	0	637	218	1,358
2017	502	6	1,344	374	2,226
2018	754	1	2,463	107	3,325

Planning Issues

591. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will consider making regulations requiring a person signing a consent form for a planning application on their land to provide contact details in order that the council can contact them to ascertain if the consent is genuine or not; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10506/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The legal interest of an applicant for planning permission in the land or structure concerned has to be stated in the completed planning application form. Where the applicant is not the owner of the land or structure, the name and address of the owner has to be stated on the planning application form, and the written consent of the owner to the making of the planning application must also be submitted as part of the application.

Furthermore, an applicant for planning permission or an agent acting on behalf of the applicant is required to sign a declaration as part of the planning application form, stating that to the best of their knowledge and belief, the information provided on the completed form is correct and accurate and fully compliant with the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, and Regulations made thereunder.

In considering a planning application, it is a matter for the planning authority to decide if the information it receives is correct, accurate and fully compliant with planning legislation. A planning authority may invalidate an application if it does not comply with the relevant requirements under the Planning and Development Regulations 2001-2019.

In addition, where considered necessary, a planning authority may request further information in relation to a planning application, and also further request clarification of that information, under the 2001 Regulations. Such a request may include the submission of any information from the applicant concerning any estate or interest in or right over land, which the authority considers necessary to enable it to deal with the application, or any evidence, which the authority may reasonably require, to verify any particulars or information given in, or in relation to, a planning application.

I consider that the current Regulations provide sufficient safeguards to protect the interests of landowners in this regard. Where a landowner has reason to question the validity of a decision on a planning application, there are procedures available for appealing the decision of a local authority to An Bord Pleanála and for Judicial Review in the Courts.

Housing Provision

592. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if a facility (details supplied) is being used for housing allocation or emergency accommodation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10521/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department's role in relation to homelessness involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of housing authorities in addressing homelessness at local level. Under Section 10 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 housing authorities are responsible for the provision of housing supports to households for the purposes of meeting their accommodation needs, including homeless services provided in accordance with section 10 of the Housing Act 1988.

The allocation of dwellings is a matter for the relevant housing authority, in accordance with section 22 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009. However, my Department has been advised by Kerry County Council that no allocations have been made to properties, nor is emergency accommodation being provided, at the address referred to by the Deputy.

Housing Policy

593. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the original targets for housing schemes; and the number of units delivered under each scheme to date in tabular form (details supplied) [10556/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Data in relation to social housing targets and delivery on a local authority basis, across all delivery streams under Rebuilding Ireland, can be found on my Department's website at the following link:

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

The overall social housing targets set for 2016-2021, include homes to be delivered through a range of delivery mechanisms. This includes rapid build, buy and renew delivery and the repair and leasing scheme (RLS), along with all other delivery streams, which will contribute to the delivery of 50,000 homes over the lifetime of Rebuilding Ireland. It should be noted that it is a matter for individual local authorities to determine the most suitable mechanism for delivery at local level. The focus is on delivering homes, as quickly as possible, and utilising the schemes and delivery mechanisms that work best at local level.

Scheme	Published Rebuilding Ireland Target	Delivery to end 2018
Repair and Leasing (RLS)	3500	89
Rapid Build	1500	423
Buy and Renew	No specific target published	350
Housing Agency Acquisitions	1,600	517

These targets and outputs must be taken in the context of overall delivery to date under Rebuilding Ireland, which at the end of 2018 was ahead of target.

Programme	Target 2016-2018	Delivery 2016-2018
Build	10,429	11,830
Acquisition	3,905	6,781
Lease	2,825	2,620
Total	17,159	21,231

Questions Nos. 594 and 595 answered with Question No. 590.

Home Loan Scheme

596. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of Rebuilding Ireland home loans drawn down in each local authority area at the end of 2018, in tabular form. [10610/19]

600. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the Rebuilding Ireland home loan budget allocated to each local authority in 2018; the drawdown of these budgets by local authorities in 2018; and the allocations for this loan scheme to each local authority in 2019, in tabular form. [10815/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 596 and 600 together.

My Department publishes information on the overall number and value of (i) local authority loan approvals and (ii) local authority loan drawdowns. Information up to the end of Quarter 3 2018, including in relation to number and value of mortgage drawdowns, is available on the Department's website at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/house-prices-loans-and-profile-borrowers/local-authority-loan-activity>. As part of the Review of the operation of the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan scheme my Department obtained information from the local authorities on loans drawn down to the end of January. The details are in the following table.

Local Authority	Loans issued to end January 2019
Carlow County Council	5
Cavan County Council	1
Clare County Council	14
Cork City Council	1
Cork County Council	25
Donegal County Council	3
Dublin City Council	111
Dún Laoghaire - Rathdown County Council	5
Fingal County Council	82
Galway City Council	11
Galway County Council	17
Kerry County Council	6
Kildare County Council	68
Kilkenny County Council	6
Laois County Council	12
Leitrim County Council	0
Limerick City & County Council	2
Longford County Council	5
Louth County Council	10
Mayo County Council	8
Meath County Council	57
Monaghan County Council	1
Offaly County Council	0
Roscommon County Council	2
Sligo County Council	8
South Dublin County Council	29
Tipperary County Council	15

Local Authority	Loans issued to end January 2019
Waterford City & County Council	14
Westmeath County Council	6
Wexford County Council	33
Wicklow County Council	18
Total	575

The final allocations assigned to each local authority for mortgage and home improvement loans in 2018 are detailed in the following table. These final allocations are reflective of an internal rebalancing exercise carried out by my Department in respect of the approved allocations notified to the local authorities based on estimated drawdowns for 2018 as notified by the authorities.

County Councils	Final Allocation 2018
Carlow	5,200,000
Cavan	2,100,000
Clare	4,500,000
Cork	6,000,000
DL/Rathdown	10,020,000
Donegal	2,000,000
Fingal	19,276,000
Galway	3,924,000
Kerry	3,075,000
Kildare	8,000,000
Kilkenny	6,080,000
Laois	5,500,000
Leitrim	500,000
Longford	1,200,000
Louth	4,300,000
Mayo	5,456,036
Meath	9,300,000
Monaghan	5,000,000
Offaly	1,700,000
Roscommon	1,500,000
Sligo	3,375,000
South Dublin	25,000,000
Tipperary	1,978,470
Westmeath	4,576,000
Wexford	7,000,000
Wicklow	4,000,000
City Councils	
Cork	1,520,000
Dublin	50,000,000
Galway	3,000,000
City & County Councils	
Limerick	2,545,916
Waterford	2,000,000
TOTAL	209,626,422

The Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan scheme has proven to be more successful than was initially anticipated. In relation to allocations for 2019, discussions are ongoing with the Departments of Public Expenditure and Reform and Finance with regard to further funding for the scheme. My Department will be in touch with local authorities once these discussions have concluded.

Public Spending Code

597. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to raise the threshold for the single stage approval process for social housing from €2 million to €7 million; if such a proposal is consistent with the public spending code; the engagement his Department has had with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform on the matter; and if this proposal was agreed as part of the pre-budget 2019 negotiations. [10687/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): A raising of the threshold for the single-stage approval process for social housing construction projects is currently being examined in the context of a review of the Public Spending Code. This review by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform is well underway and my Department is liaising with that Department on the matter.

In the meantime, the existing arrangements, which covers social housing construction projects with an all-in budget up to €2 million and up to 15 homes, remain in place and available to local authorities.

Planning Guidelines

598. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the changes to planning guidelines he will introduce to speed up and encourage the provision of accommodation in town centres and above existing retail units in view of the fact that the current guidelines are not achieving same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10706/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department has introduced a number of initiatives aimed at encouraging and facilitating the provision of residential accommodation in town centres, including above existing retail units.

In December 2018, the Report of the Working Group on the Reuse of Existing Buildings and the Bringing Back Homes Manual for the Reuse of Existing Buildings were published. The Manual is available to download at: <https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/home-ownership/vacant-homes/vacant-homes>.

The Manual is aimed at property owners, members of the public, local authorities and stakeholders in the construction industry who are interested in developing spaces within vacant buildings and bringing them into use for residential purposes. It provides clear and detailed guidance on current policy and regulatory requirements that apply to this form of development.

The manual complements new planning regulations - the Planning and Development (Amendment)(No.2) Regulations 2018 - which came into effect on 8 February 2018 and allow for the change of use of certain vacant commercial buildings to domestic use without having

to go through the planning process. A copy of the Regulations is available on the Irish Statute Book website at the following link:

<http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2018/si/30/made/en/pdf>.

Furthermore, in August 2017, I announced the establishment of a new Vacant Homes Unit in my Department to drive and co-ordinate actions at central and local government levels in addressing vacancy and to support local authorities in their actions. The Vacant Homes Unit has been supplemented by the appointment of Vacant Homes Officers in each of the 31 local authorities who have been mandated to quickly identify vacancy hotspots, particularly in areas where there is a high demand for homes, and to engage with property owners in terms of advising them of the opportunities available, including through the Repair and Leasing Scheme and the Buy and Renew Scheme, to assist in bringing vacant properties into productive use for housing purposes.

The Bringing Back Homes manual will also support the work of the Vacant Homes Officers in helping them to clarify for developers and property owners the regulatory requirements that need to be complied with in converting vacant commercial spaces into residential use, thereby helping to maintain safe, sustainable and quality standards for homes while simultaneously reducing uncertainty and complexity.

I am satisfied that there are a range of measures and supports available to encourage and facilitate the provision of residential accommodation in town centres, including the conversion of vacant commercial spaces over retail units for residential use.

Irish Water Remit

599. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if responsibility for further development and expansion of the Edenderry wastewater treatment plant rests with Irish Water or Offaly County Council. [10724/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Since 1 January 2014, Irish Water has statutory responsibility for all aspects of water services planning, delivery and operation at national, regional and local levels including responsibility for the Edenderry Waste Water Treatment Plant.

Irish Water has established a dedicated team to deal with representations and queries from public representatives. If Deputies have any queries on specific issues in relation to water services, the team can be contacted via email to oireachtasmembers@water.ie or by telephone on a dedicated number, 1890 578 578.

Question No. 600 answered with Question No. 596.

Housing Assistance Payment

601. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of plans to make changes to the HAP system (details supplied). [10820/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): In terms of the administration of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme, Limerick City and County Council provide a highly effective transactional shared service on behalf of all local authorities. This HAP Shared Services Centre (SSC) manages all HAP related rental transac-

tions for the tenant, local authority and landlord. Once a HAP application has been received and confirmed as valid by the relevant local authority, it is then processed by the HAP SSC. On average, HAP applications are processed by the SSC within 2 working days of receipt. Any rental payment arising for a given month will then be made to a landlord on the last Wednesday of that month.

At the end of Quarter 4 2018, there were over 43,400 households having their housing needs met via HAP and over 25,000 landlords and agents in receipt of monthly HAP payments.

Local Authority Contracts

602. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the allegations that Meath County Council paid moneys to a company (details supplied) for work carried out by another company from the 2008 and 2009 period that subsequently led to a Garda investigation and resulted in a conviction in relation to fraud; if his Department has carried out an examination of the circumstances which led to this instance; if he is satisfied that Meath County Council and all other local authorities have updated procedures to ensure that a similar case does not reoccur; if he is satisfied that Meath County Council has ensured that the moneys due have now been recouped from the company and that the company which carried out the works has been paid for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10860/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Local authorities are independent statutory bodies with responsibility for their day-to-day operations in accordance with the governing legislation and codes. Local authorities must adhere to the rules for financial procedures and procurement in the same way as all public bodies.

In relation to the matter raised, I understand that a review of the payments involved was undertaken in 2018 as part of the 2017 audit by the Local Government Audit Service and the auditor was satisfied that the case did not indicate any additional reasonable measures that the Council could have had in place given that the issues which arose were outside the Council's control or knowledge. The matters involved have been the subject of an investigation by An Garda Síochána and have come before the Courts. These are the appropriate avenues for issues of the kind involved to be pursued and it would not be appropriate for me to comment further on the matter.

Hedge Cutting Season

603. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the status of the introduction of regulations to provide for managed hedge cutting on roadsides and burning of vegetation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10358/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): Section 40 of the Wildlife Acts 1976, as amended, prohibits the cutting, grubbing, burning or destruction of vegetation, with certain strict exemptions, from 1 March to 31 August.

Following a review of Section 40, which included consideration of submissions from interested parties, proposals were announced in December 2015 to introduce legislation to allow for managed hedge cutting and burning at certain times within the existing closed period on a pilot two year basis. The relevant legislation was included in the Heritage Bill 2016, which was enacted in July last year.

Section 7(1) of the Heritage Act 2018 provides that I may make Regulations to allow the burning of vegetation during such periods in the month of March and in such parts of the country as specified in the Regulations.

I recently made a decision not to make Regulations to extend the season for the burning of vegetation into March. This decision was taken as there would have been no basis for me to do so given the fact that the relatively dry weather during the six month period when the burning of vegetation could have been undertaken under the law (September to February inclusive) would not have precluded landowners from burning vegetation. Therefore, the existing provisions in the Wildlife Acts on burning remain in force.

In relation to hedgerows, Section 7(2) of the Heritage Act 2018 provides for the cutting of roadside hedges only during the month of August under Regulations. Ireland has some 300,000 kilometres of hedgerow mainly surrounding fields and properties across the country and only roadside hedges are subject to the provisions of the Heritage Act - a fraction of the entirety of the total hedgerow resource in this country. I fully recognise that hedgerows are a very important wildlife habitat, providing food, shelter, corridors of movement, nesting and hibernation sites for many of our native flora and fauna. The change in timing of cutting set out in Section 7 of the Act should not interfere with any of these functions. To that end, and to ensure that any birds' nests that might still be active by August will not be at risk, any Regulations made under Section 7(2) will require that any cutting in August may only be of the current year's growth and should not involve the use of heavy flails. It is the intention that my Department will carry out studies to determine what, if any, effects there are during the pilot phase.

I would also point out to the Deputy that both the burning and hedgerow provisions will expire after a two-year pilot period, and it follows that there will be an ongoing assessment throughout the pilot.

Údarás na Gaeltachta

604. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if Údarás na Gaeltachta will be strengthened via legislative changes in the same capacity as Enterprise Ireland will be under Part 3 of the Withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union (Consequential Provisions) Bill 2019 in order to support Údarás client companies through investment, loans and regional development and innovation grants in order to mitigate the harmful effects of Brexit. [10398/19]

605. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if Údarás na Gaeltachta will be strengthened via legislative changes in the same capacity as Enterprise Ireland will be under Part 3 of the Withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union (Consequential Provisions) Bill 2019 and allow Údarás client companies to avail of the EU General block exemption regulation on state aid permitting maximum aid intensities for research and development projects of up to 70% for small and medium enterprises which is not permitted currently under Irish legislation. [10399/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Seán Kyne): I propose to take Questions Nos. 604 and 605 together.

At the outset I wish to assure the Deputy that Údarás na Gaeltachta are working in cooperation with all other relevant organisations on a coordinated approach to Brexit. In that context, Údarás na Gaeltachta continue to work in tandem with Enterprise Ireland [EI] on an ongoing basis to ensure that their client-companies receive the same supports as those that are avail-

able to client-companies of EI.

It should be noted that, since 2012, both agencies operate under an mutually agreed memorandum of understanding [MOU] which ensures that client companies of Údarás na Gaeltachta have access to the same range of schemes being provided by Enterprise Ireland.

In light of this, I am satisfied that Údarás client-companies will have access to the same level of supports and resources as will be available to clients companies of EI on foot of the enactment of the Withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union (Consequential Provisions) Bill 2019.

Finally, I wish to reassure the Deputy that there is regular and ongoing contact between officials from my Department and officials from the Department of Enterprise, Business and Innovation in relation to this matter and that both Departments recognise the need to ensure that both Údarás na Gaeltachta and Enterprise Ireland are in a position to offer the same level of supports to their respective client companies.

In these circumstances, I am of the view that there is no need to specifically include Údarás na Gaeltachta in the provisions of Part 3 of the Withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union (Consequential Provisions) Bill 2019.

National Monuments

606. Deputy Jackie Cahill asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will request the OPW to carry out an assessment on a protected historical structure (details supplied) to ascertain its current condition and to prepare a plan for its restoration; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10402/19]

607. Deputy Jackie Cahill asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will request the OPW to remove the cover on a protected historical structure (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10403/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 606 and 607 together.

I refer the Deputy to my reply to PQ No. 1434 of 7th September 2018 which is copied below.

The site referred to by the Deputy is protected under the National Monuments Acts and any person proposing to carry out works at or in relation to it is required to give the Minister two months' advance notice. Any such works would also be subject to applicable planning and development legislation, for which the planning authority has specific responsibility.

I am advised that a representative from my Department's National Monuments Service has visited the site in question on a number of occasions with the Parish Priest and the local authority Heritage Officer to discuss and advise on particular work proposals and that the Department is now awaiting the formal statutory notification required for the works.

I understand that Tipperary County Council's Heritage Officer has been in regular contact with my Department's National Monuments Service in the meantime and that proposals for conservation works at the site are currently being developed. Once these plans have been finalised they will be submitted to my Department in compliance with the requirements the National Monuments Acts.

As the monuments are not in the ownership of guardianship of the State, the Office of Public

Works would have no function in relation to their management and upkeep.

National Monuments

608. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if Ireland is a signatory of the International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites (The Venice Charter 1964); and if so, if Ireland complies with the principals and objectives contained within. [10426/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): The 1964 Venice Charter is not an agreement between State parties and there is therefore no mechanism for State ratification, signature or accession to it.

Conservation theory and practice is continually evolving and Ireland is guided by the most up to date principles and objectives of international best practice.

Údarás na Gaeltachta

609. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** den Aire Cultúir, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta eolas maidir leis na na nithe seo a leanas a thabhairt cothrom le dáta i dtáblaí (sonraí tugtha) [10452/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Seán Kyne): Tá na sonraí atá iarrtha ag an Teachta leagtha amach sa tábla thíos:

Contae	Líon Iarratais Ceadaithe	Líon Iarratais nár Ceadaíodh	Iomlán an mhaoinithe a ceadaíodh
Dún na nGall	1	0	€5,000
Maigh Eo	0	0	0
Gaillimh	2	0	€10,000
Ciarraí	0	0	0
Corcaigh	0	0	0
Port Láirge	0	0	0
An Mhí	0	0	0
Iomlán	3	0	€15,000

Mar atá ráite agam roimhe seo, tuigim ó Údarás na Gaeltachta go mbíonn siad ag bualadh lena gcuid cliantchomhlachtaí go rialta chun aon ábhar inní i dtaca leis an mBreatimeacht a phlé agus chun tacú le comhlachtaí agus iad a spreagadh le hanailís a dhéanamh ar thacaíochtaí margaíochta agus forbairtí straitéiseacha ar a ngnó a phlé.

Ar ndóigh, san idirbheartaíocht leanúnach atá ar siúl ag an Údarás lena gcliaint, tá gach comhlacht curtha ar an eolas faoina scéimeanna atá ar fáil, ach is beag comhlachtaí atá ag baint leasa as an scéim 'Bí Réidh' féin.

Tuigim go bhfuil an líon beag iarratas a fuarthas faoi scéim ar aon dul leis an éileamh go ginearálta atá faighte ag Fiontraíocht Éireann ar a macasamhail de scéim Be Prepared.

É sin ráite, tuigim go bhfuil leas agus spéis bainte ag cliaint an Údaráis as scéimeanna eile atá ar fáil dóibh agus ceadaíodh €1.8m de thacaíocht in iomlán in 2018 do scéimeanna i leith

Taighde & Forbairt, Rochtain ar Mhargáí, Tacaíocht d'Eochair Phostanna agus an Scéim Céimithe.

Heritage Council

610. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the position regarding the relationship between the Heritage Council and the National Biodiversity Data Centre, NBDC, in view of the announcement of the new biodiversity charter; if the Heritage Council plans to establish a new service level agreement with the NBDC; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10501/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): Since its inception, the Heritage Council has invested considerable resources in the establishment and development of the National Biodiversity Data Centre (NBDC). The Council places great value on the work carried out by the NBDC and its staff.

This work is of national and international significance and helps strengthen our understanding of biodiversity issues and provides valuable data to inform our efforts in tackling the ongoing threats to our habitats and species.

I understand that the Heritage Council is committed to the finalisation of an extension of the existing service level agreement with the NBDC as a matter of priority. A new service level agreement subsequent to this will be shaped by the outcomes of a review of its structures and this review will take place during 2019.

The Heritage Council is fully committed to building on its investment in the NBDC and ensuring its sustainable future.

Special Areas of Conservation

611. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if a farmer (details supplied) will be compensated for the designation of their lands as special areas of conservation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10513/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): In accordance with the Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2000 and the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011, certain activities in sites protected for nature conservation may only be undertaken with my prior consent, as Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, or with the consent of another public authority, if applicable. Compensation may be payable where a person has been refused consent by me for an activity requiring consent within a protected site that he or she had been undertaking in the five year period prior to the refusal.

My Department have been in contact with the individual referred to in the Deputy's Question and has supplied him with information regarding the procedure for making an application for compensation, where consent has been refused to undertake a prescribed activity in a protected site.

My Department also operates the National Parks and Wildlife Service Farm Plan Scheme to promote a focused, targeted and innovative approach to farming for habitats and species of conservation concern in some of Ireland's most important biodiversity areas. The scheme was closed to voluntary applications in April 2010 but a number of bespoke plans are still in place, where there is an overriding conservation imperative and where other national solutions are not

provided for.

Údarás na Gaeltachta

612. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Cultúir, Oidhreachta agus Gaeltachta cén chaoi a roinneadh an €500,000 breise a cuireadh ar fáil d'Údarás na Gaeltachta le haghaidh comharchumainn agus eagraíochtaí pobalbhunaithe do 2019; cén méid breise a tugadh do gach eagraíocht faoi leith agus cén bunús a bhí leis an gcinneadh i ngach cás; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [10554/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Seán Kyne) : Is as an soláthar airgid a chuirtear ar fáil go bliantúil d'Údarás na Gaeltachta faoi fhómhír C7 de Vóta mo Roinne a chuirtear cúnaimh ar fáil d'eagraíochtaí pobalbhunaithe agus comharchumainn Ghaeltachta. Ina thaobh sin, ní miste a mheabhrrú don Teachta go bhfuil €3.85 milliún curtha ar fáil don Údarás faoin bhfómhír seo do 2019 – sin allúntas reatha breise de €500,000 i mbliana.

Tuigim go bhfuil buiséad iomlán de **€4.225m** ceadaithe ag Bord Údarás na Gaeltachta chun maoiniú a dhéanamh ar fheidhmiú Chlár Forbartha Pobail agus Teanga na heagraíochta do 2019. San áireamh sa gclár seo, bíonn soláthar maoinithe bhliantúil d'fhochuideachtaí na heagraíochta Muintearas CTR, Ealaín (na Gaeltachta) CTR agus do Chomhar Naíonraí na Gaeltachta CTR chomh maith le deontais reáchtála na gcomharchumann agus na n-eagraíochtaí forbartha pobail. Ciallaíonn sé seo go bhfuil méadú de **€530,000** tagtha ar an mbuiséad atá á chur ar fáil don chlár seo do 2019 agus sonraithe sa tábla thíos.

Tá briseadh síos ar an leithdháileadh atá déanta ar an mbuiséad de €4.225m atá ceadaithe ag Bord an Údaráis (a fógraíodh go poiblí ar 1 Márta) leagtha amach sna táblaí thíos.

An Ciste Forbartha Pobail, Forbartha Teanga & Eagraíochtaí Forbartha Pobail 2019

-	2019	Méadú
-	Soláthar	
-	€	€
Comhar Naíonraí na Gaeltachta CTR	535,000	-
Muintearas CTR	630,000	25,000
Ealaín (na Gaeltachta) CTR	357,000	15,000
Clár um Fhorbairt Pobail Áitiúil (LCDP)	140,000	-
Imeachtaí agus Gníomhaíochtaí Buanaithe Teanga	102,000	-
Forbairt ar Thurasóireacht Chultúrtha	100,000	15,000
Soláthar do bhunú gréasán gteic	35,000	35,000
An Scéim Fiontar Pobail	50,000	2,000
Deontas Reáchtála na nEagras Pobail	2,276,000	438,000
Iomlán	€4,225,000	€530,000

Questions - Written Answers

Eagras Pobail	Soláthar2018	Soláthar2019
Dún na nGall		
Comharchumann Oileán Árainn Mhór Teo	€90,000	€107,000
Comharchumann Thoraí Teo	€90,000	€107,000
Comharchumann Forbartha Ghaoth Dobhair Teo.	€63,000	€73,500
Comharchumann na nOileán Beag Teo.	€32,000	€36,000
Lár Chomhairle Paróiste Gleann Cholm Cille CTR	€50,000	€60,500
Céim Aniar CTR	€58,000	€66,000
Pobal Eascarrach CTR	€38,000	€47,000
Forbairt Eachla CTR	€30,000	€48,000
Le bunú – Fánaid *	€10,000	€40,000
Iomlán - Dún na nGall		€585,000
Maigh Eo		
Comhlacht Forbartha Áitiúil Acla CTR	€73,000	€85,000
Comhar Dún Chaocháin Teo	€46,000	€50,000
Comharchumann Forbartha Ionad Deirbhile Eachléim Teo.	€52,000	€61,000
Coiste Cultúr Teanga & Forbartha T.M.E Teo	€39,000	€59,000
Iomlán - Maigh Eo		€255,000
Gaillimh		
Comhar Caomhán Teo.	€90,000	€107,000
Comharchumann Forbartha Árann Teo.	€97,000	€107,000
Comharchumann Dhúiche Sheoigheach Teo.	€59,000	€69,000
Comharchumann Shailearna Teo.	€62,000	€71,000
Comhairle Ceantar na nOileán CTR	€52,000	€62,500
Comharchumann Sliogéisc Chonamara Teo**	€0	€35,000
Forbairt Chonamara Láir Teo	€58,000	€67,500
Comharchumann Mhic Dara Teo.	€58,000	€69,000
Comhlacht Forbartha An Spidéil CTR	€38,000	€45,000
Forbairt Pobail Mhaigh Cui-linn CTR	€38,000	€47,500

Eagras Pobail	Soláthar2018	Soláthar2019
Comhlacht Forbartha Inis Meáin CTR	€80,000	€104,000
Comhar Chuigéil (Leitir Mealláin) Teo	€38,000	€42,000
Iomlán - Gaillimh		€826,500
An Mhí		
Comharchumann Ráth Chairn Teo.	€59,000	€68,500
Iomlán – An Mhí		€68,500
Ciarraí		
Comharchumann Forbartha Léith Triúigh Teo.	€60,000	€67,500
Comharchumann Forbartha Chorca Dhuibhne Teo.	€74,000	€86,000
Comhchoiste Ghaeltachtaí Chiarraí Theas CTR***	€61,000	€101,000
Forbairt na Dromada Teo.	€49,000	€56,500
Iomlán - Ciarraí		€311,000
Corcaigh		
Comharchumann Chléire Teo.	€90,000	€106,000
Comharchumann Forbartha Mhúscaí Teo.	€50,000	€60,000
Iomlán - Corcaigh		€166,000
Port Láirge		
Comhlucht Forbartha na Déise CTR	€54,000	€64,000
Iomlán – Port Láirge		€64,000
Soláthar Iomlán	€1,838,000	€2,276,000

* I 2018 ceadaíodh soláthar le tacú le heagras pobail nua a bhunú le freastal ar cheantar na Gaeltachta Láir i dTír Chonaill agus bunaíodh an comhlacht Forbairt Eachla CTR.

Tá soláthar de €40,000 ceadaithe anois freisin le tabhairt faoi chéimeanna le heagraíocht forbartha pobail nua a bhunú i bhFánaid agus beidh céimeanna á dtógáil chuige sin in 2019.

** Comharchumann Sliogéisc Chonamara Teo. (C.S.C. Teo.) Le roinnt míonna anuas tá athstruchtúru iomlán déanta ar C.S.C. Teo. agus tá coiste nua tofa le tacaíocht iomlán ó bhaill an Chomharchumainn. Tá plan forbartha curtha le chéile chun sástachta na mbaill agus tá gá le bainisteoir/ Oifigeach Forbartha a fhostú le cuidiú leis an gComharchumann a phleananna forbartha a chur i bhfeidhm. Tá deontas réachtála €35,000 ceadaithe don gcomharchumann pobail seo atá ag tabhairt deis d'iascairí agus d'fheirmeoirí beaga atá lonnaithe i gceantar tearcfhorbartha breis airgid a shaothrú agus bainistíocht éifeachtach a dhéanamh ar an acmhainn luachmhar seo. Tá forbairt acmhainní mara aitheanta mar chuid lárnach de straitéis forbartha Údarás na Gaeltachta. Sa gcomhthéacs seo beifear ag díriú ar fhorbairt na hacmhainne sliogéisc i gcuán Chill Chiaráin mar chuid thábhachtach agus luachmhar den acmhainn sin.

** Comhchoiste Ghaeltachtaí Chiarraí Theas CTR. Anuas ar an soláthar breise atá ar fáil do Chomhchoiste Ghaeltachtaí Chiarraí Theas CTR faoi na critéir thuasluaite, tá maoiniú breise

ceadaithe don eagrais le tacú le Bainisteoir Tionscnaimh a fhostú le tabhairt faoin chlár oibre atá ag éirí as tuairisc Thascfhórsa Uíbh Ráthaigh agus mar pháirt mhaoiniú ar an dtacaíocht a ceadaíodh le gairid faoin gCiste um Athghiniúint Réigiúnach.

Maidir leis na deontais atá ceadaithe do na nEagrais Forbartha Pobail tuigim go bhfuil mé-adú buiséid i gceist do gach eagrais i 2019 agus go bhfuil an soláthar do gach eagrais bunaithe ar chlár oibre agus gníomhaíochtaí faoi leith atá agus a bheidh idir lámha ag na heagrais. Cuireadh na méadaithe buiséid i bhfeidhm de réir critéir sonracha ag brath ar chúinsí agus rannpháirtíocht na n-eagrais i ngníomhaíochtaí mar seo leanas:

- Freagrach as ullmhú/feidhmiú pleananna teanga
- Ag cur scéim pinsin ar fáil do na bainisteoirí
- Eagrais ar Oileán
- Forbairt ar Thograí Nua
- Clár Oibre agus Acmhainn Foirne Lánaimseartha a éascú