

## Written Answers.

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

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*Questions Nos. 1 to 16, inclusive, answered orally.*

*Questions Nos. 17 to 37, inclusive, resubmitted.*

*Questions Nos. 38 to 47, inclusive, answered orally.*

### **Brexit Preparations**

48. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Finance the steps he has taken and plans to take to date in preparation for post-Brexit customs checks at ports, specifically Rosslare Europort to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17639/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am informed by Revenue that significant work has been undertaken in preparation for post-Brexit Customs checks at Rosslare Europort. The Office of Public Works are responsible for the delivery of the necessary infrastructure and in preparation for the no-deal scenario, temporary facilities were installed in Rosslare Harbour including public office facilities, basic driver comfort facilities and exam areas for SPS and Customs controls. OPW are currently working to ensure that permanent facilities will be in place by 1 January 2021.

As regards staffing and resources, I am advised that Revenue appointed over 400 additional staff nationally to customs and related roles for Brexit in the period September 2018 to 12 April 2019. 30 of these additional 400 staff were assigned to Rosslare Europort. These additional staff brought the total Revenue staff in Rosslare Europort to approximately 50. In order to facilitate trade, Revenue will operate extended opening hours to suit current trade flows.

Revenue has engaged directly with trade and business to provide advice and support in relation to the changes that will occur as a result of Brexit. On 30 January, Revenue, together with Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine, hosted a Customs Brexit Information seminar in Wexford town. This was part of an ongoing and extensive trader engagement program highlighting the Brexit-related Revenue supports and providing an opportunity for traders to speak directly with experts across a range of specific Customs themes as well as from other Government Departments and agencies.

On 5 April 2019, Revenue commenced direct engagement with truck drivers at both Dublin Port and Rosslare Europort. Customs Officers provided advice to drivers waiting to embark ferries and on-board a number of sailings. Information leaflets, providing key customs advice for truck drivers were distributed to ensure that drivers understand and are aware of the impact Brexit will have on their journeys.

On 8 April 2019, Revenue gave a presentation in Rosslare Europort to the haulage sector outlining the Customs procedures and obligations in relation to the flow of goods through Rosslare Europort.

*Question No. 49 answered orally.*

### **Economic Competitiveness**

50. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which the economy performs robustly and competitively in line with other economies across Europe; if specific precautions are required at this juncture; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17799/19]

98. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance if specific issues affecting the competitiveness of the economy have been identified; if remedial action is required; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18035/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 50 and 98 together.

Our economy continues to grow at a robust pace, with GDP growth of 6.7 per cent in 2018. As a result, Ireland continues to be one of the fastest growing economies in Europe. I would like to stress that while the headline GDP figure can be exaggerated in an Irish context, other indicators such as consumer spending, modified domestic demand, along with taxation receipts confirm the robust growth in our economy.

Our economic health is most clearly evident in the labour market with more people working in Ireland than ever before (2.28 million) and the unemployment rate is now significantly below that of other Euro Area countries. The outlook for the economy remains positive over the coming years, with modified domestic demand, a more meaningful measure of underlying economic activity in Ireland, is set to expand by 4.0 per cent this year and 3.3 per cent next year.

The strength of our economy, in part, reflects the important steps we have taken to improve our competitiveness. Since 2008, the Central Bank's real harmonised competitiveness indicator has improved by approximately 22 per cent.

The restoration of competitiveness has been hard-won through improvements in productivity, along with wage and price moderation. However we cannot become complacent. As the National Competitiveness Council (NCC) highlighted in its recent report, there remains a number of bottlenecks at a sectorial level which impact on Ireland's cost competitiveness.

Importantly, the robust economic growth in recent years has not yet given rise to significant inflationary pressures. For 2018 as a whole, Ireland's inflation averaged just 0.7 per cent, this compares to an average inflation rate of 1.9 per cent for the EU as a whole. The comparatively low level of inflation in Ireland should help to maintain our competitiveness and protect real wage growth.

On wage developments, while average hourly earnings grew at 3 per cent in 2018, a noticeable increase on the growth rate of 1.7 per cent recorded in 2017, this came on the back of a near decade of low or negative growth in earnings. The rise in household incomes is a welcome development, however it needs to be monitored closely to avoid a significant acceleration in wages, which may undermine Ireland's competitiveness relative to other European countries.

Despite the positive outlook for our economy, the risks over the coming years are numerous and primarily external in nature. The best way we can mitigate against these risks is through prudent budgetary policy, careful management of the public finances and by focusing on competitiveness-oriented policies. Through the National Development Plan in particular, we are investing significantly to address the bottlenecks to growth which emerged during the recovery, such as the need for housing and public infrastructure investment. This should ensure that our economy remains competitive and avoid the build-up of bottlenecks that could limit our growth potential.

### **Financial Services Regulation**

51. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance when he plans to bring forward legislation on the regulation of personal contract plans as recommended by the review of regulation on personal contract plans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17765/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As I have indicated previously to the Deputy, it is important to keep the market for the provision of financial services under review to ensure that the level of consumer protection continues to be robust. In this context, last summer I asked Mr. Michael Tutty to conduct a review of the PCP market and regulatory structure and his report was subsequently published by my Department in November. That report found that there was currently no evidence of significant consumer detriment arising from PCPs but nevertheless it set out a number of conclusions and recommendations to help avoid possible problems arising in the future. Among these it suggested that legal advice should be obtained on, inter alia, the precise legal status of PCPs and on the scope and means of ensuring that relevant provisions of the Central Bank Consumer Protection Code, should apply to the providers of PCP agreements to consumers.

My Department is currently consulting the Office of the Attorney General on these queries and it is expected that a response will shortly be received. When it is to hand and in the light of the content of the advice, my Department will then further engage with the Central Bank, the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation and the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission on the further steps as may be required or desirable, such as the need for additional legislation, in order to advance the Tutty Report recommendations.

### **Credit Union Lending**

52. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Finance the steps he is taking and the progress being made in establishing a mechanism that would allow and facilitate funds from an organisation (details supplied) to be invested in social housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17724/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** This is a question that has been asked, and answered, many times. I last answered it in Dail myself in mid February this year (PQ 1750/19) and my colleague Minister English also answered a similar question at his oral Parliamentary Questions last week. Each time it has clearly been stated that the Government is not, and has never committed to, establishing a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) on behalf of the organisation mentioned in the details supplied.

At present I am not aware of any legal or regulatory barriers to the organisation mentioned establishing its own SPV to invest social housing through Tier 3 Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs).

Since 2015, there has been extensive engagement from my Department and the Department of Housing with this organisation. Following analysis of their two proposals and meetings with the organisation in question, both Departments stated in writing that the second of the proposed models – the establishment of an SPV by credit unions – was the most suitable.

In July 2016, Rebuilding Ireland separately committed to establishing an Innovation Fund to support the development of innovative financial models, such as SPVs, by Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs). It has been repeatedly clarified both in writing and indeed in answers to Parliamentary Questions that this commitment was not to establish a state owned SPV, rather to provide funding to help develop a sector-led AHB SPV.

In relation to supporting Credit Unions in the provision of funding for social housing, the role of the Government and the Central Bank is to ensure there are an appropriate legislative and regulatory framework. In this regard, the Central Bank revised the Credit Union Investment Regulations in March 2018 to enable credit unions to invest in social housing via an SPV.

As such the Government and the Central Bank have fulfilled their role and it is now up to both the credit union and social housing sectors themselves to progress and develop any specific funding mechanisms.

I am aware that one of the Credit Union representative bodies has completed all of the preparatory work for establishing an SPV but is awaiting a minimum level of projects to justify the costs of establishing the SPV. I have not been made aware of progress made by the organisation referred to in establishing such an SPV.

## **Tax Code**

**53. Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the steps he will take to change the lucrative tax arrangements in place in order to disincentivise commercial investors from distorting the market for new housing in Dublin and nationally through the buy-to-rent model; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17794/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am aware of recently expressed concerns to which the Deputy refers, in relation to the potential effect investors adopting the ‘buy to rent’ model are having on the Irish property market.

I would like to advise the Deputy that my Department actively monitors developments in this sector on an ongoing basis, and has recently published a paper on Institutional Investment in the Housing Market. The paper is based on CSO data up to 2017, the latest year available.

While there is a perception that institutional investors are purchasing large amounts of housing stock, the data show that their activity has been limited in the context of the overall housing market. In 2017 — the latest year for which we have data — firms in this category were net purchasers of just 1 per cent of residential sales, or just over 500 units. Furthermore, from 2010 to 2017, net purchases by Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs), real estate funds and private equity firms were less than 0.01 per cent of available units, or just 380 units.

In relation to the tax treatment of such entities, the function of the REIT framework for example, is not to provide an overall tax exemption. It is to facilitate collective investment in rental property by removing a double layer of taxation which would otherwise apply on property investment via a corporate vehicle. REITs are required to distribute 85% of their property profits each year for taxation at the level of the shareholder and Dividend Withholding Tax is collected on the distributions.

Additionally, the Irish Real Estate Fund (IREF) regime was introduced in Finance Act 2016 as a result of concerns raised in both the media and the Dáil regarding the activities of certain non-resident investors in the Irish property market. These provisions apply to certain investment funds deriving 25% or more of their value from Irish real estate assets and impose a Dividend Withholding Tax on distributions to non-resident investors.

I currently have no plans to change the aforementioned treatment of such entities, however, as the Deputy will be aware, as part of the 2018 Finance Bill process I committed that my officials would undertake a report of the impact of REITs, IREFs and Section 110 companies on the residential property market. This report to be presented to the Tax Strategy Group this summer, and work is ongoing in this regard.

### **Flood Risk Insurance Cover Provision**

54. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Finance when measures will be introduced to ensure insurance companies cannot refuse insurance in locations in which flood defence measures have been introduced. [10612/19]

**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. 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 (Solvency II Directive) which expressly prohibits Member States from doing so.

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 us that they and Local Authorities will work closely together on all of the projects to ensure that they are all implemented in the lifetime of the Programme.

The Government continues to believe that its existing policy and investment in relation to flooding which is focused on the development of a sustainable, planned and risk-based approach to dealing with flooding problems is the best way forward. This commitment is underpinned by a significant capital works investment programme by the OPW and Local Authorities, and 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.

The nature of this arrangement is such that it has led to a greater availability of flood cover

in previously higher risk areas. For instance, the most recent Insurance Ireland survey in March 2019 of approximately 87% of the property insurance market in Ireland indicates that of the completed defence schemes, 95% of policies in areas benefitting from permanent flood defences include flood cover, while 74% of policies in areas benefitting from demountable defences include flood cover. It should be noted that my Department is continuing to actively examine what can be done to increase the level of cover in areas with demountable defences.

### **VAT Exemptions**

55. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the precedent set by his predecessor (details supplied) in which his predecessor intervened in a decision by the Revenue Commissioners to impose VAT on herbal teas in 2014 which resulted in the abandonment of the proposed VAT imposition; if he has given consideration to intervening in the proposed imposition of 23% VAT on food supplements planned to commence on 1 March 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17646/19]

63. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to intervene to defer the planned imposition of 23% VAT on food supplements until a review of the impact of same on small businesses and employees has taken place, in view of the impending effect of Brexit in addition to the VAT hike; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17647/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 55 and 63 together.

The background to the issue is that VAT legislation does not apply the zero rate of VAT to food supplements but shortly after the introduction of VAT Revenue applied a concessionary zero rating to certain vitamin, mineral and fish oil food supplement products. As the market developed this treatment resulted in the zero rating by Revenue of further similar products. However, it had become increasingly difficult to maintain an effective distinction between food supplements that could benefit from the zero rate and those that were standard rated.

After undertaking a comprehensive review of the VAT treatment of food supplements, including getting an expert report on the definition of food for the purposes of the VAT Consolidation Act, Revenue concluded that the status quo was no longer sustainable and issued new guidance in December 2018 which removed the concessionary zero rating of various food supplement products with effect from 1 March 2019.

Following representation from Deputies and from the industry I wrote to Revenue outlining my plans to examine the policy and legislative options for the taxation of food supplement products in the context of Finance Bill 2019. Revenue responded by delaying the withdrawal of its concessionary zero rating of the food supplement products concerned until 1 November 2019. This will allow time for the enactment of any legislative changes in the context of Budget 2020. The Deputy referred to the example of the change in the VAT treatment of herbal teas. The change in that instance was affected by amending the VAT Consolidation Act by way of an amendment in Finance Act 2014. Following the consultation process that is planned I will consider if an amendment concerning food supplements is necessary.

I have committed to putting in place a consultation process to help me identify the policy options in relation to VAT on food supplements and will publish the conclusions in the Tax Strategy Papers later this year. I envisage seeking input from a wide range of interested parties, including from health and nutrition experts, to ensure that any legislative changes I bring forward are evidence based, and I will consult with my colleague the Minister for Health in this

regard.

Details on the public consultation will be announced shortly.

### **Tax Credits**

56. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the refunding of unused tax credits to persons and couples on lower incomes; if his Department has costed different income levels of such refunds in the preparations for budget 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17650/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** This matter was looked at in some detail in 2002 by the Working Group established under the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness. The Group was chaired by the Department of Finance and included representatives from ICTU, IBEC, the various farming organisations, the Community and Voluntary Pillar, relevant Government Departments and the Office of the Revenue Commissioners.

The Working Group found that there were significant disadvantages with such a system. These included the potential negative impacts on the incentive to work, labour supply, labour force participation and overall productivity and output. The Commission on Taxation in its 2009 report also did not recommend the introduction of refundable tax credits.

Furthermore, the cost of providing refundable tax credits would be extremely high. Revenue have in the past estimated the cost of providing a limited refundable tax credit, that is, refundable only to those currently on the tax record, at approximately €2 billion per annum.

I am aware that certain Groups have proposed different schemes for refundable tax credits which are based on a number of arbitrary restrictions such as age, hours worked, income and PRSI contributions in the previous year. These Groups have claimed much lower costs for these schemes. However, my Department and the Revenue would dispute these lower costings.

What is not in doubt, however, is that refundable tax credits can have a negative impact on the incentive to work.

In these times when we need to encourage people to join the workforce and remain in the workforce, however very significant difficulties exist with the use of refundable tax credits.

### **Tax Code**

57. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance his views on a recent presentation to the Oireachtas Select Committee on Budgetary Oversight that the cost of tax expenditures in revenue forgone is approximately €21.4 billion per annum; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10482/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am aware of the Budget Oversight Committee's ongoing work in the area of tax expenditures, and the publication of a report on the topic earlier this month. The Committee had met with representatives of my Department and Revenue on January 22nd 2019. It had also met separately with the Parliamentary Budget Office (who have also done considerable work in the area of tax expenditures), and with the economist Dr. Micheál Collins from the School of Social Policy in UCD.

The Budget Oversight Committee Report acknowledges that estimates of revenue foregone

can be different due to different definitions of what is included in tax expenditure. The Parliamentary Budget Office aggregate cost estimate is in the region of €5 billion based on the Department of Finance classification which is narrower and is aligned with an OECD's definition of tax expenditure.

The work on tax expenditures review is a continuous process. The 2017 tax strategy group paper on the topic noted significant advances have been made in the analysis of tax expenditures. There is the Department's 2014 tax expenditure guidelines, a comprehensive analytical process for evaluations and ex-ante evaluations of proposed new tax incentives. All tax expenditures that commenced post 2014 have been subject to sunset clauses.

With regards to the eight recommendations made in the Report by the Committee, they are currently being considered by my Department, and by Revenue.

### **NAMA Investigations**

58. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Finance if he will consider suspending the work of NAMA immediately pending the final report of the Cooke commission of investigation into Project Eagle; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17800/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** On 13 June 2017 the Government agreed the order establishing the NAMA Commission of Investigation and selected Justice John Cooke to lead the Commission in investigating the NAMA's disposal of its Northern Ireland loan portfolio, referred to as "Project Eagle". The Commission of Investigation is under the remit of the Department of Taoiseach and the former Minister for Finance and Department of Finance Officials are the subject of one of the terms of reference. Therefore, it is not appropriate for me to comment extensively. The Commission's terms of reference and interim report are available on the Merrion Street website. Neither call for a suspension of NAMA's activities. The Commission's final report is scheduled to be published by the end June 2019.

It is important to note that in no way has the integrity of NAMA or the NAMA Board or the integrity of its decisions been brought into question in relation to the disposal of Project Eagle. I therefore have no intention of directing NAMA to halt its activities. To do so would irreparably damage NAMA's positive contribution to our recovery and damage our reputation as a credible, open and transparent market. By extension, any such interference would be detrimental to the interests of Irish taxpayers.

The decision of the Oireachtas in 2009 to allow NAMA to carry out its functions in an independent manner has been vindicated by its strong performance since inception. In October 2017 it eliminated the Irish taxpayers' contingent liability of €30 billion which arose from the senior debt issued in order to acquire bank loan portfolios. NAMA also expects to redeem its subordinated debt by March 2020 and to produce a surplus – currently estimated at €3.5 billion – by the time it completes its work subject to continued positive market performance.

Halting NAMA's activities would put these achievements at risk. It would entail the State taking direct control of NAMA and bring NAMA onto the State's balance sheet. Such action also would raise serious competition concerns limiting the State's flexibility in recovering value from NAMA's remaining assets. Such action would also create significant challenges for NAMA in retaining staff and preserving a viable platform to maximise the return from its remaining assets.

## Tax Code

59. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Finance the status of the review his Department is undertaking on the 100% increase in betting duty. [17641/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The increase in the betting duty rate from 1 per cent to 2 per cent, and the betting intermediary duty rate from 15% to 25%, came into effect on 1 January 2019. The last time that the betting duty rate was increased was in 1975 and at 1% betting duty was at an all time low.

Receipts from betting duty represented less than 1 per cent of all excise receipts in 2018 as in previous years. In addition, unlike other excisable commodities, there is no VAT applied on betting transactions. I have outlined why I consider the betting sector needs to make a fair contribution to the Exchequer.

In any discussion on betting duty, we must acknowledge the raised public consciousness of the problem of gambling in society. While problem gambling can result in the problem gambler, and their family, bearing the severest of economic and of course personal costs, the social costs of problem gambling can extend to their employers and to public institutions in the health, welfare and justice systems, such costs ultimately being borne by taxpayers. I have outlined my view that this needs to be better reflected within the betting duty regime.

In the course of last year's Finance Bill process, I acknowledged that small independent bookmakers may have difficulty competing with larger bookmakers with retail and/or online operations. At the time I agreed to review an alternative proposal put forward by the betting sector. My officials are currently considering this proposal, including the compatibility of a core element with EU rules, and will set out analysis and options in relation to betting duty at the Tax Strategy Group (TSG) meeting in July. The TSG Papers will be published on the Department's website shortly afterwards.

Ultimately many taxes on goods or services are passed through to the end consumers and bookmakers will need to make commercial decisions on such matters in their pricing decisions. Betting duty will be given further consideration in the next budget and in that context my decision will be informed by the outcome of the review into the alternative proposal put forward by the betting sector as well as the other considerations which I have set out.

## Insurance Industry

60. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the competitiveness of the insurance section at present; the work he is carrying out in the area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17832/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Irish insurance sector is diverse, comprising life, non-life and reinsurance firms operating across a range of product and geographical markets. As Minister for Finance, I am responsible for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation of the sector. This framework is mainly governed by the EU Solvency II Directive, which provides for three ways in which an insurance undertaking can operate within the Irish market. These are to:

- establish a head office in Ireland (authorised by Central Bank of Ireland);
- establish a branch in Ireland through Freedom of Establishment (FOE); or

- operate on a Freedom of Services basis, i.e. conduct business in Ireland from another country (FOS).

It should be noted that there are companies operating in each of these channels in the Irish insurance market.

The Solvency II framework is designed to allow for a level playing field across the European Union for insurers, not only in terms of access to markets within the EU, but also with regard to the level of supervision and regulation. Therefore it plays an essential role in facilitating competition in the insurance sector across the EU.

However, there are other factors, beyond the legal and regulatory framework which also inform insurance companies decision making processes as to whether or not to operate or to continue to operate in any country. For example, the level of awards, and the number of claims will be important such considerations for insurers. In this regard, there has been some sectors of our economy such as play centres where because of these aforementioned factors, insurance cover has either become unavailable or prohibitively expensive.

Consequently, in order to create a more competitive environment, the Government is focusing on implementing the recommendations of the Cost of Insurance Working Group (CIWG) including those of the second Personal Injuries Commission (PIC) Report which concluded that soft tissue injuries are significantly higher here than in England and Wales (4.4 times) and recommended that action be taken to address this disparity through the establishment of the Judicial Council.

The current position with the Judicial Council Bill is that the Minister for Justice and Equality has indicated that he hopes to have this Bill enacted by the summer. In this regard, it recently completed Committee Stage in the Seanad. Alongside this, the Law Reform Commission has included the subject of capping damages in personal injuries litigation in its draft 5th Programme of Law Reform and this work will begin shortly.

### **Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears**

61. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the use of fixed assets receivers by vulture funds and State-owned banks to force the sale of buy-to-let properties in arrears; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17793/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As the Deputy will be aware, there is an extensive array of regulatory protections for borrowers who are in arrears under the various statutory Codes of Conduct issued by the Central Bank, such as the Consumer Protection Code 2012 and the Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears 2013 (CCMA). Furthermore under the Consumer Protection (Regulation of Credit Servicing Firms) Act 2018, which came into effect on 21 January 2019, if a loan is transferred the holder of the legal title to the credit must now be authorised by the Central Bank as a credit servicing firm. Such credit servicing firms must act in accordance with Irish financial services law that applies to ‘regulated financial service providers’. This ensures that consumers, whose loans are sold to another firm, maintain the same regulatory protections that they had prior to the sale.

However, while the legislative framework has been expanded to include the regulation of both loan owners and credit servicing, regulated lenders (or credit servicing firms) are entitled to make certain commercial decisions in relation to non performing loans whilst adhering to all the relevant consumer protection regulation that is in place.

The specific legislation and regulation of receivership would fall under the aegis of the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation who would be better placed to comment on and provide information on this topic.

With regard to the “state owned” banks or, more accurately, those in which the State has a majority shareholding, their corporate strategies and decisions are the responsibility of the boards and management and the firms must be run on an independent and commercial basis. The banks’ independence is protected by Relationship Frameworks which are legally binding documents which I as Minister, cannot change unilaterally. These frameworks which are publicly available, were insisted upon by the European Commission to protect competition in the Irish market.

That being said my officials received the following response from AIB:

“AIB continues to seek engagement with all borrowers in difficulty and only appoints Receivers when all other avenues have been exhausted. Appointments are primarily for the purpose of protecting and ultimately realising security, these are referred to as Fixed Asset Receivers. While appointed by the bank, the Receiver has a responsibility to realise the best return for the borrower.”

My officials received the following from PTSB:

“Permanent TSB do not currently use Fixed Asset Receivers to sell properties”.

*Question No. 62 answered with Question No. 43.*

*Question No. 63 answered with Question No. 55.*

### **Property Tax Review**

64. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide a report on the local property tax review process undertaken by his Department; the reason for the deferral of changes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17791/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** A review of the local property tax was carried out by the Department of Finance in conjunction with the Departments of the Taoiseach, Housing, Planning and Local Government, Public Expenditure and Reform and the Revenue Commissioners. The terms of reference required that in conducting the review the review group was to have regard to the principle of achieving relative stability in the LPT payments of those liable for the tax and provide clear direction on the likely payments faced by households in 2020.

The review group was asked to look in particular at the impact on LPT liabilities of property price developments since the original valuation date of 1st May 2013. The review also included an examination of the outstanding recommendations of the 2015 Thornhill review of the Local Property Tax. A public consultation process was conducted as part of the review to enable all interested parties and individuals to submit their views on the future of the LPT.

The review focused on the impact of house price movements under a series of scenarios involving different rate and tax band structures. However, against a background of significant but geographically uneven increases in residential property price levels, I believe it is necessary to engage in further consultation in order to identify a scenario that would deliver on the condition I set that there should be relative stability for all taxpayers in their LPT liabilities and that any

increases should be modest and affordable.

Having considered the findings of the review report, and as I announced on the 2nd of April, I have therefore decided to defer the valuation date from 1st November 2019 to 1st November 2020 and to submit the report to the Budget Oversight Committee (BOC) in the context of the recommendations in its report on LPT of 21 March 2018. The deferral of revaluation until November 2020 provides time and space for the BOC to consider the report of the inter-departmental review and to provide its views to me. Importantly, as a result of my decision, the LPT bills of those liable for the tax will not be increasing in 2020.

### **Tax Collection Forecasts**

65. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance the income tax receipts for the first quarter of 2019; the reason the budget 2019 projection for this tax yield was not achieved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17643/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I can advise the Deputy that in the year to-date income tax receipts of €4,973 million have been collected against a target of €5,144 million. This represents a small shortfall of just 3.3 per cent or €171 million. However, it should be noted that income tax is a broadly based tax-head, covering a range of sub-components. In the year to end-March there was some weakness recorded in receipts derived from unearned sources of income, and early Schedule D tax payments. However, it should be noted that PAYE income tax receipts which account for about 70 per cent of the overall annual target finished the quarter broadly in line with collection targets which reflects the continuation of positive labour market developments. Separately, USC posted a similar performance.

Finally, I would caution against drawing any conclusions for the year's performance with just one quarter of data. My Department will continue to monitor developments over the course of the year.

### **Insurance Costs**

66. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to businesses closing down due to the cost, and in some cases unavailability, of insurance; his plans to protect such businesses and the jobs of persons working in them; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11152/19]

68. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Finance the actions he is taking to alleviate difficulties being experienced by business owners, particularly those in the play sector in securing insurance for their business at rates that are sustainable; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17831/19]

79. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Finance the measures being taken to address the difficulties faced by persons and businesses regarding the high cost of insurance cover; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17784/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 66, 68 and 79 together.

I am very conscious of the difficulties being faced by certain small businesses in obtaining insurance and that a number of such businesses have had to close or are facing closure if they are unable to get cover. I believe that the issue of the rising cost of insurance and in some cases

its unavailability is linked to high award levels particularly for soft tissue injuries, as well as what appears to be an increase in fraudulent and exaggerated claims. The result of this is that in certain parts of the economy such as play centres, insurers are withdrawing altogether as they argue they are incurring losses in these areas

The Deputy will be aware that neither I, as Minister for Finance, nor the Central Bank can interfere in the provision or pricing of insurance products. However it was recognised that the State could play a role in improving the environment within which insurers operate, thus explaining why the Cost of Insurance Working Group (CIWG) was established in July 2016.

The CIWG has produced two reports and a series of quarterly progress updates on the various recommendations made by CIWG and endorsed by Government. The difficulties facing the consumer, voluntary and small business sector from the high cost of insurance premiums are acknowledged in these reports.

A key recommendation of the CIWG was the establishment of the Personal Injuries Commission (PIC) which was asked to examine amongst other things award levels in this country compared with elsewhere. The PIC reported in September 2018 and concluded that soft tissue injuries are significantly higher here than in England and Wales (4.4 times) and recommended that action be taken to address this disparity through the establishment of the Judicial Council. The PIC recommended that this body would become responsible for preparing the guidelines on personal injury award levels, and would replace the Book of Quantum.

The current position with the Judicial Council Bill is that the Minister for Justice and Equality has indicated that he intends having it enacted by the summer. In this regard, it recently completed Committee Stage in the Seanad. Alongside this, the Law Reform Commission has included the subject of capping damages in personal injuries litigation in its draft 5th Programme of Law Reform and this work will begin shortly.

In relation to the investigation of insurance fraud by the Gardaí, Minister of State D'Arcy has been in regular contact with the Garda Commissioner. The Minister of State has been assured by the Commissioner that he is working to increase Garda capacity in this area and a public announcement is expected on this matter in the next couple of weeks.

I expect that insurers' pricing of premiums in general will take account of the measures which have been, and are being, implemented as a result of the CIWG recommendations more broadly and I believe that insurers themselves recognise this. In this regard, I would recall that Justice Nicholas Kearns, the Chairperson of the Personal Injuries Commission (PIC), noted in the foreword of its second report that insurance industry representatives on the PIC repeatedly stated that, as award levels and associated costs account for the bulk of the cost of insurance, if claims costs come down and are maintained at a consistent and predictable level, then premiums will also reduce accordingly. A further public statement by insurers to this effect would assist in efforts to continue the necessary reform.

Finally, it has been suggested that the provision of support packages to businesses like play centres to protect the businesses and the jobs of persons working in them should be considered. However, this would amount to the State in effect becoming an insurance provider. Such a step would likely be in breach of the Solvency II Directive and as it would involve the State providing preferential support to one part of the economy over another, it would run the risk of being considered State Aid and contrary to EU State Aid rules. In addition, if a package of Government support, contained or otherwise available more generally to businesses, was put in place, it is also likely that such a measure could result ultimately in insurers withdrawing from large parts of the overall market. This would end up being counter-productive and bad for such small businesses in the longer term.

## **Insurance Costs**

67. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Finance the measures taken to meet and engage with insurance companies regarding excessive premiums being charged to consumers, particularly in counties Carlow and Kilkenny; if he has investigated the possibility of opening up the insurance market to new providers in order to increase competitiveness in prices charged for motor insurance which will ultimately result in a better deal for the consumer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17651/19]

73. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Finance the status of the measures taken to meet and engage with insurance companies here regarding excessive premiums being charged to consumers particularly in counties Cavan and Monaghan. [17740/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 67 and 73 together.

As outlined to the Deputy in previous PQ responses (including PQs 9764/19, 7359/19, 48428/18 and 40780/18), stakeholder consultation formed the foundation upon which the two primary reports of the Cost of Insurance Working Group and the accompanying recommendations were developed. This consultation process involved a wide range of stakeholders representing the different voices within this sector, including representative bodies, the major individual motor insurance providers and interest groups. The impact of excessive premiums being charged to consumers from all counties across the country was a feature of this engagement process with industry.

In addition, Department officials regularly raise specific issues affecting consumers across the country during their ongoing engagement with Insurance Ireland. Furthermore, Minister of State D'Arcy has separately met with representatives from insurance companies and other stakeholders in relation to a number of issues and the problems resulting from high insurance premiums have been discussed during these engagements.

Quarterly progress updates on the implementation of the Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance and the Report on the Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance provide more detailed information on the implementation of each of the recommendations and actions. The eighth quarterly update was published in March and is available on the Department's website.

Alongside delivering fairer premiums for consumers, a key objective of the Working Group is to create a more competitive insurance market overall in this country. I believe that the full implementation of all of the recommendations will make Ireland more attractive to new entrants, thus increasing capacity as well as competition.

Finally, it should be noted that the nature of the EU Single Market is such that insurance undertakings authorised in other member states are allowed conduct business in the Irish market on either a freedom of service basis or a freedom of establishment basis, consequently there are no restrictions preventing such companies entering this market if they wish. You should also be aware that Recommendation 5 of the Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance called for the Department to support efforts and raise awareness of the need to improve cross-border insurance at EU level. Accordingly, the Department is monitoring developments at EU level on an ongoing basis and is for instance actively participating in the current Motor Insurance Directive amendment proposal.

*Question No. 68 answered with Question No. 66.*

## VAT Yield

69. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance the way in which the budget 2019 decision on VAT is reflected in the VAT yield for the Exchequer in the first quarter of 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17644/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I presume the Deputy is referring to the Budget 2019 policy change to increase the VAT rate on tourism-related activities to 13.5 per cent from January 1st this year. The estimated increased Exchequer yield arising from this Budget change is €466 million in 2019. In terms of composition, the VAT rate increase in tourist accommodation is expected to yield €235 million, restaurants €191 million; hairdressing €27 million; bloodstock sales €7 million and cinemas and shows €6 million.

Generally speaking VAT is paid in arrears every second month with relatively insignificant receipts in the ‘off’ months. The January 2019 VAT receipts were primarily related to the November/December trading period, under which the old rate of 9 per cent would have applied to such tourism-related activity.

Accordingly, the recent March collection which mainly relates to the January/February trading period would have been the first under the new 13.5 per cent rate. In year-on-year terms monthly receipts were up by 9.0 per cent or €173 million. However, data is not available on what proportion of this relates to the rate increase or specifically the tourism sector.

### Oireachtas Select Committee Recommendations

70. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the recommendation in the recent report by the Oireachtas Select Committee on Budgetary Oversight on tax expenditures requesting that his Department prepares a report giving detailed reasons as to the reason sunset clauses are not attached to forgone tax expenditures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17827/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am aware of the Budget Oversight Committee’s ongoing work in the area of tax expenditures, which recently culminated in its publication of a paper on the issue on the Monday of last week, 8th April 2019.

In advance of publishing this Report the Committee had met with representatives of my Department and Revenue (on January 22nd 2019), as well as of the Parliamentary Budget Office (who have also done considerable work in the area of tax expenditures), and with the economist Dr, Micheál Collins from the School of Social Policy in UCD.

The recommendation regarding sunset clauses raised by the Deputy is one of eight recommendations set out in that Report. I confirm that all tax expenditures that commenced post-2014 have been subject to sunset clauses. Other tax expenditures will be reviewed over time as part of a process of the regular review process.

The recommendations made in the Report are currently being considered by my Department and by Revenue.

My Department and Revenue will continue to engage positively and constructively with the Committee on Budgetary Oversight in regards to any future work it may choose to undertake on the topic of tax expenditures.

## **Insurance Compensation Fund**

71. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the reason for the delay in bringing another court application for funds to pay claimants involved with the collapse of a company (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17766/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Setanta Insurance (“Setanta”) was placed into liquidation by the Malta Financial Services Authority on 30 April 2014. As it was a Maltese incorporated company, the liquidation is being carried out under Maltese law.

The Deputy will be aware that under the Insurance Act 1964, as amended, monies may only be paid out of the Insurance Compensation Fund (ICF), with the approval of the High Court. As Minister for Finance I have no role in this process.

The liquidator of Setanta has informed me that since the last application was submitted in November 2018, a further 126 personal injury claims have now been settled and these will be included in the next application to the Fund together with a number of legal costs payments and third party property damage claims. The latest information from the liquidator estimates that the total value of the next tranche will be approximately €8.3 million.

In relation to when the next payments will be made, the Deputy will note that in accordance with the relevant legislation, there are certain steps to be completed in preparing any application to the High Court for payment from the ICF. These steps include the assessment and verification of each individual claim within the application by the State Claims Agency. The Agency have informed me that while it was hoped to arrange a court date during April, the court date provided by the High Court is the 13 May. This will allow for the payments to issue towards the end of May or early June.

Any individual (or their solicitor) who has queries about their payment should contact the liquidator via phone at +353 (0)818 255 255 or via email at [iesetanta@deloitte.ie](mailto:iesetanta@deloitte.ie).

## **Tax Code**

72. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance when he will make a decision and implement the decision on a change to betting tax in view the ongoing impact on the sector and on independent bookmakers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17795/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The increase in the betting duty rate from 1 per cent to 2 per cent, and the betting intermediary duty rate from 15% to 25%, came into effect on 1 January 2019. The last time that the betting duty rate was increased was in 1975 and at 1% betting duty was at an all time low.

Receipts from betting duty represented less than 1 per cent of all excise receipts in 2018. In addition, unlike other excisable commodities, there is no VAT applied on betting transactions. I have outlined why I consider the betting sector needs to make a fair contribution to the Exchequer.

In any discussion on betting duty, we must acknowledge the raised public consciousness of the problem of gambling in society. While problem gambling can result in the problem gambler and their family bearing the severest of economic and of course personal costs, the social costs of problem gambling can extend to their employers and to public institutions in the health, welfare and justice systems with such costs ultimately being borne by taxpayers. I have outlined my view that this needs to be better reflected within the betting duty regime.

In the course of last year's Finance Bill process, I acknowledged that small independent bookmakers may have difficulty competing with larger bookmakers with retail and/or online operations. At the time I agreed to review an alternative proposal put forward by the betting sector. My officials are currently considering this proposal, including the compatibility of a core element with EU rules, and will set out analysis and options in relation to betting duty at the Tax Strategy Group (TSG) meeting in July. The TSG Papers will be published on the Department's website shortly afterwards.

Ultimately many taxes on goods or services are passed through to the end consumers and bookmakers will need to make commercial decisions on such matters in their pricing decisions. Betting duty will be given further consideration in the next budget and in that context my decision will be informed by the outcome of the review into the alternative proposal put forward by the betting sector as well as the other considerations which I have set out.

*Question No. 73 answered with Question No. 67.*

### **Personal Injuries Commission**

74. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the recommendation in the recent report by the Personal Injuries Commission that a judicial council be established and the judges on it provide guidelines on the appropriate levels of damages for personal injuries cases; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17829/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As the Deputy is aware, a key recommendation of the Cost of Insurance Working Group (CIWG) was the establishment of the Personal Injuries Commission (PIC) which was asked to examine amongst other things award levels in this country compared with elsewhere. The PIC reported in September 2018 and concluded that soft tissue injuries are significantly higher here than in England and Wales (4.4 times) and recommended that action be taken to address this disparity through the establishment of the Judicial Council. The PIC recommended that this body would become responsible for preparing the guidelines on personal injury award levels, and would replace the Book of Quantum. In doing this, the PIC believes that the Judicial Council would, in compiling the guidelines, take account of the jurisprudence of the Court of Appeal and the results of its benchmarking exercise.

The PIC Report represents the first independent and objective acknowledgement of the differential of award levels between this country and England and Wales, and therefore in my view the implementation of its recommendations to address this differential through a judicial recalibration of the existing Book of Quantum by means of the Judicial Council would be an important step forward. Consequently, I see the enactment of the Judicial Council Bill by the Minister for Justice and Equality, Charlie Flanagan TD, as an important Government priority.

The current position with the Judicial Council Bill is that the Minister for Justice and Equality has indicated that he hopes that it can be enacted by the summer. In this regard, it recently completed Committee Stage in the Seanad. It should also be noted that alongside this legislation, the Law Reform Commission has included the subject of capping damages in personal injuries litigation in its draft 5th Programme of Law Reform and this work will begin shortly.

While the Judicial Council Bill's role in reviewing the quantum of awards will be an important reform and has been highlighted in particular by insurers, I would expect that those insurers' pricing of premiums in general and willingness to take on risk in particular sectors will also take account of the other measures which have been, and are being, implemented as a result of

the CIWG recommendations more broadly and I believe that insurers themselves recognise this.

Finally, I would recall that Justice Nicholas Kearns, the Chairperson of the Personal Injuries Commission (PIC), noted in the foreword of its second report that insurance industry representatives on the PIC repeatedly stated that, as award levels and associated costs account for the bulk of the cost of insurance, if claims costs come down and are maintained at a consistent and predictable level, then premiums will also reduce accordingly. A further public statement by insurers to this effect would assist in efforts to continue the necessary reform.

### **Carbon Tax Implementation**

75. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to increase carbon tax; his views on the impact of such an increase on the progressivity of the tax system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17796/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Decisions in relation to the carbon tax take place as part of the annual budgetary process. The Energy and Environmental Taxes paper prepared annually for the Tax Strategy Group contains analysis on carbon tax policy options. Recent Tax Strategy Group papers are available to read on the Department of Finance website and the 2019 Environmental Tax paper will be published in the coming months. My decision in relation to the carbon tax will also be informed by the recent report of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action as well as the All of Government Climate Plan being developed by my colleague the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and the Environment.

### **Community Banking**

76. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to support a public banking scheme based on the Sparkasse model due to the continued difficulties in lending volumes to SMEs, particularly in rural areas and the high interest rates charged; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [15648/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As the Deputy is aware, my Department in conjunction with the Department of Rural and Community Development, issued a report on Local Public Banking in Ireland last year. The report concluded that there is not a compelling case for the State to establish a new local public banking system based on the German Sparkassen model in Ireland.

However, a commitment was given in the report that my Department would arrange for an independent evaluation to consider how the objectives of community banking and how the local provision of banking and financial services could be furthered through other delivery mechanisms.

Following a procurement process, the contract was awarded to Indecon earlier this year and work on the independent evaluation is underway.

As regards SME loan volumes, the Department of Finance's SME Credit Demand Survey, which is published biannually, has consistently found a decline in the demand for Bank lending by Irish SMEs. This has fallen from 40% in the initial survey in 2011 to the current level of 20% in the most recent survey, covering the period October to March 2018.

In respect of the issue of the high interest rates charged to SMEs by the Deputy, I, as Min-

ister for Finance, have no direct function in the relationship between the banks and their customers. I have no statutory function in relation to the banking decisions made by individual lending institutions as these are taken by the board and management of the relevant institution. This includes decisions in relation to product interest rates as determined by the banks from time to time.

It should be noted that in the most recent Department of Finance SME credit demand survey, only 1% of SMEs that did not seek credit stated it was due to it being too expensive to borrow. The same survey notes that four in ten of all SMEs with outstanding debt are not certain of the interest rate attached to their outstanding loans. Of those that are aware, the average cost of credit reported on outstanding loans is 4.4%, down from 5.1% in September 2017.

### **State Aid Investigations**

77. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance when the appeal against the European Commission ruling in a case (details supplied) will be heard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17797/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Government profoundly disagrees with the Commission's analysis in the Apple State aid case.

An appeal is therefore being brought before the European Courts. Such an appeal takes the form of an application to the General Court of the European Union, asking it to annul the Decision of the Commission.

The Attorney General prepared the legal grounds in support of the annulment proceedings and the application has been lodged in the General Court of the European Union. As is normal practice, a summary of these have been published in the Official Journal of the European Union. They were also published on the Department of Finance's website in December 2016.

The case has been granted priority status and has been progressing through the various stages of private written proceedings before the General Court of the European Union. The written proceedings have now concluded and while the timing of any oral hearing is entirely at the discretion of the Court, it may be the case that the appeal could be heard in the coming months.

It will most likely be several years before the case is ultimately concluded.

### **Tax Reliefs Eligibility**

78. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Finance if he will consider providing income tax relief for the long-term lease of residential homes to address security of tenure in view of the success of a similar measure in the agricultural sector under section 664 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 as amended by the Finance Act 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17648/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I understand that the Deputy is proposing that income tax relief, similar to that which is provided for under Section 644 TCA 1997, would apply where landlords provide long-term leases of residential properties. As the Deputy will be aware, decisions by me in relation to the Tax Acts are made in the context of the annual Budget and Finance Bill process. However, bearing in mind the issues outlined below, I am not minded, at this time, to support a proposal along the lines of that put forward in the Deputy's question.

Generally, rental income, after deduction of allowable letting expenses, is subject to tax as part of the total taxable income of a landlord. Individual landlords are subject to income tax on all their income combined, at the applicable rates, including USC and PRSI where appropriate.

Section 664 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 ('relief for certain income from leasing of farm land') provides for the exemption of certain income from the leasing of farm land, where the land is let under a qualifying lease. This particular relief was designed to encourage longer term leases of farm land, with the targeted policy objective of assisting with the mobility and productive use of agricultural land.

When considering the introduction of any tax expenditure measure, my officials undertake an evaluation of the proposal in accordance with the Department of Finance Tax Expenditure Guidelines. An evaluation will seek to address issues such as identification of the market failure, the policy rationale for intervention, cost, and whether a tax based measure is the most efficient form of intervention. With regard to the latter point, in many cases a market failure may be more appropriately remedied by a direct expenditure measure or through regulation. Other considerations include the potential for deadweight costs, the potential cost of the tax revenue foregone to the Exchequer and the scope for abuse.

Furthermore, Ireland's past experience with tax incentives in the housing sector strongly suggests the need for a cautionary stance when considering intervention in the rental sector. There are many competing priorities which must be considered when deciding which policy measures to introduce and the rental sector is just one of many other sectors that may require assistance and intervention. I must be mindful of the many demands on the Exchequer and the need to maintain a broad base of taxation.

Finally, as the Deputy may be aware, in Finance Act 2018, and with effect from 1 January 2019, I provided for the full restoration of the amount of interest that may be deducted by landlords in respect of loans used to purchase, improve or repair their residential property, as a means to support the rental sector.

*Question No. 79 answered with Question No. 66.*

### **Film Industry Tax Reliefs**

80. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance if film producers who apply for and receive section 481 tax relief are responsible to ensure that the requirement to provide quality employment and training is met and have legal responsibility for employees and trainees on film productions funded by section 481 and that those legal responsibilities carry over from production to production in cases in which the same producer is involved; his views on whether the resulting number of jobs being created in the film industry is a small fraction of the number previously claimed by industry representatives in testimony and submissions to the Houses of the Oireachtas in view of the annual tax expenditure of €70 to €80 million on section 481; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17825/19]

89. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance the penalties which will be imposed on film producers in receipt of section 481 tax relief that are found to have breached the legal rights of workers; if these will include withdrawal of the tax relief and other public funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16759/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 80 and 89 together.

The Deputy will be aware that a number of amendments were made to Section 481 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 as part of Finance Act 2018. I would like to advise the Deputy that I signed the regulations and commencement order that give effect to the 2018 changes on the 27th of March.

One of the most significant changes I made relates to the potential for inflated claims. Production companies are now required to apply for payment of the tax credit under the self-assessment system. This brings the operation of the credit within the normal penalty and prosecution provisions for incorrect claims.

In relation to training, I legislated to split the certification process between Revenue and the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (DCHG). Production companies are now required to apply to the DCHG before commencement of main production to have the film certified as a qualifying film. This provides an opportunity for earlier engagement on the training requirements associated with the credit and the quality of training intended to be provided.

Applicants must now provide a skills development plan if the amount to be spent on making the film in Ireland is over €2m, that plan must be agreed with Screen Ireland. There must be a skills development participant for every €177,500 of tax credit claimed, up to a maximum of 8 such participants. A post project skills development report is required for each project.

In relation to quality employment, as I have previously stated, the monitoring of compliance with employment rights legislation is primarily a matter for the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation through the Workplace Relations Commission, which falls within that Department's remit. However, as part of the new certification process to be undertaken by DCHG, an applicant company is required to sign an undertaking of compliance with all relevant employment legislation. This undertaking is required to be signed and furnished with every section 481 application.

If a producer does not comply with the employment and skills development requirements set out by the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, including compliance with the undertaking, they are not eligible for the corporation tax credit. Any amount already claimed will be recoverable, with interest. As the claim for tax relief is made by the producer on a self assessment basis, in each case consideration would have to be given to Revenue's Code of Practice for Revenue Audit and other Compliance Interventions to determine whether or not penalties and publication may arise.

In relation to numbers employed within the Industry, the Revenue Commissioners, from section 481 applications in 2016, estimate the number of employees directly engaged in Section 481 productions to be 2,158 (full time equivalents). My Department in carrying out the Section 481 cost benefit analysis in 2018 estimated that there were a further 902 indirect employments giving a total of 3,060 full time equivalents associated with Section 481 projects in that year. It must be emphasised that these figures relate specifically to projects in receipt of the section 481 tax credit, whereas some other figures quoted refer to the wider audio-visual and radio sector.

### **VAT Registration**

81. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Finance the reason for the difference in the VAT registration threshold for the sale of services versus the sale of goods; if the anomaly will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17649/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** VAT is governed by the EU VAT Directive (Council Directive 2006/112/EC), with which Irish VAT law must comply. Article 284 of

the Directive permits Ireland to maintain two thresholds - €75,000 for goods and €37,500 for services.

Different VAT registration thresholds for the supply of goods and services are a feature of the EU VAT Directive and Irish VAT legislation and reflect the profound difference between the two supplies. In general, the value added in relation to the supply of goods will be much smaller relative to turnover compared with a supply of services. Having a lower VAT registration threshold for services reflects this difference in the proportion of value-added.

### **Tax Treaties**

82. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance when the OECD will bring forward its conclusions on potential digital tax reforms; the level of consultation there has been with the OECD in relation to digital tax and related corporation tax matters; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17769/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Deputy will be aware that the OECD are carrying out further work on the reform of the international tax system to address the tax challenges arising from increasing digitalisation.

There are two broad pillars to this work being discussed at the OECD. A first group of proposals advocate the need to reallocate a proportion of profits, and thus taxation rights, towards different concepts of value creation, including the value generated by having a presence in a market jurisdiction. The second group of proposals are asking whether there are remaining concerns about base erosion and profit shifting that should be addressed by common global minimum taxation rules.

A public consultation was held by the OECD in March which provided an opportunity for a wide range of stakeholders to contribute to the debate. There was considerable interest in the public consultation with approximately 250 responses received by the OECD. A detailed work plan is now being developed by the OECD to be brought before the BEPS Inclusive Framework in May 2019 for agreement. This in turn will be presented to G20 Finance Ministers in June 2019 for approval. It is expected that this workplan will request that the OECD's technical Working Groups further develop the proposals over the next 18 months with a view to reaching final agreement by end 2020.

I have consistently recognised that further change to the international tax framework is necessary to ensure that we reach a stable global consensus for how and where companies should be taxed. A certain, stable, and globally agreed international tax framework is vital to facilitate cross border trade and investment. I remain convinced that the OECD BEPS Inclusive Framework, where over 120 countries work together on an equal footing, is the correct forum for this work to be carried out.

There are a variety of views at the OECD table and the eventual outcome will need to strike a balance to reflect these differing interests. It is in Ireland's interest that an agreement is eventually reached to ensure the continuation of a stable, consensus based international tax framework which is vital to facilitate cross-border trade and investment.

### **Brexit Issues**

83. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Finance if he or his officials have

discussed the latest ESRI special article on Brexit published 26 March 2019; and its implications for the island of Ireland (details supplied). [16721/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Both my officials and I have discussed the recent joint ESRI and Department of Finance study of the potential macro-economic impacts of Brexit on the Irish economy.

The research does not examine the implications of Brexit on an all-island basis. As the UK Government and other research institutes have assessed, Brexit will have a negative economic impact on the UK economy and the Northern Ireland economy in particular. The all-island economy is a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation.

In terms of the joint ESRI and Department of Finance research, a range of alternative scenarios were considered given the uncertainty surrounding Brexit. The study finds that, compared to a no Brexit baseline, the level of GDP in Ireland ten years after Brexit would be around 2.6 per cent lower in a Deal scenario and 5.0 per cent lower in a Disorderly No-Deal scenario respectively. This assessment shows that all Brexit scenarios will imply a slower pace of growth with negative consequences throughout the economy.

This slower growth will have a negative impact on the labour market. Employment is still forecast to continue growing – but at a slower pace than would be the case under a no Brexit scenario.

The general government balance would worsen by an average of ½ a percentage point of GDP over the medium-term, and by nearly 1 per cent over the long-term, in the disorderly no-deal Brexit scenario. The deterioration in the fiscal balance would be structural, not cyclical in nature. This would reflect a permanent reduction in the size of the economy and consequently in the amount of tax revenue it generates. The implications of this will be considered as part of the Budgetary cycle.

It is important to recognise that such estimates may not capture the full impact, and the figures may be conservative. Indeed, the impact in certain exposed sectors and regions will be worse than the average.

The Government has also taken important steps to prepare our economy, including through dedicated measures announced in Budgets 2017, 2018 and 2019. We will continue to strengthen the resilience of the economy, to maximise opportunities and to prepare our economy for the challenges of Brexit.

### **Army Personnel**

84. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the date on which the last director medical branch conference took place; and the date on which the next conference is scheduled to take place. [17903/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** I am advised that the last Director Medical Branch conference was held on 8 November 2018, and that the next conference is currently scheduled for 18 April 2019.

### **Defence Forces Pensions**

85. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if the deci-

sion not to award a person (details supplied) pension entitlements from their recently deceased spouse will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17944/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** The position is that the late spouse of the person in question was not a member of the Defence Forces Contributory Spouses and Children's Pension Scheme. He opted out of the Original Scheme in 1977 and did not opt to join the Revised Scheme in 1985 when given the opportunity to do so. Accordingly, it is regretted that there is no spouse's pension payable under the Scheme and the person in question has been informed of this.

In the past, an option in relation to Scheme membership could not be changed. However, in recent years, a limited appeals process was introduced to examine individual cases and to allow appeals that meet any one of the following criteria:

(i) where there is no evidence that an option was provided to the individual public servant in the first place;

(ii) where there is medical evidence to indicate that the person making the decision not to join the scheme was of sufficiently unsound mind not to appreciate the consequences of his or her decision;

(iii) where a member of the original scheme declined to join the revised scheme in circumstances where there would have been no reasonably foreseeable adverse financial consequences for the individual (in terms only of his or her scheme contributions) had he or she instead opted to join the revised scheme.

This case has also been examined in the context of the above limited appeals process but, unfortunately, there is no evidence that it meets any of the criteria. If it is considered that there is further information which may be of relevance, this can be sent to my Department and the matter will be considered further.

### **Defence Forces Recruitment**

86. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the cost of recruitment campaigns for the Defence Forces in 2018; and the number of new recruits in the Defence Forces in 2018. [18048/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** In 2018, expenditure relating to the publicity and advertising of the various recruitment campaigns amounted to approximately €424,000.

The number of inductions to the Defence Forces in 2018 was 612, which included 492 (32F) General Service recruits.

### **British-Irish Agreement**

87. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the Good Friday Agreement, and in particular regarding strands 1 and 2 being suspended in their entirety; and if he has spoken with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on same recently. [17817/19]

**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.

The devolved institutions of the Agreement are 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. There are pressing decisions and issues across a range of areas, which require a functioning Executive and Assembly.

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.

Following the most recent round of consultations by the two Governments with the parties on 15 February, I do not underestimate the way to go in achieving a resolution. However, I continue to believe that this can be achieved and there is an increasingly urgent need for talks to begin.

Unfortunately, the difficulties that have arisen in relation to the UK exit from the European Union and getting the Withdrawal Agreement ratified by the UK, has predominated in recent weeks. However, the Government has always strongly argued that the challenges raised by the UK exit must not stand in the way of getting all the institutions of the Good Friday Agreement up and working again. Indeed, the challenges raised by the UK exit from the European Union for the island of Ireland are further profound and compelling reasons for the devolved power-sharing institutions in Northern Ireland and the North South Ministerial Council to be operating on behalf of citizens, and in accordance with their respective mandates under the Good Friday Agreement.

Both Governments remain determined to find a way beyond the current impasse to get the institutions of the Agreement operating again. 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 will continue to work with the Secretary of State and remain in regular contact with the leaders of each of the political parties, to get the necessary political process underway to secure an agreement for a functioning Executive and Assembly and North South Ministerial Council.

## **VAT Exemptions**

88. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Finance if there have been discussions on VAT rates payable for legal services specifically for family law; his plans to conduct a review to examine the idea of providing a VAT exemption or reduction for legal advice for family law proceedings with a view to removing some of the financial burden placed on families experiencing marital breakdown or a change in relationship; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11992/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The VAT rating of goods and services is subject to EU VAT law, with which Irish VAT law must comply. In accordance with the EU VAT Directive legal services are liable to VAT at the standard rate, currently 23%.

In general, the VAT Directive provides that all goods and services are liable to VAT at the standard rate unless they fall within categories of goods and services specified in the Directive,

in respect of which Member States may apply a lower rate or exemption from VAT. The supply of legal services is not included in any of those categories of services and therefore there is no discretion for Ireland to adjust the VAT rate applicable on this service.

*Question No. 89 answered with Question No. 80.*

### **Banking Operations**

90. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Finance if his Department will investigate the removal of small business customers overdrafts accounts and the sale of debt by a bank (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17964/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Deputy will be aware that a reduction in the level of non performing loans (NPLs) across European banks is a major priority for the European banking regulator, the SSM. Given this position, banking regulators have tasked each bank with developing and implementing strategies with the expectation that their ratios will be reduced towards the European average. Despite the significant number of restructures undertaken, given the sale of reduction required, it was inevitable though unfortunate, that loan sales would be required.

I should highlight for the Deputy that in my role as Minister for Finance, I cannot stop loan sales even by the banks in which the State has a shareholding. Decisions in this regard, as well as the criteria used to decide the make-up of loans to be included, are the sole responsibility of the board and management of the banks which must be run on an independent and commercial basis. The banks' independence is protected by Relationship Frameworks which are legally binding documents that I cannot change unilaterally. These frameworks which are publicly available, were insisted upon by the European Commission to protect competition in the Irish market.

It is important to reiterate that the protections in place for all borrowers before a sale, either by way of securitisation or otherwise, remain unchanged. Under the Consumer Protection (Regulation of Credit Servicing Firms) Act 2018, which came into effect on 21 January 2019, if a loan is transferred the holder of the legal title to the credit must now be authorised by the Central Bank as a credit servicing firm. Such credit servicing firms must act in accordance with Irish financial services law that applies to 'regulated financial service providers'. This ensures that consumers, whose loans are sold to another firm, maintain the same regulatory protections that they had prior to the sale.

Furthermore, in terms of overdrafts being converted into a loan facility and transferred to a Retail Credit Firm, customers have the right to appeal the withdrawal of any undrawn funds (from the overdraft facility) to the Credit Review Office (CRO). The CRO is able to review cases where credit facilities up to €3m are refused, withdrawn, or offered on unreasonable conditions. Details of how to appeal to the CRO can be found on the website [www.creditreview.ie](http://www.creditreview.ie).

Notwithstanding that the banks' independence in these matters is protected as previously discussed, officials from my department contacted AIB and it provided the following response:

“As is standard for a portfolio sales process, it is a requirement to withdraw overdraft facilities and convert these facilities into term loans. Please see detailed below the process and infrastructure in place to support overdraft customers as they transition to Everyday DAC:

- “Customers included in the portfolio sale, with an overdraft facility, have been issued with a letter providing notification of the withdrawal of the overdraft facility. As part of this notifi-

cation, customers have been advised that they can utilise the full facility, including accessing available funds, throughout the notification period which will be 65 days. This provides customers with the option of availing of the full credit facility ahead of the withdrawal date.

- “Customers have also been advised that they can retain working current a/c’s (which must be maintained in a credit position) post closure of sale. This means customers can retain their bank a/c’s and there is no impact from an operational perspective in terms of physical movement of a/c’s, debits etc.

- “At the end of the notification period, the drawn balance will transfer with other Loans to Everyday Finance DAC. Any overdraft facilities with a €0 or credit balance will not transfer and will remain with AIB operating as a current/credit account.

- “As outlined in the notification letter, SME customers have the right to appeal the withdrawal of credit and the appeal will be heard in line with the current independent SME/Credit Review Office appeals process.”

## House Prices

91. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance if he and the Central Bank continue to monitor the impact venture capital companies are likely to have on the housing market in view of their increased stake in the business and the extent to which they influence rising market prices. [18028/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Department of Finance continues to monitor all aspects of the housing market, including the impact of venture capital companies and other institutional investors. In fact, in February of this year my Department published a paper titled ‘Institutional Investment in the Housing Market’.

The paper describes how ownership of rental properties by large scale landlords - those that own more than 100 rental units - accounted for less than five per cent of all tenancies nationally. In 2017, the latest year for which data is available, the combined property purchasing activity of property funds, real estate companies and REITs accounted for a net one per cent of transactions.

The Central Statistics Office is due to publish updated data on the market activity of all non-household buyers in the summer. Publication of this data will allow further analysis of the impact of institutional investors such as venture capital companies.

The Government’s primary response to mitigating residential price inflation is to increase supply. I understand that in 2019, the vast majority of investments made by institutional investors will be via ‘forward commit’ deals i.e. the funding or forward purchasing of yet-to-be-built stock. This is a very positive development in terms of boosting supply, particularly as the focus of most institutional investors is on the construction of apartments. As the National Planning Framework sets out, Ireland needs to increase the density of its housing stock if we are to meet our sustainability goals.

In relation to prices, the increased presence of institutional investors has coincided with a significant deceleration in home price inflation. As of February 2019, annual residential price inflation was 4.3 per cent, substantially down from 12.5 per cent in the same month last year.

## Home Repossessions Rate

92. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which he directly, or through the Central Bank, continues to monitor the levels of repossessions by lending institutions in respect of family homes in which the borrower continues to make realistic repayments in circumstances in which the lender decided to claim repossession nonetheless; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18029/19]

93. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the number of family homes or rental properties repossessed by each of the lending institutions, their agents or successors in the past five years; the number of families forced onto the local authority housing waiting list as a result; the extent to which offers were made to the lenders to continue meeting repayments which were subsequently rejected by the lenders; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18030/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 92 and 93 together.

I have been advised by the Central Bank of Ireland that their quarterly mortgage arrears, restructures and repossession statistics provides data on the number of property repossessions in a given quarter across all institutions. The reporting template is collected on an aggregate basis and the following tables summarises the number of Principal Dwelling Houses/Buy-to-Let repossessions on an annual basis over the past 5 years.

In relation to the extent to which offers were made to lenders to continue meeting repayments which were subsequently rejected by the lenders, the Central Bank has no data in relation to individual borrowers repayments or proposed repayments.

Finally, local authority waiting lists are a matter for my colleague the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government.

#### **PDH Property Repossessions**

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Repossessions: properties repossessed on foot of an order	315	726	492	526	244
Repossessions: properties voluntarily surrendered/ abandoned	996	809	1,201	891	633
Total	1,311	1,535	1,693	1,417	877

#### **BTL Property Repossessions**

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Repossessions: properties repossessed on foot of an order	170	562	571	310	100
Repossessions: properties voluntarily surrendered/ abandoned	290	279	584	1,686	327

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Total	460	841	1,155	1,996	427

### Credit Availability

94. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the degree to which working capital is being provided by the various lending institutions for the farming and business sectors with particular reference to the need to ensure the ability of productive sectors to have ready access to competitively priced credit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18031/19]

102. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which each of the main banks have facilitated the borrowing requirements of the construction sector in the past 12 months; if each are performing adequately in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18041/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 94 and 102 together.

As the Minister for Finance I have no function in the commercial decisions of banks, however it is Government policy to ensure there is an adequate supply of credit, including working capital, to all viable SMEs and Farms.

The Central Bank of Ireland collects data on bank lending by NACE sector, and collects gross new lending drawdown data for SME lending by NACE sector. Lending for farming is captured in the 'primary industries' sector.

The following table shows the outstanding stock of lending at end Q4 2018 to enterprises of all sizes (SME and Large enterprises) engaged in the primary industries, construction, and business and administration sectors, as well as for all the remaining non-financial sectors, and the total non-financial lending amount. The outstanding stock of lending to SMEs only engaged in these five sectors is also shown in the second column. The final column contains data on total gross new lending to SMEs for these five sectors during all of 2018.

	Total enterprise (SME & Large) lending outstanding stock (€m)	SME lending outstanding stock(€m)	SME gross new lending drawdowns during 2018(€m)
Primary industries	3,990	3,449	824
Business and administration	4,037	1,164	343
Construction	683	442	199
Other Sectors (Ex-FI)	34,166	18,330	3,947
Total (Ex-FI)	42,875	23,385	5,313

The source of this data are table A.14 (SME & large enterprise) and A14.1 (SME) located on the Central Bank of Ireland Statistics page.

To continue to monitor levels of working capital available to SMEs, my Department conducts biannual surveys looking at demand for credit by SMEs. The most recent Department of Finance SME Credit Demand Survey, covering the period April to September 2018, shows that, when pending applications are excluded, 88% of credit applications to banks were approved or partially approved.

Of the 20% of SMEs that applied for credit in the 6 months to September 2018, 38% cited working capital/cash flow requirements as the main reason they were applying for bank finance. When asked about sources of finance for working capital, internal funds/retained earnings were the main finance source of working capital with 85% of working capital coming from this source, up 4% since September 2017.

Supporting the availability of finance for SMEs, including smaller enterprises, is a cornerstone element of Government policy in our efforts to strengthen the economy and create jobs. Government is focused on ensuring that all viable SMEs, operating in all sectors, including construction, have access to an appropriate supply of credit from a diverse range of bank and non-bank sources.

### **Brexit Preparations**

95. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which he remains satisfied regarding the preparations undertaken by his and other Departments for Brexit notwithstanding the ongoing delays; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18032/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Government welcomed the decision of the recent European Council to an extension of the Article 50 process until 31 October 2019. The extension includes giving the UK flexibility to leave before that date should the Withdrawal Agreement be ratified.

The European Council decision made clear that the Withdrawal Agreement, including the backstop, cannot be re-negotiated and that any unilateral commitments by the UK Government should be compatible with the letter and the spirit of the Withdrawal Agreement. We welcome these important assertions.

If the UK stays in the EU beyond 22 May and holds EP elections, it will continue to be a full EU Member State. We welcome the UK's commitment to act in a responsible and constructive way during the extension. This is important to safeguard the effective functioning of the EU as we make decisions on our future and for our citizens, and the EU27 can therefore discuss matters related to long term decisions without the UK.

The European Council also agreed that should the UK's position on the EU-UK future relationship evolve, the EU is prepared to reconsider the political declaration on the future relationship.

The Government remains focused on the ratification of the Withdrawal Agreement as the best way to ensure an orderly withdrawal of the UK from the EU and to fully protect the Good Friday Agreement. The decision of the European Council provides the UK with more time, until 31 October, to ensure an orderly withdrawal, however while it means that the immediate risk of a no deal Brexit has receded it has not been fully averted. The preparations, that have been taking place since before the Brexit referendum took place for all possible scenarios are therefore continuing. Brexit in all scenarios will have negative consequences and as a Government we are determined to be as ready as we can be.

The Government's Contingency Action Plan, published on 19 December 2018, sets out comprehensive, cross-Government preparations that have been taking place since even before the referendum. The Government has been taking key decisions to advance the implementation of our Brexit preparations.

This includes the preparation of Brexit related legislation, the Withdrawal of the United

Kingdom from the European Union (Consequential Provisions) Act, which has completed all Oireachtas stages and was signed into law by the President on 17 March.

The Act complements legal measures at EU level and focuses on measures protecting our citizens and supporting the economy, enterprise and jobs, particularly in key economic sectors. It makes provisions for continued access to healthcare, social security protection, student support and justice and security measures. The Act is primarily intended for a no deal scenario, and most of the Act will not be commenced should the Withdrawal agreement be ratified.

The legislation which I proposed in the areas of Taxation and Financial Services is an important part of the whole of Government response to Brexit, as it will ensure continuity of access for business and citizens in relation to certain taxation reliefs and allowances, as well as enabling insurance undertakings to continue to fulfil contractual obligations to their Irish customers, in a no deal scenario.

The Government has also taken important steps to prepare our economy, including through dedicated measures announced in Budgets 2017, 2018 and 2019, supported by long-term planning through the National Development Plan and the National Planning Framework which will provide significant investment in Ireland's public capital infrastructure.

As Minister for Finance, my objective is to protect the economic and financial interests of the State and to support the work of the Revenue Commissioners so as to minimise the Brexit disruption to trade, to the greatest extent possible. I am satisfied that my Department and its relevant agencies will continue to work to ensure that they are as prepared as possible to limit the inevitable disruption to consumers and trade, post Brexit.

As a Government we will continue to strongly encourage businesses and citizens to do the same. For instance businesses that trade with the UK should apply now to the Revenue Commission for their customs number (EORI). The Government website *gov.ie/brexit* is an important resource in this regard and contains information on a range of Brexit supports and advice, as well as an overview of the institutions offering financial assistance to businesses such as the SBCI, microfinance Ireland, Intertrade Ireland and Enterprise Ireland.

### **Corporation Tax Regime**

96. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which he expects to be in a position to defend the 12.5% corporation tax and dispel the misinformation propagated by certain persons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18033/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Ireland's corporation tax regime is a core part of our economic policy mix and is a longstanding anchor of our offering on foreign direct investment ('FDI').

At 12.5%, Ireland has one of the most competitive headline corporate tax rates in the OECD. This rate is applied to a broad base with limited deductions – a policy which is endorsed by the likes of the OECD as it is good for growth in our economy.

Our competitive corporation tax regime has been an important part of our industrial policy since the 1950s and has attracted real and substantive operations to Ireland since then, bringing real jobs and investment into Ireland.

The value of a stable and consistent approach to corporation tax policy, both for the business community and for the Exchequer, has long been recognised. The cornerstone of this policy is

the long-term and continuing commitment to the 12.5% corporation tax rate.

Ireland has been criticised for the way in which our tax system has been used by multinationals in their aggressive tax planning structures to exploit mismatches between the tax systems of various countries and gaps in the international tax framework. In defending our domestic tax system I recognise the importance of ensuring effective taxation of multinational companies and the need for internationally agreed solutions to counter aggressive tax planning. For this reason Ireland has been, and continues to be, fully engaged with international efforts to counter aggressive tax planning, through both the OECD's BEPS (Base Erosion and Profit Shifting) project and the co-ordinated action at EU level.

In September 2018, I published Ireland's Corporation Tax Roadmap, marking another milestone in Ireland's ongoing work on corporation tax reform. It lays out the next steps in implementing the various commitments we have made through the EU Anti-Tax Avoidance Directives, the BEPS reports and the recommendations set out in the Coffey Review of Ireland's Corporation Tax Code.

Ireland continues to engage in the OECD on ongoing international tax reform and recognises that further change to the international tax framework is necessary. I am supportive of the further examination of proposals currently being discussed via the OECD Inclusive Framework and the aim of reaching a global consensus. In these discussions it is Ireland's view that any changes must not disproportionately prejudice small open economies and any agreed outcome must be long-term, sustainable and above all fair.

In all of this we will continue to foster economic activity in Ireland, the EU and beyond by adapting and evolving our corporate tax regime, while maintaining our key 12.5% rate, and ensuring that we continue to have a regime that is transparent, sustainable and legitimate.

### **Economic Policy**

97. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which he has identified particular or specific threats to the stability of the economy pre or post-Brexit, with particular reference to changing trading conditions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18034/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As published in the Stability Programme Update for 2019, my Department provides a discussion of the risks to economy over the coming years. These are numerous and primarily external in nature.

First and foremost is the ongoing uncertainty around Brexit. Joint research by the ESRI and my Department has shown the impact that a disorderly Brexit could have for the economy. Secondly, given Ireland's position as a small open economy with a high degree of integration in global value chains, any further disruption to trade or a slowdown in global growth would have a disproportionate impact on the Irish economy, and a stylised model based assessment of the impact of a shock to world growth is provided in the Stability Programme.

On the domestic front, the principal risks relate to potential overheating as the economy approaches full-employment, and the concentrated nature of Ireland's production base.

The best way that we can mitigate against these risks however is through prudent budgetary policy, careful management of the public finances and by focusing on competitiveness-oriented policies, and this is what this Government continues to do.

### **Insurance Costs**

99. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which he continues to monitor activities in the insurance industry with particular reference to arresting the upward spiral of premiums; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18036/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am very conscious of the difficulties that increased insurance costs generally are having on many consumers, voluntary organisation and small businesses in this country. That is why the completion of the Cost of Insurance Working Group's (CIWG) work remains very important in order to fully achieve its objectives of delivering fairer premiums for consumers and businesses, and a more stable and competitive insurance market.

In this regard, I believe that significant progress has been made on the motor side which is reflected in the fact that the most recent Central Statistics Office data indicates that the cost of motor insurance has fallen by 23.8% since July 2016. Consequently the average consumer should be seeing reductions when renewing their motor insurance.

In relation to the Report on the Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance, the CIWG's most recent quarterly Progress Update on the implementation of its recommendations indicated that 24 out of the total of 26 action points which were due for completion during 2018 overall have been accomplished. This Progress Update also included an additional section providing the up-to-date status in respect of relevant recommendations from the two reports issued by the Personal Injuries Commission (PIC).

The Deputy will be aware that the PIC reported in September 2018 and concluded that soft tissue injuries are significantly higher here than in England and Wales (4.4 times) and recommended that action be taken to address this disparity through the establishment of the Judicial Council. The PIC recommended that this body would become responsible for preparing the guidelines on personal injury award levels, and would replace the Book of Quantum.

While the Working Group will continue to focus on implementing all of its recommendations, I consider that bringing the levels of damages awarded in this country more in line with those awarded in other jurisdictions is undoubtedly the single most essential challenge which must be overcome if there is to be a sustainable reduction in insurance costs. The current position with the Judicial Council Bill is that the Minister for Justice and Equality has indicated that he hopes that the Bill will be enacted by the summer. In this regard, it recently completed Committee Stage in the Seanad. Alongside this, the Law Reform Commission has included the subject of capping damages in personal injuries litigation in its draft 5th Programme of Law Reform and this work will begin shortly.

Finally, I expect that insurers' pricing of premiums in general will take account of the measures which have been, and are being, implemented as a result of the CIWG recommendations more broadly and I believe that insurers themselves recognise this. In this regard, I would recall that Justice Nicholas Kearns, the Chairperson of the Personal Injuries Commission (PIC), noted in the foreword of its second report that insurance industry representatives on the PIC repeatedly stated that, as award levels and associated costs account for the bulk of the cost of insurance, if claims costs come down and are maintained at a consistent and predictable level, then premiums will also reduce accordingly. A further public statement by insurers to this effect would assist in efforts to continue the necessary reform.

## **Insurance Costs**

100. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance if reference can be made to comparisons with other jurisdictions throughout Europe in respect of insurance costs here with a view to ensuring the competitiveness of the economy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18037/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** At the outset, I recognise that insurance costs are important in the context of ensuring the competitiveness of the economy and I am very conscious of the difficulties being faced by certain small businesses in obtaining insurance and that a number of such businesses have had to close or are facing closure if they are unable to get cover. The Deputy will be aware that neither I, as Minister for Finance, nor the Central Bank can interfere in the provision or pricing of insurance products. However it was recognised that the State could play a role in improving the environment within which insurers operate, thus explaining why the Cost of Insurance Working Group (CIWG) was established in July 2016.

I understand from my officials that it is difficult to obtain reliable data to accurately compare the cost of insurance here to that in other jurisdictions throughout Europe. I am informed that international organisations, such as the OECD and Eurostat, do not publish comparative data on the cost of insurance between countries. Eurostat publishes Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices (HICP) data with regard to insurance, but this only provides a comparison of the level of inflation for different types of insurance such as motor and travel insurance. However, it is not possible to compare the underlying cost of each of the types of insurance. In addition, this does not include a comparative index for the price of insurance to businesses. Indeed, the CSO noted in its recent report to the CIWG on the feasibility of producing an index to measure the cost of insurance to businesses that there is little international precedent for such an index.

In any event, any international comparisons on the basis of price alone would not take into account factors such as the various regulatory environments and liability systems in place in different jurisdictions. However, increasing the availability of data in Ireland in relation to insurance and understanding the factors that influence or drive the cost of it are important. This was recognised by the CIWG and both of its Reports on the Cost of Motor Insurance (2017) and the Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance (2018) recommended a number of actions to improve transparency. In this regard, I believe the Central Bank (National Claims Information Database) Act, 2018 will be a major help from a transparency perspective. As the Deputy will be aware, the relevant legislation to establish the database was commenced in late January, and the Central Bank expects to produce its first report in the second half of this year. While its initial focus will be on the cost of motor insurance, I look forward to the Central Bank's analysis by the end of this year on the feasibility and merit of extending the Database to employer and public liability insurance. If such a move is feasible, this is something I think will have a positive impact on understanding in more detail the recent trends in the cost of insurance to businesses.

Increasing transparency is not a solution by itself, I believe that the issue of the rising cost of insurance and in some cases its unavailability is linked to high award levels particularly for soft tissue injuries, as well as what appears to be an increase in fraudulent and exaggerated claims. In that regard, a key recommendation of the CIWG was the establishment of the Personal Injuries Commission (PIC) which was asked to examine amongst other things award levels in this country compared with elsewhere. The PIC reported in September 2018 and concluded that soft tissue injuries are significantly higher here than in England and Wales (4.4 times) and recommended that action be taken to address this disparity through the establishment of the Judicial Council. The PIC recommended that this body would become responsible for preparing

the guidelines on personal injury award levels, and would replace the Book of Quantum.

The current position with the Judicial Council Bill is that the Minister for Justice and Equality has indicated that he hopes to have the legislation enacted by the summer. In this regard, it recently completed Committee Stage in the Seanad. Alongside this, the Law Reform Commission has included the subject of capping damages in personal injuries litigation in its draft 5th Programme of Law Reform and this work will begin shortly.

Finally, I expect that insurers' pricing of premiums in general will take account of the measures which have been, and are being, implemented as a result of the CIWG recommendations more broadly and I believe that insurers themselves recognise this. In this regard, I would recall that Justice Nicholas Kearns, the Chairperson of the Personal Injuries Commission (PIC), noted in the foreword of its second report that insurance industry representatives on the PIC repeatedly stated that, as award levels and associated costs account for the bulk of the cost of insurance, if claims costs come down and are maintained at a consistent and predictable level, then premiums will also reduce accordingly. A further public statement by insurers to this effect would assist in efforts to continue the necessary reform.

### **Economic Data**

101. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the degree to which his Department can forecast economic prospects over the next five years in view of the variety of potential challenges globally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18039/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Irish economy continues to grow at a robust pace, with annual GDP growth of 6.7 per cent in 2018. However, over the last number of months uncertainty in the external environment has increased substantially. The pace of growth has slowed in Ireland's key export markets, with a loss of momentum particularly evident in both the euro area and the UK. Accordingly the Department of Finance has revised down its forecast, relative to Budget 2019, for GDP by a quarter of a percentage point this year and next.

As published in the Stability Programme Update for 2019, my Department is forecasting GDP growth of 3.9 per cent this year and 3.3 per cent next year. Over the medium term, GDP is expected to be around 2 1/2 per cent, with positive contributions from both net exports and domestic demand.

As regards Brexit, the Department's projections assume that a transition period will be agreed that extends or replicates existing frameworks until end-2020, i.e. the UK is assumed to remain in the single market and customs union during this period. From 2021 onwards, the baseline forecasts assume that the EU and UK conclude a trade agreement. This form of agreement results in any lower level of GDP over the 2021-2023 period relative to a hypothetical no-Brexit baseline scenario.

Despite the relatively positive outlook for our economy, the risks over the coming years are numerous and primarily external in nature. First and foremost is the ongoing uncertainty around Brexit. Secondly, given Ireland's position as a small open economy with a high degree of integration in global value chains, any further disruption to trade or a slowdown in global growth would have a disproportionate impact on the Irish economy. Over the medium term, the principal risks relate to potential overheating as the economy approaches full-employment.

The best way we can mitigate against these risks is through prudent budgetary policy, careful management of the public finances and by focusing on competitiveness-oriented policies.

*Question No. 102 answered with Question No. 94.*

### **National Monuments**

103. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans for a site (details supplied); when it will be operational; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17904/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran):** Bunadober Mill (also known as Moran's Mill) is a National Monument in State care since 1996 and responsibility for its maintenance and protection falls to the Office of Public Works. The Mill is a surviving example of vernacular rural industrial heritage which contains a particularly notable horizontal mill wheel and other historically-important mill machinery.

The strategic aim is to conserve and protect the mill complex in its current form and to allow for the future presentation of the site to the visiting public. To this end, the OPW has been undertaking a careful conservation project at the site to address a number of issues sequentially:

- To ensure that the fabric of the building is secure and structurally sound;
- To carry out a wildlife assessment (Bat Survey);
- To record all surviving elements of the Mill structure and its loose and fixed contents (both in traditional record and laser survey), to carry out an inventory of them and to take these elements into safe storage if possible;
- To carry out essential works to the horizontal wheel to rectify the effects of a significant earlier structural collapse, to assess the condition of various working elements and to repair them;
- To develop a strategy for managed public access and presentation of the Mill Complex;
- To rehabilitate the Mill pond

Following the completion of the first major phase of work in the period leading up to 2014/15, the buildings and contents are now secure. In 2015, OPW commissioned an external conservation expert to complete an agreed Conservation and Management Plan for the site which will inform the next steps to be taken towards the ultimate presentation of the site to visitors. Remaining elements of this work will be addressed on a progressive basis as and when resources permit. It is not possible at this time to say exactly when the site will be open to the public.

### **Garda Station Closures**

104. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of the buildings in which Garda stations were formally located in counties Cavan and Monaghan which have been sold; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17945/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran):** I have been advised by the Commissioners of Public Works that two former Garda Station buildings in County Cavan have been sold. These are Finea and Tullyvin.

No former Garda stations in County Monaghan have been sold.

The former Garda station at Shantonagh, Co. Monaghan was a leased property and this lease was surrendered following the closure of the station.

The following table sets out the position with the remaining former Garda stations that remain in State ownership.

Former Garda Station	County	Closed	Status
Bawnboy	Cavan	2013	Reopening as part of the Programme for a Partnership Government
Redmills	Cavan	2013	Future use under consideration
Stradone (New) *	Cavan	2013	Refurbished and extended. Currently in use by An Garda Síochána.
Clontibret	Monaghan	2012	Future use under consideration
Corrinshigagh	Monaghan	2013	Future use under consideration
Newbliss	Monaghan	2013	Future use under consideration
Smithborough	Monaghan	2012	Future use under consideration

\* The old Garda station at Stradone, Co. Cavan closed in 2002. This property is surplus to requirements and is being prepared for disposal.

### Departmental Websites

105. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the annual cost in 2017 and 2018 of hosting a website (details supplied); and the breakdown of all associated information and communications technology and staff costs in tabular form. [17972/19]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** My Department has developed the gov.ie website which is a key tenant of the Public Service ICT strategy under Digital First. The objective of gov.ie is the creation of a shared website for all Departments, presenting content in an accessible manner for ease of online interaction for citizens and businesses. It will provide easy-to-find information about government services and will improve on separate department websites which have different designs, navigation, writing styles and isolated services. It will involve a significant improvement in how Government delivers access to its information and services online, focusing more on the user of the services rather than the providers of those services. Development of the site started in 2017 and activity increased in 2018 as the Public Consultations portal was incorporated. Three departmental websites have been added in 2019 so far. The gov.ie site was originally hosted exclusively by a company called Linode but we now also use Amazon Web Services (AWS). The cost associated with hosting gov.ie in 2017, including VAT, was €588.96. In 2018, as activity was substantially increased and considerably more resilience and services added, the cost was €5,414.97, also including VAT.

Company	2017	2018
Amazon AWS	€0	€3,749.14
Linode	€588.96	€1,665.83
Total	€588.96	€5,414.97

### Office of Public Works

106. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if a survey undertaken by the Office of Public Works in County Cork in October 2018 will be pro-

vided to a person (details supplied). [18012/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran):** The site inspection carried out by the Office of Public Works (OPW) in conjunction with Cork County Council at the home of the person named by the Deputy is part of the application process under the Voluntary Homeowners Relocation Scheme. The Relocation Committee has considered the site inspection report of the homeowner in question.

The Commissioners of Public Works in Ireland are expected to make a decision on a number of applications under the Scheme in the coming weeks, following which the Commissioners will make contact with the person named.

### **Public Sector Staff Remuneration**

107. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the updated position on the restorative elements of FEMPI; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18038/19]

109. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which public sector pay restoration has been achieved and or is pending; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18275/19]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 107 and 109 together.

I refer the Deputy to my reply to PQ 6225 of 7 February 2019. The position remains unchanged.

The process of dismantling the Financial Emergency legislation commenced under the Lansdowne Road Agreement 2016-2018 and will be completed under the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020 (PSSA).

The PSSA, which was negotiated in 2017, and the provisions of which were statutorily provided for under the terms of the Public Service Pay and Pensions Act 2017, allows for a continued, controlled unwinding of the financial emergency (FEMPI) legislation. The unwinding process is progressively weighted towards those at the lower levels of pay (who will see their salaries increase relative to 2008), and is implemented on a phased basis.

By end 2019 salary rates up to €50,000 will be fully restored. By end 2020 salary rates up to €70,000 (over 90% of the public service) will be fully restored.

For public servants who have not achieved full restoration of the FEMPI cuts by October 2020 (i.e. the date of the last PSSA increase), restoration of the amount must be completed by way of Ministerial order. This order must be made on the following dates:

For those with a post-PSSA salary of under €150,000:

- Covered public servants: a date after 1 October 2020 but before 1 July 2021.
- Non-covered public servants: on 1 July 2021.

For those with a post-PSSA salary in excess of €150,000:

- Covered public servants: a date after 1 October 2020 but before 1 July 2022.

- Non-covered public servants: a date after 1 July 2021 but before 1 July 2022.

### Garda Station Refurbishment

108. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the progress towards the reopening of the Garda station in Bawnboy, County Cavan; the works involved; the projected cost; the timeframe to completion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17958/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran):** The Office of Public Works has been requested by An Garda Síochána to progress the reopening of six former Garda Stations including the Station at Bawnboy, Co. Cavan. A brief of requirements for this Station was obtained from An Garda Síochána and a full technical assessment completed. The deliberative process between An Garda Síochána and OPW to finalise proposals for the re-opening is continuing. Upon final ‘sign-off’ by An Garda Síochána, OPW will submit the necessary Part 9 planning application and progress the procurement of works required to re-open the Station which, it is expected, will take place this year.

*Question No. 109 answered with Question No. 107.*

### National Monuments

110. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the amount spent on a site (details supplied) in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17908/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran):** Bunnadobber (Moran’s Mill) is a National Monument in the care of the Office of Public Works. The following table gives details of expenditure for the last three years. The bulk of this expenditure relates to pest control, electricity and pay costs. General maintenance at the site is undertaken by the OPW direct labour force working from the Athenry National Monuments Depot.

Bunnadobber Morans Mill

Year End 2019	2018	2017	2016
Total	12,669	10,487	27,297

### Garda Communications

111. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the duration remaining on a contract with a company (details supplied) for the provision of digital radio services to An Garda Síochána and other emergency services; if no concession agreement exists in respect of this contract; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17950/19]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The current contract for the provision of radio services to An Garda Síochána and other emergency services is due to expire on 16 June 2019. This contract covers the provision of national narrowband secure digital radios network services as a managed service and as such no concession agreement was included in the contract.

Officials of my Department are engaged in a procurement exercise to establish a new replacement framework for the delivery of a nation-wide, narrowband, secure, managed digital radio service for voice and data purposes and for the supply of associated services. It advertised its intention to procure replacement services in January 2017 and is currently in the process of a competitive procedure with negotiation with Stage 2 RFT documents due to be published to pre-qualified candidates in Quarter 2 2019.

Officials of my Department are also in negotiations, which are at an advanced stage, to agree a variation agreement with the current supplier that would extend the current contract for a period of up to eighteen months.

### **Public Procurement Contracts**

112. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the date on which the tender process will open for competition in respect of finding a provider for digital radio services to An Garda Síochána and other emergency services in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17951/19]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Officials of my Department are engaged in an OJEU procurement exercise to establish a new replacement framework for the delivery of a nation-wide, narrowband, secure, managed digital radio service for voice and data purposes and for the supply of associated services. It advertised its intention to procure replacement services in January 2017 and is currently in the process of a competitive procedure with negotiation with Stage 2 RFT documents due to be published to pre-qualified candidates in Quarter 2 2019.

### **Garda Communications**

113. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he has consulted with An Garda Síochána and other emergency services in the context of their changing needs in respect of digital radio services; if new requirements have been identified by them in advance of a new provider being contracted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17952/19]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Officials of my Department are engaged in a procurement exercise to establish a new replacement framework for the delivery of a nation-wide, narrowband, secure, managed digital radio service for voice and data purposes and for the supply of associated services. My officials solicited the views and requirements of all agencies currently using, and those who may use this network in the future, for inclusion in the RFT documents. A project group comprised of representatives from An Garda Síochána and other emergency services bodies has overseen and inputted into the drafting of RFT documents including technical and operational requirements.

### **Community Employment Schemes Supervisors**

114. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the position regarding pension provision for community employment scheme supervisors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18050/19]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** This issue

relates to a claim by community employment supervisors and assistant supervisors who have been seeking, through their union representatives, the allocation of Exchequer funding to implement a 2008 Labour Court recommendation relating to the provision of a pension scheme.

The matter was the subject of extensive discussion at the Community Sector High Level Forum which was reconvened to examine certain issues pertaining to the Community Employment sector and in particular to ensure that the matter was fully examined having regard to both costs and precedent.

A detailed scoping exercise was carried out by my Department in 2017 in order to comprehensively examine and assess the full potential implications of the issues under consideration.

The scoping exercise clearly illustrated that this matter presents very significant issues for the Exchequer, with a potential cost exposure for the State of between €188 million per annum and €347m depending on the size of the sector which is difficult to ascertain, were consequential demands to be made to fund employer pension contributions for all similar State funded Community and Voluntary organisations. This excludes any provision for immediate ex-gratia lump sum payment of pension for those imminently retiring, as sought, which could, depending on the size of the sector, give rise to a further Exchequer cost exposure of up to €318 million.

The Forum met in the period subsequent to the conduct of the scoping exercise where relevant matters in respect of this issue were discussed in comprehensive detail with the members of the Forum. These discussions provided a clear understanding to each of the parties of their respective positions in relation to this matter and in this context the formal engagement process between the parties was accordingly concluded on this basis.

It continues to be the position that state organisations are not the employer of the particular employees concerned and accordingly it is not for the State to provide funding for occupational pension scheme provision.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

115. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the additional funding request submitted by a school (details supplied) due to an estimated increase in cost of impending works associated with EPA health and safety requirements, per planning approval subsequent to approval of original application for a replacement building; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that following four years of engagement in the planning process, the importance of this project in serving the pupils and staff of the school and the educational requirements of the residents and young families of the local community; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18068/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** In May, 2015, my Department approved an all-in-devolved grant for the provision of a mainstream classroom and a resource room for the school referred to by the Deputy.

I fully appreciate the importance of this project to the school community and to all relevant stakeholders. However, the project proceeded to tender without reverting to my Department at the appropriate time as required under the terms and conditions of the scheme. In addition, the Board of Management had tendered for an unapproved scope of works.

In that context, and earlier this month, the Board was advised that it was required to revert to the original approved works. It is now a matter for the Board of Management to progress the project accordingly.

## **Special Educational Needs Staff**

116. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason no procedures are in place to enable the transfer of an allocated SNA from a primary school to a secondary school for a child; if his attention has been drawn to the anxiety experienced by families (details supplied); his plans to address the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17868/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible for allocating a quantum of Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support for each school annually taking into account the assessed care needs of children qualifying for SNA support enrolled in the school.

The NCSE allocates SNA support to schools in accordance with the criteria set out in Department Circular 0030/2014, which is available on my Department's website at [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie), in order that students who have care needs can access SNA support as and when it is needed.

In considering applications for SNA support for individual pupils, the NCSE take account of the pupils' needs and consider the resources available to the school to identify whether additionality is needed or whether the school might reasonably be expected to meet the needs of the pupils from its current level of resources.

SNAs are not allocated to individual children but to schools as a school based resource.

SNA allocations to all schools can change from year to year as children with care needs leave a school, as new children with care needs enrol in a school and as children develop more independent living skills and their care needs diminish over time.

The SNA allocations for the 2018/19 school year were announced in May 2018 to provide certainty to schools, parents and SNAs at the earliest opportunity. It is expected that this timeframe will also be adhered to this year with the allocations for September 2019 being announced in May 2019.

## **Gaelscoil Issues**

117. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the financial resources and other supports that can be provided to new independent Gaelscoileanna in the Dublin 10 and 12 areas (details supplied). [17871/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** My Department establishes and supports new schools where a demographic need for a new school has been identified. Pre-opening capitation funding and start-up grants are available to new Irish-medium and English-medium schools established in this way, and ongoing funding and resources are provided in line with national norms.

I am taking the Deputy's reference to "new independent Gaelscoileanna" to mean new Irish-medium primary schools established by private parties. There is no mechanism by which new independent primary schools established by private parties are recognised and/or supported by the Department.

As the Deputy may be aware, my Department uses a Geographical Information System (GIS) to identify where the pressure for school places across the country will arise. The GIS

uses data from a range of sources, including the Central Statistics Office, Ordnance Survey Ireland, the Department of Social Protection and the Department's own databases. With this information, my Department carries out nationwide demographic exercises at primary and post-primary level to determine where additional school accommodation is needed.

Major new residential developments in an area also 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.

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

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

As the Deputy may be aware, following completion of nationwide demographic exercises, the Government recently announced plans for the establishment of 42 new schools over the next four years (2019 to 2022) to meet demographic needs.

While a new school wasn't announced for the Ballyfermot\_D10 and Dolphin's Barn\_D12 areas, as with other school planning areas nationwide, the demographic data is being kept under ongoing review by the Department to take account of updated data.

Regarding the language of instruction of a planned new school, a patronage process is run by my Department after it has been decided, based on demographic analysis, that a new school is required. This patronage process is open to all patron bodies and prospective patrons. Parental preferences for each patron, along with their preference for the language of instruction (Irish or English) of the new school, from parents of children who reside in the school planning areas concerned, together with the extent of diversity currently available in these areas, are key to decisions in relation to the outcome of this process. It is through this process that a new primary school can be an Irish-medium Gaelscoil or an English-medium school.

Separately, the Schools Reconfiguration for Diversity Process also provides an opportunity to increase the number of Gaelscoileanna nationwide. This new process is aimed at accelerating the delivery of multi-denominational and non-denominational schools towards the Government target of 400 such schools by 2030. The process, which involves the live transfer of existing schools, is designed to provide additional multi-/non-denominational schools in Irish or English and an opportunity is available to English-medium schools seeking to make a transition to Irish-medium provision in that context, in line with the expressed wishes of parents and the local school community.

Separately to the main Schools Reconfiguration for Diversity Process, school communities can directly engage with their school patron regarding transfer of patronage to become a multi-denominational school, including a multi-denominational Irish-medium school. Any school which is seeking a transfer of patronage should contact their school patron directly.

## **School Patronage**

118. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to provide for more diversity of choice for parents of primary school children in an area (details supplied); if divestment or other proposals are under consideration; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17877/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** As the Deputy will be aware, the Programme for Government includes a commitment of reaching 400 multi-/non-denominational schools in Ireland by the year 2030. The Schools Reconfiguration for Diversity Process is aimed at assisting in achieving this target by transferring existing schools from denominational to multi-/non-denominational patronage in line with the wishes of the school community. The first Identification Phase of the phase 1 pilot process is nearing completion for 16 initial areas nationwide, which in the case of Tipperary ETB includes a report on the Roscrea area. It is envisaged that these reports will be published on my Department’s website [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie) in the first half of this year.

The Newport/Birdhill/Ballina is does not form part of the 16 areas selected by ETBs for the initial roll-out of this process. However, separately to the main Schools Reconfiguration for Diversity Process, school communities can directly engage with their school patron regarding transfer of patronage to a multi-denominational patron. For example, the ‘early movers’ provision fast-tracks patronage reassignment. The first ‘early mover’ reconfiguration has successfully taken place, with Two-Mile Community National School in Kerry opening in September 2017.

Any school which is seeking a transfer of patronage under the ‘early movers’ provision should contact their school patron directly.

### **Home Tuition Scheme Provision**

119. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address a matter regarding the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17899/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The purpose of my Department’s Home Tuition Grant Scheme is to provide funding towards the provision of a compensatory educational service for students enrolled in school, with a significant medical condition which has, and is likely to cause, major disruption to their attendance in school on a continuing basis.

Home tuition is not an alternative to a school placement and is provided in very limited and specific circumstances.

As tuition takes place outside the usual school structure it is important that home tutors are qualified to provide an educational programme. Accordingly, it is a condition of the scheme that parents/legal guardians recruit a tutor who is qualified in the sector in which tuition is being provided, and is registered with the Teaching Council for the duration of the approved tuition, up to and including issue of final payment.

When a child is deemed eligible for home tuition, a sanction letter issues to the parents/legal guardians, which include the name(s) of the approved tutor(s), sanctioned start and finish dates for the tutor and grant rate per hour. Approval dates for tutors may be contingent on a number of factors including conditions attached to their Teaching Council registration.

The Scheme provides for an appeal process regarding decisions made in the allocation of

Home Tuition support. Appeals may be submitted in writing to my Department's Special Education Section outlining the reasons for the appeal, along with supporting documents or reports, as appropriate.

The parent referred to by the Deputy has submitted an appeal to my Department in recent days. My officials will consider the appeal and contact the parent directly in due course.

### Departmental Staff Data

120. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of school inspectors employed in each of the years 2008 to 2018. [17900/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The following table gives details of the staffing cohort at my Department's Inspectorate division from 2008 to 2018 as requested by the Deputy.

#### Staffing in the Inspectorate

Grade	31-Dec-08	31-Dec-09	31-Dec-10	31-Dec-11	31-Dec-12	31-Dec-13
Chief Inspector	1.00	0.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Deputy Chief Inspector	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Assistant Chief Inspector	11.00	7.00	6.00	8.00	8.00	8.00
Divisional Inspector	40.00	29.00	28.00	26.00	23.80	24.00
Primary District Inspector	34.53	32.73	33.00	32.00	34.00	33.00
Senior Inspector	35.60	31.60	32.00	26.80	22.80	22.60
Post Primary Inspector	30.00	31.00	30.80	31.40	32.50	32.10
Early Years Inspector	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Total	153.13	132.33	131.80	126.20	123.10	121.70

[Table contd.]

Grade	31-Dec-14	31-Dec-15	31-Dec-16	31-Dec-17	31-Dec-18
Chief Inspector	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Deputy Chief Inspector	1.00	1.00	1.00	2.00	2.00
Assistant Chief Inspector	8.00	8.00	9.00	10.00	10.00
Divisional Inspector	25.00	24.00	24.60	26.60	26.00
Primary District Inspector	32.00	35.00	33.00	31.00	27.80
Senior Inspector	24.60	22.60	24.70	24.70	26.00
Post Primary Inspector	21.30	26.30	27.50	28.50	30.50
Early Years Inspector	0.00	9.00	12.00	14.00	17.00
Total	112.90	126.90	132.80	137.80	140.30

### Schools Building Projects Status

121. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if representatives of a campus (details supplied) will be notified regarding a new date on which he will meet them to discuss the Maynooth PP project and the provision of extra rooms from the school term commencing September 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17905/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The Deputy will be aware that I met yesterday with local principals, the ETB and public representatives including the Deputy herself to discuss this project to which she refers. I can add that the matters referred to by her were discussed at that meeting which was attended by the local Education and Training Board (KWETB) as well as other school representatives. I can also inform the Deputy that tenders for the completion of the project are issuing today to short-listed tenderers.

### Apprenticeship Data

122. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of new apprenticeships established in each of the years 2016 to 2018. [17976/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):** The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the following table.

#### New Consortia Apprenticeship Programmes

New Consortia Apprenticeships Programmes	2016	2017	2018
New Apprenticeships Established	2	7	9

### Education and Training Boards

123. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason for ongoing delays in the development of the new Louth and Meath Education and Training Board headquarters facility in Drogheda, County Louth; the planned date for commencement of the building project on the site in Drogheda; the progress made to advance the project in 2018 and to date in 2019; the funds expended on the head office project in each of the years 2015 to 2018 and to date in 2019, including professional and consultancy fees, surveying, legal fees and so on; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17989/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** As the Deputy is aware, the project to which he refers has been devolved for delivery to the local Education and Training Board (LMETB).

A number of design issues have arisen with this project. These have included issues relating to the need for additional security features for the proposed building that became apparent at tender stage and which required a change in brief with consequent design alterations. Currently, the capacity of the building is being reviewed to ensure it meets LMETB's needs into the future.

I can assure the Deputy that every effort to progress the project has been made in 2018 and 2019 and will continue to be made. A number of meetings between officials from my Department and LMETB and its design team, with a view to addressing the relevant issues, have taken place in the last year. However, it is still too early at this stage to give a commencement date for construction.

To date, approximately €260k has been spent on costs related to the project including design team fees, planning and statutory consent fees and surveys for the project. Approximately €200k of this was expended in 2015 with the remainder spent last year.

### Residency Permits

124. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if residency will be updated or extended in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17855/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Deputy will be aware from my response in September last year that it was open to the person concerned to write to the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department in relation to their request for permission to reside in this State. I understand there is no record of correspondence from the person concerned and it would appear the person's presence in the State is unlawful.

The Deputy will appreciate that, under the relevant provisions of the Immigration Act, 2004, a non-national may not be in the State other than within the terms of a permission from the Minister for Justice and Equality. In order to allow for a full examination of the person's circumstances the person concerned should write to Unit 2, Domestic Residence and Permissions Division, INIS, 13/14 Burgh Quay, Dublin 2 without delay and provide a detailed account, including documentary evidence, of their personal circumstances since the expiration of their permission to reside in this State.

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

### **Garda Data**

125. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí located in counties Cavan, Monaghan and Meath to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17922/19]

**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 2,600 Garda recruits have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide, of whom 90 were assigned to the Cavan/Monaghan Division and 78 were assigned to the Meath Division.

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 Cavan/Monaghan Division and the

Meath Division.

The Garda strength by rank of the Cavan/Monaghan Division and the Meath Division, from 2009 to 28 February 2019 as provided by the Garda Commissioner is available on my Department's website through the following link.

For more general information on Garda Facts and Figures please see this link.

### **Garda Deployment**

126. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of new Garda recruits assigned to each Garda division since recruitment resumed in Templemore in 2014, by year in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17923/19]

**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.

In relation to the allocation of newly attested Gardaí, it is important to keep in mind that they have a further 16 months of practical and classroom based training to complete in order to receive their BA in Applied Policing. To ensure that they are properly supported and supervised and have opportunities to gain the breadth of policing experience required, the Commissioner's policy is to allocate them to specially designated training stations which have the required training and development structures and resources in place, including trained Garda tutors and access to a permanently appointed supervisory Sergeant who is thoroughly familiar with their responsibilities under the training programme. While not all Garda Stations are training stations, it is important to note that the allocation of probationer Gardaí to a Divisional training station facilitates the reassignment of Gardaí to other stations within the Division, if required, by the Divisional Officer.

Since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, almost 2,600 Garda recruits have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide including some 207 who attested on 8 March, the first attestation of this year.

I am informed by the Commissioner that the Cohort model of resource allocation is currently utilised for the general allocation of personnel within An Garda Síochána, including newly attested probationer Gardaí from the Garda College. The allocation and transfer of Garda Personnel using the Cohort Model is determined by a number of factors, including crime and non-crime workload, minimum establishment, population, area, policing arrangements, operational strategies and transfers applications, including welfare issues. When allocations are taking place, comprehensive consultation is carried out with Local Management during which all factors are taken into consideration. Where a deficiency in resources is identified the matter is considered fully and addressed accordingly.

The information requested by the Deputy, as provided by the Garda Commissioner, is available on my Department's website through the following link.

The Government remains committed to the recruitment of additional Gardaí and accordingly 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.

For additional and more general information on Garda Facts and Figures please see the following link.

### **Domestic Homicide**

127. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 566 of 26 March 2019, when a reply will be provided. [17932/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As I indicated in response to the original question, I have sought a report from the Garda Commissioner in relation to the issue raised. I will respond to the Deputy when I receive a response.

### **Domestic Homicide**

128. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 568 of 26 March 2019, when a reply will be provided. [17933/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As I indicated in response to the original question, I have sought a report from the Garda Commissioner in relation to the issue raised. I will respond to the Deputy when I receive a response.

### **Legal Aid Applications Data**

129. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons waiting on mediation through the free legal aid system by county; the length of time they are waiting; the waiting times for same in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17941/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** Mediation is a process for resolving disputes where those in dispute meet with a third party who helps them to negotiate an agreed resolution. The Family Mediation Service is provided by the Legal Aid Board.

The waiting times for family mediation services as of 31st March 2019 are set out on an office by office basis, in the table below, the details of which have been provided to me by the Legal Aid Board. These details are maintained by the Legal Aid Board in terms of numbers waiting and the waiting times involved on an office by office basis rather than by county.

I am also informed by the Legal Aid Board that short notice appointments will be provided to those who can take a cancelled appointment at the last minute. Those clients who have a pending court date are accommodated, if possible, with priority appointments.

The Legal Aid Board has advised me that the number waiting for mediation may include some clients who have already been offered appointments and have not been able to accept

them for one reason or another.

Schedule 1:

County	Town	Number Waiting at end March	Approx Waiting times (weeks)
Cork	Cork	56	19
Donegal	Letterkenny	17	14
Dublin	Jervis Street	72	12
	Tallaght	42	14
	Blanchardstown	55	16
Galway	Galway	26	12
Kerry	Tralee	7	8
Kilkenny	Kilkenny	2	8
Laois	Portlaoise	32	20
Limerick	Limerick	26	10
Louth	Dundalk	50	48
Mayo	Castlebar	13	8
Sligo	Sligo	9	8
Waterford	Waterford	9	8
Westmeath	Athlone	30	10
Wexford	Wexford	34	14

### Garda Resources

130. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if extra funding is being provided for Garda resources in the Cavan-Monaghan Garda division in 2019 in view of the recent ATM robberies. [17942/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Deputy will be aware that 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 in Garda ICT, the Garda fleet and the Garda estate - in total, the Garda capital allocation has increased from €61 million to €92 million in 2019, a 50% increase.

This unprecedented current and capital investment in An Garda Síochána is 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.

Under the Garda Síochána Act 2005, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for managing and controlling the administration and business of An Garda Síochána.

It is a matter for the Commissioner to efficiently manage the very significant resources which have been provided and to determine the allocation of budgets to all regions, including the Northern Region and all Divisions, including Cavan/ Monaghan Division, based upon operational requirements. This includes the allocation of resources in response to emerging crime trends.

I share the Deputies' concern about the recent ATM robberies, the majority of which have taken place in Northern Ireland. These are crimes that have a significant impact on both businesses and communities and I condemn the criminals behind them in the strongest terms.

I can further assure the Deputy of the strong ongoing cooperation between Gardaí and the PSNI, including in relation to their investigations into these robberies and to the high priority attached to combatting cross-border organised crime, in particular through the Joint Agency Task Force established under the Fresh Start Agreement.

### Garda Station Closures

131. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda stations that have been closed in the Cavan-Monaghan Garda division in the past decade in tabular form; if An Garda Síochána has plans for the remaining stations in State ownership; his plans in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17945/19]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I have been advised by the Commissioners of Public Works that two former Garda Station buildings in County Cavan have been sold. These are Finea and Tullyvin.

No former Garda stations in County Monaghan have been sold.

The former Garda station at Shantonagh, Co. Monaghan was a leased property and this lease was surrendered following the closure of the station.

The following table sets out the position with the remaining former Garda stations that remain in State ownership.

Former Garda Station	County	Closed	Status
Bawnboy	Cavan	2013	Reopening as part of the Programme for a Partnership Government
Redmills	Cavan	2013	Future use under consideration
Stradone (New) *	Cavan	2013	Refurbished and extended. Currently in use by An Garda Síochána.
Clontibret	Monaghan	2012	Future use under consideration
Corrinshigagh	Monaghan	2013	Future use under consideration
Newbliss	Monaghan	2013	Future use under consideration
Smithborough	Monaghan	2012	Future use under consideration

\* The old Garda station at Stradone, Co. Cavan closed in 2002. This property is surplus to requirements and is being prepared for disposal.

### Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission Investigations

132. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his attention has been drawn to the death of a person (details supplied); his views regarding unanswered questions of the family regarding the circumstances surrounding the death in Garda custody; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18051/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy will be aware, the circumstances of the death of the person concerned, which occurred in St James's Hospital, were investigated by GSOC in view of the fact that the person had been in Garda custody earlier on the day of his death. This was in accordance with standard operating procedure. Subsequent to the GSOC investigation, a file was prepared for the DPP and a recommendation to prosecute the arresting Garda member was made. Following a trial in 2011, the Garda member was acquitted on all charges.

The matter raised in the Deputy's question is the subject of recent correspondence to me from a member of the deceased person's family. That correspondence is being considered in my Department. When I have ascertained the relevant facts I will respond to the family. I am not, therefore, in a position at this stage to provide any further information to the Deputy.

### **IDA Ireland Site Visits**

133. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the most recent occasion on which IDA Ireland visited counties Cavan, Monaghan and Meath; the number of new jobs that have been created by the IDA in the past 12 months; the steps it is taking to attract companies to the counties; the success it has had with the strategy for the counties; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17935/19]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Regional development, not just in the Border area but across Ireland, remains a key priority. Together with my Department and its enterprise Agencies, I am focused on strengthening investment and job creation all over the country.

The annual results of the IDA demonstrate that we are making significant progress. In 2018, for example, 56% of all net new jobs created by the Agency were in locations outside Dublin. Similarly, every region in Ireland, including the Border Region, posted net gains in jobs last year. There are now over 132,000 people employed across 681 firms in IDA client companies outside the capital. In fact, 58% of all IDA-supported employment is now outside of Dublin. This represents the highest number of people employed in the regions by IDA clients in the Agency's history.

While there were no new foreign direct investment (FDI) supported jobs created in Cavan in 2018, Monaghan experienced an 8% increase in FDI employment, with 12 jobs added by companies in the County. Similarly, Meath saw a 4.5% increase in IDA supported employment, with the creation of 67 new jobs last year.

Since this question was last raised by the Deputy, IDA Ireland has released the site visit data for the first quarter of 2019 and Counties Cavan, Monaghan and Meath have each hosted one site visit so far this year. In 2018, County Meath reported a twofold increase in site visits with six visits last year. County Cavan hosted two site visits, whilst there were three site visits to County Monaghan, compared to one visit in 2017.

As the Deputy is also aware, as part of Budget 2019, I allocated an additional €10m for the next phase of the IDA Regional Property Programme (RPP). The RPP includes plans for an Advanced Technology Unit (ATU) at Knockaconny, County Monaghan and a design and delivery team has been appointed for this Unit.

The IDA has a dedicated regional manager for the North East/North West Region and an office in the Cavan Innovation and Technology Centre. As part of its strategy to promote the area, it is focusing on sectors including agrifood, manufacturing, tourism and internationally traded services. The Agency's staff regularly engage with key stakeholders on the ground in Cavan and Monaghan, including with local authorities, public bodies, the education sector and companies from both its own client base but also from the indigenous sector. County Meath, meanwhile, is being actively marketed by the IDA as a location for second sites for multinationals in the Dublin region, with a focus on building clusters in existing sectors like high-value manufacturing and international services.

We are working hard, across Government, to further unlock the economic potential of all

counties including those in the Border. The Enterprise Agencies under my remit will continue to engage with their clients, and with one another, to create more jobs and source new investment in 2019.

### **Job Creation**

134. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the status of the 200 jobs announced for Athlone by a company (details supplied) in July 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17955/19]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Since becoming Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, I have made regional development my top priority. Indeed, enterprise development and job creation in the regions of Ireland is a key policy priority of this Government.

We want to have a situation where all regions are enabled to realise their potential as contributors to economic development, and thereby reduce regional disparities. The Government welcomes all new job announcements by businesses, and the announcement by Mr Price to create 200 jobs in Athlone in July of last year is very good news for Athlone and the Midlands. I look forward to the impact these jobs will have in the Midlands region.

My Department remains committed to achieving an overall jobs uplift of between 10 and 15 per cent in each region by 2020 and to bring and/or maintain unemployment levels in each region to within at least one percentage point of the State average.

The most recent CSO Labour Force Survey employment figures (Q4 2018) for the Midlands continue to show very good progress in employment levels. From Q1 2015 (baseline year) to Q4 2018, a total of 20,000 more people are in employment in the Midlands, and unemployment has more than halved in over the same period from 14.9 percent to 6.6 percent.

It is also important to note that as well as meeting the numerical targets, it is also about creating jobs that are of good quality and sustainable over the longer term.

To that end, on the 6th of February last in Mountmellick, I launched a new Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020 for the Midlands, one of nine new Regional Enterprise Plans that build on the progress achieved under the previous Regional Action Plan for Jobs 2015-2017.

The Midlands Plan is focused around seven Strategic Objectives as follows:

1. Ensure that the Midlands is well positioned to address the challenges posed by the transition to a low carbon economy and renewable energy
2. Leverage opportunities in big data and data analytics from ILOFAR
3. Position and support the growth of the Midlands as an advanced manufacturing centre of excellence
4. Enhance the collective offering of the Midlands as a place to live, work and invest in
5. Strengthen the attractiveness of the Midlands as a destination to visit
6. Harness the potential of the food and beverage industry in the Midlands
7. Ensure the availability of skills and talent to realise the Midlands' economic potential and address upskilling requirements

I'm pleased to report that the Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan Steering Committee has begun the process to drive delivery of the actions within the new Plan.

### **Examinership Arrangements**

135. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the actions she has taken to protect jobs at a company (details supplied); if she has spoken with the management of the company regarding safeguarding jobs in Irish stores after the UK parent entity was placed into administration; if gift vouchers in Irish stores will be fully redeemable; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17967/19]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I am informed that the Irish stores of the company referred to in the details supplied by the Deputy operate under a separate Irish company established following an examinership process here in 2016. As such, the Irish stores are not directly affected by the decision to place the UK Group's holding company in administration. According to a statement on the company's website, the Group's operating companies continue to trade as normal and all orders, returns, refunds and gift cards are being honoured. I am, of course, concerned at any developments that could potentially affect the employees and customers of the company's Irish operations and will keep the situation under review.

### **Work Permits Applications Data**

136. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the steps being taken to increase the speed at which work permits are being issued; the number of outstanding work permits at the end of each of the past four calendar months, that is, 31 December 2018 to 31 March 2019, that remain to be processed by sector in tabular form. [17968/19]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** My officials in the Employment Permits section of my Department inform me that current processing times for employment permits are:

- 3 weeks for Trusted Partner applications (which made up 71% of all applications in 2018).
- 11 weeks for Standard applications (which made up 29% of applications in 2018).

The Department is continuing to take steps to improve these processing times. The main reason for the delays is the current high level of demand for employment permits, due to our economic success, growing labour market and reduced labour surplus.

During 2018 some 16,800 applications were received which was approx. 30% higher than 2017. This strong demand has continued into 2019 with a 15% increase in applications received to date (3,755 applications received at end of March).

During 2018 13,398 permits were granted representing an almost 20% increase over last year. Quarter 4 in 2018 saw the highest number of permits issued in any quarter in the previous 10 years. The high levels of permits being issued has continued into 2019 with a 44% increase in permits issued through Quarter 1 when compared to the same period in 2018. A total of 3,878 permits have issued by end of March 2019 (which includes a number of permits that were applied for in 2018).

Through a combination of increased resources, staff working overtime and ICT and opera-

tional improvements, processing times are reducing with further improvements anticipated for standard applications in the coming weeks.

As well as the short-term measures introduced to date, my officials are currently seeking tenders for a Business Processing Reengineering study to be carried out to identify further efficiencies and identify possible new system requirements including exploring the development of a new IT system which will take advantage of all the new technologies available, including full digitisation. In parallel with this new development, the Department is determined to continue to reduce processing times and is engaging extensively with stakeholders to ensure that they understand the process and that they comply with the application requirements so that no unnecessary delays occur..

There are currently approximately 1,890 permit applications in the processing queue, down from a peak of 3,230 in September 2018. All permit applications remain in this queue until reached for processing at which stage the appropriate economic sector is assigned. Therefore, there is no statistical breakdown by economic sector for applications in the processing queue. However, please find the overall amount of permit applications in the processing queue that remained to be processed on the dates requested.

Date	Employment Permit applications in processing queue at month end
31st December 2018	2,637
31st January 2019	2,052
28th February 2019	1,975
31st March 2019	1,731

### Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement Reports

137. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if she and her officials explored all possible mechanisms to date in the Houses of the Oireachtas, and-or legal options, to facilitate the publication of the ODCE report into the collapse of a trial of a person (details supplied); and if this cannot be done through the parliamentary or committee system, the other options that can be considered in the Houses of the Oireachtas to achieve this objective in view of the outstanding public interest and transparency for this action. [17969/19]

138. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her views of whether the full report of the trial of a person (details supplied) should be made available to the Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas in order to identify potential legal lacunae and weaknesses that emerged in this case in existing company law and to ensure that Members can input this information into the scrutiny of the draft companies (corporate enforcement authority) Bill which will ultimately produce more robust legislation in the area. [17970/19]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 137 and 138 together.

There has been extensive engagement with the Office of the Attorney General on the publication of the Report of the Director of Corporate Enforcement (ODCE) prepared under section 955(1)(a) of the Companies Act 2014.

Because of section 956 of the Companies Act 2014 the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation is prohibited from publishing reports prepared pursuant to Section 955 of the Act.

The Companies Act 2014 contains strict confidentiality obligations on information in the

possession of the Director. This is because there is a public interest in ensuring that ongoing and future investigations are not compromised by the disclosure of details of an individual investigation and the investigative process itself.

However, while it is not possible to publish the report itself, an account of the investigative shortcomings identified by Judge Aylmer, in so far as they relate directly to the role of the ODCE, was published on 4 December 2018 on the website of my Department. The account sets out the factors which led to the investigative shortcomings identified by the Judge, including the need for a broader skills base, a greater range and depth of knowledge and experience of criminal prosecutions within the Office and a greater appreciation of the necessity to employ appropriate procedures and manage risk.

Now that we know the factors that led to the shortcomings, our focus has shifted to ensuring we use the lessons of this investigation, note the steps already taken to address them and identify further measures to enhance the capacity of the ODCE to tackle corporate wrongdoing.

Since the time of the investigation, the Director has implemented multiple reforms within the ODCE, including staffing and procedural reforms that address many of the issues that led to the investigative shortcomings outlined by Judge Aylmer. Further measures to be taken include the establishment, as announced by Government in November 2017, of the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement as a stand-alone agency, to provide it with greater autonomy in relation to staffing resources and ensure it is better equipped to investigate increasingly complex breaches of company law.

In his judgment, Judge Aylmer did not point to any deficiencies in the company law framework. Nevertheless, as part of the process of preparing legislation to establish the ODCE as an Agency, any further powers that are identified as a requirement for carrying out the functions of the Agency will be conferred under statute as appropriate.

The General Scheme of a Bill to establish the ODCE as an Agency was published on my Department's website on 4 December 2018 and is currently subject to pre-legislative scrutiny by the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Business, Enterprise and Innovation. The General Scheme proposes new, or develops existing powers and investigative tools for the Agency, including:

Enhanced search and entry powers;

Admissibility of statements;

Access to telecom records;

Power to oblige liquidators to provide evidence that they are qualified to act as liquidators;

New grounds to apply to the Courts for an Order to restrict a person from acting as a director in winding-up situations.

With regard to the procedures pertaining to the parliamentary or committee system, such procedures are a matter for the Houses of the Oireachtas.

### **Skills Development**

139. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the funding allocated to the expert group on future skills needs in each of the years 2016 to 2018; the 2019 funding allocation between current and capital funding; the annual costs incurred and allocations made in each of the years 2016 to 2018; the number of part and full-time civil

servants attached to the expert group; and the associated annual staff costs in tabular form. [17973/19]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs is an independent body that advises the Government on the current and future skills needs of the Irish economy. It is served by a Secretariat that is based in my Department.

The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs is funded through the National Training Fund. The information below details:

Funding allocated to the EGFSN from 2016 to 2018;

Current and capital funding allocated for 2019;

Annual costs incurred from 2016 to 2018;

The number of civil servants (part and full-time) attached to the Group and their costs

#### 1. Budget Allocations 2016-2018

Allocation 2016 (€)	Allocation 2017 (€)	Allocation 2018 (€)
€490,000	€380,000	€460,000

#### 2. 2019 Allocation

Allocation 2019 (€)	Pay (€)	Non Pay (€)
€507,000	€317,000	€190,000

#### 3. Actual Expenditure 2016-2018

Expenditure 2016 (€)	Expenditure 2017 (€)	Expenditure 2018 (€)
€278,044	€342,502	€460,000

#### 4. Civil Servant Numbers

In 2019, there is 1 Principal Officer, 3 Assistant Principal Officers, 1 Administrative Officer and 1 Executive Officer involved in EGFSN activity.

### Company Law

140. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her views on requiring large accountancy firms to separate audit functions from non-audit business; and if an impact analysis has been carried out by her Department in this regard. [18005/19]

141. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her views on proposals (details supplied); and if an impact analysis has been carried out by her Department in this regard. [18006/19]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 140 and 141 together.

The EU completed a significant reform of the rules governing statutory audit with the adoption of two new instruments in April 2014. The resulting Audit Directive (2014/56/EU) and Regulation ((EU)(537/2014)) updated existing EU law. The package contained new legislative requirements including in relation to the independence regime between the audited entity and audit firm and auditor reporting.

The Audit Directive and Regulation were given effect in S.I. 312 of 2016 and elevated to primary legislation in the Companies (Statutory Audits) Act 2018. The Regulatory Impact Analyses for S.I. 312 of 2016 and the Companies (Statutory Audits) Act 2018 are each published on my Department's website with details of the Member State options exercised in the transposition.

The new framework for statutory audit enhances independence requirements on all statutory auditors and audit firms such as the requirement to maintain professional scepticism and to assess possible threats to their independence in advance of taking up an audit engagement. The EU Regulation also introduced new obligations specifically addressed to the auditors of public interest entities i.e. credit institutions, insurance undertakings and listed entities. The main requirements on auditors and public interest entities in respect of independence are:

- The prohibition of the provision of certain non-audit services to the audited entity and the provision of other non-audit services subject to certain conditions.

- A cap on fees from non-audit services of 70% of audit fees, based on the average of the three preceding years audit fees.

- A requirement to change auditor at least every ten years and to change the key audit partner every five years.

In relation to auditor communication, the content of all audit reports now includes requirements to describe the scope of the statutory audit and to provide a statement on any material uncertainty that cast significant doubt about the entity's ability to continue as a going concern. The EU Regulation also imposed additional obligations in respect of the audit report of public interest entities such as providing a description of the most significant assessed risks of material misstatement including assessed risks of material misstatement due to fraud and the auditor's response to those risks.

There are no plans to change the current requirements which have been in place since 2016 but, as with all areas of policy and law, their impact will be kept under review.

### **Medical Aids and Appliances Provision**

142. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Kildare will receive a medical chair. [17853/19]

**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.

### **National Treatment Purchase Fund Eligibility**

143. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health the way in which persons are selected for treatment via the National Treatment Purchase Fund, NTPF, to be sent to private hospitals for treatment; if there is a minimum waiting time a person must be on a public waiting

list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17863/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Reducing waiting time for patients for hospital operations and procedures is a key priority for Government. Budget 2019 announced that the Government has further increased investment in tackling waiting lists, with funding to the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) increasing from €55 million in 2018 to €75 million in 2019.

The joint Department of Health/HSE/NTPF Scheduled Care Access Plan 2019 was published recently and sets out measures to improve care for patients waiting for scheduled care in 2019 by reducing waiting times for inpatient/day case treatment and outpatient appointments. The plan will place a strong focus on a number of high-volume procedures. When combined with HSE activity, it is projected that the NTPF will be in a position to offer treatment to all clinically suitable patients waiting more than 6 months for one of these procedures.

The NTPF works with public hospitals, as opposed to with patients directly, to offer and provide the funding for treatment to clinically suitable long waiting patients who are on an inpatient/day case waiting list for surgery, having been referred on to such a list following clinical assessment by a consultant/specialist at an outpatient clinic.

The key criteria of the NTPF is the prioritisation of the longest waiting patients first. While the NTPF identifies patients eligible for NTPF treatment, it is solely on the basis of their time spent on the Inpatient/Daycase Waiting List. The clinical suitability of the patient to avail of NTPF funded treatment is determined by the public hospital.

### **National Children's Hospital Expenditure**

144. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health the value of fees paid to a company (details supplied) for the national children's hospital since 2013 to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17864/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The National Paediatric Hospital Development Board (NPHDB) has statutory responsibility for planning, designing, building and equipping the new children's hospital. I have referred your question to the NPHDB for direct reply.

### **Disabilities Assessments**

145. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that no child assessments are being carried out at a facility (details supplied) due to a vacant position not being filled; and if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that a substantial number of children are awaiting assessment that cannot access further education. [17867/19]

**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.

### **Primary Care Centres Provision**

146. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to establish a primary medical centre in Millstreet, County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17872/19]

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

### **Speech and Language Therapy Provision**

147. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if it is policy in CHO area 1 that access to speech and language therapy for children is not age dependent and that in cases in which a child is assessed as having potential for further improvement that intervention can and will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17878/19]

148. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if it is policy in CHO area 2 that access to speech and language therapy for children is not age dependent and that in cases in which a child is assessed as having potential for further improvement that intervention can and will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17879/19]

149. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if it is policy in CHO area 3 that access to speech and language therapy for children is not age dependent and that in cases in which a child is assessed as having potential for further improvement that intervention can and will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17880/19]

150. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if it is policy in CHO area 4 that access to speech and language therapy for children is not age dependent and that in cases in which a child is assessed as having potential for further improvement that intervention can and will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17881/19]

151. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if it is policy in CHO area 5 that access to speech and language therapy for children is not age dependent and that in cases in which a child is assessed as having potential for further improvement that intervention can and will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17882/19]

152. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if it is policy in CHO area 6 that access to speech and language therapy for children is not age dependent and that in cases in which a child is assessed as having potential for further improvement that intervention can and will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17883/19]

153. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if it is policy in CHO area 7 that access to speech and language therapy for children is not age dependent and that in cases in which a child is assessed as having potential for further improvement that intervention can and will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17884/19]

154. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if it is policy in CHO area 8 that access to speech and language therapy for children is not age dependent and that in cases in which a child is assessed as having potential for further improvement that intervention can and

will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17885/19]

155. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if it is policy in CHO area 9 that access to speech and language therapy for children is not age dependent and that in cases in which a child is assessed as having potential for further improvement that intervention can and will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17886/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 147 to 155, inclusive, together.

As these questions relate to service matters, I have arranged for the questions to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply.

### **Services for People with Disabilities**

156. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 152 of 7 February 2019, his plans to fulfil the identified assessed needs of the 64 adults with an intellectual disability in County Wexford on the waiting list for residential care; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17891/19]

157. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 152 of 7 February 2019, the number of the 19 adults with an intellectual disability in County Wexford on the waiting list for residential care in 2010 that were also on the waiting list for residential care in 2018 and therefore were included in the number of 64 on the waiting list for 2018. [17892/19]

158. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 152 of 7 February 2019, the number of the 19 adults with an intellectual disability in County Wexford on the waiting list for residential care in 2010 that have since accessed residential care; and the number no longer on the waiting list for other reasons of those that have not accessed residential care. [17893/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 156 to 158, inclusive, together.

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

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

### **Disabilities Data**

159. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health the number of adults with intellectual disabilities in residential care in County Wexford. [17894/19]

**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.

### **Disabilities Data**

160. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health the number of adults with an intellectual disability in County Wexford who will be placed in appropriate needs based residential care settings by the end of 2019 and 2020, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17895/19]

**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 Staff Recruitment**

161. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the position of technician in the cardiovascular unit at University Hospital Waterford is vacant; his plans to appoint a person into the role; if the position has been advertised; the expected timeframe for it to be filled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17898/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this is an operational issue, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to you directly as soon as possible.

### **Health Services Staff Remuneration**

162. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health when section 39 workers in Nenagh day care centre will have their pay restored in view of the fact it has been reinstated for their counterparts in the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17909/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** You will be aware that in February 2018, an agreement was reached at the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) between my Department, the HSE and health sector Trade Unions in relation to a process aimed at resolving the pay restoration issue for staff employed by section 39 bodies in 50 pilot organisations. The 50 organisations included were agreed at the WRC by all parties.

I asked the HSE to engage with the Section 39 organisations to establish the facts around

what cuts were applied and how and when they were implemented. The HSE completed the first phase of their work in relation to the agencies identified as part of the WRC process. This exercise has shown that of the agencies who returned data, a majority did apply pay reductions of some form. It also showed that some agencies made some form of pay restoration between 2016 and 2018.

Following constructive engagement with the assistance of the Workplace Relations Commission, an agreement was reached on 2 October between the parties. Pay restoration will commence with an annual pay increase of up to €1,000 in April 2019 for those employed by the 50 organisations involved in the pilot. Any outstanding balance will be paid in two equal amounts in 2020 and 2021.

The HSE are undertaking a further validation exercise of those 50 pilot organisations and their funding requirements to enable the pay restoration. Further information was requested from these organisations. It is recognised that some of the organisations which did not form part of this pilot phase are likely to have pay restoration issues also. A process of engagement to address this will commence in 2019.

### **Mental Health Services**

163. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Health the measures being put in place to rectify issues with sewerage at Deer Lodge mental health unit, Killarney, County Kerry, which is causing distress for both staff and patients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17910/19]

**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**

164. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17911/19]

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

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

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

### **Ambulance Service Provision**

165. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if ambulance shortages will be addressed for staff rostering in County Monaghan which has emerged due to the removal of a vehicle (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17912/19]

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

### **Ambulance Service Provision**

166. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if a new ambulance allocated recently to County Monaghan to help manage new rostering has been moved to cover Castleblaney which has no ambulance; if so, the reason the ambulance was not taken from another county in which there are surplus ambulances to requirements to fill the gap; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17913/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this is a service matter I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

### **Ambulance Service Staff**

167. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the number of new ambulance personnel recruited in counties Cavan and Monaghan in the past year (details supplied); if these staff were already classified as unrostered staff prior to this announcement; the reason no new additional staff were rostered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17915/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this is a service matter I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

### **Ambulance Service Staff**

168. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the number of new intern paramedics counties Cavan and Monaghan received following their graduation from college; the reason intern paramedics from the north east are not being trained up in positions in the counties upon graduation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17916/19]

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

### **Cancer Screening Programmes**

169. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the timescale for the results of repeat cervical smears; the number of women waiting for same; the length of time they are waiting; and the reason for delays by county in tabular form. [17921/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** In May 2018, I asked CervicalCheck to make the necessary arrangements to provide that any woman who had a CervicalCheck smear test, and whose GP considered that she should have a further test as part of her reassurance,

to access such a further test without charge. In the months since then, there was a significant increase in the volume of women presenting for smear tests. This included women who have availed of the out of cycle tests, but also a greater number of women presenting for scheduled screening. This increased level of engagement with the programme is welcome but has undoubtedly put pressure on lab capacity and turnaround times.

The HSE has been undertaking a global search for laboratory capacity to help alleviate the backlog and has recently advised that it has identified additional capacity internationally. It is currently working to agree commercial arrangements, and complete quality assurance processes, in order to enable it to incorporate this capacity into the CervicalCheck programme. However, it is important to be clear that the backlog will take some time to resolve.

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

### **Orthodontic Services Waiting Lists**

170. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health his plans to reduce the waiting list for children who need to avail of orthodontic treatment in County Cork in view of the fact there is a waiting period of three years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17931/19]

**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.

### **Hospital Services**

171. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the status of a unit (details supplied); the details of the review of same; when the review will be concluded; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17936/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Monaghan Hospital and Cavan General Hospital operate as a single entity, with an integrated managerial and clinical governance system, care pathways and support functions. The Emergency Department is located at Cavan General Hospital, while the facilities at Monaghan Hospital are focused on elective care and the streaming of appropriate patients to the Minor Injuries Unit located on site.

The Smaller Hospitals Framework defined the role of smaller hospitals and outlined the need for smaller hospitals and larger hospitals to operate within Hospital Groups. The Framework identified the activities that can be performed in smaller Model 2 hospitals, like Monaghan Hospital, in a safe and sustainable manner. In developing our smaller hospitals, the first and overriding concern is the safety of patients.

Significant progress has been made in the establishment and development of Hospital Groups over the last few years. Our hospitals are now working together and supporting each other in Groups. This new way of working provides a stronger role for smaller hospitals, like Monaghan Hospital, in delivering a higher volume of less complex care in many cases closer to patients’ homes. It also ensures that patients who require true emergency or complex planned care are managed safely in a larger hospital environment.

With regards to the Minor Injuries Unit, as outlined in the Programme for a Partnership Government, the Department of Health is committed to undertaking a review of Medical Assessment Units, Minor Injuries Units and similar units with a view to extending their opening

hours. Minor Injuries Clinics and similar units provide valuable services to local communities and alleviate the pressures on Emergency Departments. The Minor Injury Unit in Monaghan Hospital is open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm and can treat both adults and children over 5 years with non-life-threatening or limb-threatening injuries.

### **Hospitals Data**

172. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the number of attendances at a unit (details supplied) in each of the years 2010 to 2018 and to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17937/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the Deputy directly.

### **Emergency Departments**

173. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the status of work planned for a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17938/19]

174. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the need for investment in regional hospitals and in particular a unit (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17939/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 173 and 174 together.

I acknowledge the distress overcrowded Emergency Departments cause to patients, their families, and frontline staff working in very challenging working conditions in hospitals throughout the country. The number of patients attending Emergency Departments continues to increase year on year, with approximately 1.3 million attendances in 2018, up 3.5% on 2017, hospitals are increasingly operating at or above capacity.

This is a very busy period for our health services, with many sites reporting significant numbers of patient attendances. In the first 2 months of 2019, the number of patients attending our hospital Emergency Departments increased by 7% and the number of Emergency Department admissions increased by 5% compared to the same period last year.

Despite this significant increase in demand, our health services have managed better than in previous years and based on provisional data, the numbers of patients on trolleys were 15% lower between December and February this winter than the previous winter.

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. The Department of Health is committed to securing and further developing the role of our smaller hospitals, including Model 3 hospitals such as Cavan Hospital, with the expansion of services delivered in these hospitals, especially in services such as day surgery; ambulatory

care; medical services and diagnostics.

Future investment in Cavan General Hospital will be considered within the overall acute hospital infrastructure programme, the prioritised needs of the hospital groups and within the overall capital envelope available to the health service.

Project Ireland 2040 provides €10.9 billion for Health capital developments across the country, including both national programmes and individual projects, across acute, primary and social care. Health capital projects and programmes currently underway will continue. As to be expected with such a plan, many proposals are at an early stage and will require to progress through appraisal, planning design and tender before a firm timeline or funding required can be established.

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.

### **Emergency Departments Data**

175. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the number of emergency department attendances at Cavan General Hospital in each of the years 2012 to 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17940/19]

**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.

### **Medical Card Eligibility**

176. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if eligibility for a medical card will be reviewed in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17946/19]

**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.

### **Primary Care Centres Provision**

177. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Health if all nursing and other services being provided at Mervue health centre, Galway, will be continued and staffing levels at the health centre be maintained at the current level going forward in order to continue to provide essential healthcare for persons in the area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17959/19]

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

### **Cross-Border Health Initiatives**

178. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an application for a refund under the cross-border directive by a person (details supplied) will be expedited. [17961/19]

**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.

### **Cross-Border Health Initiatives**

179. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an application for a refund under the cross-border directive by a person (details supplied) will be expedited. [17962/19]

**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 Reimbursement**

180. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health the progress on the approval process for the drug nusinersen, that is, Spinraza; if the case of a person (details supplied) will be examined; the type of care and medication that his Department and or the HSE will fund in this case; if he will meet the parents of the person; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17963/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The HSE has statutory responsibility for medicine pricing and reimbursement, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013. The Act specifies the criteria for decisions on the reimbursement of medicines. As Minister for Health I have no role or powers in this regard.

I am advised by the HSE that, following detailed consideration of an application for the reimbursement of Nusinersen (Spinraza) and lengthy engagement with the company, the HSE recently decided that it was unable to reimburse Nusinersen (Spinraza). The HSE concluded that the evidence for clinical effectiveness was still quite limited and that the price proposed by the manufacturer was not a cost-effective use of resources.

The HSE wrote to the manufacturer 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 had 28 days to respond or make representations to the HSE's proposed decision.

I am advised by the HSE that the manufacturer has submitted a revised submission, which will now be considered at the next HSE Drugs Group meeting, following which a recommendation will be made to the HSE Leadership Team for a final decision. As the statutory process is ongoing, it would be inappropriate for me to meet with family members at this time.

### **Respite Care Services**

181. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health if days and nights spent in a public hospital count as respite days and or nights; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that persons are being refused respite due to time spent in a hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17965/19]

**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.

### **Medicinal Products Reimbursement**

182. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delay for the reimbursement of a drug (details supplied). [17974/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The HSE has statutory responsibility for medicine pricing and reimbursement, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013. The Act specifies the criteria for decisions on the reimbursement of medicines. The Minister for Health has no role or powers in relation to such matters.

I am advised by the HSE that following detailed consideration of an application for the reimbursement of Osimertinib (Tagrisso) and engagement with the company, HSE Leadership decided that it was unable to reimburse Osimertinib (Tagrisso). The HSE concluded that it could not support reimbursement on the basis that reimbursement was not likely to represent a cost efficient use of resources.

The HSE wrote to the manufacturer 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 had 28 days to respond or make representations to the HSE’s proposed decision.

I am advised by the HSE that the manufacturer has submitted representations, which will be considered by the HSE Drugs Group in due course, following which a recommendation will be made to the HSE Leadership Team for a final decision.

### **National Children’s Hospital Location**

183. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if he will address concerns that the site of the national children’s hospital at St. James’s will be unable to accommodate the co-location of the maternity hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17978/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As has been previously stated, it is the intention of this Government that there will be co-location of maternity services at the new children’s hospital site at St James’s. The National Maternity Strategy published in January 2016, reaffirms the commitment to delivery of tri-located maternity services on the St. James’s campus.

It is proposed to relocate the Coombe Women & Infants University Hospital to the St James’s Hospital campus, thereby achieving tri-location of adult, paediatric and maternity services. A site for the proposed maternity hospital is identified in the St. James’ Site Master Plan, and the new children’s hospital design has incorporated the required operational links with both the maternity and adult hospitals. While the construction of the new maternity hospital will not commence until the new children’s hospital is completed, the preparatory work for the new maternity hospital will begin in advance.

### **Health Services Staff Recruitment**

184. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the reason physiotherapists who were interviewed in 2016 and were placed on the national panel for physiotherapist staff grade in order of merit must now re-interview to be placed behind 2017 and 2018 panellists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17979/19]

185. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the reason the 2016 national panel for physiotherapist staff grade is being disbanded while the supplementary panels of the original 2016 panel carried out in 2017 and 2018 will remain in place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17980/19]

186. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if he will engage with the physiotherapy profession and their representatives in relation to the national panel for physiotherapist staff grade and improvements which could be made to the way in which it operates. [17981/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 184 to 186, inclusive, together.

I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy on this matter.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

187. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Health if consideration will be given to allocating a person (details supplied) a hospital appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17995/19]

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

### **Disabilities Assessments**

188. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the length of delays being experienced by a person (details supplied); his plans to alleviate the waiting lists for children in north County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18013/19]

**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**

189. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the alternative options available for a family to access help for their child (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18014/19]

**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 Services**

190. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health the status of a service in a hospital (details supplied); if cover has been secured to continue the service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18016/19]

**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 reply to the Deputy directly.

### **Departmental Expenditure**

191. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Health the overall quantum of expenditure undertaken by his HSE and the Department on non-medical professional expert advice, and-or services, on a quarterly basis in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019; and the purpose of the expenditure undertaken. [18046/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The information requested by the Deputy is not immediately available. I will survey the Department and the collated replies will be prepared into a full response to the Deputy as soon as possible.

I have asked the HSE to respond directly with regard to their expenditure.

### **Health Services Provision**

192. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health the resources available in CHO1 for persons suffering from Parkinson's disease; his plans to allocate funding to an organisation (details supplied); if his attention has been drawn to the fact that there are only two Parkinson's nurse specialists outside Dublin to cater for 25 counties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18047/19]

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

## **Health Services Funding**

193. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health the status of the funding crisis facing a society (details supplied); if funding can be secured to ensure it continues to operate as normal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18067/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** A commitment of €60,000 additional funding is being provided to the Irish Deaf Society under a cross-departmental initiative.

The funding is a once-off grant for the purpose of developing a Business Plan and implementation strategy setting out a clear and detailed pathway to financial sustainability. Pobal are assisting in the oversight of the additional funds and related activities.

## **Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme**

194. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to change the regulations regarding the eligibility of donkeys for the purpose of achieving a minimum stocking density under the ANC scheme; if his plans to allow donkeys to continue to be fully eligible for calculation of stocking density will be reconsidered; the names of stakeholders consulted by him in arriving at his decision; the details on animal welfare concerns that informed his decision; the way in which his decision to limit eligibility would address animal welfare concerns; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17890/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Under the eligibility criteria of the Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) scheme, applicants must maintain 0.15 Livestock Units (LU) per eligible forage hectare for 7 consecutive months and maintain an average of 0.15 LU over the 12 months of the scheme. Donkeys have always been accepted as eligible animals under the scheme along with cattle, sheep, goats and deer. Horses are also accepted but are subject to additional criteria and must be held on a premises registered as an Equine Breeding Enterprise.

In finalising the design of the 2019 ANC Scheme, officials from my Department consulted directly with the farmer representative bodies in relation to the inclusion of donkeys in the scheme in future years. Officials from my Department are also in contact with the Donkey Sanctuary in this regard.

Following such consultation, it has been decided to introduce changes in the scheme stocking requirement in relation to donkeys. From the 2020 scheme year, only 50% of an applicants stocking density can be fulfilled using donkeys and the balance must be fulfilled using other eligible animals. This change was highlighted in the Terms and Conditions document of the 2019 ANC scheme in order to give sufficient lead in time to applicants who may need to amend their stocking patterns.

## **Basic Payment Scheme Administration**

195. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of farmers by county who will secure an increase in their basic farm payments; the number who will receive a reduced payment in the event of full internal convergence of payments as supported by the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development of the European Parliament; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17917/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The draft legislative proposals for the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) post-2020 were launched by Commissioner Hogan on 1 June 2018. The proposals, as drafted, involve significant changes, including in relation to governance, the distribution of direct payments among farmers and the increasing environmental conditionality attaching to such payments. There will also be some additional discretion for Member States in configuring the measures available, within parameters laid down in Council Regulations.

The recent meeting of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development of the European Parliament concluded a series of votes on the CAP reform package, including the adoption of an alternative compromise amendment on internal convergence which calls for full harmonisation of aid per hectare within Member States by 2027.

My Department is a strong proponent of evidence-based policy making, and I can confirm that work is currently underway to analyse the impact of the various elements of direct payments in the draft regulations. Preliminary modelling exercises have been carried out and the results of these analyses are currently being reviewed and revised to take account of the most recently available data.

All direct payment measures including the proposed Basic Income Support for Sustainability payment, the Complementary Redistribution of Income Support for Sustainability payment, the Complementary Income Support for Young Farmers and the Eco-Schemes are inextricably linked to each other. This means that each time one of the elements is changed, each of the other elements also must change. As a result, any analysis, including analysis on convergence, only remains current until one of the elements changes.

This state of flux is likely to continue until the regulations are fully developed, at which time detailed analyses will be completed to fully address the impact on farmers in Ireland of CAP 2020. This methodology is congruent with the requirement for each Member State to prepare a Strategic Plan addressing all aspects of CAP expenditure and, consequently, all of these analyses remain at a drafting stage until the Regulations are resolved.

### **Aquaculture Licence Administration**

196. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding oyster licences; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17918/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** My Department considers all applications for aquaculture licences in accordance with the provisions of the 1997 Fisheries (Amendment) Act, the 1933 Foreshore Act and applicable EU legislation. The licensing process involves consultation with a wide range of scientific and technical advisers as well as various Statutory Consultees. The legislation also provides for a period of public consultation.

In addition, the legislation governing aquaculture licensing provides for an appeals mechanism. Appeals against licence decisions are a matter for the Aquaculture Licences Appeals Board (ALAB) which is an independent statutory body. Full details of the appeals process can be obtained at:

*<http://www.alab.ie/appealsprocess/>*

The person referred to by the Deputy submitted a number of applications for the cultiva-

tion of Pacific Oysters on sites in Castlemaine Harbour. Negative determinations were made in respect of these licence applications in Autumn 2018. The reasons for these determinations are set out on my Department's website at the following link.

My Department understands that the applicant appealed two of the licensing determinations in question to ALAB. As the Board is currently considering the appeals as part of a statutory process, it would not be appropriate for me to comment further on the matter pending the conclusion of that process.

### GLAS Payments

197. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons in counties Cavan and Monaghan and nationwide by county waiting for GLAS payments; the number of part payments issued in tabular form; and his plans to process the outstanding payments. [17927/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** My Department has processed 47,474 GLAS 2018 advance payments since 2018 payments commenced last November. This represents over 97% of scheme participants. The bulk of remaining cases have an outstanding issue on the participant's side. My Department continues to work with both farmers and their advisors to ensure that issues are resolved and outstanding payments are made as quickly as possible.

In respect of both counties Cavan and Monaghan, 98.70% of participants have received a 2018 Advance payment. The table below outlines the number of farmers actively participating in GLAS that have received a payment in respect of the 2018 scheme year.

Payments will continue to issue on a weekly basis as cases are finalised and compliance achieved by applicants.

	GLAS 1	2018	GLAS 2	2018	GLAS 3	2018
County	Cases	Advance	Cases	Advance	Cases	Advance
Carlow	269	266	123	117	125	118
Cavan	898	890	424	417	525	516
Clare	1,593	1,566	682	673	784	771
Cork	2,101	2,033	979	954	916	879
Donegal	1,907	1,838	981	939	1,390	1,349
Dublin	56	53	17	16	17	16
Galway	3,021	2,928	1,269	1,215	1,559	1,501
Kerry	1,747	1,683	862	830	748	722
Kildare	237	222	74	71	111	106
Kilkenny	417	406	203	191	184	174
Laois	364	353	189	181	225	220
Leitrim	1,011	986	415	411	518	513
Limerick	1,032	1,006	293	287	395	384
Longford	509	493	336	329	325	315
Louth	144	139	77	75	91	87
Mayo	2,521	2,458	1,304	1,263	1,638	1,603
Meath	416	402	194	189	241	234
Monaghan	569	562	142	142	327	321
Offaly	469	462	272	270	283	275

	GLAS 1	2018	GLAS 2	2018	GLAS 3	2018
County	Cases	Advance	Cases	Advance	Cases	Advance
Roscommon	1,503	1,479	541	531	704	690
Sligo	924	903	356	348	484	476
Tipperary	1,105	1,080	489	477	483	471
Waterford	348	331	123	115	116	113
Westmeath	635	624	257	255	273	265
Wexford	741	722	254	245	302	286
Wicklow	322	309	150	145	196	188
TOTAL	24,859	24,194	11,006	10,686	12,960	12,593

### Brexit Preparations

198. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the contingency steps being taken to limit the impact of a no-deal Brexit on the agriculture sector. [17928/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** While ratification of the Withdrawal Agreement is still the Government's primary focus, and preparations are continuing for all scenarios, greater priority has, of course, been given recently to preparations for a no-deal Brexit.

My Department, as part of the whole-of-Government approach, has been very active in relation to preparedness for the import controls at our ports and airports that will be required when the UK becomes a Third Country. In this regard, the focus has been on allowing the Department to fulfil its legal obligations as efficiently as possible, while also ensuring the minimum possible disruption to trading arrangements.

My Department has also sharpened its Brexit communications strategy in order to keep stakeholders informed and to encourage them to take the necessary steps to allow their trading arrangements with the UK to continue. Key elements here include an updated website, call centre and central e-mail address, streamlined registration arrangements and increased presence on social media.

In order to help mitigate the impacts on the sector, I have introduced a number of budgetary measures over the last three years aimed at helping farmers and fishermen to improve competitiveness, and to support market and product diversification.

Furthermore, in anticipation of a no-deal Brexit, I have met with both Commissioner Hogan and Commissioner Vella to discuss the potential impact of a disorderly Brexit on the agrifood and fisheries sectors, and have stressed the need to be ready to deploy a range of measures to mitigate the potential impacts on farmers, fishermen and processors.

While the immediate prospect of a no-deal Brexit has waned, my officials are continuing to deepen and broaden preparatory arrangements in order to ensure that our state of readiness is maintained and enhanced against the backdrop of what continues to be an uncertain political environment.

### Coillte Teoranta Lands

199. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he

will address a health and safety hazard (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17953/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The management of the Coillte forest estate and operational matters such as the issue raised by the Deputy are a matter for, and the responsibility of, Coillte as a commercial State Body.

I have accordingly referred the Deputy's question to Coillte and have requested that a response issues directly to you.

### **Beef Exports**

200. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his attention has been drawn to the ongoing delay in securing final approval for a number of Irish companies from authorities abroad to commence export of their product; and if he will assist these companies by communicating with the authorities abroad (details supplied). [17954/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** My officials continue to work towards opening and enhancing access to as many markets as possible. This is a key part of our response to the challenges and uncertainty posed by Brexit, and in line with the market development theme of the Food Wise 2025 strategy.

The opening of the Chinese market for Irish beef in 2018 was the culmination of significant work over a number of years. Exports of Irish beef to China commenced during the summer 2018. Six Irish beef plants were approved to export beef to China in 2018 and an additional beef plant has been approved by the Chinese authorities this week, thus bringing the number of Irish plants now approved to export beef to China to seven.

According to CSO trade statistics, Ireland exported approximately €2.8 million (1,400 tonnes) to China in 2018. In addition, Ireland has had beef access to Hong Kong Special Administrative Region for some time, and exported €62 million (19,000 tonnes) to that market in 2018.

In relation to the outstanding beef plants applications, updated applications and further details were requested by the Chinese authorities last year and these were submitted during a technical meeting between officials from my Department and the Chinese authorities last November.

Every effort has been made by my Department in coordination with the Irish Embassy in Beijing to progress these applications. Indeed, earlier this month, I met with the outgoing Chinese Ambassador to Ireland and raised this matter with him while next month, I am leading a major agrifood Trade Mission to China, during which I aim to seek progress on the issue of these plant approvals with my Ministerial counterparts in China.

The Deputy will appreciate, however, that ultimately the timeline for these approvals remains a matter for the Chinese authorities.

### **Thoroughbred Foal Levy Regulations**

201. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views regarding the operation of the foal levy and the legality of same; and his plans to change it. [17996/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Horse Racing Ireland (HRI) is a commercial state body established under the Horse and Greyhound Racing Act, 2001, and is responsible for the overall administration, promotion and development of the horse racing industry.

The current Foal Levy scheme, which was introduced in 2000 on a statutory basis, applies to all thoroughbred foals registered in Ireland. The Foal Levy is currently calculated with reference to SI 735 of 2011, which is the governing legislation.

HRI's Foal Levy Committee reviews the rates, bands and structures of the levy on an annual basis and has also considered potential alternative methodologies to calculate the levy due. They have concluded that the current banded/tiered approach represents the most equitable and appropriate way of securing the vital funds needed for the breeding sector. I understand that the majority of foals registered fall into the two lower bands of €35 and €50, and that there is a very high compliance rate of circa 98.3%.

The levy generates vital funding for the Irish Equine Centre, Irish Thoroughbred Marketing and the Irish Thoroughbred Breeders Association. Without the levy funding, these organisations would be unable to provide the services that they do

As such, I have no plans to alter the current arrangements for the levy.

### **Brexit Supports**

202. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the details and criteria on the new Brexit €50 million towards farmers for capital investment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17997/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** I was pleased to launch the "Future Growth Loan Scheme" recently. The initiative has been developed by my Department and the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation in partnership with the Department of Finance, the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) and the European Investment Fund (EIF). It will be delivered through participating finance providers and make up to €300 million of investment loans available to eligible Irish businesses, including farmers and the agrifood & 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 at 4.5% or lower, will be for terms of 8 to 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 - €60 million in loan funding available initially for farmers, within an overall agrifood 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.

The Scheme will open for loan eligibility applications through the SBCI from 17th April. Further information including a FAQ document may be accessed on my Department's website at the following link.

### **Climate Change Policy**

203. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the measures in place to combat climate change and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to keep global warming within the temperature goals of the Paris Agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17856/19]

204. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if climate change is a priority for him; his views on whether there is demand from persons to tackle the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17859/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 203 and 204 together.

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, heat, and agriculture, as well as a range of other sectors.

The All of Government Plan will have a strong focus on implementation, including actions with specific timelines and steps needed to achieve each action, assigning clear lines of responsibility for delivery. It will also be informed by successful approaches in other countries, where such approaches could be adapted for implementation in Ireland, and by the recently published report of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action.

The Plan will build on the previous actions and framework put in place by both the National Mitigation Plan and the National Development Plan, and is to be completed shortly.

### **Climate Change Policy**

205. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to work with local and international businesses such as insurance companies to address the issue of climate change (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17860/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Government has a key role in enabling, facilitating and supporting private sector adaptation through policies, regulation and other supportive measures such as information sharing and awareness raising. It is important, however, that private sector and business in general take a lead themselves in considering climate impacts in their long term strategic planning and investment decisions, and assess climate risks to their own assets and activities. Ireland's first statutory National Adaptation Framework (NAF) represents our national policy response to the challenges posed by the impacts of climate change. The Framework sets out the context to ensure Local Authorities, regions and sectors can assess the key risks and vulnerabilities of climate change, implement climate resilience actions, and ensure climate adaptation considerations are mainstreamed into local, regional and national policy making. The National Adapta-

tion Framework (NAF) identifies the need for Government to engage with the private sector in shaping and developing their adaptation strategies and plans and also identifies the need for further research into the impacts of climate change on enterprise.

The National Adaptation Framework (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 climate resilience. Information platforms such as Climate Ireland, which was developed under the EPA Research Programme, can help to provide business with more accurate information on the projected impacts of climate change and encourage them to take action to lower their exposure to the impacts of climate change. My Department is currently developing proposals in relation to the future of Climate Ireland in conjunction with the EPA.

Local Authorities will also have an important role to play in engaging with businesses on climate change at local level. In 2018, my Department provided €10 million to establish and fund four Climate Action Regional Offices (CAROs). The CAROs will provide a focal point for businesses and communities to partner and collaborate with Local Authorities in delivering on meaningful climate action initiatives at a local level.

I'm currently working with my Government colleagues across all Departments to develop an All of Government Climate Plan. The Climate Plan will set out a detailed road map ensuring a whole of government integrated strategy and including a review of the challenges associated with the availability of property (home and business) insurance and possible responses. The All of Government Plan will require mobilisation across all sectors - including buildings, heat, transport, industry and agriculture to step up Ireland's response to climate change.

### **Climate Change Adaptation Plans**

206. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the initiatives in place to reduce the vulnerability and exposure of Ireland to expected climate change problems; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17861/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Ireland's first statutory National Adaptation Framework (NAF), published in January 2018, represents our national policy response to the challenges posed by the impacts of climate change. The Framework sets out the context to ensure Local Authorities, regions and sectors can assess the key risks and vulnerabilities of climate change, implement climate resilience actions, and ensure climate adaptation considerations are mainstreamed into all local, regional and national policy making. Under the Framework, seven Government Departments with responsibility for twelve priority sectors are required to prepare sectorial adaptation plans in line with the requirements of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015. The deadline for the submission of sectorial adaptation plans to Government for approval is 30 September 2019.

Local understanding is also crucial to getting adaptation right. Under the National Adaptation Framework, each Local Authority is required to develop a local adaptation strategy. Local Authorities have been set a deadline for the completion of local strategies by 30 September 2019. In January 2018, my Department entered into a funding commitment of €10m over 5 years to establish four Climate Action Regional Offices (CAROs). A key priority for the CAROs in 2019 will be to support the Local Authorities within their region to develop their local adaptation strategies and ensure they align with national adaptation policy and sectorial priorities.

Adaptation planning is an iterative process, with the National Adaptation Framework to be reviewed at least once every five years in line with the 2015 Climate Act. This will ensure that we adopt a dynamic approach to adaptation planning which is informed by the latest scientific evidence thus enabling Departments, Agencies and Local Authorities to modify or escalate adaptation actions as appropriate as climate projections are updated.

### **Climate Change Policy**

207. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to increase warning signals for climate change storm mitigation in the future in order to reduce exposure to damage from storms such as Storm Ophelia; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17862/19]

**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. Questions in relation to Government policy on severe weather alerts are a matter for Met Éireann. Ireland's National Adaptation Framework (NAF) which was published in January 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. My Department will continue to liaise with Met Éireann and be guided by their expertise in relation to all areas that come under their remit.

### **Post Office Network**

208. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the discussions or communications he or his officials have had with An Post regarding the relocation of the post office in Thurles; the details of such discussions or communications; the dates, times, attendees and locations of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17876/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** An Post is a commercial State body with its own Board. Decisions relating to the post office network, including plans for individual post offices, are an operational matter for the Board and management of An Post. An Post provided a note to politicians and the media on the relocation of the post office in Thurles, a copy of which was received by officials in my Department on 13 March. A copy of this communication will be provided to the Deputy.

### **Renewable Heat Incentive**

209. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the timeframe for the introduction of a scheme (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17888/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** 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. Under Project Ireland 2040, the National Development Plan sets out an allocation of €300 million for the roll-out of the scheme for the period up to 2027. The first phase of the scheme, an installation grant for heat pumps, opened for applications in September 2018. This phase of the scheme will support ground, air and water source electric heat pump installations providing grant-aid of up to 30% of the installation cost. This phase of the scheme was implemented under the State aid General Block Exemption Regulation and did not require prior approval from the European Commission.

The second phase of the scheme, an operational support for biomass boilers and anaerobic digestion heating systems followed the full State aid notification process. Earlier this week (15 April), the European Commission published a notification that it had approved the scheme under State aid rules. The Terms & Conditions of the scheme are in the process of being finalised and will ensure full compliance with the requirements set out in the State aid approval.

While no date has been set, the completion of the State aid approval process is a key step and I expect to be in a position to announce the opening of the second phase of the scheme in the near future.

Further details of the scheme are available on my Department's website at the following link.

### **Departmental Reports**

210. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of a report and its findings and outcome (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17902/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** A report into the stability of the mine workings along part of the LP4900 has been completed by Gyproc's consultants, SRK. This has recently been submitted to the three authorities, Monaghan County Council, the Environmental Protection Authority and my Department. My Department's independent consultants, Wardell Armstrong, have been engaged to review the SRK Report and this will take place over the coming weeks.

### **North-South Interconnector**

211. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the North-South interconnector project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17919/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The North South Interconnector is critical to improving the efficient operation of the Single Electricity Market and increasing security of electricity supply across the island of Ireland. A resilient and well connected energy infrastructure is vital for Ireland's economic well-being and the ability to respond to the future needs of energy consumers. In December 2016 An Bord Pleanála granted planning permission for the project in Ireland, while in January 2018 full planning permission was granted for the section of the line that lies in Northern Ireland.

Both of the planning decisions have been subject to legal proceedings in each jurisdiction.

In Ireland, a Supreme Court appeal of the planning permission was dismissed on 19 February 2019.

In Northern Ireland, on 8 February 2019, the Department for Infrastructure asked the High Court to quash the planning permission given so the planning application can be re-determined under new legislation introduced by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in November 2018.

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

### Trading Online Voucher Scheme

212. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the amount allocated to the digital trading voucher scheme in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019; the amount expended in each year; and the number of digital vouchers provided under the scheme in each year. [17966/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Trading Online Voucher Scheme is an initiative specifically designed to support small and micro enterprises to trade online. The scheme offers financial assistance of up to €2,500, subject to matching funding, coupled with training, mentoring and networking supports to help small businesses to develop their online trading capability. Small businesses, with 10 or fewer employees and less than €2m in revenue, that have little or no capacity to trade online, are eligible to apply. The Trading Online Voucher Scheme is funded by my Department and is delivered on a nationwide basis by the Local Enterprise Office (LEO) network. Businesses must be located within the jurisdiction of the LEO to which they apply. The Trading Online Voucher Scheme is demand-led and, as such, funding is provided to LEOs and is drawn down based on the value of approved ‘vouchers’ and costs incurred in administering the Scheme.

	2016	2017	2018	2019 (end March)
Amount allocated	€3m	€3m	€3m	€2.3m
Amount spent/ drawdown	€1.7m	€1.8m	€1.9m	Nil (The first drawdown for 2019 is scheduled for end April 2019)
Number of vouchers approved	1154	1196	1107	290

### Electricity Generation

213. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if there are plans to convert the Moneypoint power plant to a nuclear power station; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17977/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** There are no plans to convert the Moneypoint power plant to a nuclear power station. Nuclear powered electricity generation plants are prohibited in Ireland in line with the provisions of section 18 of the Electricity Regulation Act, 1999, as amended. Section 18(1) provides that the Minister shall specify by order the criteria in accordance with which an application for

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an authorisation to construct or reconstruct a generating station may be determined by the Commission for the Regulation of Utilities. Section 18(6) provides that an order under this section shall not provide for the use of nuclear fission for the generation of electricity.

### **Angling Sector**

214. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the projects which have been completed under the National Strategy for Angling Development 2015-2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18007/19]

215. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the projects which have been sanctioned under the National Strategy for Angling Development 2015-2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18008/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Canney):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 214 and 215 together.

I refer to the reply to Question No. 1033 of 26 March 2019.

The National Strategy for Angling Development is administered by Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI).

I have asked IFI to compile the detailed information sought and provide it directly to the Deputy. I would also be happy to have IFI brief the Deputy in relation to fisheries development works if required.

### **National Broadband Plan Administration**

216. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment further to Parliamentary Question No. 573 of 9 April 2019, if any of the 300 locations referenced are in areas in which commercial operators have indicated plans to roll out broadband, 5G or other Internet services; if this will impact on the roll-out of the national broadband plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18066/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Broadband Connection Point locations referenced by the Deputy are all located in the AMBER area of 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. In the event of a contract award, these locations have been identified for early connection in co-operation with Department of Rural and Community Development. These designated Broadband Connection Points (BCPs) have been identified by local authority broadband officers in every county and will provide important broadband access for public use in the initial stage of deployment and include locations such as schools, community centres and sports clubs.

### **National Driver Licensing Service**

217. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans

to ensure that additional resources are provided for the National Driver Licensing Service in view of the additional demands and waiting lists arising in offices such as Cavan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17870/19]

**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 Licensing Exchange Agreements**

218. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans on forming a bilateral agreement with the UK to honour driver licences post-Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17920/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Section 23A of the Road Traffic Act 1961 allows for the recognition of foreign driving licences for exchange purposes in Ireland. When the United Kingdom leaves the European Union, Ireland will pursue this option and my officials are working on this at present in conjunction with the Road Safety Authority. This may take a little time to complete as it involves a formal bilateral agreement and the introduction of legislation.

### **Driver Test Waiting Lists**

219. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of persons to date on waiting lists for driver tests in counties Cavan and Monaghan; the length of time they have been waiting in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17929/19]

**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.

### **Sports Capital Programme Applications**

220. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the time-frame for sports capital grant applications; and when he will announce recipients of funding under this scheme. [18010/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin):** The 2018 round of the Sports Capital Programme opened for applications on Friday 7 September and the application period closed on Friday 19th October. By that deadline, a record 2,337 applications were submitted seeking a total of €162m in funding.

186 of these applications were for projects that were deemed invalid under the 2017 round of the programme that subsequently submitted corrected documents. These applications were assessed first and approximately €7m in allocations to 170 projects were announced on the 17th January.

Work is now underway in assessing the new 2018 applications. We hope to process 635 equipment only applications by next month. For the first time, applicants who have submitted

incorrect documentation under this round will be given the opportunity to correct their application during the assessment period. While there will be no undue delay in completing the assessment process, in view of the opportunity to correct documentation, the record number of applications received and the detailed information contained in each application, it is likely to take a number of months to have all applications assessed. Accordingly, I expect that it may be the third quarter of this year before the full set of allocations under this current round of the programme are announced.

### **Missing Children**

221. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of children reported missing from residential care homes in 2018. [17857/19]

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

### **Childcare Costs**

222. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will address a matter (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18002/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** Through the National Childcare Scheme and a range of other measures, we are committed to changing Ireland's childcare system from one of the most expensive in the world to one of the very best. In designing the National Childcare Scheme, extensive research and consultations have been carried out to ensure that this goal is achieved and that the Scheme can help as many families as possible.

The National Childcare Scheme will greatly increase the number of families who can access financial support. The Scheme removes many of the restrictive eligibility requirements of the existing support programmes, whereby a parent must be in receipt of certain Social Protection payments or a Medical Card in order to receive targeted supports. This 'poverty-proofs' the Scheme by ensuring that families at or below the relative income poverty line will benefit from the highest subsidy rates under the Scheme. It will also make work pay for parents trying to get back into employment or training as they will now be able to avail of help with their childcare costs. Many working families will, for the first time, be entitled to subsidies which will reduce their childcare costs significantly. Others will see an increase in their level of subsidy. For example, a family with a child aged two in full-time care (40 hours) and currently benefitting from the maximum subsidy of €145 per week under CCS Band A, would see their subsidy increase to €174 per week, an additional subsidisation of €1,500 per annum.

Arrangements are in place to ensure that no one loses out in the initial transition to the new Scheme. So, whilst there may have been fears that, in a small number of cases, where a family currently receiving the maximum amount of financial support for full-time childcare under an existing programme may receive less under the new Scheme, particularly if their child is, in reality, receiving after-school care only rather than full-time childcare, they will not lose out. The family can continue to access their current targeted supports (i.e. effectively remain on their current payment) until the end of August 2020, 16 months from now.

I have also directed my officials to undertake research and analysis to examine any adjust-

ments to the National Childcare Scheme which might be required to address unusual or anomalous cases, where this is the right thing to do to protect and benefit lower income parents. In this regard, I would highlight that the new National Childcare Scheme has been designed to be flexible, with income thresholds, maximum hours and subsidy rates which can be adjusted in line with Government decisions and as more investment becomes available. As such, any adjustments deemed necessary by Government can be carried out in a quick and responsive manner.

The Scheme is designed so that families who need the most support can receive it. Maximum subsidy rates are payable in all cases where a family meets the lowest income threshold, tapering down smoothly as income increases.

An Income Assessed subsidy is available to families with children aged between 24 weeks and 15 years. This subsidy will vary depending on family income, the child's age and their educational stage. It can be used towards the cost of a registered childcare place for up to a maximum of 40 hours per week where parents are working, studying or training, or in circumstances where a parent is unavailable to care for a child. Where parents are not working, studying or training, the subsidy will be paid for up to a maximum of 15 hours per week.

In order to qualify for enhanced hours (i.e. up to a maximum of 40 hours per week), both the applicant and the applicant's partner, if applicable, must meet at least one of the following criteria, they must be:

- In work
- In study
- Transitioning into, or out of, work or study
- Unavailable to provide childcare for the child.

### **CLÁR Programme**

223. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if he will award funding under the CLÁR programme for a group (details supplied). [18003/19]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** As the Deputy will be aware, CLÁR is an important part of the Government's Action Plan for Rural Development and focuses on areas which have suffered the greatest levels of population decline.

I launched the 2019 CLÁR programme on the 28th February last. The programme provides funding for small scale infrastructural projects in disadvantaged rural areas that have experienced significant levels of de-population.

Calls for proposals under the 2019 CLÁR programme were invited under the following measures:

- Measure 1: Support for Schools/Community Safety Measures
- Measure 2: Play Areas (including MUGAs)
- Measure 3: 3(a) First Response Support Measure
- 3(b) Support for Mobility and Cancer Care Transport.
- 3(c) Sensory Gardens

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Applications under Measures 1, 2 and 3(c) are to be submitted by the relevant Local Authority. Applications under Measures 3(a) and 3(b) were invited from voluntary organisations.

In this case, the group referred to by the Deputy can make an application to Longford County Council to be considered in the Council's submission to my Department for funding. The closing date for receipt of applications by the Department under the 2019 CLÁR Programme is 25 April 2019.

After the closing date, my officials will assess all applications received, and I hope to be in a position to announce the successful projects following that process.

### **Invalidity Pension Applications**

224. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the progress to date in the determination of an application for invalidity pension in the case of a person (details supplied); when the application will be concluded; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17854/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The gentleman referred to has been awarded invalidity pension with effect from 28 February 2019. Payment will issue to his nominated bank account on 18 April 2019. Any arrears due from 28 February 2019 to 17 April 2019 will issue in due course. The gentleman in question was notified of this decision on 12 April 2019.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Pension Provisions**

225. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a person (details supplied) will be informed of the outcome of deliberations of the new pension payment rates for women who cared for children at home. [17865/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Since late September 2018, my Department has been examining the social insurance records of approximately 90,000 pensioners, born on or after 1 September 1946, who have a reduced rate State pension contributory entitlement based on post Budget 2012 rate-bands. These payments are being reviewed under a new Total Contributions Approach (TCA) pension calculation which includes provision for HomeCaring periods.

The person concerned has been awarded the maximum possible number of HomeCaring periods in respect of time parenting their children. The person has 960 reckonable paid contributions which combined with reckonable credits and their HomeCaring periods results in a payment rate of 75.38% of the maximum rate pension. As the person is already in receipt of an 85% rate of payment, it is more financially beneficial for them to remain in their existing rate of payment.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Social Welfare Appeals Status**

226. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if an oral hearing will be held in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17887/19]

**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 27 February 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 has also advised me that your representations, including your request for an oral hearing, will be brought to the attention of the Appeals Officer who is assigned this case.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Disability Allowance Payments**

227. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when arrears will issue for a disability allowance application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17889/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The person concerned has been awarded disability allowance with effect from 5 December 2018. The first payment was made by her chosen payment method on 13 February 2019.

Arrears of payment due have been calculated taking account of overlapping payments and have issued to the person concerned on 12 April 2019.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Disability Allowance Applications Waiting Times**

228. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the length of time it is taking to process disability allowance applications; and the number of applications waiting to be processed. [17924/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** In February 2019, the average waiting time to award a new disability allowance application was 14 weeks. At the end of February 2019, there were 5,773 disability allowance applications awaiting decision.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Invalidity Pension Waiting Times**

229. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the waiting times for the processing of applications for invalidity pension; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17925/19]

**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 average time taken to process a new IP claim in February 2019 was eight weeks. The Department is committed to ensuring that claims are processed as expeditiously as possible.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Social Welfare Benefits Waiting Times**

230. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the waiting times for processing carer's allowance and carer's benefit applications; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17926/19]

**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 while carer's benefit (CARB) is a payment made to insured people who leave the workforce. Both payments can be made to people who are 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.

At the end of February 2019 the average waiting time for a decision on a new CA claim was 15 weeks while it was 12 weeks for CARB claims. Additional resources have been applied to the processing of CA claims and this continues to reduce the average week to process.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Social Welfare Appeals Status**

231. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if an oral hearing will be granted in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17943/19]

**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 18 February 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 26 March 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 has also advised me that your representations, including your request for an oral hearing, will be brought to the attention of the Appeals Officer who is

assigned this case.

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.

### **Flexible Work Practices**

232. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the legislative Acts and provisions in operation for consideration to be given to requests from employees for flexible working arrangements in the workplace. [17971/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** In Ireland, there are no explicit legislative provisions governing flexible hours and flexible working arrangements. Flexible hours and flexible working arrangements are generally at the discretion of individual employers and are not governed by specific legislation.

The Protection of Employees (Part-Time Work) Act 2001 (the 2001 Act) implemented EU Council Directive 97/81/EC into Irish law. The purpose of the Directive was to eliminate discrimination against part-time employees and to improve the quality of part-time work. It also aimed to facilitate the development of part-time work on a voluntary basis and to contribute to the flexible organisation of working time in a manner which takes into account the needs of employers and employees.

Section 13(5) of the 2001 Act contains provisions regarding the preparation and publishing of a Code of Practice by the Workplace Relations Commission in relation to the steps that could be taken by employers for the purposes of giving consideration to a request by workers to transfer from full-time work to part-time and vice-versa.

Following consultation with the social partners, the Code of Practice (Code of Practice on Access to Part-Time Working) (Declaration) Order 2006 (S.I. No. 8 of 2006) was implemented, in 2006. The Code is admissible in evidence in any proceedings before a Court, the Labour Court or an Adjudication Officer of the Workplace Relations Commission.

The Code seeks to:

- Encourage best practice and conformity with the provisions of the Employment Equality Acts 1998-2004 and the Protection of Employees (Part-Time Work) Act 2001;
- Promote the development of policies and procedures to assist employers, employees and their representatives, as appropriate, to improve access to part-time work for those employees who wish to work on a part-time basis;
- Promote discussion and encourage employers, employees and their representatives, as appropriate, to consider part-time work and to address any barriers that may exist;
- Stimulate employers - where consistent with business requirements - to provide wider access to part-time work options;
- Provide a framework and practical guidance on procedures for accessing part-time work;
- Inform those who are interested in part-time work.

Further information regarding the rights of part-time employees is available from Workplace Relations Commission's Information and Customer Service.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Flexible Work Practices**

233. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a worker on a 26 to 31 hour band can work more hours provided both the employer and the employee agree to same. [17975/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** In general an employee who is employed on any band of hours can work more hours provided both the employer and employee agree to same.

Employers can flex employees' hours of work provided such hours do not breach the employment contract or the Organisation of Working Time Act.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Carer's Allowance Eligibility**

234. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a self-employed person paying class S PRSI who has to retire from their employment to care for a sick partner is entitled to a carer's allowance; if not, her plans to address the matter or outline the entitlements to an alternative payment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17982/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Carer's Benefit (CARB) is a PRSI based payment made to a person who leaves 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.

In order to qualify, the applicant must have paid a certain number of PRSI contributions. Only contributions at Class A, B, C, D, H and E can be counted towards Carer's Benefit. Class S (self-employed contributions) do not count.

Instead the person concerned may have an entitlement to Carer's allowance (CA). 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.

In order to qualify, applicants must show that they are habitually resident in the State, that their means are less than the statutory limit, that they are providing full-time care and attention and that the person being cared for requires that level of care.

Means are any income belonging to the carer and their spouse, civil partner, or cohabitant, property, (except their own home) or an asset that could bring in money or provide them with an income, for example occupational pensions, or pensions or benefits from another country.

The person being cared for must have such a disability that as a result 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 and likely to require that level of care for at least twelve months.

In addition the carer must be providing this level of care.

Applications forms for CA can be found at any Intreo or Citizens' Information Office Nationwide or can be downloaded from my Department's website, [www.welfare.ie](http://www.welfare.ie)

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### Invalidity Pension Appeals

235. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an invalidity pension appeal by a person (details supplied). [18001/19]

**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 10th April 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.

### Farm Assist Scheme Data

236. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons in County Tipperary in receipt of the farm assist payment in each of the years 2014 to 2018 and to date in 2019; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18009/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The number of persons in County Tipperary in receipt of the farm assist payment in each of the years 2014 to 2018 and to date in 2019.

Year	No. of recipients
December 2014	336
December 2015	300
December 2016	269
December 2017	252
December 2018	223
March 2019	220

### Disability Allowance Payments

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237. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of arrears in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18024/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The person concerned has been awarded disability allowance with effect from 28 June 2017. The first payment was made by her chosen payment method on 3 April 2019.

Arrears of payment due have been calculated taking account of overlapping payments and have issued to the person concerned on 12 April 2019.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Disability Allowance Applications**

238. **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. [18049/19]

**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 12 February 2019.

On 12 April 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.

### **Housing Policy**

239. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the impact of a sizeable capital expenditure on the building of local authority houses as required nationally including affordable houses for sale to eligible families as opposed to the various modes of assistance available through rent support, HAP or other interim measures which have an annual impact as opposed to a once off capital investment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18040/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Over the course of the 6-year Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan, the Government is committed to meeting the housing needs of over 138,000 households. This will be achieved through blended delivery, involving increasing the social housing stock by 50,000 homes, through build, acquisition and leasing programmes, and supporting some 88,000 further households through the Housing Assistance Payment and the Rental Accommodation Scheme.

Over the period 2016-2018, the housing needs of some 90,000 households were supported under current programmes, including the HAP and RAS schemes. This figure includes continuing to provide support to those already in homes supported under the programmes concerned, and also the additional tenancies established during that period. If the funding provided for these 90,000 households had been transferred to capital expenditure, to support building or

buying homes, it would have secured some 5,500 homes, leaving no resources available to support the other 85,500 households. Looking at it another way, it would take almost €20 billion to provide a new build local authority home for those 90,000 households.

Rebuilding Ireland is working, with annual delivery targets exceeded in 2017 and again in 2018. By end 2018, over 72,000 additional social housing supports had already been provided under the Plan. I am confident that the actions, targets and resources available under Rebuilding Ireland provide a strong platform for delivering homes for those on social housing waiting lists.

### **Local Authority Housing Data**

240. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the average time it takes for each local authority to relet council homes after they become vacant in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17875/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** The management and maintenance of local authority housing stock, including pre-letting repairs to vacant properties, responsive repairs and implementing planned maintenance programmes, is a matter for each individual local authority, in line with Section 58 of the Housing Act 1966. Local authorities return vacant properties to use through their own resources but my Department also continues to provide exchequer support to local authorities under the voids programme to support the timely re-tenanting of social homes that become vacant and require significant investment prior to re-letting.

Local authorities will always have a level of vacancy in their housing stock, as the turnover of stock is continuous. All local authorities, however, are actively encouraged to ensure all vacant properties in their stock are brought back into use as expeditiously as possible. Local authorities have been well supported by my Department in this regard, as well as utilising their own resources to make social homes available to new tenants as soon as possible.

On an ongoing basis, the National Oversight & Audit Commission (NOAC) reviews the social housing stock level in local authorities every year, including the number of vacant local authority houses at a particular point in time. NOAC’s activities in this regard are summarised in its Annual Performance Indicator Reports for the years 2014-2017; the most recent data on a local authority basis are set out in the 2017 report which is available on the NOAC website, at the following link.

### **Housing Assistance Payment Data**

241. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of HAP tenancies paying a top-up to the HAP payment out of all HAP and homeless HAP payments; the value of those top-ups; and the number of these tenants paying a top-up in receipt of a social welfare payment by local authority area. [17956/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** At the end of March 2019, there were 45,423 active tenancies being supported under the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme. Collection of data in relation to the number of households making a top-up payment to their landlord does not form part of the standard reporting process of my Department. However, the information available to the HAP Shared Service Centre operated by Limerick City and County Council indicates that approximately three quarters of all HAP tenancies are fully supported.

In the case of other tenancies, it should be noted that there is no legislative provision precluding HAP supported households contributing towards the monthly rent to their landlord. This reflects the fact that, unlike Rent Supplement, where payment ceases in certain circumstances, HAP support can continue to be paid where a household's income increases, including for reasons of the tenant taking up full-time employment. In those cases, it would therefore be expected that some tenants would consider rental options, which they source themselves in the private rental market, that would involve them paying an element of rent beyond the HAP rent limits, enabled to do so by their improved income position.

It should be noted that local authorities have a responsibility to ensure that tenancies are sustainable and are advised not to provide HAP support to tenancies where they are not satisfied that the household would not be in a position to meet the rental costs being sought.

My Department does not collect information in relation to social welfare payments; however, a local authority will take into consideration all relevant income when assessing a HAP application.

### **Local Authority Funding**

242. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the reason an application from Louth County Council for grant aid under the urban regeneration and development fund for the development of the Drogheda northern port access route was recently refused by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17988/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** The Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) was launched as part of Project Ireland 2040, to support the compact growth and sustainable development of Ireland's five cities, regional drivers and other large urban centres. I initiated the first call for proposals under the Fund in July 2018 and the deadline for submission of applications was 28 September. A total of 189 applications were submitted to my Department and, on 26 November, I announced the successful applicants for funding, details of which are available on my Department's website at the following link.

There were two categories of submission; Category A for projects that were 'ready to go' and Category B to support the initial development of projects (Master-planning/Feasibility) to ensure a pipeline of projects into the future as the URDF is a rolling fund, with €2 billion available to 2027.

The project in question was amongst the group of unsuccessful proposals that were deemed not eligible or were not recommended due to the following general reasons:

- The proposal did not respond to core assessment criteria of the fund or the quality of the proposal was low;
- The proposal was a routine capital project more related to other capital funding sources available from another department or agency;
- The proposal was already commercially viable and would be better supported by market response; and
- The proposal was not in compliance with state aid or the additionality factor/wider leveraging of the project was in question (Value for Money).

However, in accordance with the terms of the first call for proposals Louth County Council sought a review of that decision. That review is presently in train and the outcome, which is expected shortly, will be communicated to the County Council as soon as possible.

### **Social and Affordable Housing Eligibility**

243. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the rationale for setting a 35% of net income threshold in his draft affordable housing regulations; and the way in which this relates to the 22% of net income threshold when determining Rebuilding Ireland home loan mortgages. [17990/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Part 5 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 was commenced in 2018, and provides the statutory basis for the provision of affordable housing for purchase.

In March 2019, I signed the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 (Part 5) Regulations 2019, which primarily deal with the order of priority for the allocation of affordable homes within a Scheme of Priority. These regulations do not contain a reference to a 35% of net income threshold.

Section 84 (2) of the 2009 Act provides that where a household applies to a housing authority to purchase an affordable dwelling under an affordable dwelling purchase arrangement, the housing authority shall carry out an assessment of the household's eligibility. This assessment will take into account a range of factors, including the provisions of section 84 (2)(b), which provides that the assessment will have regard as to whether the income of the household is adequate to meet the repayments on a mortgage, i.e. that payments should not exceed 35% of the household's annual income, net of income tax and PSRI.

In relation to the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan, this is another measure which seeks to address issues of affordability. Rather than a Loan to Income (LTI) limit of the nature suggested, a maximum permissible Net Disposable Income (NDI) ratio of 35% is used in respect of the loan. This reflects more accurately the benefit to the individual of the low fixed rate available for the full life of the loan.

### **Social and Affordable Housing Eligibility**

244. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will amend the eligibility criteria of his draft affordable housing regulations to ensure that applicants who have been forced to live outside the local authority area in which their centre of interest is due to high housing costs will not be excluded from applying for affordable housing in that local authority due to the fact that at the time of application they are not resident in that county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17991/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Part 5 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 was commenced on 18 June 2018 and provides the statutory basis for the provision of affordable housing for purchase.

On 12 March 2019, I signed the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 (Part 5) Regulations 2019. These regulations deal with the order of priority for the allocation of affordable homes and the preparation of a 'Scheme of Priority' by each local authority.

People who are not residing in a local authority area are not excluded from making an ap-

plication for an affordable home in that local authority area. It is open to all eligible persons to apply under the affordable housing scheme on the basis of need.

However, in accordance with what is laid down in the aforementioned regulations, where at any point in time, the local demand for affordable housing units may exceed supply, a system of prioritisation is required. In such situations, the regulations seek to provide a transparent and balanced framework for the allocation of available affordable housing units. As such, the framework prioritises applicants in a number of ways. This includes those who have been residing in the administrative area for a period of up to 12 months preceding an application, where an applicant or any member of their household is attending school, college or university in the administrative area, and where an applicant or any member of their household is working in the administrative area.

Within a Scheme of Priority, it is a reserved function of each local authority to specify their own distance requirements in relation to the places of education and employment for applicants and members of their households.

### **Approved Housing Bodies**

245. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the AHB special purpose vehicle being set up for the purpose of accessing credit union finance will be operational; and the efforts he is making to assist the AHB sector in setting up this vehicle. [17992/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Considerable work has been ongoing between the Irish Council for Social Housing (ICSH), a number of larger Tier 3 Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) and their financial advisors on the development of a vehicle for delivering private financing for AHBs providing social housing in line with ambitions set out in the Government's Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness. The Department provided funding for this project under the Innovation Fund.

The ICSH work is being undertaken in three phases, the first two of which have been completed, those being the phases designed to test the market interest in investing in social housing and the appetite among AHBs for private finance. While the ICSH had hoped to have completed the final phase of the work by now, focused on the structuring of special purpose vehicles, this important work remains ongoing.

One of the issues which has given rise to the delay in concluding the work is the need to take account of other private finance arrangements/vehicles that certain AHBs have put in place in parallel. The decision by Eurostat to reclassify AHBs has also influenced the progression of this final phase of work. Alongside this project, three individual AHBs have been successful in accessing private finance from financial institutions to deliver new social housing, with each financial institution having their own specific requirements for lending and investing.

While the completion of the outstanding phase of work is primarily a matter for the ICSH, it is hoped that they will be in a position to bring it to finality as soon as possible.

### **Approved Housing Bodies**

246. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the average annual cost per unit of the availability agreement payment to AHBs for each

category of such availability agreement for each year since these agreements have been in place; and the number of such units and total costs of such units for each year each category of availability agreement has been in operation in tabular form. [17993/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Payment and Availability (P&A) funding to Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) was introduced by my Department for leased properties, secured by AHBs, in 2009. It was subsequently extended to the acquisition and construction of properties by AHBs and facilitates delivery under the Capital Advance Loan Facility (CALF), the Mortgage to Rent Scheme (MTR), the Housing Agency Acquisitions Fund (HAA) and the Repair and Leasing Scheme (RLS). All P&A funding is underpinned by a P&A agreement, which is a template contractual arrangement between an AHB and a local authority setting out the terms under which AHBs make properties available to local authorities for the purpose of providing social housing support.

The average cost of P&A agreements varies having regard to the level of discount on market rent applicable to each specific funding scheme, together with variations in market rents across different geographical areas and property types. The average annual cost per unit of each category of P&A agreement, and the total number of operational units supported each year, is set out in Table 1. A breakdown of the data by the categories sought is not available before 2014. As has been clarified separately for the Deputy, P&A costs are not comparable to the payments arising under Social Housing PPP contracts.

The total P&A spend for 2018 is set out in Table 2. The total cost of such units, broken down by the categories sought, is not available before 2018. The data below is based on local authority claims for operational P&A agreements recorded on the Department's SHCEP financial management system. Any variations in data between operational figures and total output across build, acquisition and leasing delivery streams is due to the time lag in the submission of claims to the Department in respect of new units after delivery.

**Table 1: Average Annual P&A Cost and Total Operational Units under P&A 2014 - 2018**

	2014		2015		2016	
P&A Type	Total Units	Average Annual Cost	Total Units	Average Annual Cost	Total Units	Average Annual Cost
CALF (incl. HAA)	661	€9,456	1,053	€9,480	1,528	€9,876
MTR	49	€7,932	107	€8,388	178	€8,508
Leasing (incl. NARPS)	510	€7,260	975	€8,052	1,176	€8,340
RLS	0	€0	0	€0	0	€0
Total	1,220	€8,364	2,135	€8,724	2,882	€9,108

  

	2017		2018	
P&A Type	Total Units	Average Annual Cost	Total Units	Average Annual Cost
CALF (incl. HAA)	2,575	€10,572	3,816	€11,292
MTR	264	€8,772	379	€9,000
Leasing (incl. NARPS)	1,725	€9,300	1,838	€9,228
RLS	0	€0	1	€7,200
Total	4,564	€9,984	6,034	€10,512

**Table 2: Total Cost P&A agreements 2018**

P&A Type	Cost 2018
CALF (incl. HAA)	€42,831,138
MTR	€3,481,410
Leasing (incl. NARPS)	€16,714,251
RLS	€4,303
Total	€63,031,102

### Social and Affordable Housing Data

247. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the locations by local authority of the ten affordable purchase scheme sites approved to date; the estimated completion times of each; the anticipated cost per unit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18061/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Under the Serviced Sites Fund (SSF), the Government has committed €310 million over the three years 2019 to 2021, to provide infrastructure supports for the delivery of 6,200 affordable homes to purchase or rent. In December 2018, an initial 10 projects, with the potential for 1,400 affordable homes, were approved with an allocation of €43 million under the first call for proposals, details of which are set out in the following table.

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

The overall cost and the timing of delivery for these projects is contingent upon the completion of planning and procurement in the first instance, and local authorities are working to achieve delivery as quickly as possible. It is expected that the first tranche of affordable homes will be delivered next year.

I recently issued a second call for applications under the Serviced Sites Fund. As a result, 19 local authorities who carried out economic assessments, which identified affordability issues in their areas, will be in a position to make applications for funding in respect of additional sites

earmarked for affordable housing.

Furthermore, approximately 2,350 affordable homes are in the process of being delivered on mainly publicly owned lands supported through the €200 million Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF). An additional 5,600 homes will benefit from a LIHAF-related cost reduction, some of which are already coming to market. Details of these schemes and their locations are available on the Rebuilding Ireland website at <http://rebuildingireland.ie/lihaf/>.

### **Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund**

248. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the timeframe for the delivery of affordable units under the local infrastructure housing activation fund; the locations of each unit by local authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18062/19]

249. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the estimated average price reduction per unit under units provided under the local infrastructure housing activation fund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18063/19]

250. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the drawdown of funding under the LIHAF to date by project; the number of units delivered by project to date; the number projected by project; the number of affordable units to be provided by project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18064/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 248 to 250, inclusive, together.

As a key initiative of the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF) is primarily designed to fund the provision of public off-site infrastructure to relieve critical infrastructure blockages and enable housing developments to be built on key sites at scale.

Funding of €200 million was provided under LIHAF, of which €150 million was made available via the Exchequer with local authorities matching up to €50 million. 30 projects received final approval with an overall budget of €195.7m, of which €146.8m will be Exchequer funded, with the remainder funded via local authorities.

Approximately 2,350 affordable homes are in the process of being delivered on mainly publicly owned lands supported through LIHAF. An additional 5,600 homes will benefit from a LIHAF-related cost reduction, some of which are already coming to market. Details on all of the LIHAF projects by local authority area, budget allocation, project timeframe and description and housing delivery are available at [www.rebuildingireland.ie/LIHAF](http://www.rebuildingireland.ie/LIHAF).

In terms of LIHAF funding drawdown, thus far, most projects have been at the design and planning stages, with the bulk of expenditure arising during the construction phase, and this is reflected in the level of expenditure to date. As the projects progress further through construction, site activity and drawdowns will significantly escalate. Currently, approximately one third of the projects are at the finish tender and construction phase and it is expected that the remaining projects will follow later in the year. The following table details the funding drawn down up to end of Q1 2019.

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Local Authority	Project name	Drawdown of LIHAF funding to end of Q1 2019 (€)
Clare	Claureen, Ennis	86,009
Cork City	Old Whitechurch Road	3,308,511
Cork City	South Docks	564,225
Cork County	Midleton (Water-rock)	241,917
Cork County	Carrigaline	53,152
Cork County	Glanmire	129,051
Dublin City	Dodder Bridge	126,464
Dublin City	Belmayne and Clongriffin	11,108
Dun Laoghaire Rathdown	Cherrywood	333,504
Dun Laoghaire Rathdown	Woodbrook Shanganagh	0
Dun Laoghaire Rathdown	Clay Farm	0
Fingal	Donabate Distributor Road	5,051,489
Fingal	Oldtown Mooretown	0
Fingal	Baldoyle Stapolin	274,561
Kildare	Naas	237,563
Kildare	Maynooth	156,697
Kildare	Sallins	654,584
Kilkenny	Ferrybank	18,626
Kilkenny	Western Environs	378,826
Limerick	Mungret	1,168,859
Louth	Newtown Drogheda	44,867
Louth	Mount Avenue Dundalk	46,854
Meath	Ratoath	151,596
Meath	Farganstown, Navan	277,318
South Dublin	Kilcarbery/Corkagh Grange	226,345
South Dublin	Clonburris SDZ	10,680
South Dublin	Adamstown	50,290
Waterford City and County Council	Gracedieu	52,234
Waterford City and County Council	Kilbarry	94,590
Westmeath	Brawny Road, Athlone	52,500

In terms of homes delivered, the following table details the number of completed homes up to Q1 2019.

Local Authority	Project Name	Homes Delivered to end Q1 2019
Cork County	Carrigaline	100
Fingal	Oldtown/ Mooretown	144
Kildare	Naas	163
Meath	Ratoath	82
South Dublin	Adamstown SDZ	325

### Housing Data

251. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of housing projects approved under the urban regeneration and development fund and or the rural regeneration and development fund to date; the anticipated number of units; the number of affordable units; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18065/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Project Ireland 2040, as launched by the Government in February 2018, is the overarching policy and planning framework for the social, economic and cultural development of Ireland. It includes a detailed capital investment plan for the period 2018 to 2027, the National Development Plan (NDP) 2018-2027, and the 20-year National Planning Framework (NPF).

The NPF sets a new long-term strategic planning and investment context for Ireland over the next 20 years, outlining at high-level a national vision for Ireland to 2040, which will establish the principles to manage future population and economic growth, catering for 1 million extra people, 600,000 extra jobs and over 500,000 extra homes. As part of this, the future housing needs of our growing population are of course among the key issues that will be addressed through the NPF.

The NDP established four new funds, with a combined allocation of €4 billion to 2027. The Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF), which is the fund operated by my Department, was launched last year and has an overall provision of €2 billion to 2027. €58m is available in 2019 to provide initial support to the 88 projects announced last November on foot of the first call for proposals. €550 million is included in the NDP to provide further support for these and other similar projects up to 2022.

The URDF was established to support applicant led projects that will contribute to regeneration and rejuvenation of Ireland's five cities and other large towns, in line with the objectives of the NPF and the NDP. The aim is to achieve more compact, sustainable and mixed use development, with a view to ensuring that more parts of our urban areas can become attractive and vibrant places in which people choose to live and work, as well as to invest and to visit. This will be done by supporting proposals that contribute to the re-development of key brownfield areas both by enabling infrastructure and new master-planned development proposals.

While the URDF is not intended to provide direct support for particular housing projects, some of the projects it is currently supporting will enable a significant proportion of residential and mixed-use development to be delivered within the existing built-up footprints of our cities and towns.

The Rural Regeneration and Development Fund falls within the remit of my colleague, the Minister for Rural and Community Development.

### **Archaeological Sites**

252. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if her attention has been drawn to unique or valuable artefacts discovered at various locations nationally over the past ten years; the location in which they are now stored or displayed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17914/19]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** I am aware that the rich history of Ireland gives rise to archaeological finds on a regular basis. The most significant recent find was the Tullydonnell hoard of gold objects in Co Donegal.

The National Cultural Institutions Act, 1997 sets out the responsibilities and procedures for archaeological finds in the State.

All discoveries are to be notified to the National Museum of Ireland and those items may be retained by the Museum for the national collections.

Arrangements for display or loan of discovered artefacts are considered by the National Museum of Ireland, having regard to curatorial responsibilities and public interest.

### **EU Directives**

253. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if her attention has been drawn to the substantial number of seagulls recorded after use of the 2018.19 derogation in Balbriggan and the effect on homes, schools and businesses including premises in which human food is prepared, sold and consumed; the relevance of a study (details supplied) to her policy obligations to avail of derogations in the interests of public health and safety and in respect of the declarations due on 1 May 2019; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17947/19]

254. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if her attention has been drawn to a statement in an article by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17948/19]

255. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the reason the consultative committee will not be tasked with enumerating the extent of the seagull infestation problem in Balbriggan (details supplied); and if clarification on same will be provided. [17949/19]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 253 to 255, inclusive, together.

A review of the derogation process under Article 9 of the EU Birds Directive was completed by ANIAR Ecology last year. The consultants in their report made a number of recommendations in relation to seagulls including the setting up of a group to agree a programme of action in relation to the seagull situation in the certain urban areas. In line with the recommendations in the consultant's report I have agreed to the formation of a Consultative Committee, with an independent chair, whose membership will include representatives of the National Parks and Wildlife Service of my Department, Fingal County Council, local community representatives and a conservation group.

The remit of the Consultative Committee is not confined to one particular urban area given the widespread range of seagulls. I understand that arrangements are in hand to convene the first meeting of the Committee shortly after the Easter holiday period. I am aware of the study commissioned by the local authority concerned on the population of nesting gulls in Balbriggan, Skerries and Howth in County Dublin and I expect that this will be a matter for discussion by the Consultative Committee.

The Deputy refers to an article in a national newspaper and I will be happy to have this brought to the attention of the Consultative Committee.