

## 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 6, inclusive, answered orally.*

### Children in Care

7. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her views on whether €13,250 per week for a private residential placement for a child is an appropriate charge by private service providers for this service. [22241/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I understand that the cost of €13,250 quoted by the Deputy relates to one young person living on their own for a specified period of time. This young person has an exceptionally high level of complex needs and behaviours.

As a result, they need to be cared for in an environment without other young people present and with a high staff ratio. The needs of this young person dictates that they need full time staff cover, twenty-four hours a day.

This is a case of a young person needing the State to pull out all the stops in order to care for them. Yes, the cost of the care is high, but it is necessary.

Private providers of children's residential services are contracted through a national procurement process. The national weekly costs are set at €6000 per placement per week. This figure is based on there being more than one child or young person in the centre.

In many cases young people in residential placements also receive a range of specialist services and supports outside of those provided by the centre. This can lead to additional costs.

When specialised, appropriate placements are successful, they can have a positive impact on the outcomes for this small number of very vulnerable children and young people. I acknowledge that not all placements are not successful, but we owe it to these children and young people to make every effort on their behalf.

Ultimately we must provide a safe, supportive setting for vulnerable children. When we get this right, the benefits for the child, and for us all, are considerable.

*Question No. 8 answered orally.*

### Children in Care

9. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the steps she has taken to address the concerns raised over staffing and other standards at private residential

care homes used by Tusla. [22276/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I thank the Deputy for her important question. Maintaining consistent high standards in residential care is a challenge across many jurisdictions where the work involves caring for adolescents, many with traumatic histories, complex behaviour and ambivalence about their placement.

Residential care is a small, but vital part of our care system and the basis for successful outcomes for the young people relies on the experience, quality and resilience of the management and staff group.

Approximately 6 % of children in care - 376 at the end of February - live in residential settings, and 238 of these children live in privately managed centres commissioned by Tusla. Included in this number are older teenage separated children seeking asylum or those received in care from the Irish Refugee Protection Programme.

Residential settings care for a very small number of children, often two or three. Some are single occupancy, where the largest centres for separated children have, on average, six young people.

All centres are inspected against the relevant standards and regulations and additionally Tusla registers private centres. Conditions are placed on the registration of centres who fall below the standards expected, for instance the number of children in the centre. Centres that are struggling to meet standards do not survive in such a regulated environment.

The majority of inspections show evidence of positive relationships between staff and young people, and the needs of the young people being met.

The Deputy asks about staffing in residential centres. I have been concerned to learn that in some centres there is a high turnover of staff and a dependency on agency staff. I am also aware of injuries sustained by some staff in the course of their work and the impact this has on stability in the centre.

My officials have been engaged with Tusla on the challenges posed in residential care and work is ongoing to provide a greater level of assessment and therapeutic input to the centres from the ACTS Team (Assessment, Counselling, Therapy and Support Team).

I welcome CORU's upcoming accreditation of Social Care Courses and registration of Social Care Workers as I believe this will lead to the enhancement of professional social care as the lead profession in working with troubled young people.

Tusla have developed a programme called Creative Community Alternatives that will support older adolescents at home with proper supports, and prevent their coming into a care placement against their wishes.

*Question No. 10 answered orally.*

### **Childcare Services Provision**

11. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if options are being considered to increase childcare facilities nationally. [22604/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I have noted many times how, historically, there has been very low levels of investment in Early Learning

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and Care and School Age Childcare in Ireland. Over the past four budgets however, we have increased investment substantially. It has risen from €260 to €575 million. This significant increase in investment has assisted with an unprecedented doubling of capacity in the sector from 103,000 places in 2014, to 214,000 places in 2018. The average service has grown from 33 places to 44 places.

A key priority for me as Minister has been to support the early learning and care and school age childcare sector through the provision of capital funding, where it is most needed.

In 2019, I secured a Capital budget of €9.6m for the sector which enables a focus on increasing the number of places available, and supporting services to get ready for the forthcoming National Childcare Scheme.

This capital funding is expected to produce approximately 1,300 new 0-3 spaces and 2,300 new school age childcare places this year. Pobal and my officials are currently finalising the assessment of these applications and I expect to be announcing the successful applicants very shortly. This will enable building to begin over the summer and the places to be available before the end of the year.

Under the National Development Plan published in 2018, I ensured that Childcare was identified as a strategic priority and I secured €250 million in additional funding for the expansion of high quality services.

Finally, I want to expand opportunities in the childminding sector. I commissioned an Expert Group Report on childminding services in 2017. In the coming months, I will publish an Action Plan setting out how my Department will support more of these vitally important service providers to become registered with Tusla. This means they will be able to access the National Childcare Scheme when introduced. This will further increase access to high quality childcare services.

I am very conscious of the need to ensure we have sufficient capacity for all age groups. My Department, in conjunction with Pobal, will continue to monitor the situation closely, and to plan for future requirements.

*Questions Nos. 12 to 15, inclusive, answered orally.*

### **Child Protection**

16. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which adequate protection exists by way of legislation with particular reference to the way in which such protection can be provided throughout all the various organisations in the public or private sector offering care, support or protection to children in loco parentis; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22251/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The Children First Act 2015, which was fully commenced in December 2017, provides for a number of key child protection measures. These include raising awareness of child abuse and neglect, providing for reporting and management of child protection concerns and improving child protection arrangements in organisations providing services to children.

The Act places a number of statutory obligations on organisations, both public and private, providing relevant services to children.

There is a requirement:

- to keep children safe from harm while they are availing of the service;
- to carry out a risk assessment; and,
- to prepare a child safeguarding statement which sets out the policies and procedures which are in place to mitigate these risks.

Services to children which must produce a Child Safeguarding Statement are set out in Schedule 1 of the Act.

The Children First Act 2015 also places an obligation on defined categories of persons to report child abuse, at or above the level specified in the Act, to Tusla. The list of categories of persons who are mandated reporters is set out in Schedule 2 of the Act.

They are, in the main, professionals working with children or certain categories of adults and include teachers, many health professionals, gardaí, owners and staff of crèches, and trained youth workers. The Act also includes a provision whereby mandated persons must, if reasonably requested to do so, assist Tusla in the assessment of a child protection risk.

This assistance can take the form of verbal or written reports, attendance at meetings, or the provision of information or documents.

The Act operates side-by-side with the non-statutory obligations provided for in the National Guidelines under Children First. The guidance sets out definitions of abuse, and signs for its recognition. It explains how reports about reasonable concerns of child abuse or neglect should be made by the general public and professionals to Tusla.

It sets out what organisations need to do to keep children safe. It also describes the obligations under the Children First Act 2015 and who they attach to. These guidelines have been in place since 1999 and were fully revised and published in October 2017 to include reference to the provisions of the Act.

Taken together, the Children First Act, the Criminal Justice (Withholding of Information on Offences Against Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012 and the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012, represent a significant legislative framework to promote the welfare and protection of children, including in relation to organisations providing services to children.

*Question No. 17 answered orally.*

### **Legislative Process**

18. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of the Adoption (Information and Tracing) Bill 2016. [22273/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The Adoption (Information and Tracing) Bill 2016 has passed Second Stage in the Seanad. I am hoping that Committee Stage in the Seanad will be scheduled for June, and thereafter, I intend to proceed to enactment as quickly as possible.

As I am sure the Deputy is aware, the Bill seeks to balance the rights to identity and to privacy, which sometimes conflict with one another.

Given the constitutional context, striking the balance between these rights is proving challenging, and has required significant engagement between my office and the Office of the Attorney General.

I am conscious of the delay with progressing the Bill. It has been a long and arduous legislative journey but I continue to make sincere efforts to tilt the balance more strongly in favour of applicants' right to identity and access to birth information, while maintaining necessary protections for a small cohort of potentially vulnerable birth parents.

I hope I can rely on my Oireachtas colleagues support in relation to this very important piece of legislation.

### Youth Services Data

19. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will provide the City of Dublin Youth Service Board organisational chart 2019. [22242/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The role of the City of Dublin Youth Service Board (CDYSB) is to support the provision, co-ordination, administration and assessment of youth services in their functional area and to provide such information as may be required by myself as Minister for Children and Youth Affairs.

As the Deputy is aware the CDYSB is a committee of the City of Dublin Education and Training Board.

As such, any organisational concerns in relation to the committee fall under the remit of the Department of Education and Skills and my colleague Minister McHugh.

I understand that my colleague Minister McHugh has informed you that he would be happy to facilitate a meeting with the Department of Education and Skills, my Department and yourself, in relation to youth services.

While I am happy to discuss the value of youth services and youth work, I must stress that any review of CDYSB would be in the domain of the CEO of CDET, which falls under the remit of the Department of Education and Skills.

The Department of Education and Skills has provided details of the organisational structure of CDYSB, which is set out below in tabular form. My officials have been advised that there was an error in the organisation chart provided to you on the 8th May and so an amended one is being given to you today.

Job Title:	Headcount	WTE:	Job Grade:
Director	1	1	Director
Head of Operations	1	1	Head of Operations
Development Officers	4	4	Development Officers
Liaison Officers	8	7.92	Liaison Officers
Senior Youth Worker	2	2	Senior Youthworker
Finance & Governance	2	2	Senior Youthworker
Head of Finance	1	1	Assistant Principal Officer

Job Title:	Headcount	WTE:	Job Grade:
Administrative Of- ficer	1	1	Administrative Of- ficer
Staff Officer	2	2	Staff Officer
Assistant Staff Of- ficer	1	0.58	Assistant Staff Of- ficer
Clerical Officer	2	1.8	Clerical Officer
Assistant Porter	1	1	Assistant Porter
General Operative	1	0.57	General Operative
Youth Workers	5	5	4 in Stoneybatter, 1 in CDYSB
Co-located Staff:			
Development Officer	1	1	Development Officer
Liaison Officers	2	2	Liaison Officers
Seconded Staff:			
Liaison Officer	1	0.60	Liaison Officer
Career Break:			We previously had one Liaison Officer on career break but they resumed on 1/5/19

### Children in Care

20. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the details of the use of seclusion and restraint within Tusla funded care facilities; the frequency with which these methods are employed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22274/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** Young people in residential care have a placement plan which sets out how they will have their needs and preferences met, including family contacts, hobbies, education and health issues. Included in the plan is an individual Crisis Management Plan.

This is based on an assessment of the young person's potential behaviour during a crisis and what are the most effective ways to help the young person manage their behaviour. The plan is drawn up in conjunction with the young person.

The use of the Crisis Management Plan ensures that crisis behaviour is responded to appropriately and safely and that where a restrictive practice is needed it is kept to a minimum. An important part of the plan is a review, including the young person, of what triggered the event, the young person's experience of the restrictive practice and learning for the future. Young people in residential care centres are not subject to seclusion as a restrictive practice.

There are occasions where a child may be on their own or just with staff, but this does not mean that they are in seclusion. There may be circumstances when a child is continuously with staff and separated from other children in the Unit. This will be for a time limited period and in response to a specific behaviour incident.

Tusla has a national policy on single separation for use in Special Care Units only. Special Care is where a child is detained by the High Court for their care and protection. Children in residential care are not detained.

This practice is used only when alternative interventions either have not worked, or are not suitable, and when single separation has been assessed as being the least harmful option to the child to avoid immediate risk or harm.

Tusla has provided me with the latest collated data available, which relates to March 2019. These data indicate that there were 14 children in Special Care and that 8 incidents of single separation or seclusion interventions were used in March.

Data on physical interventions or restraint for March 2019 show that there were 475 children in residential care, and that there were 69 interventions.

Physical interventions are used when all alternative procedures have been considered and every effort has been made to identify and alleviate the cause of the young person's challenging behaviour.

The least restrictive procedure for the shortest duration necessary will always be used.

### **Affordable Childcare Scheme Expenditure**

21. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 563 of 9 April 2019, her plans to increase the scheme by €1 per hour for the under 3 age group in view of the costs of childcare on a comparable EU basis; and if her attention has been drawn to the overall benefits of such an increase for parents. [22244/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The National Childcare Scheme is a new, national scheme of financial support to help parents with the cost of quality childcare.

The development of the Scheme is a significant move forward in delivering quality, accessible, affordable childcare to families throughout Ireland.

The Scheme provides a universal subsidy to all families with children under 3 years, as well as families with children over 3 years who have not yet qualified for the free pre-school programme. The universal subsidy is not means-tested and provides 50c per hour towards the cost of a registered childcare place for up to 40 hours per week. Increasing the universal subsidy for children under 3 remains an option that will be considered in future Budgets.

The Scheme also provides income-related subsidies which, for the first time ever, will be differentiated based on age. Providers will receive the highest subsidies for children under 3, making it more attractive to care for this age group. Subsidies of up to €5.10 per hour for babies will be available for up to 40 hours per week, for families using registered childcare. This means that maximum subsidy for a child under 1 will be €204 per week (€10,600 per annum) - a significant increase on the current maximum targeted rate of €145 per week.

The 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, it establishes a sustainable platform for investment in early learning and care and school age childcare for years to come.

Over the last four budgets investment in early learning and care and school age childcare

has risen by 117%. However, I acknowledge that more investment will be needed to deliver the system that children and families deserve and First 5 commits to doubling investment over the next 10 years.

### **Child Abuse**

22. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to the levels of sexual abuse and abuse of children within emergency accommodation settings; the steps she has taken to address same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22277/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I understand the Deputy is referring to the number of mandatory reports in relation to sexual and other abuse made about children living in emergency and homeless accommodation. Tusla, the Child and Family Agency respond to children who are reported to be at risk of harm. In some cases there are increased risks for children who experience homelessness.

Since the introduction of mandatory reporting in December 2017, an average of 1% of mandated reports were from managers of homeless or emergency accommodation, a total of 127 reports in all. These reports relate to physical and emotional abuse, neglect and sexual abuse.

I can advise the Deputy that the figures published on mandated reports nationally reflect the overall number of referrals made by all mandated reporters. Sexual abuse referrals made up 17% of mandated referrals in February 2019. It is important to note that multiple referrals may be made about the same child.

Tusla collates data on all referrals received, including those coming from mandated reporters. This information is published on their website on a monthly basis.

I have been advised that a joint protocol has been agreed between the Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DHRE) and Tusla. The protocol restates, as matter of good practice, the duties to report abuse to Tusla and Gardaí, as per the requirements for mandatory reporting under the Children First Act 2015 and the 2017 Children First guidance.

The aim of the protocol is to ensure that appropriate responses to child protection and welfare issues are in place between the agencies. The protocol outlines the responsibilities on service providers of homeless accommodation under Children First to notify the Child and Family Agency where concerns regarding possible abuse exist.

Tusla examines all notifications and making a determination is made on whether the concerns refer to harm or welfare. Following that determination a pathway is identified to ensure that there is an appropriate response. Managers of emergency homelessness accommodation are designated persons, with clear obligations to report concerns of abuse or neglect to Tusla.

### **Departmental Funding**

23. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of funding for the provision of supports for special needs children; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22250/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** Officials in my Department were in contact with the Deputy's office, and I understand that the question specifi-

cally relates to supports for children with special needs to take part in school-age childcare.

My Department does not currently provide additional supports for children with disabilities or special needs to attend school-age childcare services. However, in First 5, the Whole of Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families, I have made a commitment to reviewing such needs in due course. It is important however that in the first instance my Department completes the planned three year evaluation of the AIM programme and that we apply any learning from it to the development of new policy and service provision.

Deputies may be aware that AIM - the Access and Inclusion Model - provides both universal and targeted supports for the meaningful participation of children with disabilities in the ECCE pre-school programme. The third year of AIM's operation will end next month and work on the 3-year evaluation will then commence. A one year evaluation conducted by external consultants was very positive and indeed AIM has won a number of national awards.

The Government made a commitment in First 5 to consider enhancements to, or extension of, AIM to other groups of children. Such an extension might involve younger children (such as under-3s) or children attending school-age childcare services, or it might involve children with additional needs other than a disability. However, I must stress that any decisions on extension or reform of AIM will be subject to the findings of the evaluation, other relevant developments and the securing of necessary resources.

The Deputy may also be interested to know that on 21 May I launched a public consultation on the future of school-age childcare. The consultation focuses on the development of comprehensive regulations and a national quality framework. Details on the online survey and a call for submissions can be found on my Department's website.

### **Early Childhood Care and Education**

24. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the terms and conditions for the granting of an overage exemption for children within the ECCE scheme to apply for an additional year prior to commencing primary school; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [19799/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** In the first instance it should be highlighted that the Early Childhood Care and Education programme (ECCE) is a two year pre-school programme. There is no provision for a third year which may not be in the best interests of a child, and could have the capacity to lead to breaching the statutory school starting age.

Overage exemptions were introduced at the onset of the ECCE programme in 2010. At that time ECCE operated for a 38 week period, or one programme year. For some children with special/additional needs, attending preschool five days a week was not feasible and so therefore an allowance was made. Their one year ECCE place was split over two years, e.g. a child may have availed of three days ECCE provision in year one and two days in year two. In order to facilitate this, in the cases where the child would have been overage for ECCE in the latter year, an overage exemption was granted. It is important to note that this provision of an overage exemption by my Department for the ECCE programme was never intended as a mechanism to delay a child's entry to primary education or to address any issue of non-availability of a school place. In the past, the operation of the system of overage exemption has caused confusion where some parents and providers have mistakenly assumed that an overage exemption approval from the DCYA represented derogation from age requirements attaching to the statutory requirement

that a child attend primary school before the age of 6 years.

The application process for an exemption from the upper age limit for the ECCE programme was introduced within a context where:

- The ECCE programme was for a year only; and
- The Access and Inclusions Model (AIM) did not exist.

Given the extension of the ECCE programme in 2016/2017, the further extension of the programme to two full years from September 2018, and the introduction of AIM in June 2016, the rationale underpinning the policy intent of the system of overage exemption came under review as the initial premise for the provision of an exemption might have been considered to be no longer valid, i.e. an overage exemption as originally designed allowed for a child to avail of one programme year of ECCE over two years, whereas the standard provision is now a full two programme years.

The overage exemption process has recently been the subject of a consultation process and report by the National Disability Authority (NDA). Officials from my Department are now considering policy options following on from this report. The new policy will consider the future of the system of exemptions and how best to support parents and children in the important transition from pre-school to primary school. It is worth stressing that the only rationale underpinning these considerations is what is in the best interests of the child.

A key finding of the recently published NDA report is that it is in children's best interests to enrol in primary school with their peers and to transition to becoming a teenager with their peers. I would also note that associated research shows broad agreement that it is in the best interest of the child to start school with their peers.

Until such time as any new policy proposals are implemented, I have stated that the current system should continue. Overage Exemptions currently provided by my Department are governed by three guiding principles as follows:

- Letter of Recommendation from a specialist clinician
- Child's age - not being over 6 years of age during the exemption year (as per Educational Welfare Act, 2000)
- ECCE Allocation taken - if a child has utilised their full 2 years of ECCE provision they will not be eligible for any further ECCE allocation.

My Department is working closely with the Department of Education and Skills and the National Council for Special Education to ensure that planning for a successful transition to primary school with the child's peers begins as early as possible, and that the necessary resources are in place in the school to enable the child settle in comfortably and optimise their learning experience.

### **Childcare Costs**

25. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to develop targeted supports for parents and guardians in County Wexford paying for childcare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21740/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** My Depart-

ment funds a number of programmes and schemes in place to support parents and guardians with the cost of Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare. These are available on a national basis through thousands of registered providers across all counties, including Wexford. They include:

- The universal pre-school Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme, which provides children with 15 hours per week of pre-school education over a 38-week programme year. Since September 2018 children qualify for two years of universal pre-school.

- The universal Community Childcare Subvention (CCSU) and the targeted Community Childhood Subvention (CCS), which provide weekly subsidies to offset fees charged by providers. CCS is available to families who hold a Medical Card or are in receipt of social welfare benefits.

- The Training and Employment Childcare (TEC) Schemes provide a weekly subsidy to offset fees charged by providers for parents on approved education or training courses, Community Employment schemes, or those returning to work who need school-age childcare.

- Specific supports are also in place for children in emergency accommodation, in accommodation centres provided by the State for persons in the protection process or programme refugee children in Emergency Reception and Orientation Centres.

Radical reforms to the targeted schemes, based on the principle of progressive universalism, are in train. The National Childcare Scheme (NCS), when introduced this October, will replace the CCS and TEC schemes with a single, streamlined scheme.

Under the NCS, parents will continue to have access to the universal subsidy towards the cost of Early Learning and Care. This stands at €1,040 per annum currently for a child under 3 in full time registered Early Learning and Care. Targeted subsidies for children from 6 months to 15 years of age will be provided, with the level of subsidy determined by net household income and the age of the child (children). Households with a net income of less than €26,000 will receive the maximum subsidy. This can be as high as €5.10 per hour, available for up to 40 hours per week, for a child under one. Households with net income up to €60,000 will also benefit, but on a sliding scale from the maximum subsidy level available for incomes under €26,000. Further information is available at [www.ncs.gov.ie](http://www.ncs.gov.ie).

In addition to these universal and targeted subsidies, the NCS allows for additional support for families where there is an identified need for Early Learning and Care on grounds of child development or child welfare. Families with high levels of need, who require Early Learning and Care for child welfare, child protection or family support reasons, may be referred for support by a specified “sponsor” body. Where such a referral is made, the family will automatically qualify for a subsidy for the number of hours considered appropriate by the sponsor without having to satisfy the scheme’s eligibility, income or enhanced hours requirements.

Recent analysis undertaken by the OECD has concluded that, when the NCS is introduced, the costs of Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare to parents will come closer to the OECD average. The NCS, in creating a flexible platform for future investment in funding, will allow subsidies to be expanded over time and further progress to be made.

### **Child and Family Agency Staff**

26. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of the recruitment of social care workers; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22275/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** Tusla's Business Plan for 2019 has identified an initial gross recruitment target of 102 Social Care Workers to cover new posts and attrition. Tusla projects that this recruitment may eventually result in an increase in Tusla's social care workers of 57 once attrition and backfilling is taken into account.

Tusla has informed me that it has a rolling campaign for social care workers. In addition, Tusla has developed other initiatives, such as bespoke campaigns for social care workers, to support its on-going recruitment drive in the more difficult to fill Special Care settings.

Tusla has advised that at 31 March, 2019 there were 1,152 Whole Time Equivalent (WTE) social care workers in Tusla, which represents 29% of its overall workforce (3955 WTE). In addition, Tusla currently engages 210 agency social care workers to ensure continuity of service.

Recruitment of social care workers is particularly challenging in Special Care settings. For example, at the end of 2018, Tusla had appointed 131 new social care workers however, 70 social care workers either left or retired from the organisation during the same period. Tusla has identified that there are approximately 1,000 social care graduates per year however, a much smaller sub-group is willing to work in the particularly challenging environment of Special Care. This challenge is further compounded as Tusla is competing with the HSE, Oberstown Children Detention Campus, the voluntary and private sector to recruit from this sub-group.

I am aware that Tusla is exploring a number of measures to address the challenges in Special Care, such as increasing the potential talent pool by widening the eligible skills and experience considered for the role, improving the work environment and implementing a new model of care. Tusla has also commenced a stability programme to appoint in excess of 25 agency social care workers on temporary three year contracts into identified posts within the service.

At the same time, Tusla has indicated that a key focus for the Agency is the continued development of initiatives to support the retention of the talent, capability and institutional knowledge that already exists within the Agency. A Retention Steering Group has been established by Tusla to plan and implement an integrated approach throughout the organisation and its work is being coordinated through Tusla's Health and Wellbeing and Employee Assistance service. In this context, Tusla has confirmed that the turnover rate for social care workers has fallen from 4.6% in 2017 to 3.52% in 2018 and this may be attributed to the recent work that Tusla has undertaken to address retention issues.

Tusla has developed its Strategic Workforce Planning Model – Phase 1 Multidisciplinary teams which will be rolled out by a Strategic Workforce Implementation Plan 2019-2020 and which encompasses capability and capacity planning. It is my expectation that this will chart the way forward in terms of a realistic approach to the personnel deficits being experienced by Tusla. Tusla has established a Steering Group, and also intends to establish Working Groups, to oversee and drive the implementation of the Strategic Workforce Planning Model and I welcome this approach.

I also welcome the fact that the Retention Steering Group will feed into the Strategic Workforce Planning Model, focusing on staff wellbeing by assessing workplace stressors, employee psychological wellbeing and critical incident exposure in the workplace.

With regard to HR, my Department is primarily focussed on funding, governance and support of Tusla however, my officials are actively engaging and supporting Tusla and other stakeholders with regard to addressing issues relating to the supply, recruitment and retention of social workers and social care workers.

## **Youth Services Funding**

27. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to reinstate funding to youth projects which were hard hit during the recession; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22245/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** As the Deputy is aware my Department, along with all Government Departments, was required to deliver substantial savings on all funding programmes in line with the Comprehensive Review of Expenditure 2012-2014.

In recent years funding for the provision of youth services has increased on an annual basis. Between 2016 and 2019 the annual current youth funding available to my Department has increased from €51.9m to €60.4m. This additional funding is being used for programmes that target disadvantaged young people and to assist national youth organisations in their work to support local voluntary youth services.

In addition, my Department is currently managing the most significant reform of youth services ever undertaken. This will provide an opportunity to identify need and to focus funding on young people most in need of intervention.

I recognise the value of youth work from both a social and an economic viewpoint, so strengthening our investment in youth work makes sense. In this regard, increasing the budget for youth service funding is a key priority for me.

## **Child Detention Centres**

28. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to the fact that 31 boys have been charged for criminal damage at a campus (details supplied) in 14 separate incidents in a two-year period between 2016 and 2018; and her views on this high number. [22240/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The Deputy will be aware that under Irish Law, criminal investigations can only be carried out by An Garda Síochána who then submit a report to the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP). The DPP, who operates independently, then decides whether or not someone should be prosecuted and for what crime. While Oberstown has procedures in place for notification of incidents to my Department, I am advised by Oberstown that it does not have access to the details of any follow up charges that relate to an incident.

## **School Completion Programme**

29. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of the school completion programme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22243/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I am very conscious that the School Completion Programme (SCP) continues to deliver a valuable service for some of our most vulnerable young people. Currently, the SCP receives annual funding of 24.7million.

My Department works with the Educational Welfare Service (EWS) to ensure that necessary resources are available to support this programme and to ensure staffing levels are sufficient to deliver a high quality service for those young people most at risk of early school leaving. However a number of long term complex issues continue to exist in relation to both the governance and the staffing of the programme.

In this regard and in recognition of the need for a strong policy platform for educational welfare services, including the SCP, I requested my officials establish a Task Group to support the further development and integration of these services. The work of this group is near completion and I am eager to ensure that output will result in a clear blueprint for the development of the three strands of the EWS, including the SCP.

A consultation event on the blueprint will be held on June 10th where those working with vulnerable young people as part of the EWS will have an opportunity to express their views and help shape the policy blueprint prior to its publication.

As part of the implementation of the actions contained in the blueprint I have requested that a new SCP scheme be scoped out and developed to ensure that its reach, resources and impact are maximised in supporting young people and I will also continue to examine options in relation to the employment status of SCP Coordinators and Project workers.

### **Youth Services Provision**

30. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which adequate supports remain available to children and teenagers who for one reason or another find themselves isolated from their peers; the extent to which this continues to be available to offer support in such circumstances; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22252/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** Both I, and my Department, are committed to ensuring that every young person in Ireland has access to the transformational power that participating in youth services can bring, and to that end we have invested €63.6M in current and capital funding in clubs, services and young people 2019. €35.18 million of which is for the Targeted Youth Funding Scheme.

The overall mission of the Targeted Youth Funding Scheme is to provide out of school supports to young people in their local communities to enable them to overcome adverse circumstances and achieve their full potential by strengthening their personal and social competencies. Young people aged 10 to 24 years of age who are described in the National Youth Strategy as marginalised, disadvantaged or vulnerable will be the primary target group for services available through the new scheme.

A further €11m is allocated to 30 national and major regional voluntary organisations through the Youth Service Grant Scheme. Among the recipients of the Youth Service Grant Scheme is SpunOut.ie which provides a youth information website created by young people, for young people. SpunOut.ie provides a space for young people to have their voices heard and to share their life experiences with other young people. I understand that their reach is more than 140,000 active readers each month.

In addition to this, 21 Youth Information Centres have been allocated €1.4m in 2019 to continue to provide young people with access to information on rights, opportunities, health, welfare and other matters.

## Youth Services Funding

31. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the details of future investment in youth supports and infrastructure; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22691/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The overall budget allocation for the youth sector in 2019 is € 60.4m in current funding. This represents an additional €1.5m over 2018; an increase of €8.5m in the youth funding provided in 2016. The level of funding supports the delivery of a range of youth work programmes and services for all young people, including those from disadvantaged communities, by the youth work sector. The additional funding will be used to support programmes in areas where there are disadvantaged young people and where there is a pressing need for targeted services to meet the needs of young people.

As the Deputy is aware my Department is managing the most significant reform of youth services ever undertaken. This reform will provide an opportunity to identify need and to focus funding on young people most in need of intervention. Future development and investment in youth services will be informed by the mapping exercise completed in 2017, which mapped youth service provision across the State. This mapping will assist the Department and the relevant ETB in developing a detailed social demographic profile in terms of both population numbers and deprivation levels. My Department is committed to working with ETBs to identify need and explore ways to address this need where it emerges.

The provision of additional funding to my Department to support the provision of youth services and infrastructure is a matter for consideration in the context of the annual Estimates and Budgetary process and having regard to the resources available to the Government.

## Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries

32. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to refer the final report of the commission of investigation into mother and baby institutions to An Garda Síochána; if her officials are liaising with officials in the Department of Justice and Equality on the matter; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21737/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The Commission of Investigation (Mother and Baby Homes and certain related Matters) was established to facilitate a purely fact finding investigation into matters of significant public concern. The Commission is due to deliver its final report in February 2020 and it is important not to pre-empt the outcome of the Commission's work.

While the Commission is not structured to adjudicate on individual behaviours, nor impose penalties, if its final report reveals issues which are potentially criminal in nature it will of course be referred to the appropriate investigative and prosecution authorities.

Subject to the advice of the Attorney General and Government approval, the report will be published and publicly available for consideration by all relevant authorities.

In the interim, any person with a complaint or allegation of a potentially criminal nature should make a report directly to An Garda Síochána. It is not necessary to await the completion of the Commission's work before doing so.

*Question No. 33 answered with Question No. 13.*

### **Child Protection**

34. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to establish further child and adolescent sexual assault treatment services units in addition to the unit located in County Galway; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22254/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I thank the Deputy for her question, which I take it is referring to the planned Barnahus/One House service for child victims of sexual abuse.

As the Deputy notes the plan is that the pilot service will open this year in Galway. A key aspect of the pilot is to establish the governance arrangements where three agencies, Tusla, the HSE and An Garda Síochána work together to provide the services needed by child victims of sexual assault in a child centred way, that supports them and their families. The interdepartmental group, established to provide oversight of the development of this service, will, in conjunction with those working in the pilot site, agree on the optimal number and location of centres.

The One House project is informed by international best practice, and is based on the Icelandic Barnahus model. The model brings together the forensic, protection, health, therapeutic and policing services in a child centred way in order to minimise as far as possible any additional trauma for the child and their family.

This new approach is aimed at ensuring children are not re-traumatised by having to recount the details of their ordeal a number of times to different people.

### **Child Poverty**

35. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the efforts her Department and others are taking to tackle child poverty; if child specific targets will be met under the national social target for poverty reduction; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22201/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** Under the Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures National Policy Framework (2014 – 2020) my Department, in collaboration with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection and other Departments, is taking a whole-of-government approach to tackling child poverty.

A considerable amount has been achieved through this cross government working and through the Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures implementation structures such as the National Advisory Council.

I and officials in my Department are working closely with the Council in identifying the most impactful approaches to be considered in addressing child poverty, and I am currently considering the outcomes from this process.

Effective measures have being introduced by the Government in the last three budgets. The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection specifically provides income support for families, spending in excess of €3 billion in 2018 through child-related supports, including: the Working Family Payment, Increases for a Qualified Child (to primary social welfare payments), the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance and Child Benefit.

Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures includes a target to reduce, by two thirds the number of child living in consistent poverty by 2020. Good progress is being made. The latest data from

the 2017 Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) shows a significant reduction in the consistent poverty rate for children over 2016, which decreased from 10.9% to 8.8%, a reduction of just over 2 percentage points (25,000 children), the second highest reduction in the rate since the collection of SILC data began in 2004.

The forthcoming National Childcare Scheme, under my Department, will mean the first ever statutory entitlement to financial support for childcare. The scheme aims to improve children's outcomes, support lifelong learning, and reduce the cost of quality childcare for families across Ireland and to help reduce child poverty.

The next National Action Plan on Poverty and Social Inclusion (2019 – 2025) currently being finalised by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Inclusion, is due to be published shortly. This will assemble in one place the range of policy measures across Government Departments that are designed to address different aspects of poverty and social inclusion, including child poverty. This Plan will keep child poverty firmly on the radar of Government and will help keep the momentum moving forward.

I have written to the Taoiseach asking that as we prepare for the Action Plan that the issue of child poverty is discussed at the heart of Government – involving every Minister, every Department as well as the agencies they work with.

### **Family Resource Centres**

36. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to the considerable staffing shortages that exist within family resource centres, particularly those in counties Longford and Westmeath; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22688/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** Tusla, the Child and Family Agency administers the Family Resource Centre Programme, which supports 121 Family Resource Centres (FRCs) throughout the country. FRCs provide a holistic service of child, family and community support and advocacy to all children and families in their community. Tusla provides financial support to FRCs to fund the salaries of a certain number of staff and to cover some overheads.

I am happy to have negotiated an additional €4.5m in funding for the Family Resource Centre Programme between 2018 and 2019. This allowed for increases in core funding for each centre, as well as the establishment of 11 new Family Resource Centres which are now fully operational.

FRCs are independent organisations and are managed by a Voluntary Board of Management which is representative of the local community. Each individual FRC is responsible for the recruitment of its employees and the terms and conditions under which they are employed.

I have been made aware of service pressures in some FRCs throughout the country. I have met with representatives of a number of FRCs, including centres in the counties to which the Deputy refers. I have also received representations from and on behalf of individual FRCs and their representative body, the Family Resource Centre National Forum (FRCNF) in relation to funding and their wish to increase staffing levels.

Tusla engages directly with FRCs, and the FRCNF, with regard to service pressures. Tusla has advised me that it has also been made aware of requests from certain FRCs for additional funding to increase staffing levels.

I highly value the Family Resource Centre Programme, and was pleased to secure an additional €1.5 million in funding for the Programme this year. As the Deputy may be aware, I recently announced that this additional funding will be used to:

- Increase core funding to each of the 110 Family Resource Centres which existed pre-2018 by 5%.

- Employ an additional 17 Family Support Workers, where one Family Resource Centre in each of the 17 Tusla geographical areas will receive funding to employ a Family Support Worker.

- Fund the Family Resource Centre Suicide Prevention and Mental Health Promotion Programme.

I recognise and value the positive impact of the work of Family Resource Centres in supporting families and local communities. I will continue to prioritise the Family Resource Centre Programme with a view to future funding as resources allow.

### Intellectual Property Management

37. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Taoiseach the value which the development of intellectual property contributed to the economy in 2018. [22525/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach(Deputy Seán Kyne):** The contribution of research and development to capital formation is given in the following table for 2012 to 2018. The total R&D is made up of domestically produced R&D as well as the imports and exports of Intellectual Property and R&D services. Total R&D less net R&D imports provides an estimate of the contribution of domestically produced R&D to the economy.

Please note that the 2012 to 2017 figures come from the annual National Income and Expenditure release of 2018 while the 2018 figures are the sum of the figures from the Quarterly National Accounts for the four quarters of 2018. All of these figures are subject to revision in the upcoming annual National Income and Expenditure release of 2019.

Research & Development in Capital Formation					€ millions			
Year	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	
Total R&D	9,574	8,083	9,944	30,553		58,137	26,810	25,221
Net R&D Imports	7,240	4,899	6,427	26,345		54,074	21,925	20,918
R&D less net R&D Imports	2,334	3,184	3,517	4,208		4,063	4,885	4,303

### Defence Forces Personnel Data

38. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of members of the Defence Forces who are citizens of another EU country; and the service branch each is in. [22333/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** Citizenship of Defence Forces personnel is not recorded in a way that is readily accessed through the Personnel Management System. The collation of this data would require respective Formation Headquarters to conduct a manual review of all personnel files within their control and accordingly, such a voluminous task is not feasible.

### **Defence Forces Properties**

39. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to upgrade the furniture and interior of the guard room at the magazine in the Curragh Camp, County Kildare. [22406/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** I have been advised that the magazine guardroom is situated in a modern, recently constructed building. There are no plans to upgrade the interior of the building as the guardroom is less than 5 years old. The only outstanding work is the replacement of two sockets which will take place in the coming days. Replacement furniture has been ordered and its delivery is expected within two weeks.

### **Defence Forces Properties**

40. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if funding is available in 2019 for the refurbishment works on block 7 in Plunkett Barracks; the length of time the refurbishment works will take to complete; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22701/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** I have been advised that it is planned to upgrade and refurbish Plunkett Block 7 with work starting on site in 2019. Provision has been made in the 2019 Defence Estimates to fund that portion of the refurbishment works scheduled for 2019. The scope of the work will include the complete refurbishment of the building. It will be upgraded, room layouts altered, the ablution areas totally renewed and all sanitary fittings replaced, finishes to floors, walls and ceilings upgraded and the mechanical and electrical services replaced entirely.

A multi-discipline Design Team was appointed for the project and they have developed detailed proposals, with a view to tenders for the work being sought and the work commencing on site as soon as a Contractor is procured and appointed.

Stage 2 of the tender has commenced with the shortlisted contractors invited to submit their tender proposals. The closing date for receipt of tenders is 30 May 2019. Following this an assessment of tenders will be conducted before proceeding to a contract award. The expected duration of the construction work is approximately 9 months from commencement.

### **Air Corps Strength**

41. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of pilots and air traffic controllers who are due to graduate in both 2019 and 2020, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22857/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** The military authorities have provided the table below which displays the information sought by the Deputy.

Year	Pilots due to graduate/graduated	Air Traffic Controllers due to graduate/graduated
2019	10	3
2020	0*	2

**\*Pilots that were due to qualify in early 2020 will now graduate in Q4 of 2019.**

The Government remains committed to maximising recruitment to increase the strength of the Air Corps and the Permanent Defence Force (PDF) overall and to retaining the capacity of the PDF to operate effectively across all roles.

### Defence Forces Equipment

42. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the position regarding the virtual desktop architecture project for the Defence Forces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22858/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** My priority as Minister of State with Responsibility for Defence is to ensure that the operational capability of the Defence Forces is maintained to the greatest extent possible so as to enable the Defence Forces to carry out their roles as assigned by Government.

Maintenance and upgrading of military and technical equipment for the Defence Forces remains a clear focus for me. Future equipment priorities for the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service are considered in the context of the White Paper on Defence as part of the capability development and equipment priorities planning process. The principal aim over the period of the White Paper will be to replace and upgrade, as required, existing capabilities in order to retain a flexible response for a wide range of operational requirements, including response to security risks and other emergencies, both at home and overseas.

In accordance with the National Development Plan (NDP), the capital allocation for Defence has been increased to €106 million for 2019, an increase of €29 million. The NDP provides for a total of €541 million over the period 2018 to 2022. This level of capital funding will allow the Defence Organisation to undertake a programme of sustained equipment replacement and infrastructural development across the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service as identified and prioritised in the Defence White Paper and builds on the significant investment programme over recent years.

The Government is currently investing €12.8 million in updating the Communications Information and Security Network System for the Defence Forces so as to enable the current system to migrate to a Virtual Desktop Architecture. This information technology modernisation project commenced in 2016 when a contract was awarded to Evros Technology, an Irish company, and is scheduled to run until 2021. The project is on track and within budget. It will enable the Defence Forces to securely evolve its networks and information systems and to increase interoperability between users and other government departments and external agencies.

I am satisfied that the Defence Forces have the necessary modern and effective range of equipment and technology available to them which is line with best international standards in order to fulfil all roles assigned to them by Government.

### Ministerial Meetings

43. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade when he last spoke with his Canadian counterpart; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22314/19]

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

There have been strong and sustained Canadian-Irish bilateral contacts in recent years, including most recently a meeting last week between the Taoiseach and Prime Minister Trudeau, which took place en marge of a conference in Paris. I understand that the Taoiseach updated Prime Minister Trudeau on current Brexit and Northern Ireland developments and they spoke on other important issues, including the ratification of CETA.

Otherwise, Prime Minister Trudeau visited Ireland in July 2017 and there was a follow up visit by the Taoiseach to Canada not long after. 2018 saw several high level visits of Government Ministers to Canada and this has been maintained into 2019. St. Patrick's Day 2019 saw the Minister Bruton visit Toronto and Minister of State Cannon visit Calgary and Vancouver, where we have opened a new Consulate General in recent months. The Ministers launched the Government's new strategy for Canada, which sets a high level of ambition on all aspects of the relationship, and a further expansion of our footprint, with a new Consulate in Toronto before 2025.

I have previously spoken by phone with my Canadian counterpart, Minister Freeland, in October 2017. I was also fortunate to visit Ottawa and Toronto earlier in that year in my previous Ministerial role, and saw first-hand the thriving Irish communities that exist there. I was warmly received by Minister McKenna, who has responsibility for Environment and Climate change, and we discussed the excellent and close relationship that our two countries share.

I was also delighted to address the Ireland Canada Business Association conference last November to speak to the historic and continuing strong and collaborative relations we enjoy with Canada, and the potential of our bilateral relationship in the coming years. I look forward to travelling to Canada and engaging with the Canadian Government, as well as visiting Ireland's Embassy in Ottawa and our new Consulate General in Vancouver, in the near future.

### **Brexit Preparations**

44. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the steps he will take to prepare for a no-deal Brexit in view of the collapse of talks between the British Labour Party and the Conservative Party; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22514/19]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** My Department and I continue to monitor closely the ongoing political developments in the United Kingdom.

The decision of the April European Council to extend the Article 50 process until 31 October 2019, at the request of Prime Minister May, reduced the risk of an immediate no-deal Brexit. However, the ongoing and deepening political impasse in the UK, to which the Deputy refers, and the failure to date of the UK Parliament to ratify the Withdrawal Agreement mean that the risk of a no-deal Brexit is a significant and serious concern and we continue to prepare accordingly.

The Cabinet had a further discussion on Brexit last week and has agreed that work on preparations for a no-deal Brexit should continue to be taken forward as a matter of priority across Government Departments and Agencies.

The immediate focus since December 2018 has been on ensuring the necessary contingency measures are in place to limit the potential negative effects of a no deal Brexit. Much of this work, details of which were published in the Government's December 2018 Brexit Contingency Action Plan and subsequent updates, will continue to be relevant in any Brexit scenario.

The period afforded by the agreed extension is being used to further deepen our no-deal responses and to add to or refine completed measures to maximise readiness for a no-deal scenario. Many of the preparatory measures undertaken by businesses should also be of benefit in any scenario but it is important that businesses and other affected sectors continue to do their own preparations also.

The Deputy will be aware that legislative provisions have been passed by the Oireachtas in the Withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union (Consequential Provisions) Act 2019 and remain ready to be deployed if and when required.

Brexit, in whatever form it takes, will have a significant impact on Ireland. Government, businesses and citizens must make the necessary preparations to minimise its impact on our trade and our economy. We are determined to be as ready as we can be, whatever the outcome of the Brexit process.

### **Brexit Negotiations**

45. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on recent discussions he has had with Mr. Michel Barnier about the Brexit impasse; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22515/19]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Throughout the Article 50 process I, as well as officials from my Department, have had frequent and ongoing contact with representatives from other EU27 Member States, the Commission and the Article 50 Task Force headed by Michel Barnier, as well as the UK.

I last met with Mr Barnier on 8 April during his visit to Dublin in advance of the European Council. On that occasion we discussed preparations for the European Council meeting, and the question of an extension to Article 50. On that occasion, Mr Barnier also held meetings with the Taoiseach and Minister Donohoe. I also met him again briefly on the margins of the General Affairs Council (Article 50) in Luxemborg on 9 April.

Since the European Council (Article 50) meeting of 10 April, and the decision to extend the date of the UK's departure from the European Union until 31 October, my officials have been, and will continue to be, in regular contact with both the Article 50 Taskforce and the Commission's Brexit Preparedness Group to discuss and review ongoing developments.

There is complete agreement that responsibility for avoiding a no-deal Brexit firmly lies with the UK. At the same time, there is deep concern about the ongoing political impasse in the UK and real disappointment that the cross-party talks between the Government and the Labour Party ended without agreement. Unfortunately, it is our assessment that the risk of a no-deal Brexit is very real and therefore we continue to work urgently on no-deal preparedness.

My most recent discussions with Mr. Barnier and my colleagues throughout the EU once

again underlined the strong solidarity with Ireland and the EU's absolute commitment, notwithstanding the ongoing political impasse in the UK, to protect the Good Friday Agreement. As the European Council made clear again on 10 April, the Withdrawal Agreement, including the backstop, cannot be renegotiated, and any unilateral commitments by the UK Government should be compatible with the letter and the spirit of the Withdrawal Agreement. However, should the position of the UK evolve, such as in the area of customs, then the EU would be prepared to reconsider the Political Declaration on the future relationship.

The European Council will review the current situation at its meeting on 20-21 June. This discussion will be prepared at the General Affairs Council (Article 50) on 18 June, at which I will have another opportunity to meet Mr. Barnier.

### **Registration of Births**

46. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade when a foreign birth registration application by a person (details supplied) will be processed and original supporting documentation returned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22557/19]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Foreign Births Registration, by its nature, can be a detailed and complex process, often involving official documentation related to three generations and issued by several jurisdictions. Due to the complex nature of Foreign Births Registration, it takes on average between 6 to 12 months to process an application.

With regard to the specific application the Deputy has enquired about, I can confirm that the application in question has been received. A member of the Foreign Births Registration Team will contact the applicant directly if any further documents or clarifications are required to process the application.

### **Foreign Conflicts**

47. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if war crimes and genocide against the Rohingya were discussed at recent EU meetings he attended in view of the recent UN comments on same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22626/19]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** In January this year, I attended the EU-ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting in Brussels, during which the crisis in Rakhine State was raised with our ASEAN counterparts, which includes Myanmar. Furthermore, during the EU Foreign Affairs Committee in December 2018, Council Conclusions were adopted calling on Myanmar to hold to account those responsible for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide and to take meaningful action towards the creation of conditions conducive to a safe, voluntary, dignified and sustainable return of those displaced from Rakhine State to their places of origin.

Two weeks ago, following a 10-day visit to Bangladesh, Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia, the UN Independent International Fact Finding Mission on Myanmar (IIFFM) urged the international community to cut off all financial and other support to Myanmar's military, owing to the Myanmar Government's lack of resolve in addressing the nation's conflicts and protecting human rights. The IIFFM also cited the need for the commanders of Myanmar's military to be

isolated and brought before a credible court to answer charges of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide.

Ireland, together with our EU and UN partners, has consistently called for the accountability of those who are responsible for such crimes and supports actions at international level in this regard. The EU has also put in place targeted restrictive measures, which Ireland continues to support, against senior military officers of the Myanmar Security Forces responsible for these acts.

Ireland has strongly, directly and repeatedly stated that the best long-term framework for a sustainable solution that addresses the concerns of the Rohingya, including the key issue of securing citizenship rights and the protection that accrues, remains the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State which was led by the late Kofi Annan.

Ireland continues to call for the full implementation of the Advisory Commission's findings and will continue to do so. Officials in my Department, including in the Embassy of Ireland in Thailand, which is also accredited to Myanmar, will continue to monitor the situation.

### **Ministerial Communications**

48. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has spoken recently with the US Secretary of State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22703/19]

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

I last visited the US in February, where I met with senior Congressional leaders and launched the Government's new US and Canada strategy. During this visit, I also met with Secretary of State Pompeo at a Defeat-ISIS Coalition conference. We discussed issues of mutual concern related to the conference, but also bilateral and broader international issues.

My engagements were followed in March with visits by the largest ever delegation of Government Ministers to the US for St. Patrick's Day. In total, eight Ministers, the Attorney General and the Taoiseach visited fifteen cities and had a range of high level engagements, including in the White House with President Trump.

The Government has since had the opportunity to engage with a high level Congressional delegation, representing the Friends of Ireland Caucus in Congress and led by Speaker of the House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi. I met personally with this delegation in April, as did the Taoiseach and the Minister for Finance. The Government also hosted a State Dinner for the delegation at which other Government Ministers and senior officials were present. We took these opportunities to fully brief the delegation on a range of issues, including Brexit and Northern Ireland developments, record two-way trade and investment, as well as Irish emigration to the US and the undocumented Irish.

As the Deputy will be aware, President Trump is scheduled to visit Ireland in early June and is expected to meet with the Taoiseach. This meeting, and other upcoming engagements with the US Administration and Congressional leaders, provide excellent opportunities for open and fruitful discussions.

## Diplomatic Representation

49. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if each Irish honorary or consulate general is contactable to deal with emergency incidents on a 24-7 basis; if all emergency incidents, especially during the out-of-hours period, are dealt with at the nearest Irish embassy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22856/19]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Ireland's Honorary Consuls are not asked to provide a 24-hour, seven-day service. Our Embassies and career Consulates abroad do not have staff permanently on duty round-the-clock, but do operate an out-of-hours contact service. If required, officers can be called in to deal with emergencies and do so on a regular basis.

A citizen in difficulty abroad who is unable to contact the nearest Irish mission can telephone the Department's Consular Assistance Unit in Dublin on +3531 408 2000. A Duty Officer is available at the same number outside of office hours.

## Tax Exemptions

50. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Finance if he will liaise with the Revenue Commissioners to address the anomaly that exists regarding non-habitual residents' tax exemptions under Article 19, which excludes civil servants, gardaí and members of the Defence Forces from availing of such exemptions in Portugal, in view of the fact that holders of other occupations, including semi-State employees, can avail of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22589/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Article 19 (*Government Service*) of the Ireland-Portugal Double Taxation Convention follows the standard provisions of double tax conventions internationally concerning the allocation of taxing rights in relation to pensions on foot of central and local government employments. Paragraph 2 of that Article provides that a pension, paid to an individual in respect of services rendered to the State, is taxable only in Ireland - unless the individual is both a resident of, and a national of, Portugal.

The *non-habitual resident tax exemption* to which the Deputy's question refers is an exemption provided by Portuguese law: It is not provided under Article 19 or any other provision of the Ireland-Portugal Double Taxation Convention. The terms and scope of, and any perceived anomaly regarding, the exemption are a matter for Portuguese law. Consequently, it is unclear how Revenue or I could have any role in that regard and I am advised by Revenue that it is not its practice to comment on the application of the provisions of the national law of other countries.

## Tax Compliance

51. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Finance if an inspection by the Revenue Commissioners has taken place to ascertain whether a company (details supplied) paid taxes on service charges collected and credit card tips collected since it opened in 2018; and if so, the outcome of same. [22740/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Section 851A of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 provides for taxpayer confidentiality and prohibits Revenue from disclosing information in respect of any taxpayer. On that basis, it is not possible for Revenue to provide

the information requested by the Deputy.

Revenue has however assured me that it operates a very comprehensive risk-based compliance programme, which is supported by a broad range of data, intelligence and analytical technologies. The nature and potential severity of the intervention undertaken by Revenue in any non-compliant case is determined by the risks identified and the behaviour of the taxpayer.

I am informed that Revenue carried out almost 581,000 compliance interventions in 2018 that yielded €572m for the Exchequer and I commend it for its commitment to ensuring continued high tax compliance rates in Ireland and a 'level playing field' for all businesses and taxpayers.

### **Revenue Commissioners**

52. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Finance if the attention of the Revenue Commissioners has been drawn to the delays experienced by customers using the contact number it has provided in order to access appointments; his plans to address this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22323/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised by Revenue that the service to which the Deputy is referring suffered a temporary technical fault, which resulted in customer calls not being correctly routed to call agents for follow up action. The service has since been restored and is available at telephone number 056-7783700, which is a single contact number to manage appointment requests across the South East geographic area.

Revenue has also advised me that it contacted customers who tried to use the service during the breakdown period, where contact details were left on the system, to assist them with their queries and arrange appointments as required. If the Deputy is aware of any person that encountered difficulties with the service and has not yet received a call-back, he can notify Revenue at telephone number 01-8655401. Revenue has assured me that it will make immediate contact with any such cases.

### **Tax Credits**

53. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Finance the policy regarding personal tax credits (details supplied). [22339/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised by Revenue that it does not have a policy of withdrawing tax credits based on a taxpayer's age.

In fact, Revenue seeks to apply certain credits automatically in situations where it has the relevant information available already on the taxpayer record. For example, the Age Tax Credit, as provided for by section 464 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997, is granted automatically in the year in which the taxpayer reaches 65 years of age. For jointly assessed couples, the credit is granted automatically when the older spouse or civil partner reaches 65 years of age.

Revenue also reserves the right to withdraw tax credits where there is no longer entitlement to them. For example, Revenue will withdraw credits based on flat rate employment-related expenses where a taxpayer is no longer in employment.

Revenue has confirmed that if the Deputy can provide the details of the cases to which he is referring, including the specific credit(s) involved, it will investigate the matter(s) and revert

directly to him.

### **Amusement Machine Licences**

54. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Finance the outcome of the national compliance project on the gaming and amusement sector conducted by the Revenue Commissioners; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22417/19]

55. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the fact that industry sources estimate that around 30,000 unlicensed gaming machines are in operation across the State and that the Revenue Commissioners is missing out on €15 million in gaming machine licence fees annually; if he or officials from his Department have met or discussed this issue with the chair of the Revenue Commissioners; the explanation provided by the Revenue Commissioners for not meeting its statutory responsibilities to collect these monies; the reason the Revenue Commissioners have only recently, since late 2017, commenced a compliance campaign against unlicensed and illegal gambling operations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22418/19]

56. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 67 of 27 February 2019 and 69 of 22 February 2019, if the Revenue Commissioners have contacted local authorities to resolve the information gaps in their operational records regarding the fact that they did not maintain a list of the areas in which Part III of the 1956 Act is in operation; if the Comptroller and Auditor General has examined the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22419/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 54 to 56, inclusive, together.

I am advised that Revenue commenced a nationwide compliance project in 2017 in relation to the gaming and amusement sector, including compliance with licensing laws. Revenue's enforcement of the law in relation to gaming and amusement machine licensing is based on detecting machines that are unlicensed and in particular, detecting gaming machines that have been licensed improperly as amusement machines. As of 11 April 2019, the total yield under the project was €2.68 million. In addition, a total of 325 gaming machines have been seized to date for failure to comply with excise licensing requirements. Revenue has confirmed that the project is ongoing and it continues to be a priority.

I note the Deputy's reference to industry estimates of the number of unlicensed gaming machines in operation and the possible excise receipts that would be involved. Revenue has advised that it is not aware of the methodology used for these estimates and, in general, considers that there are inherent difficulties in measuring the scale of such illegal activity. In the case of the national compliance project on gaming and amusements, Revenue is making use of internal taxpayer records across all tax headings, information on gaming and amusement licences granted previously and sharing of intelligence from Revenue offices across the country in its efforts to target compliance and enforcement activity under the project. This allows for resources to be deployed based on assessment of compliance risk and ensures the best use of resources.

Neither I nor officials from my Department have met or had discussions with the Revenue Chairman in relation to this project. However, both Revenue and my Department participated in the discussions of the recent interdepartmental working group on the future licensing and regulation of gambling. I understand that Revenue did provide information to the interdepartmental working group during its discussions on the progress of the national compliance

project and this is reflected in the report of the group which was published by the Department of Justice and Equality on 20 March 2019. Revenue has also advised that it must always plan for the deployment of its resources across all tax headings and that sector-specific projects such as the national compliance project on gaming and amusement machines are undertaken as part of its normal role in serving the community by fairly and efficiently collecting taxes and duties and implementing customs controls. Similar projects have been undertaken in the past in other areas, industry sectors and professions.

I note the Deputy's query in relation to the identification of local authority areas where Part III of the Gaming and Lotteries Act 1956 is in operation. Under this Part of the 1956 Act, local authorities may decide by resolution if gaming is to be permitted in respect of the whole or a specified part of its administrative area. If gaming is permitted in the area concerned, a trader must first apply to the local District Court for what is called a 'certificate for a gaming licence'. The relevant local authority and An Garda Síochána must be given 28 days' notice of this court application. Revenue does not have any statutory role under this court process. If the District Court grants this certificate, this allows the trader to apply to Revenue for a Gaming Licence, which is required for each premises where gaming machines are made available to play. If the trader concerned presents the District Court certificate to Revenue and has paid the relevant licence fee, Revenue is under a statutory obligation under section 19 of the Gaming and Lotteries Act 1956 to grant a Gaming Licence. In addition to a Gaming Licence, a trader must also apply to Revenue for a Gaming Machine Licence under section 43 of the Finance Act 1975 in respect of each gaming machine made available to play. Gaming Machine Licences may only be granted by Revenue to traders who have already been granted a Gaming Licence.

I am advised that the sole focus of Revenue is on whether the trader concerned has appropriate Gaming Licences and Gaming Machine Licences. Irrespective of whether a local authority has adopted a resolution under Part III of the 1956 Act, Revenue carries out a standard procedure when engaging with traders who have been identified as making gaming machines available for play in the public place. Such traders are issued with a 21-day warning letter warning that it is an offence under section 43 of the Finance Act 1975 to make a gaming machine available for play without the required gaming machine licence and this includes a warning that failure to comply with licensing requirements may lead to seizure of the unlicensed gaming machines. This is followed up by similar 14-day and 7-day warning letters where necessary. If the trader concerned has not complied with the licensing requirements by this point, the machines are subject to seizure by Revenue. This approach places the onus entirely on the trader concerned to establish if he or she is in a position to obtain a gaming machine licence.

I understand that at the outset of the compliance project, Revenue did make enquiries to confirm the position of all local authorities in relation to whether they had adopted a resolution under Part III of the Gaming and Lotteries Act 1956. In a number of cases, the resolutions concerned were adopted over previous decades and there were difficulties in establishing the position in relation to a number of local authority areas. In addition, the widespread reorganisation of local authorities in 2014 resulted in a lack of clarity as to previous resolutions that may have been made. Ultimately, Revenue determined that it was for the individual traders concerned to clarify their position with regard to the 1956 Act. The trader must apply to a District Court for a certificate for a Gaming Licence and the relevant local authority is placed on notice of the District Court application. If a certificate for a gaming licence is granted by the District Court, the trader can apply to Revenue for a Gaming Licence. If the trader is unable to obtain a certificate for a Gaming Licence, he or she is not in a position to apply to Revenue for a Gaming Licence and Revenue will, following reasonable warning, be able to take enforcement action. I am advised that this approach allows Revenue to deploy its resources in the most efficient manner possible under the project. Revenue has not been in contact with the Comptroller and

Auditor General in relation to this issue.

### **Tax Yield**

57. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated revenue that would be raised from the introduction of a wealth tax of 0.5%, 1% and 2%, respectively, on assets of €1 million in value and above with no exemptions in tabular form. [22474/19]

58. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated revenue that would be raised from the introduction of a wealth tax of 0.5%, 1% and 2%, respectively, on assets of €1 million in value and above with an exemption of €250,000 per child in tabular form. [22475/19]

59. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated revenue that would be raised from the introduction of a wealth tax of 0.5%, 1% and 2%, respectively, on assets of €1 million in value and above with exemptions for farmers in tabular form. [22476/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 57 to 59, inclusive, together.

As outlined to the Deputy in previous PQs (including PQ's 21932/19, 21933/19, 21934/19 & 21935/19, answered on 21 May), in order to estimate the potential revenue from a wealth tax, it is necessary to identify the wealth held by individuals. As there is currently no such wealth tax in operation in Ireland, the Department understands that the Revenue Commissioners have no basis or requirement to compile the data needed to produce estimates in relation to a potential wealth tax. Although an individual's assets and liabilities are declared to the Revenue in a number of specific circumstances (for example, after a death), this information is not a complete measure of assets and liabilities in the State, nor is it recorded in a manner that would allow analysis of the implications of an overarching wealth based tax.

However, in 2013 the Central Statistics Office conducted the first comprehensive survey of household wealth in Ireland (the Household Finance and Consumption Survey (HFCS)). The survey provides information on the ownership and values of different types of assets and liabilities along with more general information on income, employment and household composition.

During 2016, my Department, jointly with the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), conducted a research project into the distribution of wealth in Ireland and the potential implications of a wealth tax using the HFCS. The research formed part of an on-going joint-research programme with the ESRI on the Macro-Economy and Taxation. The research paper, available on the ESRI website, presented results on the composition of wealth across both the wealth and income distributions in Ireland. A number of wealth tax scenarios were then applied to the Irish data (wealth tax regimes from other jurisdictions and hypothetical scenarios). In each case, the associated tax bases and revenue yields, the number of liable households across the income distribution, and the characteristics of the households affected are outlined. While the scenarios do not fully capture the parameters outlined in the questions the Deputy may find them informative.

In order to estimate the yield from a tax with the precise parameters as outlined in the Deputy's questions, it would be necessary to seek the agreement of the CSO to revisit its original survey data for this specified purpose. This would be a significant undertaking that would take considerable time and resources to complete. It is also noted that the HFCS does not include specific data on the global assets for those domiciled or ordinarily resident and the domestic assets for those resident for tax purposes. As such, any estimate on the yield obtained from HFCS

data would not fully capture the parameters outlined in the Deputy's question. It is therefore not possible for me to provide the revenue estimate sought in each of these three PQ's.

### **Help-To-Buy Scheme Eligibility**

60. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if the definition of "first-time buyer" for the purposes of the help-to-buy scheme is planned to cover cases in which a person has previously legally purchased a home but never held a beneficial interest in it, such as in a case in which the person acted as a trustee; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22479/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Help to Buy incentive, introduced with effect from 1 January 2017, is a scheme to assist first-time purchasers with the deposit they need to buy or build a new house or apartment. The incentive gives a refund of Income Tax and Deposit Interest Retention Tax (DIRT) paid in Ireland over the previous four years, subject to limits outlined in the legislation.

Section 477C of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 outlines the definitions and conditions that apply to the Help to Buy scheme. A claimant under the scheme must make an application confirming they meet various conditions specified in the section, including that they are a first-time purchaser and that they have completed a tax return form and are tax compliant for each of the tax years for which a claim is being made. The obligations apply to each party, where there is more than one party to a claim.

The definition of "first-time purchaser" for the purposes of the scheme is an individual who, at the time of making a claim under the scheme, has not, either individually or jointly with any other person, previously purchased or previously built, directly or indirectly, on his or her own behalf a dwelling. The "qualifying residence" must be occupied as the sole or main residence of the first-time purchaser.

I am advised by Revenue that in the circumstances raised by the Deputy, where a person had previously legally purchased a home but never held a beneficial interest in the home, the full facts of the case would have to be established to determine if, at the time of the claim, the individual met the definition of "first-time purchaser" outlined above. Revenue advise me that this type of claim would need to be examined on a case by case basis. In cases where an individual had previously acted as a trustee to purchase a dwelling, the terms of the trust would have a bearing on the position. If it were determined that an individual would be a "first-time purchaser" for the purposes of the help to buy scheme, then the individual concerned may qualify for the relief if the other conditions for the incentive are met.

If the Deputy has a specific case in mind, he may wish to send full details of the case to Revenue to determine the position on qualification for the incentive.

### **Brexit Data**

61. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of businesses that have applied for the key customs registration, the economic operators registration and identification number; the number of Irish businesses with such a registration; the turnaround time for the Revenue Commissioners to process a registration application; the number of Irish businesses the Revenue Commissioners estimate will require such a registration in the course of its normal business after 31 October 2019 in the event of a disorderly Brexit; and if he will

make a statement on the matter. [22619/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Revenue has indicated that there has been a significant increase in registrations for Economic Operators Registration and Identification (EORI) numbers year on year. An EORI number is the minimum requirement for businesses that wish to trade with, or through, the UK following their departure from the EU.

Details of the number of EORI registrations applied for and issued since 2017 is as follows:

Year	Number of EORI Registrations
2017	2,595
2018	2,976
2019 to date*	6,387

Once a business is registered with the Revenue Online Service (ROS), the turnaround time for Revenue to process an EORI number application is approximately 3 minutes.

I am advised by Revenue that following an analysis of the VAT Information Exchange System (VIES) data, they identified approximately 84,000 businesses who traded with the UK in 2017. In 2018 Revenue wrote to approximately 62,000 within this group who had not registered for an EORI number and advised them of the requirement to register for an EORI number if they intended to trade with, or through, the UK post-Brexit.

The number of businesses that currently hold an EORI number since the introduction of the requirement in 2009 is 46,432\*.

\*figures reflect up to 20 May 2019.

### Universal Social Charge Abolition

62. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to reduce or abolish the universal social charge; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22640/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** An inter-departmental working group was established in February 2018 to examine and report on options for the amalgamation of USC and PRSI over the medium-term. The working group completed their work, in line with their terms of reference and their report was submitted to me in late 2018. Follow-on decisions will be taken in due course and I will make these public at the appropriate time.

More generally, the Government is committed to measures that positively benefit workers while also keeping the tax base broad.

Our income tax system has been transformed since 2008, following a necessary reform to broaden the income tax base in the interest of ensuring a stable revenue stream to fund essential public services.

I am determined to balance the priorities of ensuring that our personal taxation system remains progressive, competitive but also resilient in the future.

This is why we have been introducing targeted changes to the income tax system within available resources to make steady and sustainable progress in reducing the income tax burden, focusing on low and middle income earners. This has been done by making targeted changes to the USC and also by increasing the entry point to the higher rate of income tax.

### **Tax Reliefs Eligibility**

63. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he will address a matter regarding the normal place of work for a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22657/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Deputy is seeking clarity regarding the term “normal place of work” in the context of the eligibility of a person to claim income tax relief in respect of the expenses of business mileage from their home, which the person regards as their normal place of work. The person in question has the use of a company car and spends a small percentage of their working time working at their employer’s head office and the rest of their working time working in the field and from home.

I am advised by Revenue where an employee uses his/her private car for business purposes, and he/she incurs the total cost of such usage (for example, insurance, tax, running costs), then the reimbursement in respect of the cost of business use of the car can be made free of tax by the employer by reference to either a flat rate per kilometre allowance (i.e. prevailing civil service “mileage rates”) or actual costs incurred. However, in this instance, the employee in question is provided with the use of a company car and, in such circumstances, an income tax benefit in kind charge in respect of the use of the vehicle may arise for the employee. Where an employee is obliged to personally incur some of the running costs (e.g. fuel), the benefit in kind charge is reduced accordingly. Further guidance on the charge to benefit in kind on the provision of a car to an employee may be found on Revenue’s website.

It is not clear from the information provided whether the person concerned intends to claim business mileage expenses from his/her employer or to make a claim for income tax relief in respect of the expenses to Revenue. In addition, the exact nature and circumstances of his/her working arrangements and requirements are not clear. Although it is not possible for Revenue to express a view on the “normal place of work” in this specific case having regard to the information furnished by the Deputy, Revenue has advised that the person concerned has made direct contact with them on this query. Revenue will follow up the query with the person and, subject to receipt of further information, will advise them of their tax entitlements regarding motoring expenses.

### **VAT Rate Application**

64. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the appropriate VAT treatment of car wash and valeting services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22745/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the VAT rating of goods and services is subject to EU VAT law, with which Irish VAT law must comply. In accordance with Irish VAT legislation, car wash and valeting services are liable to VAT at the reduced rate, currently 13.5%.

### **European Council Meetings**

65. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Finance If he had bilateral meetings with his counterparts at the most recent meeting of the Economic and Financial Affairs Council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22865/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** At the last meeting of the Eurogroup

and the Economic and Financial Affairs Council on 16-17 May I met my French counterpart, Minister Bruno Le Maire. We discussed the proposed Budgetary Instrument for Competitiveness and Convergence (BICC) and the current state of play on Brexit.

I also had a bilateral meeting with Commissioner Moscovici and discussed the semester process with him.

### Liquor Licence Data

66. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Finance the number and percentage of pubs and bars in each of the six licence bands in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22866/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised by Revenue that 7,922 Excise Liquor Licences were issued in 2018. The number and percentage of licences that issued for each of the six Licence Bands are set out in the following table.

Turnover Bands	Number of Licenses	%
Band 1 – Under €190,500	3,923	49.5%
Band 2 - €190,500 - €380,999	1,862	23.5%
Band 3 - €381,000 - €634,999	881	11.1%
Band 4 - €635,000 - €952,499	499	6.3%
Band 5 - €952,500 - €1,269,999	291	3.7%
Band 6 - €1,270,000 or more	466	5.9%
Grand Total	7,922	100.0%

### Garda Stations

67. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the date for the opening of Ballinspittle Garda station; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22379/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran):** The Programme for Government included for the reopening of a number of closed Garda Stations (6) throughout the country, including Ballinspittle Garda Station, Co. Cork. OPW is currently completing the tender documents for the necessary works at this Station. Tenders will be invited over the coming weeks following which the tenders will be assessed and a contract awarded. It is expected that the works will be completed and the building ready for handover to An Garda Síochána by the end of the year.

The opening of the Garda Station is an operational matter for An Garda Síochána.

### Public Sector Staff Retirements

68. **Deputy Hildegard Naughton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform

when the report under section 3A(6) of the Public Service Superannuation (Age of Retirement) Act 2018 will be finalised and published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22772/19]

77. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if a person (details supplied) is entitled to extend a period of employment under the Public Service Superannuation (Age of Retirement) Act 2018. [22783/19]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 68 and 77 together.

On 5 December 2017, the Government made the decision to increase the compulsory retirement age to 70, for public servants recruited prior to 1 April 2004. Primary legislation was necessary in order to bring that change into effect. It was made clear at the time that until such legislation was enacted, the compulsory retirement age of 65, which applied to the vast majority of this cohort, remained in effect and pre-2004 public servants reaching that age would be required to retire.

Interim arrangements were provided for the cohort of public servants who reached their compulsory retirement age of 65 after the Government Decision because, while they would be aware of the Government’s decision, they would be unable to avail of it. Those arrangements permitted these individuals to be rehired post-retirement for a period of 1 year until they reached the age of eligibility for the State Pension (Contributory). Without that specific arrangement, they would have been required to cease working on reaching the age of 65.

The Public Service Superannuation (Age of Retirement) Act 2018 was enacted on 26 December 2018. Under the Act, any relevant public servant who had not already reached their compulsory retirement age of 65 before that date has a new compulsory retirement age of 70. Enactment of the legislation had no effect on those public servants who retired at 65 prior to the 26 December 2018 and who availed of a one year contract under the interim arrangements. The terms of their contracts continue to apply and they will cease working when they reach the age of 66.

Section 3 of the 2018 Act also provides that I, as Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, within three months of the passing of the Act, would prepare and lay before the Oireachtas a report on the public servants who were forced to retire between 6 December 2017 and the commencement of the Act, due to reaching the age of 65 years, and on potential remedies to assist this cohort of worker. This Report was laid before the Oireachtas on 26 March 2019 and is publicly available on the [www.gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie) website and in the Oireachtas Library online catalogue.

Having considered all of the issues outlined in the Report, I am satisfied that the interim arrangements were an appropriate temporary policy response at the time of the Government Decision, pending enactment of the legislation. The terms of those arrangements were clear, unambiguous and made known to those who availed of them. Accordingly, for the reasons set out in the report, I do not propose to make any changes to those terms.

### **Pension Provisions**

69. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform further to Parliamentary Question No. 197 of 2 October 2018, when the new guidance on the implementation of sections 52(6) and (7) of the 2012 Act will be finalised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22290/19]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I would advise the Deputy that for the purposes of preparing the new guidance on the implementation of section 52(6) and (7) of the Public Service Pensions (Single Scheme and other Provisions) Act 2012, referred to in my answer to Parliamentary Question No. 197 of 2 October 2018, my Department has carried out a review into the operation of those provisions. As part of the review, it is now considered necessary to seek further legal advice from the Office of the Attorney General. Once that advice has been received, and considered, my Department should be in a position to issue the new guidance for the attention of all public service pension administrators. I am hopeful that this process can be completed within a matter of months.

### Garda Station Refurbishment

70. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the amount the OPW spent on the refurbishment of Garda stations in the Laois Garda division in 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22315/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran):** I can confirm the Office of Public Works have undertaken works relating to refurbishment, renovation or maintenance of facilities in twelve Garda Stations in County Laois in 2018/19. Details are included below and incorporate works funded by both the Office of Public Works and An Garda Síochána.

Garda Station	Description of current/planned works.	2018 €	2019 (to 21/05/19) €
Durrow GS	General maintenance works, Roof repair	2,845.15	482.38
Mountmellick GS	General maintenance works, Install power points, Replacement of doors	9,194.81	1,518.72
Rathdowney GS	General maintenance works	644.18	968.03
Stradbally GS	General maintenance works, Shower repair, Replace door, Exterior maintenance works	13,136.89	5,764.03
Borris-in-Ossory GS	General maintenance works, Refurbishment including Dry lining, Plastering, Wiring, Flooring, Shower/toilet facility	80,324.77	-
Ballylinan GS	Asbestos Survey	676.50	-

Garda Station	Description of current/planned works.	2018 €	2019 (to 21/05/19) €
Portlaoise GS	General maintenance works, Emergency lighting, Repair gutter, Repair flat roof, Repairs to plaster, Pot holes. *Preparation for planned refurbishment including Ramp, Removal of raised beds, Temporary accommodation, Tree pruning, M&E Consultancy, Groundworks	55,258.34	158,431.17
Arles GS	Asbestos Survey	676.50	-
Mountrath GS	General maintenance works, Install data points	1,504.02	124.85
Abbeyleix GS	General maintenance works, Asbestos Survey	2,852.52	958.27
Clonaslee GS	General maintenance works	830.39	934.97
Portarlinton GS	General maintenance works, Replace broken lights, Shower repairs, Security gate repairs	14,293.86	996.56
Total		182,237.93	170,178.98

\*Refurbishment of Portlaoise Garda Station is currently at Design Stage. Some preparatory works are underway.

### Flooding Data

71. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the measures in place funded by the OPW to address flooding and coastal erosion in the south-west areas of County Cork; the projects in this regard; the value of each project; if there are projects with his Department; the value of such projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22375/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran):** The Government has provided €1 billion for investment in flood risk management measures over the coming decade. The details of this investment were announced by Minister Moran with Mr. Leo Varadkar TD, An Taoiseach on 3rd May 2018, at the launch of the Flood Risk Management Plans (FRMPs). These Plans are the output from the largest study of flood risk ever undertaken by the State, through the Office of Public Works' (OPW) Catchment-based Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) Programme.

The FRMPs set out the strategic plan to tackle flood risk, with outline design for schemes. While the specific project costs are not available until the procurement for each scheme is complete, the FRMPs did include some preliminary indicative potential costs and these are available on the OPW website, [www.floodinfo.ie](http://www.floodinfo.ie).

For schemes which are currently at construction, and following a competitive tendering process for each project, the OPW and Cork County Council are working with project consultants on the following projects: Bandon (estimated cost €28.4m) – currently at construction stage and is due to be substantially complete by July 2019, Skibbereen (estimated cost €34.5m) – currently at construction stage and due to be substantially complete in June 2019, and Clonakilty (estimated cost €24.1m) – currently at construction stage and expected to be completed in 2020.

At this time the OPW and Local Authorities have established Steering Groups to develop additional schemes to detailed design, planning and construction through procurement frameworks that were put in place ahead of the launch in 2018. The OPW and Local Authorities will, as part of the ten- year programme of investment, continue to establish Steering Groups as capacity becomes available, for those other schemes identified by the FRMPs.

In that regard, the Steering Group has been established to develop the Bantry Flood Relief Scheme, which is estimated to cost €6.6m, to detailed design and construction. A further five proposed schemes have been identified by the CFRAM programme; namely Ballingearry, Castletown-Bearhaven, Inchigeelagh, Inishannon and Schull. These are not in the first tranche of projects to be progressed, but the OPW and Cork County Council will work closely to ensure that they will be commenced as soon as possible within the 10 year timeframe for the programme of investment.

The Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government has overall responsibility for Government policy on coastal strategy. Local Authorities lead on identifying works to protect the coast in their respective areas.

The primary objective of Government policy on coastal protection is to ensure that, in areas identified as being at greatest risk of damage or loss of economic assets through coastal flooding, Local Authorities identify appropriate and sustainable measures to protect those assets. Where defence measures are economically justified and compatible with all required environmental and other statutory requirements, they can be implemented, subject to the availability of resources.

Where necessary, Local Authorities may put forward proposals to relevant central Government Departments, including the OPW, for funding of appropriate measures, depending on the infrastructure or assets under threat.

Further to that, my Office, through the Minor Flood Mitigation Works & Coastal Protection Scheme, provides a funding mechanism to support works to protect coastal communities, particularly those at risk from flooding. This Scheme provides funding to Local Authorities to undertake minor flood mitigation or coastal protection works or studies, costing less than €0.75 million each, to address localised flooding and coastal protection problems within their administrative areas. A full list of funding approvals since 2009 under this Scheme is available at:

[www.opw.ie/en/flood-risk-management/operations/minorfloodworkscoastalprotection-scheme/](http://www.opw.ie/en/flood-risk-management/operations/minorfloodworkscoastalprotection-scheme/).

72. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the sluice gates at Ardcanought, Castlemaine, County Kerry, will be inspected (details supplied). [22420/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran):** Remedial repair works were carried out by the Office of Public Works on the 20th May 2019 to the sluice at Ardcanought, Castlemaine, Co. Kerry. The sluice is now fully operational again.

### **Office of Public Works Properties**

73. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the OPW will consider transferring the ownership of a building to an organisation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22507/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran):** I am advised by the Commissioners of Public Works that there are no plans, at this time, to transfer the property to another public body.

Following the closure of the Garda station on Roche's Road, Wexford on the 22nd September 2017 the Office of Public Works (OPW) sought alternative State use for the property.

There is no Central Government requirement for accommodation in the former Garda Station and no alternative State requirement for the property has materialised following engagement with Wexford County Council, the Health Service Executive and Tusla.

The OPW had agreed to enter into a lease arrangement with the Wexford Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Service for the part of the property known as the Sergeant's quarters as the main building was too big for their requirements. However, the Wexford Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Service advised the OPW on the 19th February 2019 that they were to be provided with alternative accommodation in Wexford and no longer required the Sergeant's Quarters.

Wexford Community Services Council also known as St. Brigid's Day Care Centre who currently occupy the adjoining property have also expressed an interest in acquiring the former Garda station property. They are currently carrying out a review of the property to establish if it can meet their needs and if acquiring the property, given the costs of refurbishment, would be feasible.

If Wexford Community Services Council/ St. Brigid's Day Care Centre decide that they wish to proceed with acquiring the property and can satisfy the Commissioners of Public Works (CPW) that they are in a sound financial position to carry out substantial refurbishment works and maintain the property on an ongoing basis, the CPW will consider entering into a lease arrangement.

If the Wexford Community Services Council/ St. Brigid's Day Care Centre decide not to proceed with acquiring the property, the OPW will again establish if there is any alternative State use for the property prior to disposing of it on the open market.

### **National Development Plan Administration**

74. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to increase the size of the National Development Plan 2018-2027 to account for the un-

planned expense of the national broadband plan; the amount that may be required; the estimated impact of this increase on the general Government balance in each affected year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22567/19]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Government's decision to proceed with the National Broadband Plan (NBP) was taken on the basis that additional expenditure that may be required, beyond that already allocated within the National Development Plan (NDP) framework, will be funded by future revenues and will accordingly not have funding repercussions for other planned projects within the NDP.

Based on preliminary assessments, current indications are that the NBP roll-out will require c. €1.6bn in additional funding over the period of the NDP out to 2027. If all other factors were to remain unchanged, this would result in a corresponding impact on the general government balance of approximately 0.1 per cent of both GDP and GNI\* on an annual basis out to 2023 as compared with the projections published as part of the Stability Programme Update 2019.

As the Deputy will be aware, projections for general government revenue and expenditure beyond 2023 have not yet been compiled.

### **River Basin Management Plans**

75. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of works on a river (details supplied). [22642/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran):** The Office of Public Works (OPW) is responsible for the maintenance of the Brosna Drainage Scheme and during maintenance works in May/June 2018, all blockages were removed from the OPW's maintainable section of channels.

The area referred to by the Deputy is further upstream of the maintainable channel and does not fall within the remit of the OPW under the Arterial Drainage Acts. The OPW therefore has no responsibility for the maintenance of the channel, nor any authority to carry out any works there.

### **State Bodies Data**

76. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the estimated full-year cost of recruiting eight additional laboratory analysts for the State laboratory; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22702/19]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am informed by the State Laboratory that the estimated full year cost of recruiting eight additional laboratory analysts would be €289,890.16.

This calculation is based upon new entrants starting at the first point of the scale, and includes Employers' PRSI at 10.95%.

As set out in the 2019 Revised Estimates for Public Services, the State Laboratory's overall gross budget increased by 6% in 2019, and the budget allocation for Salaries, Wages and Allowances increased by 4%.

*Question No. 77 answered with Question No. 68.*

### School Accommodation

78. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when he will meet a group of school principals from Ennis, County Clare, and the surrounding area to discuss the lack of post-primary school places for September 2019 and subsequent years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22299/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** My Department understands that post primary schools in Ennis have made offers of school places and that some of those offers have yet to be accepted. In addition, students may have applied to and been offered places in a number of schools and have yet to accept or decline these offers, or have accepted a place in more than one school.

As the Deputy may be aware, the Education (Admission to Schools) Act was signed into law by the President on 18th July 2018. The overall objective of the Act is to provide a new framework for school enrolment that is designed to ensure that every child is treated fairly and that the way in which schools decide on applications for admission is structured, fair and transparent.

Section 66 of the Act, which was commenced on the 3rd October 2018 and is now operational, relates to Co-operation of Boards. It provides for schools, for the purposes of facilitating the efficient admission of students, to share information with each other in respect of applications received, offers made and offers accepted. However, it is a matter for each school to decide whether they wish to share these details with the other schools for the purposes of efficiently processing applications for admission in an area.

It is open to any of the post primary schools in Ennis to submit an application to the Department for interim temporary accommodation should this be required to meet an immediate enrolment need.

An extension at Ennis Community College to cater for projected demographic growth in the area is due to commence on site shortly and when completed, will provide capacity for an additional 200 students.

### Ministerial Meetings

79. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of times he has met formally with each chief executive officer and or chairperson or equivalent in each State agency under the remit of his Department to date in 2019, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22316/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The information requested by the Deputy is provided in the table.

Agency	Date	Representative
National Council for Special Education (NCSE)	12/02/2019	Chairperson
	14/05/2019	CEO & Head of Operations
National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA)	13/03/2019	CEO

### **Special Educational Needs Service Provision**

80. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to ensure additional special needs assistant hours are allocated to a person (details supplied). [22324/19]

**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.

As this question relates to a particular child, I have referred the question to the NCSE for their direct reply. I do not have a role in making determinations in individual cases.

### **Special Educational Needs Service Provision**

81. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the fact that in the case of a child diagnosed as having complex needs (details supplied) his Department will not appoint a special needs assistant until the child has been assessed by an occupational therapist; if his attention has further been drawn to the fact that there is a long delay in the public system for first-time assessment by an occupational therapist; the action he will take in conjunction with the health services to ensure that a special needs assistant is appointed for this child without further delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22326/19]

**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.

As this question relates to a particular child, I have referred the question to the NCSE for their direct reply. I do not have a role in making determinations in individual cases.

The availability and provision of health-related therapy services and assessments, including occupational therapy, is the responsibility of the Health Service Executive (HSE), and matters in relation to the provision of such services should be directed to the Minister for Health.

### **State Examinations Commission**

82. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when teachers who corrected cookery examinations for home economics as part of the junior certificate cycle in March 2019 will be paid by the State Examinations Commission; if there is a delay; if so, the reason therefor; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22330/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The State Examinations Commission has statutory responsibility for operational matters relating to the certificate examinations. In view of this I have forwarded your query to the State Examinations Commission for direct reply to you.

### **Student Grant Scheme Administration**

83. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if assistance is available regarding an apprenticeship (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22336/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):** Under the Student Grant Scheme, eligible candidates may receive funding, provided they are attending an approved course at an approved institution and meet the prescribed conditions of funding, including those which relate to nationality, residency, previous academic attainment and means. Under the scheme, students must be attending approved full-time courses. Part-time courses are not eligible for support. The Student Grant Scheme is not available to students from this State who are attending further education and training equivalent courses outside of the State.

### **Schools Establishment**

84. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the establishment of a school (details supplied) will be supported; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22366/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** As the Deputy may be aware, I met with members of the Glenroe school Working Group earlier in the year. Following this meeting, my Department received supporting documentation from the Group which is currently under review. A response will issue in due course once the information has been evaluated.

### **Schools Building Projects Data**

85. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the

proposed new build for a school (details supplied); the progress on the awarding of construction contracts for the new build; the timeline for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22384/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The major building project for the school referred to by the Deputy is currently at Stage 2(b) – Detailed Design.

The pre-qualification process to select a shortlist of suitable contractors has been completed and the Design Team is currently carrying out a final review of tender documentation.

Once this work is complete, my Department will be in contact with the Board of Management of the school with a view to progressing the project to tender stage.

### **Special Educational Needs Service Provision**

86. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to alleviate the pressure for places in special classes for children with autism spectrum disorder in north County Dublin; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that one school (details supplied) which offers 18 places has 101 applications on its waiting list with a number of children in mainstream also waiting for places to become available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22390/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** Individual school boards of management are responsible for the establishment of special classes. It is open to any school to make application to the National Council for Special education (NCSE) to establish a special class.

The NCSE, an independent agency of my Department, is responsible for planning, coordinating and advising on education provision for children with special educational needs. The Council ensures that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all children who have been identified as needing special class placements.

In deciding where to establish a special class in an area, the NCSE take account of the current and projected demand and the available school accommodation both current and planned. In this regard, the Special Education Needs Organiser (SENO) may approach individual schools to discuss the matter with a view to finding the optimal location in terms of convenience and sustainability.

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

Special Education Needs Organisers (SENOs) who are locally based are available to assist and advise parents whose children have special needs. They also assist and advise schools in making decisions in this area.

There are 37 special schools and 237 special classes attached to mainstream schools in Co. Dublin.

The number of ASD special classes in Co. Dublin have increased from 66 in 2011/2012 to 197 in 2018/2019.

From time to time, the NCSE identifies local areas where additional special class provision is required. In those circumstances, Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) work with

the schools and families concerned to resolve the issues involved. This process is ongoing and the NCSE are actively engaging with schools in relation to establishing ASD classes where there is an identified need for the 2019/2020 school year.

As the Deputy's question relates to a specific area of Dublin, I have forwarded it to the National Council for Special Education for direct reply.

### **Special Educational Needs Service Provision**

87. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the fact that parents of children with autism spectrum disorder waiting to secure school places are being advised by his officials to obtain refusal letters from schools with which to then make and appeal against the school under section 29 of the Education Act 1998; if the issue will be addressed; and his plans to deal with the demand for places in a more appropriate way. [22391/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The selection and enrolment of pupils in schools is the responsibility of the authorities of the individual school. My Department's main responsibility is to ensure that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all pupils seeking school places in an area. However, this may result in some pupils' not obtaining a place in the school of their first choice. As schools may not have a place for every applicant, a selection process may be necessary. This selection process and the enrolment policy on which it is based must be non-discriminatory, and must be applied fairly in respect of all applicants. Under section 15 (2) (d) of the Education Act, 1998, each school is legally obliged to disclose its enrolment policy and to ensure that, as regards that policy, principles of equality and the right of parents to send their children to a school of the parents' choice are respected. Section 29 of the Education Act, 1998 provides for an appeal by a parent or guardian to the Secretary General of my Department or, - in the case of an Education and Training Board (ETB) school, - to the ETB in the first instance, where a Board of Management of a school, or a person acting on behalf of the Board, refuses to enrol a student in a school, expels a student, or suspends a student for 20 or more days in any school year. This Department has no authority to compel a school to admit a pupil, except in the case of an appeal under section 29 of the Education Act, 1998 being upheld. Application forms for taking a section 29 appeal, which are available on my Department's website, should include a copy of the letter received from the Board of Management or a person acting on behalf of the Board of Management which outlines the decision to refuse enrolment. This is to ensure that refusal to enrol has taken place. All documents received are sent to the Appeals Committee prior to the hearing.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE), an independent agency of my Department, is responsible for planning, coordinating and advising on education provision for children with special educational needs. The Council ensures that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all children who have been identified as needing special class placements.

In deciding where to establish a special class in an area, the NCSE take account of the current and projected demand and the available school accommodation both current and planned. In this regard, the Special Education Needs Organiser (SENO) may approach individual schools to discuss the matter with a view to finding the optimal location in terms of convenience and sustainability.

Individual school boards of management are responsible for the establishment of special classes. It is open to any school to make application to the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) to establish a special class.

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

Special Education Needs Organisers (SENOs) who are locally based are available to assist and advise parents whose children have special needs. They also assist and advise schools in making decisions in this area.

From time to time, the NCSE identifies local areas where additional special class provision is required. In those circumstances, Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) work with the schools and families concerned to resolve the issues involved.

This process is ongoing and the NCSE are actively engaging with schools in relation to establishing ASD classes where there is an identified need for the 2019/2020 school year.

### **Schools Refurbishment**

88. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress of the remedial work at a school (details supplied); the action being taken to provide additional accommodation for the school year commencing September 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22409/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The Deputy will be aware that last October and November my Department carried out initial structural assessments into 42 schools constructed by a particular contractor. In 22 of these schools precautionary measures were implemented to enable continued safe occupation and part of the school to which the Deputy refers was closed following the identification of significant structural issues.

Following on from the initial assessments, which were based on sample opening up works, my Department initiated a second phase of detailed investigations for the schools on the 18th of January last. This next phase of the programme is focusing initially on the 22 schools that have precautionary measures in place and also at the school to which the Deputy refers, which remains partly closed.

The purpose of these investigations is to determine the type and extent of structural issues in each individual school and, from the technical information gathered by the appointed structural engineers, to design permanent remediation solutions for delivery where these are needed.

In line with the update published by my Department in January, detailed structural investigations have now been completed in all of the 22 schools with precautionary measures in place and at the school in question.

The school referred to is different from the schools with precautionary measures in place in that the nature and extent of the issues there are such that the building under investigation was required to close. The school remains operational in another building on site.

Detailed investigations have concluded in the closed building and engineers are working to design solutions. When these are known, a programme of works to remediate the building will be put in place for implementation.

When the works programme is available, the details will be first shared at meetings with the Patrons and the schools involved. Arrangements are being put in place, for such meetings with the Patrons and the School Authorities of the 22 schools, including Ardgillan which has been

scheduled in June.

This is an Education and Training Board school. Pending the delivery of the remediation work, my Department will ensure, in continued consultation with the ETB, that any interim accommodations needs at the school are met. In this regard, 2 additional temporary classrooms, a woodwork room and prep area together with a disabled access toilet have been approved for September 2019.

### **Special Educational Needs Service Provision**

89. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a reply will issue to a query (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22423/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The National Council for Special Education (NCSE), an independent agency of my Department, is responsible for planning, coordinating and advising on education provision for children with special educational needs. This includes taking account of the flow of students from primary into post primary. The NCSE ensures that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all children who have been identified as needing special class placements.

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

Since 2011, the NCSE has increased the number of special classes from 548 in 2011 to 1,459 across the country now, of which 1,196 are Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) special classes.

There are 37 special classes attached to mainstream schools in Co. Clare. Of these, 2 are ASD early intervention classes, 20 are primary ASD classes and 7 are post primary ASD classes. The number of ASD special classes in Co. Clare has increased from 5 in 2011/2012 to 29 in 2018/2019.

Details of all special classes for children with special educational needs are available by county on the NCSE website [www.ncse.ie](http://www.ncse.ie).

The NCSE has informed my Department that they intend to establish over 175 new special classes of which approx. 165 are new ASD special classes nationally for 2019/20 school year to meet currently identified need.

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

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

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

The NCSE have advised that there are currently no pupils without a placement option in the area referred to by the Deputy.

From time to time, the NCSE identifies local areas where additional special class provision is required.

In those circumstances, the NCSE and the Department are actively engaging with schools, patrons bodies, parents and others stakeholders to bring the required additional special class placements on stream.

### **Special Educational Needs Service Provision**

90. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if speech and language hours will be allocated to a person (details supplied). [22466/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** Speech and Language Therapy Services are under the remit of my colleague, the Minister for Health and the service is provided by the Health Service Executive (HSE). Questions in relation to the provision of speech and language therapy services should therefore be referred to the Department of Health and the HSE.

The Deputy will be aware that a demonstration project to provide in-school and pre-school therapy services has been introduced for the 2018/19 school year.

The demonstration project has been developed by a Working Group which includes representatives from the Departments of Education, Children and Youth Affairs, Health, and the Health Service Executive (HSE).

The project is being managed and co-ordinated by the National Council for Special Education with clinical support also being provided by two HSE Therapy Managers which have been assigned to the project.

The purpose of the project is to test a model of tailored therapeutic supports that allows for early intervention in terms of providing speech and language and occupational therapy within 'educational settings'. This innovative pilot will complement existing HSE funded provision of essential therapy services.

The project is taking place in Community Healthcare Organisation (CHO) 7 Region of South West Dublin, Kildare, and West Wicklow.

This region has been selected to ensure that the pre-school and in-school therapy model can be tested in both urban and rural locations and with a suitable mix of various types of schools and pre-schools.

75 schools, including a representative sample of primary, post primary, and special schools are taking part in the project.

75 Pre-school settings associated with primary schools participating in the project are being included in order to provide for therapy interventions to be made at the earliest possible time and to create linkages between pre-school and primary school provision.

In total, 150 settings are participating in the demonstration project.

The list of the participating schools and pre-schools has been published on my Departments

website.

As the project has been taking place in the region of South West Dublin, Kildare, and West Wicklow, only schools from this area could be selected for participation in the demonstration project.

Decisions in relation to the extension of the service to other areas or Counties will be taken following an evaluation of the pilot phase.

In the interim, children who require speech and language therapy services and who are not attending one of the pilot schools will continue access services from the Health Service Executive.

### **Teacher Supply**

91. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to abolish the five-day rule regarding teacher substitution (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22481/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** It is the policy of my Department that only qualified personnel should be employed by schools as teachers. Unqualified personnel should not be appointed except in exceptional circumstances and only when all avenues for recruiting qualified personnel have been exhausted and only for quite limited time periods. Circular 0031/2011 issued by my Department details a cascade of measures for the recruitment of teachers by schools, prioritising registered teachers over retired registered teachers and unregistered people.

Other than the limited exceptions provided for, Section 30 of the Teaching Council Act, prohibits payment from public funds to people employed as teachers in recognised schools unless they are registered with the Teaching Council.

The limited exceptions include a provision which allows for an unregistered person to be appointed where an employer has made all reasonable efforts to appoint a registered teacher and no registered teacher is available to take up the position in question. An unregistered person, so appointed, may not be paid from public funds for a continuous period of more than 5 consecutive school days. The employer must be satisfied that any such person appointed is competent and capable of acting in the place of a registered teacher in the school.

The employer must also continue to make all reasonable efforts to employ a registered teacher.

### **Special Educational Needs Service Provision**

92. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to include an ASD unit at a school (details supplied). [22485/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** My Department has no plans to provide additional accommodation for special classes at the school in question and has not received an application for same. As the Deputy will be aware there are currently 2 ASD Early Intervention Class groups in the school.

### **Schools Site Acquisitions**

93. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of planning for a new school (details supplied). [22487/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** My Department is actively engaged in trying to acquire a site in order to provide a permanent building for the school to which the Deputy refers. Kildare County Council are assisting my Department in this regard and have proposed a site option which is being examined in technical detail at present. Due to the commercially sensitive nature of site acquisitions generally, it is not possible to comment further at this stage. The acquisition of a site for this school is being prioritised by the Department.

### **Special Educational Needs Service Provision**

94. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a review of an application for a SNA for a child (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22498/19]

**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.

As this question relates to a particular child, I have referred the question to the NCSE for their direct reply. I do not have a role in making determinations in individual cases.

### **Summer Works Scheme Applications**

95. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application for a building project for a school (details supplied) in County Sligo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22503/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I am delighted to confirm that the school to which the Deputy refers was successful in obtaining grant funding under the 2019 Summer Works Scheme. This project has been devolved to the school authority for delivery. I can also confirm that my Department does not currently have any outstanding applications for building works from the school in question.

## **Teacher Training Provision**

96. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the estimated cost of paying 80% of the entry level rate to student teachers on placement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22505/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** School Placement is a critical part of initial teacher education (ITE) as it enables the student teacher to experience teaching and learning in a variety of contexts, and to participate in school life in a way that is structured and supported.

As you are aware, the Teaching Council is the statutory body that sets and upholds the standards for entry to the profession and reviews and accredits programmes of teacher education and training provided by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the State. The Teaching Council has determined that 25% (30 weeks) of student time over the four years of undergraduate programmes and 40% (24 weeks) of student time over the two years of postgraduate programmes should be allocated to school placement.

The estimated cost of paying 80% of the entry level rate to primary and post-primary student teachers on placement would be approximately €50 million.

## **Schools Refurbishment**

97. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an application by a school (details supplied) for the hearing impaired for a new school or refurbishment works has been received; if so, the timeline for the decision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22532/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I wish to advise that my Department has no record of receiving an application for capital funding at the school referred to by the Deputy.

It is open to the school authorities to make an application for additional accommodation through the 'Additional School Accommodation' (ASA) scheme where an accommodation deficit is identified.

I also wish to advise the Deputy that the Summer Works Scheme (SWS) is currently open for applications and will remain open until 30 June 2019. The scheme is designed to allow School Authorities, on a devolved funding basis, carry out necessary improvement and refurbishment works to existing school facilities. Full details on the types of refurbishment works that schools may apply for under SWS is available on my Department's website [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie).

## **Schools Building Projects Status**

98. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an extension for a school (details supplied) in County Dublin; the timeline for the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22536/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The major building project for the school referred to by the Deputy is currently at an advanced stage of architectural planning - Stage 2(b) Detailed Design which includes the application for statutory approvals and the

preparation of tender documents. All Statutory approvals have been secured.

In the context of reviewing the revised Stage 2(b) report submitted to the Department it was noted that the estimated Stage 2(b) cost plan had increased substantially from the approved costs at Stage 2(a).

In accordance with Department Design Team Procedures, where the approved cost limits have been exceeded, a Brief Change Report is necessary.

The Design Team is currently working on the required Brief Change Report. Upon receipt, review and approval of the Brief Change Report the Design Team will commence work on necessary revisions to the Stage 2(b) submission.

Upon receipt and review of a revised stage 2(b) submission the Department will revert to the Board of Management of the school with regard to the further progression of the project at that time.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

99. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a school building project (details supplied) will commence. [22552/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The project referred to by the Deputy is currently in architectural planning. The school will be delivered under the Department's Design & Build Programme. This delivery programme uses a professional external Project Manager to progress the project through the relevant stages of architectural planning, tendering and construction in the shortest possible timeframe.

The design is being progressed in preparation for the planning application which will be the next key step in the progression of the project. It is intended that Planning Permission will be lodged within the second quarter of 2019.

### **Special Educational Needs Service Provision**

100. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if SNA assistance hours will be awarded to a person (details supplied). [22570/19]

**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.

As this question relates to a particular child, I have referred the question to the NCSE for their direct reply. I do not have a role in making determinations in individual cases.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

101. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the timeframe for the completion of the construction of a school (details supplied); when it will be ready for occupation in full; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22579/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** As the Deputy is aware, the project to which he refers is devolved for delivery to Westmeath County Council (WCC).

The Deputy will be aware that the latest timeline for completion of the project that was provided by the contractor indicated a completion date of July 2019. WCC has raised a number of concerns with respect to progress on site since that timeline was provided. WCC has requested the contractor to furnish a revised programme of works by the end of this week.

I am satisfied that WCC is continuing to pursue the contractor for as speedy a delivery of the project as possible. Nevertheless, my Department, working with the school authorities, has put in place alternative arrangements to provide accommodation for the increase in enrolments in the school for the coming academic year should the project not be fully completed within that timeframe.

### **Schools Building Contractors**

102. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps he is taking to curtail the ability of contractors to tender for projects with his Department in circumstances in which it is shown that they have failed to honour contractual commitments and obligations under previous contracts with his Department; the steps he is taking to address such situations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22580/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The EU Procurement Directives set the parameters for tendering processes and possible exclusion of contractors from same.

The Department of Education and Skills at all times acts in accordance with public procurement legislation. Under the EU Procurement Directives, it is very difficult to exclude a contractor from a tendering process.

In terms of future contracts, the Department will at all times act in accordance with the legislation governing public procurement and will take legal advice as necessary. My Department will continue to liaise with and be advised by the Chief State Solicitors Office on such matters.

### **Student Grant Scheme**

103. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of students in receipt of an adjacent SUSI grant for students living at least 45 km away from the location where they study in the 2018-19 academic year; and the number of students in higher

education in the same academic year. [22582/19]

104. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of students in receipt of an adjacent SUSI grant for students living at least 24 km away from the location where they studied in the 2010-11 academic year; and the number of students in higher education in the same academic year. [22583/19]

105. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the estimated cost of reversing the budget 2011 decision to increase the SUSI grant non-adjacency qualifying distance from 24 km to 45 km. [22584/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 103 to 105, inclusive, together.

The student maintenance grant is a contribution towards the living costs of a student. It is not intended to cover the full costs of attending college. The student grant scheme does however, provide for different levels of maintenance support, depending on means. Grants are also provided at adjacent and non-adjacent rates. The higher non-adjacent rates are intended to provide additional support to those students who may be living away from home.

Budget 2011 provided for a number of student grant measures which came into effect for the 2011/12 academic year, including the change in the assessment of the qualifying distance criterion for the non-adjacent rate of grant from 24 kilometres to 45 kilometres.

The 24km distance criterion was originally set in 1968 and had not been updated in more than 40 years. Since then, significant improvements have taken place in the road and rail network and it is considered that the revised distance criteria is more consistent with the type of distances that students may legitimately be expected to commute to college.

The current qualifying distance of 45km for the higher non-adjacent rate of student grant takes into account a reasonable radius within which students may commute on a daily basis.

The data for the 2018/19 academic year is currently being finalised. However, according to the Higher Education Authority, there were 159,823 full-time undergraduate students in HEA supported higher education institutions for the 2017/18 academic year, of which 77,430 were grant holders with 62,946 undergraduate students in receipt of a maintenance grant. In 2017/18, 52% of maintenance grant holders qualified for the non-adjacent rate and 48% for the adjacent rate.

In relation to the 2010/11 academic year, there were 161,361 full-time undergraduate students in HEA supported higher education institutions, of which 71,532 were grant holders with 53,226 undergraduate students in receipt of a maintenance grant. In 2010/11, 77% were in receipt of the non-adjacent rate of grant and 23% were in receipt of the adjacent rate of grant.

The cost of reversing the change to the distance criteria in the Student Grant, is estimated to be in the region of €26m.

### **School Staff**

106. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the difficulties presented to national schools due to the unqualified substitute five day rule (details supplied); his plans to re-examine the unqualified substitute five day rule; and if there is scope for schools experiencing difficulties in recruiting substitute teachers to extend

the service of an unqualified substitute teacher beyond five days. [22585/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** It is the policy of my Department that only qualified personnel should be employed by schools as teachers. Unqualified personnel should not be appointed except in exceptional circumstances and only when all avenues for recruiting qualified personnel have been exhausted and only for quite limited time periods. Circular 0031/2011 issued by my Department details a cascade of measures for the recruitment of teachers by schools, prioritising registered teachers over retired registered teachers and unregistered people.

Other than the limited exceptions provided for, Section 30 of the Teaching Council Act, prohibits payment from public funds to people employed as teachers in recognised schools unless they are registered with the Teaching Council.

The limited exceptions include a provision which allows for an unregistered person to be appointed where an employer has made all reasonable efforts to appoint a registered teacher and no registered teacher is available to take up the position in question. An unregistered person, so appointed, may not be paid from public funds for a continuous period of more than 5 consecutive school days. The employer must be satisfied that any such person appointed is competent and capable of acting in the place of a registered teacher in the school.

The employer must also continue to make all reasonable efforts to employ a registered teacher.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

107. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the fact that a school (details supplied) has been notified that it must close its doors completely and vacate its temporary site on 31 January 2020 and a company has instructed that no extension of this date should be granted; if his attention has been further drawn to the unnecessary stress this is causing parents, children and teachers at the school in view of the fact that no information has been provided to date regarding alternative arrangements while the site in question is under construction; his plans to ensure that the alternative provided does not break up the school and that the fabric of the classes, including the pupils and teachers, will remain as they are in order to avoid further stress and disruption; the options being considered for the school once circumstances change on 31 January 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22591/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The permanent site acquisition process for the school to which the Deputy refers is now complete.

A planning application for the permanent accommodation for the school was lodged in January 2019. A request for additional information received from the local authority was responded to on 26 April 2019 and a decision is awaited. Following receipt of planning permission the project will proceed to tender.

Provided no issues arise it is envisaged that the permanent accommodation will be completed in September 2020.

In relation to the need for the schools interim accommodation to move from its current location in February 2020 I can advise the following.

The school's interim accommodation is located on a privately owned site. The Landlord

had required my Department to confirm that the school would vacate the property at the end of January 2020.

I am happy to announce that on Monday 27 May the Landlord contacted my Department to advise that they have carried out a review of the business plan and strategy for the site and are now agreeable to extend the Lease termination date from the 31 January 2020 to the 30 June 2020, so there is no longer a need for the school to move to alternative interim accommodation in January 2020.

I have already outlined the position in relation to the permanent accommodation for the school and the matter will be kept under review.

My Department is in regular contact with and holds monthly meetings with the school's Patron Body Educate Together in relation to this and a number of other projects under their remit and will continue to keep the school's Patron Body fully informed of progress.

### **Special Educational Needs Service Provision**

108. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an increase in special education teacher hours for a school (details supplied) will be approved; and if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the circumstances in the school have changed in the past number of years. [22616/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I wish to advise the Deputy that DES Circulars 0007/2019 for primary schools and 0008/2019 for post primary schools provide details of how the allocations of Special Education Teachers have been updated for schools from September 2019, based on updated profile data.

All schools have now received revised allocations for September 2019.

As the re profiling occurred, some schools gained additional allocations, where the profile indicator data indicates these schools have additional needs. Some schools received slightly reduced allocations, where the data indicates less need, and some schools maintained their existing allocations.

Where adjustments have been made, they have been made in a graduated manner to minimise the impact for schools. Changes to Allocations have been capped to 20% of the adjustment to the retained element which would otherwise have occurred had a graduated approach not been applied.

No school has lost a full special education teaching post as a result of the re profiling process.

There has also been no reduction to the overall number of special education teaching posts within the school system. There are currently over 13,400 special education teachers in schools, an increase of 37% since 2011.

Under the allocation model, schools have been provided with a total allocation for special education needs support based on their school profile.

The school referred to by the Deputy has 55 special education teaching hours, or the equivalent of 2.2 special education teachers (SETs), for an enrolment of 144 pupils at the time the profile was developed.

This gives an allocation ratio of 1 SET for every 65 pupils in the school, compared to a national average of 1 SET per 100 pupils across the primary school system.

This represents a proportionately a high allocation ratio, which takes into account the school profile.

Both my Department and the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) are committed to ensuring that all schools are treated equally and fairly in the manner in which their school profiles have been calculated.

Accordingly, a number of review processes have been put in place to support schools.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) published details of an appeal process for the 2019 allocation process for schools on their website [www.ncse.ie](http://www.ncse.ie).

Schools were advised that the appeal will consider circumstances where schools considered that their school profile was calculated incorrectly, using the data set out in DES Circulars 007 and 008 2019. An appeal could be submitted for a review of the information used and of the calculation of the allocation.

A second process will be put in place to address circumstances where the school profile significantly changed following the allocation process e.g. a developing school where the net enrolment numbers significantly increased.

The criteria for qualification for mainstream school developing school posts are set out in the Primary and Post Primary School Staffing Schedule for the 2019/20 school year.

Schools who qualify for additional mainstream developing school posts, in accordance with these criteria, will also qualify for additional Special Education Teaching Allocations to take account of this developing status.

Finally, it is acknowledged that there are some circumstances, which may arise in schools, which fall outside the appeals process, or allocations for developing school status.

These relate to exceptional or emergency circumstances which could not have been anticipated e.g. where the school profile changes very significantly, or where other exceptional circumstances have arisen in a school and which may require a review of schools capacity to provide additional teaching support for all pupils who need it in the school, or of their utilisation of their allocations.

A process will also be available where schools can seek a review of their allocations in the coming months, including the utilisation of their allocations, in circumstances where a school considers that very exceptional circumstances have arisen subsequent to the development of the profile.

As revised updated allocations have recently been issued to schools, this process will recommence in September 2019.

I am satisfied that there are in place a number of processes which can review the special education teacher allocation for schools where necessary.

The very significant levels of additional provision we have made in recent years to provide additional Special Education Teachers means that all schools are resourced to provide for the special educational needs of children in their schools.

### Special Educational Needs Service Provision

109. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 158 of 16 April 2019, when a child (details supplied) will be accommodated with a special needs school place to meet the child's ongoing educational requirements in view of the fact that the primary school will no longer facilitate the child as the child has reached 12 years of age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22618/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I understand from my officials that a placement has been sourced for September 2019 for the child in question.

The local Special Education Needs Organiser (SENO) has been in contact with the parent and remains available to provide advice and/or assistance with regard to special education supports for the child.

### Schools Building Projects Applications

110. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when an application for funding by a school (details supplied) will be determined; the status of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22639/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I am pleased to inform the Deputy that funding has been approved for the provision of an additional mainstream classroom and en-suite toilets at the school to which she refers. A letter has issued to the school authority in that respect.

The project has been devolved for delivery to the school authority so it is now a matter for the Board of Management to advance the project.

### Special Educational Needs Service Provision

111. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a special needs assistant for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22641/19]

**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.

As this question relates to a particular child, I have referred the question to the NCSE for their direct reply. I do not have a role in making determinations in individual cases.

### **Schools Facilities**

112. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an initiative will be taken to encourage schools to allow early childcare service provision in school buildings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22643/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I am pleased to inform the Deputy that following consultation with relevant school authorities, Guidelines on the use of School Buildings outside of School Hours were published by my Department in October 2017. These guidelines can be viewed on my Department's website at this link: <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/guidelines-on-the-use-of-school-buildings-outside-of-school-hours.pdf>

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide guidance for schools in relation to the use of school buildings outside of school hours and guidance for those schools who are considering putting such arrangements in place.

In general, the management of school premises at local level is a matter for the relevant school authorities, and if a community group is interested in using school facilities contact should be made with the school in the first instance.

### **Apprenticeship Programmes**

113. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the estimated cost of abolishing apprenticeship fees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22662/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):** An Annual Student Contribution (ASC) is levied on all students attending Institutes of Technology (IoTs). Previously this ASC was paid by FÁS/SOLAS with apprentices themselves paying the part of the contribution relating to examination fees. As part of Budget 2014, SOLAS ceased making payments to IOTs and apprentices pay the full pro rata ASC.

The amount charged to apprentices is calculated on a pro rata basis of the time which they spend in IOTs during the academic year. For craft apprenticeships, this cost would typically be one third of the €3,000 ASC paid by students attending for the full academic year and so amounts to approximately €1,000 per apprentice per period spent in the IoT. In the case of the new consortia led apprenticeships the contribution varies for each programme as their off-the-job training has a more flexible structure. In cases where training is delivered in an Education and Training Board there is no contribution made by the apprentice.

Based on projected apprenticeship provision in higher education institutions, apprentices or their employers will make up to €6.6 million in ASCs in 2019. If the arrangement in place prior to Budget 2014 arrangement were to be reinstated, where the apprentices paid the proportion of the ASC deemed to relate to examination fees, the total cost of not charging the ASC to the State would be €4.8 million in a full year.

### **Apprenticeship Programmes**

114. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the estimated cost of providing an additional 1,000 apprenticeship places; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22663/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):** The total estimated cost per apprentice in craft apprenticeships is €6,900. There were 904 apprentices registered on the new consortia led apprenticeships at the end of 2018, which is not sufficient as yet to derive a reliable average cost, however this will be kept under review as greater numbers come on stream.

Consequently, the estimated cost of providing an additional one thousand apprenticeship places is €6.9 million. It should be noted that there are also some standing costs associated with running training centres and other institutions that have not been apportioned between apprenticeship and other activity and are not included in this figure.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

115. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the stage each of the education sites are at in Celbridge, County Kildare, for the provision of new schools; the timeframe for the delivery of those schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22708/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** As the Deputy may be aware, agreement in principle has been reached with a landowner for the acquisition of a site at Donaghcumper, Celbridge. This site is proposed to facilitate the permanent accommodation needs of St. Patrick's National School, Celbridge Community School and St. Raphael's Special School on a campus type arrangement. Work is progressing and is ongoing in respect of technical matters on the acquisition.

It is a priority for my Department to commence the architectural planning process for this site at the earliest possible stage. For the time being, given the commercially sensitive nature of site acquisitions in general, I am unable to elaborate further.

### **School Accommodation**

116. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when provision will be made for an extension to a school (details supplied). [22709/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** My Department is in receipt of an application for capital funding, for additional accommodation, at the school referred to by the Deputy. Officials from my Department have been liaising with the school authority in this regard and additional information has been received.

As soon as the assessment process has been completed the decision will be relayed to the school authority directly.

### **Schools Building Projects**

117. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the works to provide a new school building for a school (details supplied) in addition to the associated refurb-

ishment works will commence as a matter of urgent priority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22739/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The building project for the school referred to by the Deputy is included in My Department's Construction Programme which is being delivered under the National Development Plan.

This project is one of the school building projects on my Department's ADAPT 2 Programme. My Department is currently in the process of procuring a Project Manager for the ADAPT 2 Programme, which contains 16 school building projects.

The appointment of a Design Team – (Architect, Quantity Surveyor, Civil & Structural Engineer, Mechanical & Electrical Engineer and Project Supervisor for the Design Process) for the school in question will commence shortly.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

118. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when phase 2 of a school building project (details supplied) will begin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22765/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The school referred to by the Deputy will be part of a shared campus. The major building project will consist of a Phase 2 extension at secondary level and a new school building for the Primary School. The building project will deliver the Post Primary building providing an area of 5,226m<sup>2</sup> new build and 2,237m<sup>2</sup> refurbishment.

In December 2018, the project completed Stage 2a (Developed Design Stage) and was authorised to proceed to Stage 2b - Detailed Design, which includes the applications for Planning Permission, Fire Cert and Disability Access Cert and the preparation of tender documents.

Planning permission for this particular project was sought earlier than usual in the architectural planning process, during Stage 2(a) as a means to identify any potential issues which might arise.

Upon receipt and review of the stage 2(b) submission the project will then be authorised to commence the pre-qualification of contractors process. Pre-qualification normally takes between 8 and 12 weeks to complete.

When pre-qualification is complete, the project will then be progressed to tender stage. A tender stage normally takes between 7 and 8 months to complete.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

119. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the building of a school (details supplied) will begin in Navan, County Meath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22766/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The school referred to by the Deputy will be part of a shared campus. The building project will deliver a new Post Primary school and the new special school building will provide an area of 3,746sqm with 11 classrooms and associated ancillary accommodation to cater for pupils with a range of learning disabilities.

In December 2018, the project completed Stage 2(a) - Developed Design Stage, and was subsequently authorised to proceed to Stage 2(b) - Detailed Design, which includes the applications for Planning Permission, Fire Cert and Disability Access Cert and the preparation of tender documents.

Planning permission for this particular project was sought earlier than usual in the architectural planning process, during Stage 2(a) as a means to identify any potential issues which might arise.

Upon receipt and review of the Stage 2(b) submission the project will then be authorised to commence the pre-qualification of contractors process. Pre-qualification normally takes between 8 and 12 weeks to complete.

When pre-qualification is complete, the project will then be progressed to tender stage. A tender stage normally takes between 7 and 8 months to complete.

### **Special Educational Needs Data**

120. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the yearly process and timeline for setting and agreeing the national allocation of special needs assistants, SNAs; the person or body who leads the process; and the reason for the delay and the change of date for the announcement of the allocation of SNAs for 2019-2020. [22799/19]

**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.

Each year the NCSE publish guidelines for schools setting out the key dates for the SNA allocations process and these are available on the NCSE website, [www.ncse.ie](http://www.ncse.ie).

I gave a commitment that the SNA allocations would be published before the end of May to provide certainty, at the earliest opportunity, for schools, SNAs and parents in relation to the posts that will be available for the coming school year.

I was very pleased to fulfill this commitment yesterday when I announced that almost 800 additional SNA posts will be allocated to schools for the beginning of the next school year, with up to 130 additional posts expected to be allocated by December 2019.

By the end of this year, there will be up to 15,950 SNAs working in our schools, an increase of over 51% since 2011.

The National Council for Special Education published the allocations for the coming school year yesterday and they are available on their website, [www.ncse.ie](http://www.ncse.ie).

### **Special Educational Needs**

121. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the criteria for a child with additional needs to access a special needs assistant, SNA, in cases in which there are varying levels of need among children in one or various classrooms in one school; the method used to decide the way in which the time of a SNA is divided among several children; the process by which it is decided in a school in which a SNA is employed; and the minimum and maximum ratio of SNAs to children permitted per school. [22800/19]

**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.

SNAs should be deployed by schools in a manner which best meets the care support requirements of the children enrolled in the school for whom SNA support has been allocated. It is a matter for schools to allocate the support as required, and on the basis of individual need, which allows schools flexibility in how the SNA support is utilised.

### **Special Educational Needs Staff**

122. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the process for special needs assistants, SNAs, who seek further employment if they are made redundant from a previous job or if their contract has ceased; and the purpose of panels within that process. [22801/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The supplementary assignment arrangements for Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) were established on foot of proposals brought forward by the Labour Relations Commission when the Haddington Road Agreement was being agreed. These supplementary assignment arrangements for SNAs continue to operate under the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018 - 2020, and both unions representing SNAs, namely SIPTU and FÓRSA, have signed up to that agreement. As set out in the LRC proposals, the supplementary assignment arrangements for SNAs only apply to current SNAs who are notified that they are to be made redundant. Accordingly, the purpose of these arrangements is to facilitate eligible SNAs who are being made redundant by one employer in filling SNA vacancies that may become available in another school / ETB. Once an SNA with a minimum of one year's service (service in a substitute capacity i.e. covering for maternity leave, sick leave, career breaks, job-sharing etc. does not count) is notified by his/her employer that s/he is to be made redundant then s/he shall be deemed to be a member of a supplementary assignment panel for SNAs. The detailed supplementary assignment arrangements for SNAs for the 2019/2020 school year are set out in Departmental Circular 0030/2019 which issued on 22 May 2019 and which is available on the Department's website at the following address: <http://www>.

education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0030\_2019.pdf The operation of this panel is described and outlined in Circular 0030/2019 and it is designed to be as flexible as possible which enables all eligible SNAs, who have the requisite Panel Form 1 completed by their former employer, to apply for any SNA position that is advertised by a school or an ETB with no sectoral, diocesan or geographical limitations imposed. Every eligible SNA will remain on the panel for two years with a view to getting further employment. If they are not successful over that period of time in obtaining a further SNA position then they will be eligible for a redundancy payment. Furthermore, an SNA may opt out of this supplementary assignment panel at any point in time triggering the processing of his/her redundancy payment in line with the terms set out in the SNA redundancy scheme (DES Circular 58/06) or any revision of same that is applicable at that time. It should be noted that this does not prevent any person, including newly qualified SNAs, from applying for SNA vacancies but employers are obliged to give precedence to applicants who are members of the SNA Supplementary Assignment Panel.

The Supplementary Assignment Panel arrangements are reviewed by my Department on an annual basis in conjunction with an independent Supplementary Assignment Manager, the school management bodies and the two unions representing SNA staff (FÓRSA and SIPTU).

My Department has set up a dedicated e-mail address to deal with all queries in relation to the SNA Supplementary Assignment Panel and any queries in respect of the operation of the Panel can be directed to this dedicated e-mail address:snasupplementpanel@education.gov.ie.

### **Schools Health and Safety**

123. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the repair work at a college (details supplied) following the discovery of a safety fault in 2018; if the school is scheduled to reopen with full capacity in September 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22806/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The Deputy will be aware that last October and November my Department carried out initial structural assessments into 42 schools constructed by a particular contractor. In 22 of these schools precautionary measures were implemented to enable continued safe occupation and part of the school to which the Deputy refers was closed following the identification of significant structural issues.

Following on from the initial assessments, which were based on sample opening up works, my Department initiated a second phase of detailed investigations for the schools on the 18th of January last. This next phase of the programme is focusing initially on the 22 schools that have precautionary measures in place and also at the school to which the Deputy refers, which remains partly closed.

The purpose of these investigations is to determine the type and extent of structural issues in each individual school and, from the technical information gathered by the appointed structural engineers, to design permanent remediation solutions for delivery where these are needed.

In line with the update published by my Department in January, detailed structural investigations have now been completed in all of the 22 schools with precautionary measures in place and at the school in question.

The school referred to is different from the schools with precautionary measures in place in that the nature and extent of the issues there are such that the building under investigation was required to close. The school remains operational in another building on site.

Detailed investigations have concluded in the closed building and engineers are working to design solutions. When these are known, a programme of works to remediate the building will be put in place for implementation.

When the works programme is available, the details will be first shared at meetings with the Patrons and the schools involved. Arrangements are being put in place, for such meetings with the Patrons and the School Authorities of the 22 schools, including Ardgillan which has been scheduled in June.

This is an Education and Training Board school. Pending the delivery of the remediation work, my Department will ensure, in continued consultation with the ETB, that any interim accommodations needs at the school are met. In this regard, 2 additional temporary classrooms, a woodwork room and prep area together with a disabled access toilet have been approved for September 2019.

### **Special Educational Needs Service Provision**

124. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the lack of autism spectrum disorder, ASD, units to meet the demand in north County Dublin and that many such units within the area are at full capacity; his plans to tackle these issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22808/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The Government is spending nearly one euro in every five of the education budget on special education – about €1.9 billion in 2019. We have significantly increased the availability of special placements for children with special educational needs as well as bringing more and more children into mainstream education.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) has a statutory function to plan and co-ordinate the provision of education and support services to children with special educational needs, in consultation with the relevant education partners and the Health Service Executive (HSE).

This includes the establishment of special class and special school placements in various geographical areas where there is an identified need.

In deciding where to establish a special class in an area, the NCSE take account of the current and projected demand and the available school accommodation both current and planned.

The Council ensures that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all children who have been identified as needing special class placements.

Since 2011, the number of special classes in mainstream schools has increased from 548 to 1,459 this year.

Provision in special schools has increased from 6,848 placements in 2011 to 7,872 this year.

There are 37 special schools and 237 special classes attached to mainstream schools in Co. Dublin.

The number of ASD special classes in Co. Dublin have increased from 66 in 2011/2012 to 197 in 2018/2019. Details of all special classes for children with special educational needs are available on [www.ncse.ie](http://www.ncse.ie).

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

Similarly, where special schools wish to expand provision, the school can apply to my Department for capital funding to accommodate additional placements.

In the case of all new schools, it is general practice to include a Special Education Needs Base (SEN Base) in the accommodation brief for new school buildings, unless local circumstances indicate that it will not be required. Typically, a two classroom SEN Base is provided in new primary schools and a two or four classroom SEN Base is provided in new post primary schools.

Notwithstanding the extent of this investment issues remain. There are some parts of the country, including north County Dublin, where increases in population and other issues have led to shortages in capacity in the school system.

The NCSE are actively engaging with education service providers in order to encourage them to address the shortage of places.

The NCSE and my Department officials hosted a briefing session for Oireachtas members in Leinster House on Tuesday last to advise members on how the NCSE engages in a planning process to open special classes annually

The NCSE and the Department will continue to encourage stakeholders to seek to open new special classes for the 2019/20 school year, including in north County Dublin.

In short, ensuring that every child has a suitable placement available to them from September is a key priority for this Government.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

125. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when construction will commence for a permanent school building for a school (details supplied) to accommodate the pupils and staff; the stage the school is at in the development process; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the current lease is to expire in February 2020; the arrangements made to accommodate the school after the lease on its existing temporary premises expires; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22827/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The permanent site acquisition process for the school to which the Deputy refers is now complete.

A planning application for the permanent accommodation for the school was lodged in January 2019. A request for additional information received from the local authority was responded to on 26 April 2019 and a decision is awaited. Following receipt of planning permission the project will proceed to tender.

Provided no issues arise it is envisaged that the permanent accommodation will be completed in September 2020.

In relation to the need for the schools interim accommodation to move from its current location in February 2020 I can advise the following.

The school's interim accommodation is located on a privately owned site. The Landlord

had required my Department to confirm that the school would vacate the property at the end of January 2020.

I am happy to announce that on Monday, 27 May, the Landlord contacted my Department to advise that they have carried out a review of the business plan and strategy for the site and are now agreeable to extend the Lease termination date from the 31 January 2020 to the 30 June 2020, so there is no longer a need for the school to move to alternative interim accommodation in January 2020.

I have already outlined the position in relation to the permanent accommodation for the school and the matter will be kept under review.

My Department is in regular contact with and holds monthly meetings with the school's Patron Body Educate Together in relation to this and a number of other projects under their remit and will continue to keep the school's Patron Body fully informed of progress.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

126. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of remedial works and the completion of external precautionary measures identified for a school (details supplied). [22836/19]

127. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the works on a school (details supplied) will be completed in summer 2019; if not, the reason; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22837/19]

128. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a school (details supplied) will be provided with temporary prefabricated buildings for accommodation on site if works on the school are not completed; if not, the reason; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22838/19]

129. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the work on a school (details supplied) will be finished. [22839/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 126 to 129, inclusive, together.

The Deputy will be aware that last October and November my Department carried out initial structural assessments into 42 schools constructed by a particular contractor. In 22 of these schools precautionary measures were implemented to enable continued safe occupation and part of the school to which the Deputy refers was closed following the identification of significant structural issues.

Precautionary measures were not required at the school referred to by the Deputy as the school was closed.

Following on from the initial assessments, which were based on sample opening up works, my Department initiated a second phase of detailed investigations for the schools on the 18th of January last. This next phase of the programme is focusing initially on the 22 schools that have precautionary measures in place and also at the school to which the Deputy refers, which remains partly closed.

The purpose of these investigations is to determine the type and extent of structural issues in each individual school and, from the technical information gathered by the appointed structural

engineers, to design permanent remediation solutions for delivery where these are needed.

In line with the update published by my Department in January, detailed structural investigations have now been completed in all of the 22 schools with precautionary measures in place and at the school in question.

The school referred to is different from the schools with precautionary measures in place in that the nature and extent of the issues there are such that the building under investigation was required to close. The school remains operational in another building on site.

Detailed investigations have concluded in the closed building and engineers are working to design solutions. When these are known, a programme of works to remediate the building will be put in place for implementation.

When the works programme is available, the details will be first shared at meetings with the Patrons and the schools involved. Arrangements are being put in place, for such meetings with the Patrons and the School Authorities of the 22 schools, including Ardgillan which has been scheduled in June.

This is an Education and Training Board school. Pending the delivery of the remediation work, my Department will ensure, in continued consultation with the ETB, that any interim accommodations needs at the school are met. In this regard, 2 additional temporary classrooms, a woodwork room and prep area together with a disabled access toilet have been approved for September 2019.

### **Education and Training Boards**

130. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has spoken recently with the CEO and/or chairperson of the City of Dublin Education and Training Board; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22864/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I have not had any formal engagement with the CEO or Chairperson of City of Dublin Education and Training Board recently. I would however meet CEOs and Chairpersons of Education and Training Boards (ETBs) on a regular basis in the course of my work as Minister.

Engagement on issues which impact ETBs is by the Executive of the ETB with officials in my Department and there is planned and regular interaction on all issues affecting ETBs.

### **Departmental Agencies Data**

131. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 120 of 18 April 2019, if the information requested regarding staffing levels has been collated. [22896/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The information requested by the Deputy concerning details of staffing levels in State agencies under the remit of my Department was collated and forwarded to the Deputy in a letter dated 21st May 2019.

A copy of the letter is in the following link.

[<a href="https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumenta-

tion/2019-05-28\_pq131-28-5-19\_en.pdf">Letter to Dara Calleary</a>]

### Parental Leave

132. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will address a matter regarding parental leave (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22301/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):** As the Deputy will be aware, the Parental Leave Act 1998, generally, does not provide for the transfer of parental leave between parents.

Section 6(6) of the Act provides that where two or parents are entitled to parental leave, neither of the parents shall be entitled to (a) the parental leave of any other parent, or (b) to transfer any part of the period of their parental leave to any other parent in respect of their child.

However, there is one very specific exception to this provision. Section 6(7) of the Act provides that where both parents are employed by the same employer, one parent may transfer up to 14 weeks of parental leave to the other, only if their employer consents.

These provisions will remain unchanged by the Parental Leave (Amendment) Bill 2017, once enacted and commenced.

In all other cases, parental leave remains non-transferable, and I can confirm that the Government has no plans to change this position.

### Public Sector Staff Data

133. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the percentage of employees employed by each State agency and local authority who meet the requirements of section 47(1) of the Disability Act 2005, in tabular form (details supplied). [22382/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy Finian McGrath):** As the Deputy will be aware, Part 5 (section 47) of the Disability Act 2005 requires public sector bodies to ensure, unless there is good reason to the contrary, that 3% of the persons employed by that body are persons with disabilities. Implementation of Part 5 of the Act is monitored on an ongoing basis by the National Disability Authority. The Authority reports each year on progress made towards the statutory 3% target for employment in the public sector. The Authority's most recent report on compliance shows that at the end of 2017, 3.5% of staff employed in public sector bodies were people identifying with disabilities, this was the seventh successive year of exceeding the statutory 3% target.

The Report, which includes a detailed breakdown and analysis of the number of people with disabilities employed across all public sector bodies, including local authorities, is available from the Authority's website at the following link: <http://www.nda.ie> .

The Deputy will also be aware of the Government's Comprehensive Employment Strategy (CES) for Persons with Disabilities 2015 - 2024. This strategy sets out a ten-year cross-Government approach to ensuring that people with disabilities who are able to, and want to, work are supported and enabled to do so, with different Departments and State agencies acting in a concerted effort to address the barriers and challenges that impact on employment of people with disabilities. One of the key priorities of the Comprehensive Employment Strategy is to

increase the statutory target of persons with disabilities employed in our public services from 3% to 6% on a phased basis by January 2024. To give effect to this commitment, legislative proposals are currently being progressed through the Oireachtas as part of the Disability (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2016.

### **Closed-Circuit Television Systems Provision**

134. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the steps being taken to support local authorities with the roll-out of community CCTV schemes to deter rural crime, particularly in relation to their assumed responsibility as a data controller under GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22809/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** CCTV systems installed for the purposes of crime prevention and as aids to policing in areas to which the general public routinely have access fall into two distinct but complementary categories, namely Garda CCTV systems and community-based CCTV systems.

Community CCTV is governed by section 38(3)(c) of the Garda Síochána Act 2005 and the Garda Síochána (CCTV) Order 2006 (SI No 289 of 2006). This legal framework requires that any proposed community CCTV scheme must:

- be approved by the local Joint Policing Committee,
- have the authorisation of the Garda Commissioner, and
- have the prior support of the relevant local authority, which must also undertake to act as data controller.

This is the legal basis for all community CCTV schemes and these key legal requirements have not changed since 2006.

In terms of the role of data the Deputy may wish to be aware that on 29 November 2018, the Data Protection Commission issued a note (available on its website [www.dataprotection.ie](http://www.dataprotection.ie)) confirming that there is a legal basis for community-based CCTV and that the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) does not introduce new barriers in that regard. In particular, the Office in its note confirmed that:

“Data protection legislation does not stand in the way of the roll-out of Community-based CCTV schemes that have been authorised by the Garda Commissioner. Once the local authority in the administrative area concerned is willing to take on and deliver on its responsibilities as a data controller for the schemes concerned, there is no legal impediment under data protection legislation to the scheme commencing.”

The Data Protection Commission has this month also circulated broad guidance for data controllers on CCTV, which I am confident will be of interest and assistance to all stakeholders and in particular to local authorities.

The Programme for a Partnership Government commits to supporting investment in CCTV systems. In furtherance of this commitment, a grant-aid scheme to assist groups in the establishment of community-based CCTV systems in their local areas is being administered by my Department. Eligible groups, including community groups and local authorities, can apply for grant-aid of up to 60% of the total capital cost of a proposed CCTV system, up to a maximum total of €40,000.

20 applications have been approved under the scheme to date, for grant aid totalling more than €500,000.

In establishing the grant-aid scheme, the Department consulted broadly, including with the Office of the Data Protection Commission, An Garda Síochána, the Office of the Attorney General and the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA). My Department continues to actively engage with all relevant parties, including the LGMA, reflecting the reality that all stakeholders have the same objective – safer and more secure communities.

I am keen to ensure that all interested groups, in both rural and urban areas, have the opportunity to take advantage of the availability of the grant aid scheme. Further details are available to download from my Department's website - [www.justice.ie](http://www.justice.ie) and support and guidance is available to help interested groups through a dedicated email address [communitycctv@justice.ie](mailto:communitycctv@justice.ie)

### Passport Services

135. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will address correspondence he received regarding a passport issue (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22302/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Deputy will wish to be aware that I have corresponded directly with the person referred to regarding this matter.

Enquiries on behalf of the person with the relevant Irish authorities are ongoing.

My office will be in further contact with the person concerned when these enquiries have been completed.

### Visa Applications

136. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in the determination of a visa application by a person (details supplied); when approval is likely to issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22306/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the visa application referred to was refused by the Visa Office in Dublin on 7 May 2019. This decision was communicated to the applicant who was advised that an appeal could be submitted up to two months following the visa refusal. No appeal has been submitted as yet. If an appeal is made, the applicant should bear in mind the original refusal reasons communicated to them and be in a position to address them.

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

In addition, applicants may themselves e-mail queries directly to INIS ([visamail@justice.ie](mailto:visamail@justice.ie)).

### **Garda Equipment**

137. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the amount An Garda Síochána spent on the replacement of Garda batons for the public order units in 2017, 2018 and to date in the 2019, in tabular form; the length of the batons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22313/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy will appreciate, in accordance with the Garda Síochána Act 2005, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for managing and controlling the administration and business of An Garda Síochána. Further, decisions in relation to the provision and allocation of Garda resources are for the Commissioner, in light of identified operational demands.

I have asked the Garda Commissioner for information in relation to the matter raised and when it is received I will write directly to the Deputy.

### **Garda Expenditure**

138. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the estimated cost of providing five extra double horse boxes for the Garda mounted unit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22318/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for managing and controlling the administration and business of An Garda Síochána as well as for decisions in relation to the allocation and management of Garda equipment and resources. As Minister, I have no direct role in these matters.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that the Garda Mounted Unit is based at Áras an Uachtarain, Phoenix Park, Dublin 8. The unit has a national remit under the direction and control of the Assistant Commissioner, Roads Policing and Major Event Management and the operational control of the Superintendent, Operational Support Services.

I understand from the Garda authorities that the estimated cost of providing five extra double horse boxes would be approximately €35,000 in total i.e. approximately €7,000 per additional double horsebox.

### **Garda Equipment**

139. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of additional marked motorbikes allocated to the roads policing unit in 2018 and to date in 2019; the number that were removed from the roads policing unit during the same period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22319/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is primarily responsible for the effective and efficient use of the resources available to An Garda Síochána. Further, decisions in relation to the provision and allocation of Garda equipment and resources, including vehicles, are for the Commissioner in light of identified operational demands.

I have requested the relevant information from the Commissioner and I will write to the

Deputy directly when I receive it.

### **Garda Station Refurbishment**

140. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the estimated cost if the budget of An Garda Síochána for small capital works to Garda stations increased by 50%; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22320/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The resources provided by Government to An Garda Síochána have reached unprecedented levels, with an allocation for 2019 of €1.76 billion. Significant capital investment is also being made, including €342 million being invested in Garda ICT infrastructure between 2016 and 2021; and €46 million in the Garda Fleet over the same period.

Significant investment is also being made in the Garda estate. The Garda Síochána Building and Refurbishment Programme 2016-2021 is an ambitious 5-year programme, based on agreed Garda priorities, which continues to benefit over 30 locations around the country, underpinned by significant Exchequer funding across the Garda and OPW Votes. In addition to that programme, other major works to the Garda estate which are ongoing include the pilot Garda station reopening project, the development of a new facility at Military Road and the major refurbishment of Fitzgibbon Street station. The goal of this investment is to address deficiencies in the Garda estate and provide fit-for-purpose facilities for Garda members and staff, as well as the public interacting with them.

The Deputy will appreciate that the Office of Public Works (OPW) has responsibility for the provision and maintenance of Garda accommodation. Works in relation to Garda accommodation are progressed by the OPW working in close cooperation with the Garda authorities. As Minister, I have no direct role in this matter.

The amount allocated to the Garda Vote for maintenance and small capital works in 2019 is €642,000. Accordingly, I am informed by the Garda authorities that if the funding provided in the Garda vote for small capital works increased by 50%, the increase would amount to €321,000, and the total cost would be €963,000.

It should be noted, however, that funding for capital and maintenance work is provided in both the Garda and OPW votes and as has been the case in previous years, funding is also being provided in the OPW vote in 2019 for maintenance of the Garda estate.

### **Legal Aid Service Reform**

141. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his Department will be carrying out a review of the threshold for eligibility for legal aid services (details supplied); and his plans to raise this threshold. [22349/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** Ensuring that all eligible persons have access to civil legal aid and advice is a priority for the Government and the Legal Aid Board. The Government has prioritised and maintained the Legal Aid Board budget in recent years, ensuring that its budget allocation increased from nearly €30.37m in 2011 to €40.796m for 2019. This represents an increase of over 34%.

As the Deputy will be aware, the statutory position is that the Legal Aid Board provides civil legal aid and advice pursuant to the Civil Legal Aid Act 1995 and the Civil Legal Aid Regula-

tions 1996 to 2016.

The Legal Aid Board periodically reviews the operation of the civil legal aid scheme. The Board has submitted a number of proposals to my Department including in relation to eligibility. My Department is working with the Legal Aid Board in evaluating these proposals with the aim of optimising the ability of the Board to provide civil legal aid to persons of insufficient means. I have already progressed the Board's proposal for the removal of contributions sought from victims of domestic violence. Statutory Instrument 626 of 2017 gave effect to this from 1 January 2018.

### **Direct Provision System**

142. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the measures in place to ensure the welfare and fair treatment of residents in direct provision centres; the complaints procedures in place for residents; the appeals processes that exist if a resident is not satisfied with a decision in relation to a complaint; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22392/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):** The Deputy will be aware that the Direct Provision system is a whole of Government approach to the provision of supports and services to persons seeking international protection. These supports and services are delivered directly to persons in the protection process in the same manner as to other residents in Ireland by the relevant Government Department or Agency. For example education services are delivered through the Department of Education and Skills, and health services are delivered by the Health Service Executive.

My Department, through the Reception & Integration Agency (RIA), is responsible for the provision of accommodation and related services to protection applicants while they await a decision on their claim for international protection.

On 30 June 2018, the Minister for Justice and Equality signed the European Communities (Reception Conditions) Regulations 2018. These Regulations transpose the EU (recast) Reception Conditions Directive into national law. The Directive lays down the standards for the reception of international protection applicants while their application is being examined.

Further, a Standards Advisory Group was set up in 2017. The work of this group is to build on the recommendations of the McMahon Report and to develop a set of standards for accommodation provided for those people seeking the protection of the State. The Standards will meet those set out in the Recast Reception Conditions Directive and in EASO Guidance on Reception Conditions. Operational standards and indicators will take due cognisance of the responsibility to promote equality, prevent discrimination and protect the human rights of employees, customers, service users and everyone affected by policies and plans as defined by the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty.

The Department of Justice and Equality working together with other Departments and agencies have already introduced far-reaching and important reforms to the overall system and this process will continue as we strive to make further improvements in the future. One of the most significant improvements is the introduction of independent living, which allows applicants to obtain food and other products in a specially-constructed food hall in the centre and to cook the food at either communal or individual cooking stations.

As of early April 2019, over 2,200 applicants across eight centres were availing of the independent living model. In addition, almost 1,400 other applicants have access to other

self-catering facilities with food provided by the contractor or the applicant themselves. The Department of Justice and Equality anticipates that all of the centres under contract to it will have moved to the independent living model by mid-2020.

In addition, there have been significant improvements to recreation opportunities, such as the provision of outdoor sports pitches, including ‘all-weather’ facilities, teenagers’ rooms and family living rooms in centres to provide social areas for particular age groups. Friends of the Centre groups have also been established in each centre. This initiative aims to bring residents, community and voluntary groups together with a view to increasing integration opportunities and providing for the development of greater community linkages with the residents and the centre.

RIA has a complaints procedure which is set out in the House Rules & Procedures Booklet for International Protection Applicants. Complaints are made initially to the Centre Manager with a view to informal resolution. If the person concerned is not satisfied with the outcome of their complaint, he or she may make a complaint to RIA who will investigate the matter and take action as appropriate.

In the event that a resident is not satisfied with how his or her complaint is dealt with, he or she has full access to the services of the Ombudsman and Ombudsman for Children. The office of the Ombudsman received 148 complaints about Direct Provision in 2018, 15 of which were upheld.

Separately, certain decisions by RIA made in line with the European Communities (Reception Conditions) Regulations 2018, relating to material reception conditions and listed in full in Regulation 20, allow for review by a Review Officer, a designated role in RIA. This review may be further appealed to the International Protection Appeals Tribunal (IPAT).

### **Direct Provision System**

143. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of unannounced inspections for each direct provision accommodation centre carried out by the Reception and Integration Agency in each of the years 2013 to 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22393/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):** The Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) oversees a comprehensive and detailed inspections system of accommodation centres for people seeking international protection. Inspections are carried out by an in-house inspectorate within RIA and also by an independent company.

The contract for independent inspections is currently held by QTS Ltd. As far as possible, every effort is made to inspect accommodation centres three times annually - twice by the internal RIA inspection team and once by the independent inspection company QTS. The purpose of an inspection is to assess the physical condition of the centre and to ensure that the services contracted by RIA are being delivered by the contractor. All inspections carried out by RIA staff or the external inspection company are unannounced.

All RIA accommodation centres are also subject to inspection by various other statutory bodies in relation to activities carried out on site, on the same basis as any entity providing accommodation, catering and other services. These may be either announced or unannounced. These include inspections with regard to fire safety, food and environmental safety, child welfare and inspections into on-site pre-schools/creches where applicable.

The statistical data the Deputy requires is attached in tabular form with this reply.

[<a href="https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumentation/2019-05-28\_pq143-28-05-19\_en.docx">Inspections</a>]

### **Direct Provision System**

144. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his attention has been drawn to a protest on 25 April 2019 by a large number of residents in a direct provision centre (details supplied); if his attention has been further drawn to video footage posted on a social media platform showing the owner of the centre informing protestors that the protest will impact on them; if he or the Reception and Integration Agency have investigated the events; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22394/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):** Staff members in the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) were made aware of the protest and senior management from RIA attended the centre on the date in question and over the following days. RIA was also made aware of the short video clip circulating on social media.

There was no follow up communication received by centre management or RIA from residents once the protest ended.

Staff in RIA regularly attend this centre and are available to answer queries or requests by residents. Contact can be made through regular clinics held within each centre where RIA staff are available to assist with any queries from residents. A dedicated RIA email address and phone line is also available for residents to contact RIA staff directly.

### **Immigration Status**

145. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current and expected status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22437/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy is aware, if an application for asylum or subsidiary protection has been made in the State, for confidentiality reasons it is not the practice to comment on such applications or to provide comment on what stage such applications are at in the administrative process. Under Section 26 of the International Protection Act 2015, it is an offence to identify an international applicant. As a result it would be contrary to national law for me or my Department officials to provide information which pertains to a protection applicant. The Chief International Protection Officer and his team of International Protection Officers are also bound by the confidentiality provisions of Section 26 of the 2015 Act to protect the identity of the applicant. Applicants or their legal representatives should contact the International Protection Office directly either by email to [info@ipo.gov.ie](mailto:info@ipo.gov.ie), by telephone to the IPO Customer Service Centre at 01 6028008 or in writing to Customer Service Centre, International Protection Office, 79-83 Lower Mount Street, Dublin 2.

Following the commencement of the International Protection Act 2015 on 31 December 2016, new arrangements for the investigation and determination of applications for international protection (refugee status and subsidiary protection) and cases involving permission to remain in the State have been introduced. Such applications are now processed, as part of a single application procedure, by the International Protection Office (IPO) which has replaced

the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC) from that date. The staff of that Office (the Chief International Protection Officer and International Protection Officers) are independent in the performance of their protection functions.

For your information, on 27 February 2017, the Chief International Protection Officer, following consultation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), published a statement on the Prioritisation of Applications under the International Protection Act 2015 which is available on the website of the International Protection Office ([www.ipa.gov.ie](http://www.ipa.gov.ie)).

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

### **Family Reunification Applications**

146. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a person (details supplied) can join their parent by way of a work permit or an alternative; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22438/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** Detailed information on the circumstances in which an Irish citizen can seek to sponsor a non-EEA national family member to join and reside with them in the State is contained in the INIS Policy Document on Non-EEA Family Reunification. This information can be accessed on the INIS website at <https://www.inis.gov.ie/en/INIS/Pages/immigration-policy-family-reunification>.

I am further informed that if the person concerned is a visa required national they must seek the appropriate visa for their circumstances. Each visa application is considered on its individual merits with the Visa Officer having regard to all of the information and documentation available. The onus rests at all times with the applicant to satisfy the Visa Officer that the particular visa sought should be granted. Guidelines on how to apply for particular types of visas are available on the INIS website at [www.inis.gov.ie](http://www.inis.gov.ie).

Information in relation to the criteria and application process relevant to employment permits is available on the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation website [www.dbi.gov.ie](http://www.dbi.gov.ie) at <https://dbi.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Workplace-and-Skills/Employment-Permits/>

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.

### **Family Reunification Applications**

147. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if spousal join will issue in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22440/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As previously indicated to the Deputy in Parliamentary Question No. 88 of the 11th of April, the information provided is not sufficient to establish the correct identity of the individual concerned in order to provide a response on the matter.

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

### **Naturalisation Eligibility**

148. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding the determination of eligibility for long-term residency and eligibility for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22441/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the position in the State of the person concerned remains to be determined. It also remains to be decided as to whether their position in the State falls to be determined in accordance with the process provided for under Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) or outside of that process. Once a decision has been made in relation to what immigration process should be applied to the immigration case of the person concerned, the outcome of that deliberation will be conveyed in writing to the person concerned.

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

### **Naturalisation Eligibility**

149. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding the determination of eligibility for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22442/19]

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

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

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

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

### **Family Reunification Applications**

150. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the spouse of a person (details supplied) can join them here in view of the fact that they were previously the holder of stamp 3; if spousal join is relevant in this situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22443/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that detailed information on the circumstances in which the person concerned can seek to sponsor a non-EEA national spouse to join and reside with him in the State is contained in the INIS Policy Document on Non-EEA Family Reunification. This information can be accessed on the INIS website at <https://www.inis.gov.ie/en/INIS/Pages/immigration-policy-family-reunification>.

I am further informed that if the person's spouse is a visa required national they must seek the appropriate visa for their circumstances. Each visa application is considered on its individual merits with the Visa Officer having regard to all of the information and documentation available. The onus rests at all times with the applicant to satisfy the Visa Officer that the particular visa sought should be granted. Guidelines on how to apply for particular types of visas are available on the INIS website at [www.inis.gov.ie](http://www.inis.gov.ie).

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

### **Leave to Remain**

151. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if means can be found to facilitate an application to remain in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22444/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned applied on 12/10/2010 for a residence card as a family member of an EU citizen under the provisions of the European Communities (Free Movement of Persons) Regulations 2006 and Directive 2004/38/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council. They stated at that time

that they were the spouse of a citizen of Portugal who was exercising EU Treaty Rights in the State. This application was refused on 19/04/2011.

On 10/05/2011 the person concerned sought a review of the decision to refuse their application. They were informed on 16/08/2011 that their review had been successful. They were provided at that time with permission to remain in the State on a Stamp 4EUFam basis for a period of five years – from 16/08/2011 to 16/08/2016.

The person concerned applied on 06/09/2016 to retain their permission to reside in the State. However, they were informed on 15/07/2017 that their application had been refused. They were informed at that time that the right of a third country national family member to accompany or join an EU citizen in a host Member State is a derived right, dependent on the EU citizen residing in the State in exercise of their EU Treaty Rights in accordance with the provisions of the Regulations and the Directive.

INIS was satisfied, based on the information available, that the EU citizen had departed the State in 2013 and, as such, the EU citizen had ceased to exercise EU Treaty rights in the State in accordance with the provisions of the Regulations and Directive at that time. As the Union citizen had not been exercising EU Treaty Rights in the State in accordance with the provisions of Regulation 6(3)(a) of the Regulations since 2013, the applicant's derived right of residence under Regulation 6(3)(b) of the Regulations ceased from that time also.

The person concerned requested a review of that decision on 16/08/2017, which application is currently under consideration. This application is at an advanced stage of processing, and the person concerned should expect a decision on their application in the coming weeks.

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

### **Family Reunification Applications**

152. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding a visa application for a spouse and child to join with a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22445/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the applications referred to by the Deputy were received in the Abuja Visa Office on 20 August, 2018.

The Policy Document on Family Reunification, first published in December 2013 and amended in December 2016, contains a stated business target that visa applications to join Irish citizens should ideally be dealt with within six months of receipt of application. However, it should be noted that this is a business target and does not constitute a legal obligation. The business target reflects the detailed and often complex assessment that is required to be carried out in relation to applications for family reunification.

While INIS endeavours to have applications of this nature processed as quickly as possible, processing times for visas can vary based on a number of factors such as the number of applications under consideration at the time, individual circumstances of the applicant and the sponsor,

the complexity of applications and whether further information or investigation is required, and the resources available. Any delays in achieving the business target are primarily related to the processing of more complex cases where the provision of additional documentation is requested or where detailed assessments of family rights under the Constitution and the European Convention on Human Rights are required.

In this particular case, I am advised that additional investigation is required and due to the complexities of the case it will be some time before it is completed. Accordingly, I am not in a position at this time to indicate a precise date when a decision will be made.

The central concern, as with all visa services worldwide, in deciding on visa applications is to strike an appropriate balance between protecting the country's vital national interests by maintaining an effective immigration regime, while at the same time facilitating travel for those who meet the criteria. Each visa application is decided on its own merits taking all relevant factors into account.

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

In addition, applicants may themselves e-mail queries directly to the Abuja Visa Office ([abujaembassy@dfa.ie](mailto:abujaembassy@dfa.ie)).

### **Residency Permits**

153. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when a person (details supplied) can obtain residency status; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22446/19]

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

I am further informed that it is open to the person concerned to write to Unit 5, Domestic Residence and Permissions Division, INIS, PO Box 12695, Dublin 2, setting out their current circumstances. Alternatively the person may email [INISdefacto@justice.ie](mailto:INISdefacto@justice.ie) for further information on how to proceed.

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

### **Residency Permits**

154. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a long-term extension of residency will be granted in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will

make a statement on the matter. [22448/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy is aware, if an application for asylum or subsidiary protection has been made in the State, for confidentiality reasons it is not the practice to comment on such applications or to provide comment on what stage such applications are at in the administrative process. Under section 26 of the International Protection Act 2015, it is an offence to identify an international applicant. As a result it would be contrary to national law for me or my Department officials to provide information which pertains to a protection applicant. The Chief International Protection Officer and his team of International Protection Officers are also bound by the confidentiality provisions of Section 26 of the 2015 Act to protect the identity of the applicant. The applicant or their legal representative should contact the International Protection Office directly either by email to [info@ipo.gov.ie](mailto:info@ipo.gov.ie), by telephone to the IPO Customer Service Centre at 01 6028008 or in writing to Customer Service Centre, International Protection Office, 79-83 Lower Mount Street, Dublin 2.

Following the commencement of the International Protection Act 2015 on 31 December 2016, new arrangements for the investigation and determination of applications for international protection (refugee status and subsidiary protection) and cases involving permission to remain in the State have been introduced. Such applications are now processed, as part of a single application procedure, by the International Protection Office (IPO) which has replaced the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC) from that date. The staff of that Office (the Chief International Protection Officer and International Protection Officers) are independent in the performance of their protection functions.

For your information, on 27 February 2017, the Chief International Protection Officer, following consultation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), published a statement on the Prioritisation of Applications under the International Protection Act 2015, which is available on the website of the International Protection Office ([www.ipo.gov.ie](http://www.ipo.gov.ie)).

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

### **Garda Vetting Legislation**

155. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the implementation of a standard validity period for all Garda vettings will be introduced in order of vetting applications persons must undergo; if vetting could be made transferable in a period particularly in view of the fact that volunteers regularly must be Garda vetted frequently; the reason details are not kept on a central database for future reference; if the matter will be examined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22486/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Deputy will appreciate that the primary purpose of the employment vetting carried out by the National Vetting Bureau is to seek to ensure the safety of children and vulnerable adults. It is carried out by An Garda Síochána primarily in accordance with the provisions of the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Acts 2012-2016 and is, as I am sure you will agree, a very important task which must be done thoroughly and correctly. My Department has no role in the processing of individual vetting applications.

Regarding sharing of vetting between organisations, vetting checks are conducted by the Garda National Vetting Bureau for each new vetting application received to ensure that the most recent data available is taken into account. This is because once there has been any significant lapse of time between one employment and another, the original vetting disclosure must be reviewed to take account of any changes in information, such as more recent criminal convictions.

In addition, the Data Protection Acts require that any sensitive personal data which employers use in regard to their employees must be current, accurate and up-to-date. Importantly, the general non-transferability and contemporaneous nature of the current process also helps to protect against the risk of fraud or forgery in the process.

However, the Act provides for the sharing of vetting disclosures in certain circumstances by registered organisations; a facility which is of assistance in the health and education sectors, for example, in reducing the need for multiple vetting applications. Section 12(3A) of the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012 (as amended) provides that two or more relevant organisations can enter into a joint written agreement in relation to the employment, contracting, permitting or placement of a person to undertake relevant work or activities, thereby providing for only one of the organisations being required to conduct vetting in respect of that person.

In general, the vetting process is working well and I understand that there are no backlogs or delays in Garda vetting at present. This efficiency has been achieved by the deployment of the e-vetting system which facilitates the on-line processing of applications for vetting from registered organisations. The current turnaround time for vetting applications submitted by organisations utilising the e-vetting system is 5 working days for over 85% of applications received. Individual applicants can track the process of their application online using the e-vetting tracking system, details of which are contained in the email received by applicants when completing their application online. Furthermore, in circumstances where there is such a sustained reduction in processing times, the issue of vetting “transferability” is largely obviated.

### **Naturalisation Applications**

156. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of a naturalisation application by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22492/19]

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

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

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

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

### **Coroners Service**

157. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the body to which concerned families can turn to for accountability in circumstances in which a post-mortem report contains serious inaccuracies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22502/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** Coroners are governed by the provisions of the Coroners Act 1962. They are quasi-judicial officials and are independent in the conduct of their functions.

Accordingly, as Minister, I do not have control over, or responsibility for, their operations or the manner in which inquests are conducted.

Where a coroner directs a post-mortem examination, such is conducted by a registered medical practitioner and the results furnished to the coroner.

As Minister, I have no involvement for the direction of, the carrying out of or the reporting of results to the coroner of post-mortem examinations by registered medical practitioners who conduct such examinations

The avenue for seeking a review of the coroner's decisions is a Judicial Review application.

### **Garda Vetting**

158. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to enable parents to access Garda vetting for childminders to work with children as distinct from applications being taken only from organisations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22541/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy may be aware, vetting is carried out by An Garda Síochána primarily in accordance with the provisions of the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012-2016.

At the time this legislation was being considered by the Houses of the Oireachtas, it was not considered appropriate or feasible for the State to require vetting in regard to a person's private family arrangements including in relation to private babysitting and childminding arrangements.

That said vetting requirements may arise in the context of a scheme for registered childminders. The regulation of this sector is a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Ms Katherine Zappone T.D.

### **Direct Provision Data**

159. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the

number of temporary accommodation centres for asylum seekers nationally; the criteria and regulations in relation to the granting of contracts for temporary accommodation centres; the location and number of residents in these centres; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22551/19]

162. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons in direct provision that are accommodated in emergency accommodation; the length of time such persons have been accommodated; the system in place for such persons to ensure access to supports and services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22594/19]

163. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number, location, capacity and occupancy of each temporary direct provision centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22595/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 159, 162 and 163 together.

The Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) of my Department has been encountering considerable ongoing pressure on its accommodation portfolio. This pressure increased significantly from the second half of 2018 when the number of new applicants requiring accommodation began to exceed RIA's bed capacity.

In January 2019, in order to ensure that the State could continue to provide accommodation for all protection applicants, and continue to comply with the EU Reception Directive, the RIA placed an Expression of Interest for Emergency Bed provision in the national media. Such accommodation involves the use of hotel and guest house accommodation where RIA typically contracts a defined number of rooms within existing commercial hotels/guest houses.

As of 21st May 2019 there were 687 residents accommodated in 19 emergency accommodation locations. These are located in counties Cavan, Dublin, Meath, Monaghan, Laois, Louth, Wicklow and Wexford.

The relevant statistical data is contained in the following table:

-Duration of Stay	No. Of Residents
Less than 1 month	116
1 month - 2 months	111
2 months - 3 months	151
3 months - 4 months	77
4 months - 5 months	83
5 months - 6 months	60
6 months - 7 months	72
7 months - 8 months	11
8 months - 9 months	6
Total numbers in Emergency Accommodation (as at 21 May)	687

The duration of stay in the Emergency Accommodation is intended to be for as short a time as possible prior to being transferred to a contracted RIA accommodation centre when places become available. Family composition, ages of children and medical needs are factors which are taken into account.

Persons accommodated are provided with full board accommodation. SafetyNet, on behalf

of the HSE, offers medical screening to those applicants who do not receive screening at Balse-skin Reception Centre. Additionally, the RIA is liaising with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection to assist in the process of linking residents with local Community Welfare Services. Staff from RIA are meeting with the residents in these locations to discuss any issues that may arise.

Premises proposed for use as emergency accommodation facilities are inspected by RIA staff prior to opening, and their suitability is assessed, taking all necessary regulatory and legislative requirements into account.

### Direct Provision System

160. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number and location of each emergency reception and orientation centre; the capacity of each; the number of residents living in each centre by length of stay in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22592/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):** Persons arriving in Ireland under the Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP) are initially accommodated in Emergency Reception and Accommodation Centres (EROCs).

Two EROCs are in operation. These are:

- The Abbeyfield Hotel, Ballaghaderreen, Co. Roscommon
- The Clonea Strand Hotel, Dungarvan, Co. Waterford

In addition, the IRPP has the use of dedicated EROC places within the Mosney Accommodation Centre, Julianstown, Co. Meath. These places are currently being allocated to the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) but will revert to the IRPP later this year.

EROC	CAPACITY	CURRENT OCCU-PANCY	AVG. LENGTH OF STAY
Abbeyfield Hotel EROC Ballaghaderreen, Co. Roscommon	200	181	70 days
Clonea Strand Hotel EROC Dungarvan, Co. Waterford	125	103	69 days
Mosney EROC Julianstown, Co. Meath	200	113	156 days
TOTALS	525	397	

1 The IRPP formerly had the use of 200 dedicated EROC spaces in Mosney Accommodation Centre. These spaces are not currently available to the IRPP and the 113 spaces now occupied by IRPP beneficiaries are in the process of being returned to the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) on a temporary basis but will revert to the IRPP later this year.

### Direct Provision System

161. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the body or organisation with responsibility for the oversight of emergency reception and orientation centres; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22593/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):** As the Deputy will be aware, the vast majority of persons arriving in Ireland under the Irish Refugee Protection Programme are initially accommodated in Emergency Reception and Accommodation Centres (EROCs).

Accommodating persons resettled under the UNHCR led programme in EROCs is considered to be good practice. It allows for a period of acclimatisation, rest and recovery. The supports provided in EROCs include education, for example, English language classes, HSE medical screening and access to the services of the relevant departments.

Oversight for the conditions in centres is the responsibility of the Reception and Integration Agency within the Department of Justice and Equality. The Irish Refugee Protection Programme is responsible for the welfare of refugees admitted to Ireland under its programme. Residents may also have access to the services of the independent offices of the Ombudsman the Ombudsman for Children.

*Questions Nos. 162 and 163 answered with Question No. 159.*

### **Departmental Staff Recruitment**

164. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the vacancy in respect of the position of child protection officer in the Reception and Integration Agency will be filled; the length of time the position has been vacant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22596/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):** The Direct Provision system encompasses the range of State services including accommodation, food, health, education and child and family services directly provided to international protection applicants through all the relevant Government Departments and Agencies.

While the child and family post remains vacant, RIA staff work in close liaison with Tusla on all relevant child and family related issues as they arise.

Tusla has confirmed that, subject to normal HR processes, that it is anticipated that this post will be replaced by end June 2019.

### **EU Directives**

165. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the way in which Ireland is complying with its obligation under Article 22 of EU (Recast) Reception Conditions Directive 2013/33/EU with regard to the assessment of the special reception needs of vulnerable persons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22597/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):** Directive 2013/33/EU lays down standards for the reception of international protection applicants. Article 21 of the Directive requires Member States, in implementing the Directive, to take into account the specific situation of vulnerable persons, and Article 22 provides for the assessment of the special needs of vulnerable persons.

Vulnerable persons include minors, unaccompanied minors, disabled people, elderly people, pregnant women, single parents, victims of human trafficking, persons with serious illnesses, persons with mental disorders and persons who have been subjected to torture, rape or other serious forms of psychological, physical or sexual violence, such as victims of female genital mutilation.

The Directive was implemented through the European Communities (Reception Conditions) Regulations 2018 which provide for an assessment in relation to special reception needs within 30 days of presentation or application. Once assessed as having special reception needs, there are a number of ways in which those needs are responded to. For example, Tusla provides the required supports to meet the needs of unaccompanied minors once identified as such.

An initial interview is conducted with all applicants when they first attend the International Protection Office in Dublin. If the applicant indicates at that point that he or she requires accommodation, he or she will then be assessed for any specific reception needs. This assessment is taken into account when assigning accommodation to the particular individual.

As detailed in the Regulations, the Minister for Health and the HSE has a lead responsibility in relation to health assessments. Applicants are invited for an initial health assessment on a voluntary basis.

There is a specific Health Screening Team funded and managed by the HSE located on the site of the Baleskin Reception facility for the purpose of assessing those who have just arrived in the State. The team comprises of GPs, a Medical Officer, a Clinical Nurse Specialist and two nurses, a primary care social worker, two primary care psychologists and clerical/administration support. This team offers a range of individual services and screening for medical and psycho-social needs with onward referral as necessary. The individual professionals communicate with RIA (within the bounds of patient confidentiality) if a particular need is identified that will affect the person's accommodation requirements.

In addition, arrangements are in place with Safetynet, who carry out health screening in various parts of the country on behalf of the HSE, to offer this screening service to those who do not, for whatever reason, avail of it in Dublin. Safetynet staff liaise with RIA if the person is deemed vulnerable on medical or related grounds. This can include a request that particular steps be taken as regards that person's accommodation.

There is on-going liaison between RIA and the HSE in relation to how best to meet the health and related needs of protection applicants. The HSE National Office for Social Inclusion has commissioned research to explore the concept of vulnerability with a view to further improving on the processes which are already in place.

It is important to emphasise that all sectors within the Direct Protection system share a role in identifying and supporting applicants who present as vulnerable. This is particularly the case where vulnerabilities may become evident beyond the initial stage of the protection process.

The Department continues to work hard to improve how we deliver services to people who claim international protection and seek our assistance, and to meet the requirements of the 2018 regulations. despite significant pressures with regard to the provision of accommodation.

## **EU Directives**

166. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the EU directives not transposed into law to date; the deadline imposed by the EU for the transposition

of same; the estimated date for transposition into law; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22598/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** Please see the following table which outlines the EU directives that come within the remit of my Department which have not yet been fully transposed into law together with relevant information in relation to those Directives.

Where Directives have not yet been transposed this is generally down to a combination of factors, including, primarily, competing legislative priorities.

Directive	Transposition Deadline	Estimated Transposition Date	Further information
Directive 2017/541/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 March 2017 on combatting terrorism and replacing Council Framework Decision 2002/475/JHA and amending Council Decision 2005/671/JHA.	N/A, Ireland did not opt-in to the measure	The Criminal (Terrorist Offences) Bill is included in the Government's legislative programme and will, when passed, facilitate Ireland's participation in this measure, enabling transposition to take place.	
DIRECTIVE 2014/62/EU OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 15 May 2014 on the protection of the euro and other currencies against counterfeiting by criminal law, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2000/383/JHA	23/05/2016	Year end 2019	The provisions required by the Directive largely already exist in Irish law by virtue of Part 5 of the Criminal Justice (Theft and Fraud Offences) Act 2001. A number of, mostly technical, amendments will be required and draft provisions for that purpose are currently with the Office of the Attorney General for advice. It is hoped that the provisions required to make these amendments can be brought before the Oireachtas in the Autumn of 2019.

Directive	Transposition Deadline	Estimated Transposition Date	Further information
<p>DIRECTIVE (EU) 2017/1371 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 5 July 2017 on the fight against fraud to the Union's financial interests by means of criminal law</p>	06/07/2019	Year end 2019	<p>This Directive requires a number of amendments to Part 6 of the Criminal Justice (Theft and Fraud Offences) Act 2001. A general scheme for the legislation which will make those amendments was published in October 2018 and the Bill is on the priority publication list for the Summer session of 2019. It is intended that the Bill will make its way through the Oireachtas during the Autumn session.</p>
<p>DIRECTIVE (EU) 2018/843 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 30 May 2018 amending Directive (EU) 2015/849 on the prevention of the use of the financial system for the purposes of money laundering or terrorist financing, and amending Directives 2009/138/EC and 2013/36/EU</p>	10/01/2020	10/01/2020	<p>This Directive requires a number of amendments to Part 6 of the Criminal Justice (Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing) Act 2010. A general scheme for the legislation which will make those amendments was published in January 2019 and the Bill is on the priority publication list for the Summer session of 2019. It is intended that the Bill will make its way through the Oireachtas during the Autumn session.</p>

Directive	Transposition Deadline	Estimated Transposition Date	Further information
Directive (EU) 2017/853 amending Council Directive 91/477/EEC on control of the acquisition and possession of weapons	14 September 2018	30 June 2019	Text of the Directive is complex and technical and required ongoing interaction with Advisory Counsel and Office of Parliamentary Counsel in the Office of the Attorney General. This was subject to delay due to the priority given to Brexit legislation.
European Accessibility Act (DIRECTIVE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL on the approximation of the laws, regulations and administrative provisions of the Member States as regards the accessibility requirements for products and services)	April 2025	The Directive has only recently been agreed (9 April 2019) and no information is available in relation to transposition at this early stage.	-

### Legislative Reviews

167. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the review of the Defamation Act 2009; when it is likely to be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22613/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** My Department is currently finalising the statutory review of the Defamation Act 2009. I expect a draft report with options for reform to be submitted to me in the coming weeks, with a view to my bringing proposals to Government in the autumn.

The Review is already addressing all the issues raised in submissions made to it, including those that featured in a recent campaign by the print media. These include:

- whether changes should be made to the respective roles of the judge and the jury in High Court defamation cases, in particular in relation to the question of damages; and
- whether any change should be made to the level or type of damages which may be awarded in defamation cases, or to the factors to be taken into account in making that determination.

It is important that the Defamation Act operates in practice to ensure that where damages are

awarded for defamation, they are fair and proportionate. The objective set for the defamation review was to ensure that our defamation law strikes the right balance between protecting an individual's good name and privacy, and protecting the right to freedom of expression, taking account of the vital role in our democracy played by a free and independent press.

### **Garda Operations**

168. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will report on Garda Operation Coatee; the number of persons arrested and charged to date; the number of successful convictions obtained to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22630/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am currently awaiting a report on this Operation from An Garda Síochána. I will contact the Deputy directly as soon as the report is to hand.

### **Citizenship Applications**

169. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his attention has been drawn to the requirement for those that have been given refugee status declaration to provide their national passport as part of an application for citizenship through naturalisation; and if his views on same in view of the fact that international protection applicants must surrender their national passport to the International Protection Office and may not retrieve it in normal circumstances if granted refugee status. [22699/19]

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

All persons making an application for a certificate of naturalisation are required to provide satisfactory evidence of their identity and nationality. This is usually in the form of a currently valid passport and may include other original supporting documents, such as a previously held or an out of date passport, birth certificate and marriage certificate. In cases where the applicant for a certificate of naturalisation has already submitted a passport to another area of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS), the Citizenship Division of INIS will take the necessary steps to secure the passport for appropriate examination and will revert to the applicant if further clarification or documentation is required.

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 Transport Provision**

170. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of ad-

ditional marked roads policing unit vans that came into the fleet in 2018 and to date in 2019; the number withdrawn during the same period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22704/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is primarily responsible for the effective and efficient use of the resources available to An Garda Síochána. Further, decisions in relation to the provision and allocation of Garda equipment and resources, including vehicles, are for the Commissioner in light of identified operational demands.

I have requested the relevant information from the Commissioner and I will write to the Deputy directly when I receive it.

### **Garda Ethnic Liaison**

171. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the work of the Garda Racial Intercultural and Diversity Office; the number of staff assigned to same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22756/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for the distribution of resources, including personnel, among the various Garda Divisions and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. Garda management keeps this distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the optimum use is made of these resources.

I am informed by the Commissioner that the Garda National Diversity and Integration Unit (GNDIU), formerly known as Garda Racial, Intercultural and Diversity Office (GRIDO) was established in April 2000. The GNDIU has responsibility for co-coordinating, monitoring and advising on all aspects of policing in the area of ethnic and cultural diversity. The unit leads on Garda policies, strategies, initiatives and training in respect of diversity, equality, integration and hate crime. The unit also liaises extensively with national and international stakeholders in the area of diversity, equality and integration to develop best policing practice that meets the policing needs of persons from diverse, minority and marginalised communities and groups. It is the conduit between An Garda Síochána and new communities who now reside in Ireland, representative groups and civil society organisations.

In addition to the Unit itself, there is a network of approximately 260 Ethnic Liaison Officers (ELOs) who are trained to engage positively with persons from diverse backgrounds and communities in the twenty-eight Garda Divisions across the State under the auspices of Community Policing.

A Garda Superintendent and a Garda Inspector currently directly supervise GNDIU. In addition, the Unit is assigned two Sergeants, a Garda and two administrative Garda Staff. One of the Sergeant positions is currently vacant due to promotion and transfer of a Sergeant.

### **Protected Disclosures**

172. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a comprehensive reply will issue to all of the matters raised by a person (details supplied); his views on the detailed allegations made of criminal and inappropriate activities within the Irish Prison

Service; the action taken to investigate the allegations; if a person or persons have been held responsible for such activity; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22760/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I can inform the Deputy that a response has issued to the person concerned. There are independent investigations and other processes underway in relation to the allegations raised and the person's concerns are being treated as a protected disclosure. The outcome of these processes is awaited.

### **Departmental Staff Remuneration**

173. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the pay claim which a group (details supplied) lodged in 2017; and when this case will be heard. [22761/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The established IR mechanism for dealing with claims and proposals relating to the conditions of service of civil servants is the Civil Service Conciliation and Arbitration Scheme. This Scheme is administered under the ambit of the Public Service Pay and Pensions Division of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. Where it is not possible to reach local agreement on claims relating to pay and/or conditions through a Department's local IR mechanism of Departmental Council, or where the costs of a claim are such that they would require sanction from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, such claims are recorded as 'disagreed' and referred to General Council.

The pay claim to which the Deputy refers has been the subject of ongoing discussion at Departmental Council in my Department. Earlier this month, it was formally recorded as 'Disagreed'. It will shortly be referred to General Council for arbitration and a hearing date will be set by that body.

### **Bail Law**

174. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the relevant statistics are available to make a valid comparison between the number of accused persons released on bail while still on bail for a previous offence in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22802/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As outlined in my response to the Deputy's Parliamentary Question No. 86 of 16 May 2019, I made enquiries in relation to the information sought by the Deputy (the number of persons on bail for more than one offence) and I am advised that this information is not available.

As the Deputy may be aware, the decision to grant bail in a particular case is a matter for the presiding Judge, who is independent in the exercise of his or her judicial functions. There is also a Constitutional presumption in favour of the grant of bail as, under Irish Law, a person is presumed innocent until proven guilty.

The Criminal Justice Act 2017 strengthens the operation of the bail system with the aim of making the law as effective as possible in protecting the public against crimes committed by persons on bail.

Under the Act, a Court, in considering an application for bail, is required to have regard to persistent serious offending by an applicant for bail and may take into account the nature and

likelihood of any danger presented by the grant of bail to a person charged with an offence that carries a penalty of 10 years' imprisonment or more. The Court will also have the power, in certain cases, to hear evidence from the victim of an offence before a decision on bail is taken.

Where an accused person is granted bail, the Act provides for stricter bail terms for repeat serious offenders, strengthens Garda powers to deal with breaches of bail and increases the use of curfews.

### Road Traffic Offences Data

175. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of enforcements or incidents of penalty points issued in relation to speeding on Carlingford Road, Drumcondra, Dublin 9 since the 30 kph speed limit was introduced. [22824/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I have sought a report from An Garda Síochána into the number of speeding incidents recorded on the road in question.

I will contact the Deputy directly on receipt of the Garda report.

### Seirbhísí Aistriúcháin

176. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Dlí agus Cirt agus Comhionannais cé mhéad airgid a caitheadh ar sheirbhísí ateangaireachta i gcúirteanna na tíre gach bliain le cúig bliana anuas arna mhionshonrú de réir teanga; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [22849/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** Mar is eol don Teachta, faoi fhorálacha an Achta um Sheirbhís Chúirteanna, 1998, is í an tSeirbhís Chúirteanna atá freagrach as bainistiú na gcúirteanna, agus tá an tSeirbhís sin neamhspleách ag feidhmiú a feidhmeanna di, lena n-áirítear eolas a sholáthar faoi chóras na gcúirteanna.

Chun cuidiú leis an Teachta, áfach, chuir mé fiosrúcháin á ndéanamh agus tá caiteachas na Seirbhíse Cúirteanna ar sheirbhísí ateangaireachta de réir Contae do na blianta 2014-2018 curtha ar fáil aici.

Caiteachas ar Sheirbhísí Ateangaireachta de réir Contae le linn 2014-2018

Contae	2014 €	2015 €	2016 €	2017 €	2018 €
Ceatharlach	8,135.58	13,611.62	15,431.31	19,624.70	33,611.43
An Cabhán	35,945.40	29,827.95	29,563.12	23,430.37	41,748.81
An Clár	8,538.74	5,600.44	5,347.77	2,561.21	2,364.91
Corcaigh	82,904.92	82,366.38	74,730.47	89,849.90	121,246.19
Dún na nGall	19,432.84	20,806.62	25,540.97	21,611.23	19,068.81
Baile Átha Cliath	411,901.49	360,460.85	393,607.83	402,192.61	301,002.17
Gaillimh	23,503.83	26,352.48	34,638.57	27,347.04	21,031.54
Ciarraí	33,876.12	30,221.12	39,107.33	44,569.06	41,817.32
Cill Dara	58,870.38	11,069.07	61,017.27	40,380.90	68,318.69

Contae	2014 €	2015 €	2016 €	2017 €	2018 €
Cill Chain-nigh	4,814.59	7,056.67	8,065.63	8,513.56	4,342.32
Laois	16,515.17	13,040.73	11,573.04	18,514.21	21,588.38
Liatroim	995.63	4,661.88	10,703.88	7,041.57	5,284.68
Luimneach	11,284.34	18,745.90	22,899.71	31,579.53	52,608.62
An Longfort	4,754.65	8,045.67	6,207.76	9,704.50	15,683.01
Lú	53,780.57	41,286.58	53,768.30	44,962.62	40,030.50
Maigh Eo	9,509.04	4,650.62	9,268.19	12,453.56	9,335.10
Muineachán	34,682.39	31,574.55	38,760.37	39,265.95	53,615.49
Uíbh Fhailí	17,244.42	20,405.73	12,690.20	4,359.19	15,303.75
Ros Comáin	17,832.21	16,130.59	17,313.29	20,290.88	23,437.90
Sligeach	7,398.07	6,170.99	9,248.08	6,536.29	7,586.36
Tiobraid Árann	27,906.19	25,536.32	43,914.68	37,548.65	58,599.18
Port Láirge	20,541.42	17,397.13	15,277.25	17,438.31	433.80
An Iarmhí	49,552.18	79,763.59	70,830.79	54,276.10	55,289.73
Loch Garman	35,711.15	34,577.12	39,806.59	45,039.93	54,633.68
Cill Mhantáin	11,931.20	14,129.88	16,383.08	2,587.04	9,911.37
An tIomlán	1,007,562.52	923,490.48	1,065,695.48	1,031,678.91	1,077,893.74

Tá curtha in iúl ag an tSeirbhís Chúirteanna nach féidir briseadh síos a chur ar fáil ar an gcaiteachas sin de réir teanga. Tá eolas maidir le líon na n-iarrataí ar theangacha do na blianta 2015-2018 leagtha amach sa tábla thíos, áfach. Tá curtha in iúl ag an tSeirbhís Chúirteanna nach bhfuil a mhacasamhail de bhriseadh síos do 2014 ar fáil go réidh.

síos do 2014 ar fáil go réidh.

Iarrataí ar Ateangaireacht de réir Teanga 2015-2018

Teanga	2018	2017	2016	2015
Polainnis	2,587	2,155	2,420	2,141
Rómáinis	1,541	1,306	1,449	1,433
Liotuáinis	1,182	1,079	1,081	1,049
Rúisis	905	819	797	712
Laitvis	312	284	240	259
Mandairínis	205	149	243	251
Portaingéilis	430	357	232	166
Seicis	176	164	194	160
Fraincis	126	141	97	120
Araibis	276	167	183	118
Eile	1,330	1,176	1,079	1,081
Iomlán	9,070	7,217	8,015	7,490

### Garda Station Refurbishment

177. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if funding will be provided for the refurbishment of a facility (details supplied); when this work will commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22859/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The resources provided by Government to An Garda Síochána have reached unprecedented levels, with an allocation of €1.76 billion for 2019. Very significant capital investment is also being made, including investment of €342 million in Garda ICT infrastructure between 2016 and 2021; and investment of €46 million in the Garda Fleet over the same period.

In terms of the estate, the Garda Building and Refurbishment Programme 2016-2021 is an ambitious 5-year programme based on agreed Garda priorities, which continues to benefit over 30 locations around the country, underpinned by significant Exchequer funding across the Garda and OPW Votes. In addition to that programme, other major works to the Garda estate which are ongoing include the pilot Garda station reopening project, the development of a new facility at Military Road and the major refurbishment of Fitzgibbon Street station. The goal of this investment is to address deficiencies in the Garda estate and provide fit-for-purpose facilities for Garda members and staff, as well as the public interacting with them.

The Deputy will appreciate that the Office of Public Works (OPW) has responsibility for the provision and maintenance of Garda accommodation. Works in relation to Garda accommodation are progressed by the Garda authorities working in close cooperation with the OPW.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that the showers and toilets in the female and male lockers rooms at the Garda station referred to by the Deputy are being extensively refurbished. These refurbishment works commenced a number of weeks ago and I am informed that it is expected that these works will be completed this week.

### **Garda Transport Expenditure**

178. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason the 2019 budget for Garda aircraft is only €1.050 million in view of the fact that the 2018 budget for the aircraft was €1.7 million; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22860/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** 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 An Garda Síochána, including investment of €342 million in Garda ICT infrastructure between 2016 and 2021 and investment of €46 million in the Garda fleet over the same period.

As the Deputy will appreciate, in accordance with the Garda Síochána Act 2005, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for managing and controlling the administration and business of An Garda Síochána. Further, the allocation of Garda resources is a matter for the Commissioner, in light of his identified operational demands.

I understand that the Garda Air Support Unit was established in 1997 and currently consists of 3 aircraft - one fixed wing aircraft and two helicopters.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that the original budget for Garda aircraft in 2018 was €1.05 million. This was increased to €1.7 million following the supplementary estimates, in order to meet the cost of specific maintenance requirements for the aircraft in 2018.

My Department will continue to engage with Garda management on an ongoing basis in

relation to current and capital resource needs.

### **Garda Equipment**

179. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the amount spent on repairs to equipment on the boards in the Garda water unit in each of the years 2017, 2018 and to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22862/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** In accordance with the Garda Síochána Act 2005, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for managing and controlling the administration and business of An Garda Síochána. Further, the allocation of Garda resources, including provision for the repair of specialist equipment, is a matter for the Commissioner, in light of identified operational demands.

I have asked the Commissioner for information in relation to the matter raised and when it is received I will write directly to the Deputy.

### **Garda Equipment**

180. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the amount An Garda Síochána spent on improving poor quality CCTV camera images in each of the years 2017, 2018 and to date in 2019; if An Garda Síochána has its own resources to improve poor quality CCTV camera images; if this work must be outsourced; if so, the location it is outsourced to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22863/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy will be aware, there has been an unprecedented level of investment in Garda resources across the State in recent years, including a budgetary allocation of €1.76 billion to An Garda Síochána for 2019. Significant capital investment is also being made in An Garda Síochána in terms of the Garda fleet, ICT infrastructure and the Garda estate.

In accordance with the Garda Síochána Act 2005 as amended, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for managing and controlling the administration and business of An Garda Síochána and for the allocation of Garda resources, including ICT resources, in light of operational demand.

I have requested the specific information sought by the Deputy from the Commissioner. I will write to the Deputy directly when I receive it.

### **Departmental Staff Recruitment**

181. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when a person (details supplied) will commence work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22875/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The candidate was successful in an open competition for the post in question and I can confirm that the Human Resources Division in my Department has been in contact with all successful applicants. Following the standard pre-contract requirements being finalised, the Department is now in a position to agree a start date with the candidate.

## **Immigrant Investor Programme Administration**

182. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason persons who have been approved by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service under the immigrant investor programme for investments in small and medium enterprises and who have been advised not to invest in approved schemes are being prevented from transferring their investment to other approved schemes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22876/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Immigrant Investor Programme (IIP) provides non-EEA nationals with a number of options to invest in Ireland, and successful applicants are granted a permission to reside in Ireland for a fixed period.

Applications are assessed by an Evaluation Committee, composed of senior civil and public servants from relevant Irish Government Departments and State Agencies involved in enterprise development in Ireland. Applications are assessed on the basis of the profile of the applicant, the commercial viability of the project, employment outcomes associated with the proposed investment and the overall benefit to the Irish State.

Investors should note that the Department has no responsibility for the performance of an investment. Investments are a private matter between the parties concerned and it is the responsibility of the investor, as in any business decision, to assess the potential success of their venture. Approval of an application under the Immigrant Investor Programme is not an endorsement of a particular project. What it does mean is that the investor has been approved and the investment is of a nature that meets the objectives of the Immigrant Investor Programme. The programme does not provide for the transfer of investors between projects. However, it is, of course, open to applicants to submit a new application for a different project they wish to invest in.

## **Industrial Relations**

183. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her views on the fact that a company (details supplied) is ignoring recommendations of the Labour Court; and the way in which she plans to respond to same. [22757/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen):** I am aware of the ongoing industrial relations issues at the company referred to by the Deputy. I am also aware that the Labour Court issued a recommendation on the 5th April 2019 in relation to a claim before it, with the Court noting that this issue has already been before it, resulting in previous recommendations.

Ireland’s system of industrial relations is based in voluntarism and it has been the consistent policy of successive Irish Governments to support the development of an institutional framework supportive of this voluntary system through which good industrial relations can prosper. In line with the voluntary nature of industrial relations in Ireland, recommendations of the Labour Court made under industrial relations legislation are not binding on the parties although it is expected that the parties involved give serious consideration to the Court’s Recommendation.

The Labour Court is an independent statutory body and discharge their functions independently of the Minister, therefore it would not be appropriate for me to comment on this matter.

I would urge both sides to engage constructively with each other and to remain engaged with the State’s industrial relations machinery in order to resolve the issues in dispute.

## Startup Funding

184. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the financial support avenues available to a start-up business which will be located in rural County Westmeath and will immediately create 5 to 10 permanent positions. [22422/19]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Local Enterprise Office (LEO) Westmeath is the ‘first-stop-shop’ for advice and guidance, financial assistance and other supports if you intend to start or grow your own business.

The LEO in Westmeath provides a ‘signposting’ service in relation to all relevant State supports available through agencies such as Revenue, the Department of Social Protection, Education and Training Boards, the Credit Review Office and MicroFinance Ireland. The LEOs can also offer advice and guidance in areas such as Local Authority rates, Public Procurement and other regulations affecting business.

The LEO Westmeath can offer direct grant aid to microenterprises (10 employees or fewer) in the manufacturing and internationally traded services sectors which, over time, have the potential to develop into strong export entities. Subject to certain eligibility criteria, the LEOs can provide financial assistance within three main categories: Feasibility Grants (investigating the potential of a business idea); Priming Grants (to part-fund a start-up); and Business Development Grants for existing businesses that want to expand. (It should be noted that the LEOs do not provide direct grant-aid to areas such as retail, personal services, local professional services, construction/local building services, as it may give rise to the displacement of existing businesses). In addition, there is a Technical Assistance Grant available for eligible micro-exporter applicants who are seeking to explore alternative markets for their product or service.

Along with the core LEO priming and business development grants, the LEOs are now offering a Technical Assistance for Micro-exporters (TAME) grant, which is designed to help LEO clients to find new markets and exports by part-funding expenditure incurred investigating and researching export markets, e.g. exhibiting at Trade Fairs, preparing marketing material and developing websites specifically targeting export markets.

Micro-enterprises may also avail of the Trading Online Voucher Scheme (TOVS) from the LEO Westmeath. The Scheme offers the opportunity for businesses to develop their website or digital marketing strategy by availing of vouchers of up to €2,500 or 50% of eligible expenditure.

Anyone with a viable business proposal can also use the LEO Westmeath to make an application to MicroFinance Ireland, which offers support in the form of loans of up to €25,000 to start-ups with viable business propositions that do not meet the conventional risk criteria applied by the banks. Successful applicants can avail of a more favorable interest rate from MFI if they make their application through the LEO.

## Immigration Status

185. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if a person (details supplied) can join their parent by way of a work permit or an alternative; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22439/19]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Employment Permits Section of my Department informs me that not enough information has

been provided to determine whether the person (details supplied) qualifies for an employment permit.

In order to work in the State all non-EEA nationals require a valid employment permit unless exempt under permission from the Department of Justice and Equality. In order to apply for an employment permit a non-EEA national must have secured a job offer for an eligible occupation from an Irish registered employer.

The State's general policy is to promote the sourcing of labour and skills needs from within Ireland and other EEA countries. Where specific skills prove difficult to source within the State or EEA, an employment permit may be sought by an employer to hire a non-EEA national in line with the Employment Permits Acts and associated Regulations, which lay down in legislation the criteria in relation to the application, grant and refusal of an employment permit.

Any application for an employment permit should comply with all of the legislative requirements for the particular employment permit type, including that the non-EEA national has the required immigration permission at the time of application. Family circumstances are not relevant in the context of employment permit applications. Immigration permissions, including any entitlements that may accrue to this individual by virtue of their father being an Irish citizen, are a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Justice and Equality, and any such queries should be directed to that Department.

Details on how to apply for an employment permit are available on our website at the following link - <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Workplace-and-Skills/Employment-Permits/>

### **Work Permits Applications**

186. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if the processing of work permits in the case of a person (details supplied) will be facilitated in respect of a firm; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22447/19]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I understand that the Deputy has been in email contact with officials in the Employment Permit Section of my Department and that the issue for this company centres on the granting of Intra-Company transfer permits. Based on the information provided by the Deputy in relation to this company, there should be no barrier to the granting of these permits.

I also understand that the company has Trusted Partner status with the Department for the purpose of applying for Employment Permits, which eases the administrative burden on companies and which ensures a faster turnaround time for the processing and issuing of permits. Current processing times for Trusted Partner applications is 3 weeks.

My Department's website sets out in some detail the process for applying for an Employment Permit or Trusted Partner status, including a very comprehensive and easily accessed Frequently Asked Questions document. In addition, the Employment Permits Section has a dedicated email address, with a 24 hour turnaround, for any questions an employer may have about the system.

Nonetheless, I have asked that an official from the Employment Permits Section of my Department contact the company concerned to provide clarification in relation to the various specific queries they have raised.

## **Intellectual Property Management**

187. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the specific measures being put in place to attract foreign direct investment from companies engaged in the commercialisation of all forms of intellectual property; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22523/19]

188. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her views on whether uncertainty over the treatment of intellectual property assets in the tax system is hampering efforts to attract foreign direct investment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22524/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy John Halligan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 187 and 188 together.

IDA Ireland is authorised by my Department to provide a range of measures and financial supports to companies, including those involved in the commercialisation of intellectual property. These supports include employment, capital, research and development, environmental and training grants. These grants remain an important means of encouraging firms to invest in Ireland, particularly in regional locations.

I can assure the Deputy that there is no uncertainty regarding the treatment of intellectual property assets in the tax system. Irish tax law provides for a scheme of relief in the form of capital allowances available to companies that incur capital expenditure on intangible assets for the purposes of a trade. The scheme applies to intangible assets which are recognised as such under generally accepted accounting practice and which are listed as a “specified intangible asset” in section 291A of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997. An important feature of the relief is that the allowances may only be offset against trading income generated from the intangible assets and, for capital expenditure incurred on or after 11 October 2017, only against up to 80% of that income.

In addition to this, the Government introduced The Knowledge Development Box (KDB) in 2015. The KDB provides for relief from tax on the profits earned from the exploitation of patents, copyrighted software and intellectual property for small companies, provided that the intellectual property was developed through research and development (R&D) carried out by companies resident in Ireland. The IDA continue to promote the KDB to new and existing clients.

More broadly, IDA Ireland’s record results for 2018 underline how strongly Ireland continues to perform when it comes to attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) of all types. FDI continues to drive the economy with strong employment growth in this sector at 7%, compared to the national average of 3% in 2018. FDI Exports experienced growth of 10% and an increase of 8% in the amount spent in the Irish economy on payroll, materials and services – which now stands at over €19.2bn. Ireland’s investment and value proposition continues to resonate with companies across the globe as investors search for stability and certainty.

## **Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement Data**

189. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of staff employed at the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement; the number of vacant positions in each of the years 2001 to 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22609/19]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The number of staff currently assigned to the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement (ODCE) is 38 (35.2 full time equivalent). In addition, 5 Gardaí are assigned to the ODCE.

Following his appointment in the latter half of 2012, the Director carried out a review of the ODCE's then skills mix and operational capacity. That review, inter alia, identified certain skill deficiencies, as a consequence of which sanction was sought, and subsequently obtained, to recruit a number of additional professional staff to address the identified need.

Further to that process, the Department, through the Public Appointments Service, recruited eight suitably qualified and experienced forensic accountants (there are seven positions of forensic accountant, but one staff member was successful in another competition and was replaced) together with a suitably qualified and experienced digital forensics specialist, for assignment to the ODCE.

Over recent years, a number of senior-level vacancies have arisen within the ODCE through a combination of retirement, promotion and transfer to other parts of the public service. In that context, the skill sets, competencies, roles and responsibilities associated with each of those posts have been reviewed and reconfigured by the Director to better reflect the organisation's current needs. This ongoing exercise has resulted in four senior-level professional posts, two Enforcement Portfolio Managers and two Enforcement Lawyers, being created. All of these posts having been filled through recruitment campaigns led by the Public Appointments Service.

The number of vacant positions for the years 2001 to 2018 (at year-end) are set out in tabular form:

*2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
	0	0	1	0	2	0	1	1	1	2	6	6	2	2	0	1	1

\*The ODCE was established on 28th November, 2001 with 15 of its approved staffing complement of 30 staff (plus 7 members of An Garda Síochána).

There are currently 4 vacancies in the ODCE, that the Department is responsible for filling. There are two vacancies of Forensic Accountant which have arisen in recent weeks. A recent retirement has led to one vacancy at Executive Officer level. My Department is currently liaising with the Public Appointments Service on filling the Forensic Accountant and Executive Officer vacancies. There is also a vacancy for a Corporate Compliance Manager which the Director is considering as part of the organisation's current priorities and overall workforce.

### Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement Data

190. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the annual budget for the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement in each of the years 2001 to 2019, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22614/19]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The annual budget for the Office from 2001 to 2019 is set out in the following table.

#### Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement

REV Allocations (€000)	Pay	Non-Pay	Total

2001	961	1,378	2,339
2002	1,308	2,364	3,672
2003	1,426	2,402	3,828
2004	1,686	2,564	4,250
2005	1,793	2,745	4,538
2006	1,899	2,814	4,713
2007	2,119	2,704	4,823
2008	2,681	2,276	4,957
2009	2,655	2,880	5,535
2010	2,579	3,507	6,086
2011	2,660	3,307	5,967
2012	2,620	3,077	5,697
2013	2,475	2,855	5,330
2014	2,465	2,207	4,672
2015	2,884	2,207	5,091
2016	2,808	2,207	5,015
2017	2,838	2,057	4,895
2018	3,000	2,057	5,057
2019	3,740	2,317	6,057

The distribution of the funding allocations across my Department's Vote, including that of the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement, is determined through the annual Revised Estimates Volume (REV) process.

Since the appointment of the current Director, the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement (ODCE) has been engaged in a process of organisational reform to ensure that the organisation is suitably equipped to discharge its mandate in an effective manner. Steps taken in that regard over recent years have included the recruitment of a number of specialist staff to enhance key skills and organisational capability, including 8 Forensic Accountants; a Digital Forensic Specialist; 2 Enforcement Lawyers and 2 Enforcement Portfolio Managers. Specific provision has been made in the Office's pay allocation from 2015 to allow for the recruitment of these additional staff.

The provision of additional resources to the ODCE has also facilitated the establishment of an in-house digital forensics laboratory, including an on-site digital forensics capability whereby data retrieved from digital devices can be relayed to investigators in real time.

An additional €1m was provided for the ODCE in 2019 to reflect the likely costs associated with the transition of the ODCE into a stand-alone Agency. A funding allocation of €6.057m has been provided for the ODCE for 2019.

The issue of resourcing of the ODCE is kept under review on a regular basis between my officials and the ODCE as part of the ongoing work in operationalising the transition of the ODCE to a stand-alone agency and also as part of the normal day-to-day interaction to discuss operational matters relating to the Office.

### Suicide Incidence

191. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the high number of suicides by homeowners in arrears and the effect of severe stress and worry

on persons experiencing same. [22462/19]

**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.

### **Occupational Therapy**

192. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health when a child (details supplied) in County Mayo can expect an appointment with the early intervention services, namely, occupational therapy, psychology and speech and language therapy; the reason the appointments for them with these services has been delayed; if an appointment will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22549/19]

**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.

### **Alcohol Advertising**

193. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Health when he will commence the provisions of the Public Health (Alcohol) Act 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22861/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Public Health (Alcohol) Bill was enacted in October 2018. In November I commenced 23 of the 31 Sections of the Act including to provide that:

From 12 November 2019:

- Alcohol advertising in or on public service vehicles, at public transport stops or stations and within 200 metres of a school, a crèche or a local authority playground will be prohibited;

- Alcohol advertising in a cinema will be prohibited except around films with an 18 classification or in a licensed premises in a cinema;

- Children's clothing that promotes alcohol will be prohibited.

From 12 November 2020:

In mixed retail outlets alcohol products and advertising are confined to one of the following:

- an area separated by a 1.2 metre high barrier; or

- units in which alcohol products are not visible up to 1.5 metres height; or

- up to three units that can be a maximum of 1 metre wide by 2.2 metres high.

In addition alcohol products can be contained but not be visible in a unit behind the counter.

From 12 November 2021:

- Alcohol advertising on a sports area during a sporting event, at events aimed at children or at events in which the majority of participants or competitors are children is prohibited;

- Alcohol sponsorship of events aimed at children, events which the majority of participants or competitors are children and events involving driving or racing motor vehicles is prohibited.

The current position with Minimum Unit Pricing is that a revised Government Decision is necessary before it can be commenced as the Government Decision in 2013 which approved the implementation of a minimum unit pricing regime did so on the basis of a similar regime being introduced simultaneously in Northern Ireland.

The provisions on the labelling and advertising of alcohol products will be commenced following the finalisation of the regulations related to those measures.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

194. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be called for a hospital appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22287/19]

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

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

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

### **Cancer Services Provision**

195. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health the length of time associated with the waiting list for ovarian and other cancer chemotherapy treatments in University Hospital Galway; the reason there is a delay in providing this treatment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22288/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** University Hospital Galway (UHG) advise that the waiting times for chemotherapy for ovarian cancer is currently 3-4 weeks. Generally, waiting times for an appointment in the Haematology/Oncology Day Ward is around three

weeks, with the Hospital expecting to secure treatment within 15 working days for 90% of patients this month.

I am aware that there have been some capacity issues at UHG. However, in recent months internal improvements to streamline processes has added to capacity and allowed UHG to increase the number of chemotherapy slots per day from 16 to 22. UHG are also prioritising the filling of vacant nursing posts in this area.

### **Nursing Homes Support Scheme Applications**

196. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health when a decision will be made on an application for the nursing home support scheme by a person (details supplied); the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22289/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Health Services Provision**

197. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the implementation of a text messaging system by the HSE (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22293/19]

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

### **Home Help Service Provision**

198. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter regarding a person (details supplied) in County Sligo waiting for approved homecare support; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22295/19]

**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**

199. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Health when a child (details supplied) will receive an assessment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22298/19]

**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.

### **Mental Health Policy**

200. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Health the status of the implementation by the HSE of a dual diagnosis strategy for patients with addiction and underlying mental health challenges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22300/19]

**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.

#### **Ambulance Service Staff**

201. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the number of acting and permanent promotions and post upgrades within the national ambulance service for administration, clerical and officer posts (details supplied) from January 2014 to date. [22303/19]

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

#### **Ambulance Service Staff**

202. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the number of internal or external job advertisements and interviews conducted for acting and permanent promotions and post upgrades within the national ambulance service for administration, clerical and officer posts (details supplied) from January 2014 to date. [22304/19]

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

#### **Hospital Appointments Delays**

203. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Health the reason a hospital appointment has been cancelled three times in the past in the case of a person (details supplied); when the appointment will be granted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22305/19]

**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.

## **Respite Care Services**

204. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Health when the respite house that was recently refurbished in Tullow, County Carlow, will be available for use; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22309/19]

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

The Programme for Partnership Government states that the Government wishes to provide more accessible respite care to facilitate full support for people with a disability.

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

## **Health Services**

205. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE will consider upgrading mobile phones used by therapists who facilitate a DBT group at a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22310/19]

**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.

## **Home Care Packages Provision**

206. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if hours will be allocated as part of a homecare package application to persons (details supplied). [22311/19]

**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.

## **Home Care Packages Provision**

207. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if hours will be allocated as part of a homecare package application to persons (details supplied). [22312/19]

**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**

208. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Kildare will undergo an urgent medical procedure in respect of the removal of a cataract at the Royal Victoria Eye and Ear Hospital, Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22327/19]

**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.

### **Respite Care Services**

209. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health if matters raised in correspondence regarding respite care from a person (details supplied) will be responded to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22328/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** I understand that a response for the correspondence referred to was issued on 20/05/19.

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

210. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if documentation will be reviewed in relation to the proposed move of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22329/19]

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

The Programme for Partnership Government states that the Government wishes to provide more accessible respite care to facilitate full support for people with a disability.

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

### **Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services**

211. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the appointment of registered general nurses to CAMHS for phlebotomy services, particularly in County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22335/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### Medical Card Eligibility

212. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the reason Lyme disease diagnostic tests are not covered by the medical card as in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22340/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Irish Public Health System provides for two categories of eligibility for persons ordinarily resident in the country, i.e. full eligibility (medical cardholders) and limited eligibility (all others). Full eligibility is determined mainly by reference to income limits. Determination of an individual's eligibility status is the responsibility of the Health Service Executive. Persons with full eligibility are entitled to a range of services including general practitioner services, prescribed drugs and medicines, all in-patient public hospital services in public wards (including consultant services), all out-patient public hospital services (including consultant services), dental, ophthalmic and aural services and appliances and a maternity and infant care service. Other services such as allied health professional services may be available to medical card holders. These services are provided free of charge except for prescribed drugs and medicines, which are subject to a €2 charge per prescribed item (maximum of €20 month per month per individual/family).

In relation to blood tests, under the terms of the current GMS contract, GPs are required to provide eligible patients with "*all proper and necessary treatment of a kind usually undertaken by a general practitioner and not requiring special skill or experience of a degree or kind which general practitioners cannot reasonably be expected to possess*". There is no provision under the GMS contract for persons who hold a medical card or GP visit card to be charged for routine phlebotomy services provided by their GP which are required to either assist in the diagnosis of illness or the treatment of a condition.

As testing and treatment for Lyme borelliosis is widely available in all major hospitals in Ireland there is no need for people to travel to other EU Member States for diagnosis or treatment.

### Hospital Services

213. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if there will be a reconfiguration of hospital groupings as part of the ongoing review; when the review will be published; and if the Regional Hospital Mullingar will be put into another grouping. [22343/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The report of the cross-party Oireachtas Committee on the Future of Healthcare, Sláintecare, identifies four core building blocks that underpin a well-functioning health system. The first of these building blocks is a clear governance and accountability framework. As part of its recommendations in this area, the Committee called for the establishment of a HSE Board, the HSE to become a more strategic and patient-focused 'national centre' carrying out national level functions, and the establishment of

regional bodies with responsibility for the planning and delivery of integrated care at a regional level.

The report further recommends that these new regional bodies should be established through the geographic alignment of current administrative regional structures. As the Deputy will be aware, 9 Community Healthcare Organisations (CHOs) and 7 Hospital Groups are in place on an administrative basis to plan and deliver community and acute care services respectively. While significant progress has been made by these structures, there is broad consensus that having separate and un-aligned structures for acute and community care impedes the development of a more integrated health service as envisaged under the Sláintecare programme.

In this regard, the Sláintecare report recommended that “further analysis and consultation should be undertaken to identify how alignment can best be achieved with minimal disruption to key structures including at community healthcare network level”.

The Government’s Sláintecare Implementation Strategy published in August 2018 and the 2019 Sláintecare Action Plan published in March 2019 commit to the development of a new system of health structures and governance as called for in the Sláintecare report. The Strategy and the Action Plan set out a number of actions to deliver on this commitment. This includes determining the optimal approach for aligning current CHO and Hospital Group structures to provide the geographical basis for the proposed new regional bodies.

As a first step, my Department undertook a public consultation regarding the geographical alignment of CHOs and Hospital Groups in 2018. In addition, my Department has carried out further detailed analysis work to determine the optimal geographical alignment of CHOs and Hospital Groups which can be achieved with minimal disruption, and which will ultimately be the geographical areas of the proposed new regional integrated care organisations. My Department is finalising proposals in this regard, and I hope to bring these proposals to Government shortly.

### **Hospitals Funding**

214. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the annual budget allocated to the Regional Hospital Mullingar for the past seven years in tabular form. [22344/19]

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

### **Hospitals Capital Programme**

215. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the amount provided to the Regional Hospital Mullingar under capital works in tabular form. [22345/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of public healthcare services and infrastructure projects, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to you in relation to this matter.

### **Primary Care Centres**

216. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health if he will report on the

current service for primary care mental health services in Raheny, Donaghmede, Edenmore and Kilbarrack, Dublin; if referrals have been suspended until later in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22350/19]

**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 Availability**

217. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health when spinraza treatment will be rolled out to persons with spinal muscular atrophy in view of the suffering and deterioration in their health and quality of life in the absence of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22353/19]

225. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health his views in relation to spinraza (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22402/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 217 and 225 together.

As the Deputies are aware, the Oireachtas put in place a strong legal framework, in the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, to give full statutory powers to the HSE to assess and make decisions on reimbursement of medicines, taking account of a range of objective factors and expert opinion as appropriate.

I fully recognise that this debilitating and progressive condition places enormous strain on SMA sufferers and their families and carers, and I can understand their wish to have access to potentially beneficial drug treatments.

However, because of the significant monies involved, the HSE must ensure that the best price is achieved for all medicines, as these commitments are often multi-million euro investments on an on-going basis. This can lead to a protracted deliberation process, where suppliers commence the negotiation process with a pricing proposal that does not reflect affordability or the evaluation of clinical effectiveness.

In the case of nusinersen (Spinraza), following detailed consideration of an application for reimbursement and lengthy engagement with the company, the HSE decided that it was unable to reimburse nusinersen. 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.

On 21 February 2019, 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 submitted additional information and that the matter remains under consideration by the HSE.

### **Hospital Staff**

218. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health the status of a speciality consultant (details supplied) in County Cork. [22358/19]

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

### **Mental Health Services Provision**

219. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the reason the primary care mental health service in an area (details supplied) has been suspended; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22360/19]

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

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

220. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) will be called for an outpatient appointment as a matter of urgency. [22377/19]

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

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

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

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

221. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if hip replacement surgery will be expedited for a person (details supplied). [22380/19]

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

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national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

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

222. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health his views on the fact that CHO area 8 has run out of funding for 2019 for prosthetics and bras for women in recovery from surgery following breast cancer; his plans in relation to same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22389/19]

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

### **Mental Health Services Provision**

223. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health his views on the announcement that due to the high number of referrals to the primary care mental health service, it is closed for new referrals from the Raheny, Donaghmede, Edenmore and Kilbarrack area for the remainder of 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22397/19]

**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**

224. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding FreeStyle Libre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22400/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

*Question No. 225 answered with Question No. 217.*

### **Respite Care Services**

226. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health his views in regard to respite care (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22407/19]

**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.

### **Disability Definitions**

227. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the status of plans to recognise a condition (details supplied) as a disability; if his attention has been drawn to the distress and suffering caused as a result of the condition; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22410/19]

232. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Health the steps he is taking to recognise the fact that persons who suffer from fibromyalgia have a disability; if appropriate treatment will be provided for persons who are suffering from it; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22431/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 227 and 232 together.

Fibromyalgia is a syndrome associated with wide-spread pain and fatigue. It is labelled a syndrome as fibromyalgia is a collection of signs, symptoms and medical problems that tend to occur together but are not related to a specific, identifiable cause. Fibromyalgia is not classified as a disability and there are currently no plans for the reclassification of fibromyalgia.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

228. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if an early assessment for a hip operation will be arranged for a person (details supplied); the reason the person has been waiting three years to date for the assessment; the number on the list waiting at University Hospital Waterford; and the waiting time for the operation. [22412/19]

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

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

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

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

229. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22413/19]

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

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

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

### **Cancer Screening Programmes**

230. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the removal of the BreastCheck unit from a location (details supplied) and the consequence that the nearest alternative location is Eccles Street; when a more suitable location will be available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22414/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** A BreastCheck mobile unit was located at the Pavilions Shopping Centre, Swords, between February and October 2018. All eligible women in the area were invited for a free mammogram at that time.

The BreastCheck programme aims to offer screening services to women in locations that are as convenient as possible for them. The National Screening Service are in discussions with the Pavilions Shopping Centre, and with other sites in Swords, with a view to returning to provide further screening.

In the meantime, women in Swords are invited to avail of the service at Eccles Street and they may arrange an appointment with BreastCheck by calling (01) 882 6900.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

231. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) who is on a waiting list since October 2013 and is awaiting ENT treatment has not been called to date to have the procedure carried out; if this will now be addressed without delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22430/19]

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

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for sched-

uled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

*Question No. 232 answered with Question No. 227.*

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

233. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied). [22433/19]

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

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

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

### **Medical Card Eligibility**

234. **Deputy Seán Barrett** asked the Minister for Health if consideration will be given to providing credits in respect of lifetime community rating for medical card holders over 34 years of age who now find themselves in the higher income bracket and are no longer eligible for a medical card and require private health insurance (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22463/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Lifetime Community Rating (LCR) was introduced in 2015 as a way to strengthen Ireland's community rated-health insurance market, where people who are old or sick do not have to pay more than the young and healthy when taking out a health insurance policy. The aim behind LCR was to encourage more young people to take out health insurance - to avoid late entry loadings of 2% per annum which may apply at age 35 and older - in order to ensure sufficient balance in the market overall between younger and older people, and between those who tend to claim more and those who tend to claim less.

Following a comprehensive review of the LCR regime in 2017 by the independent regulator, the Health Insurance Authority, the loadings regime was refined in several ways and credits made available in certain further circumstances. For example, a three-year exemption from 2008 for those made redundant was broadened this year to cover LCR loadings. As of 1 February 2019, persons who have cancelled their insurance for 6 months or more, having previously been insured for at least 3 years, will be credited for any periods of non-cover (the period of 3 years' cover does not need to be consecutive). The credited period is limited to 3 years and is

available regardless of why the insured person cancelled their insurance.

More detailed information is available on the website of the HIA at <https://www.hia.ie/consumer-information/lifetime-community-rating-explained>.

Everyone – with or without insurance - is entitled to access healthcare via the public health system, and the purchase of private health insurance by citizens is optional. The regulatory framework governing health insurance, such as late entry loadings under LCR and the application of waiting periods for new health insurance customers, applies to all persons choosing to purchase health insurance and is not related to a person's eligibility, or previous eligibility, for public health services.

### **Respite Care Services Provision**

235. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the provision of respite services in Tullaghan, County Leitrim; if the unit has been approved by HIQA; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22465/19]

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

The Programme for Partnership Government states that the Government wishes to provide more accessible respite care to facilitate full support for people with a disability.

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

### **Hospital Waiting Lists**

236. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the waiting times in respect of both routine and review appointments as part of adult diabetes services at Letterkenny University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22467/19]

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

### **Hospital Staff Recruitment**

237. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if a permanent paediatric endocrinologist is in post at Letterkenny University Hospital; if not, the reason therefor; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22468/19]

**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.

## Hospital Appointments Administration

238. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) in County Donegal will receive an earlier appointment in St. James's Hospital, Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22470/19]

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

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

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

## Hospital Transfers

239. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal will be transferred to a community hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22471/19]

**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 Admissions

240. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal will receive a date for admission to Beaumont Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22472/19]

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

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

### **Cross-Border Health Services Provision**

241. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health the reason there has been a delay in the reimbursement regarding an operation for a person (details supplied). [22473/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The management of the Cross Border Directive (CBD) is a matter for the Health Service Executive.

As the issue raised is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the Deputy directly.

### **Hospital Staff Recruitment**

242. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the reason the podiatrist post at Letterkenny University Hospital as part of diabetes services has yet to begin receiving referrals; when the post holder will take up the post; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22477/19]

**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.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

243. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) can expect an appointment. [22483/19]

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

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

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

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

244. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) can expect an appointment for an MRI scan at the Midland Regional Hospital, Tullamore.

[22484/19]

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

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

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

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

245. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be called for an appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22496/19]

**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.

### **Primary Care Centres**

246. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health his plans to expand a health centre in an area (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22500/19]

**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.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

247. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22501/19]

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

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

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

### **Home Care Packages Administration**

248. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the way in which the health budget for home support and public health nurse visits is managed for those exiting hospital care while recognising local need, particularly in areas with high levels of more senior and frailer residents such as those living in the Beaumont area; the way in which he plans to increase the levels of home support and regular public health nurse visits in this area for those exiting hospital care; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22508/19]

**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**

249. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if the reinstatement of specific medication which was withdrawn from medical card holders over two years ago (details supplied) will be reconsidered. [22510/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Medicines play a vital role in improving the health of Irish patients. Securing access to existing and new and innovative medicines is a key health service objective. However, the challenge is to do this in a safe and sustainable manner. Treatment must be appropriate and proportionate and clinical decision-making, such as prescribing, should be based on both patient needs and sound medical evidence.

Lidocaine 5% medicated plasters are licensed for localised relief of post-shingles pain in adults. This is the patch’s only licensed use in Ireland. It has been reimbursed in the community drug schemes since 2010.

Clinical concern arose as usage increased significantly, to the point where more plasters were being used in Ireland than in the entire UK National Health Service. In such situations, it is important and appropriate for clinicians to review usage and, in 2016, the HSE Medicines

Management Programme (MMP) reviewed the use of the plasters. The review estimated that only 5-10% of prescribing was for the licensed indication.

From September 2017, following the clinical review, the HSE introduced a new reimbursement approval system for the patches, to support appropriate use and patient care. Under these arrangements, the patient's GP or consultant applies to the MMP for reimbursement approval on behalf of the patient. If an application is refused, the clinician may submit an appeal to the MMP, making a clear clinical case for the patient. Information for patients and practitioners is on the HSE MMP website at: [hse.ie/yourmedicines](http://hse.ie/yourmedicines).

The decision to introduce a new reimbursement approval process for a particular treatment is a matter for the HSE. I fully support the objectives of the HSE Medicines Management Programme.

### **Day Care Services**

250. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the reason persons (details supplied) were informed they could no longer attend day care services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22516/19]

**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 Availability**

251. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health his plans to make Spinraza treatment available for patients suffering with spinal muscular atrophy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22520/19]

308. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health when a decision will be made on providing Spinraza for patients suffering from spinal muscular atrophy, SMA; the reason for the delay with the decision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22852/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 251 and 308 together.

As the Deputy is aware, the Oireachtas put in place a strong legal framework, in the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, to give full statutory powers to the HSE to assess and make decisions on reimbursement of medicines, taking account of a range of objective factors and expert opinion as appropriate.

In the case of nusinersen (Spinraza), following detailed consideration of an application for reimbursement and lengthy engagement with the company, the HSE decided that it was unable to reimburse nusinersen. 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.

On 21 February 2019, the HSE wrote to the manufacturer involved and informed it 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 submitted additional information and that the matter remains under consideration by the HSE.

### **Departmental Meetings**

252. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health if he will report on ongoing talks with an organisation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22521/19]

**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. The Government's primary concern is to ensure the continuity of disability services delivered in line with strong governance mechanisms in a cost-effective and equitable manner consistent with care and support needs. As one of many service providers, Rehab provide invaluable services and supports to people with disabilities and their families.

Minister Harris and I held a further joint meeting with Rehab and the HSE on Tuesday last, 21st May. We want to acknowledge the positive and transparent level of engagement by Rehab with the HSE over the past number of weeks, and their commitment to continue to work closely in the future. We recognise the additional expenditure requirement, as set out and agreed at our meeting, is attributable in the main to a number of specific regulatory challenges and associated service pressures. We have committed to the provision of an additional €2 million in funding to Rehab, subject to agreement with the HSE on services to be delivered.

### **HIQA Inspections**

253. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Health when the last unannounced inspection carried out by HIQA took place at a nursing home (details supplied); the staff-patient ratio at the home; the mechanisms in place to ensure the implementation of each individual patient care plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22522/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** All designated residential centres for older people, including the private nursing home referred to by the Deputy, are registered with and inspected by the Health Information and Quality Authority, HIQA. In accordance with the Health Act (Care and Welfare of Residents in Designated Centres for Older People) Regulations, 2013, as amended, all designated centres must ensure that the number and skill mix of staff is appropriate to the needs of their residents. The Regulations also include specific requirements in relation to the assessment of each resident, and the preparation, review and revision of the care plan for each resident.

The purpose of the Regulations is to ensure proper standards apply to all designated centres. HIQA carries out a programme of scheduled and unannounced inspections to assess whether residential centres are providing high quality, safe and effective services and supports to residents, and ensures that any issues or deficiencies are addressed and rectified. Where issues of non-compliance are identified, HIQA's inspection reports include a series of follow-on actions that the registered provider must implement within a prescribed time-frame.

Reports of inspections carried out by HIQA are published on the Authority's website [www.hiqa.ie](http://www.hiqa.ie), and the reports outline the type of inspection carried out, along with the findings and outcomes of the inspection.

### **Paediatric Services**

254. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health the number of consultants in Cork University Maternity Hospital responsible for children with diabetes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22526/19]

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

### **Paediatric Services**

255. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health if a paediatric consultant is responsible for diabetes in Cork University Maternity Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22527/19]

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

### **Paediatric Services**

256. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health his plans to recruit a paediatric consultant for children with diabetes in Cork University Maternity Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22528/19]

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

### **Paediatric Services**

257. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health the number of dieticians or dietician hours allocated to children with diabetes in Cork University Maternity Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22529/19]

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

### **Disease Incidence**

258. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health his views on the increased prevalence of type 1 and 2 diabetes; the number of specialist consultants employed in this area by county; the number of specialist consultants employed in this area by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22530/19]

**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.

## **Services for People with Disabilities**

259. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health when services for persons with disabilities between 60 and 65 years of age will be provided in County Laois (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22546/19]

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

The Deputy advised that he is looking at the level of day care services available for people aged over 65 with a disability, and if they are accessing services that are not available to people aged under 65 with similar disabilities, specifically if there a difference between services being accessed by people with disabilities because of their age.

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

### **Mental Health Services Staff**

260. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the availability of community mental health nurses in each region nationally; the number available in each region (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22547/19]

**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.

### **Mental Health Services Staff**

261. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the availability of advocate nurses in each region nationally for persons who suffer with mental health issues (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22548/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

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

262. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health when a hearing aid will be provided to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22553/19]

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

## Services for People with Disabilities

263. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health when an assessment of needs will be provided for a child (details supplied) in Dublin 11; the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22554/19]

**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.

## Abortion Services Provision

264. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health the reason it is the policy of medics in the National Maternity Hospital to recommend abortion of a healthy unborn child due to an alleged misdiagnosis at the hospital; if the policy of abortion as a recommendation is in place in other locations nationally; if he will instruct the HSE to develop a policy that abortion is not recommended to mothers here (details supplied); the steps he will take to ensure that a similar case will not reoccur; and the investigations being undertaken by his Department into the circumstances of the case. [22576/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Section 11 of the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018 sets out the law on access to termination of pregnancy in cases where there is a condition present affecting the foetus that is likely to lead to the death of the foetus before or within 28 days of birth.

The Minister's overriding concern in this case is for the couple involved and respecting their privacy.

The Minister notes that an appropriate external review is warranted into the matters that arise here and the steps that are being taken to have an independent review of this case conducted.

As the Deputy's question relates to a service matter, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

## Hospital Services

265. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health the waiting time for urology tests in University Hospital Galway; the reason for the long waiting list for these tests; his plans to resolve same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22586/19]

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

## **Parental Leave**

266. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health his plans to ensure that the HSE is in full compliance with its obligations under parental leave legislation and in particular the extension of unpaid parental leave on the implementation date of 1 September 2019, in view of the fact some staff are being told that there may be a delay in making the leave available to staff on this date [22590/19]

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

## **Hospital Appointments Status**

267. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22599/19]

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

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

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

## **Hospital Appointments Status**

268. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health if a hospital appointment will be expedited for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22605/19]

**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.

### **Emergency Departments Waiting Times**

269. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons aged 75 years of age and over who experienced an emergency department wait time of more than 24 hours in the first quarter of 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22608/19]

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

The National Service Plan 2019 includes an expected activity target that 99% of patients aged 75 and over are discharged or admitted within 24 hours of registration. Any breach of this target in respect of patients in this age cohort is unacceptable.

I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly with the specific information requested.

### **Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Provision**

270. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the steps he will take in the case of a child (details supplied) who is at high risk of self-harm and under the care of CAMHS. [22610/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Provision**

271. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that CAMHS is advising parents to seek help privately for seriously ill children who are deemed to be high risk of self-harm; and if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that the waiting lists for private consultations are also over three months and in the case of high-risk children, including a child (details supplied), waiting three months is not an option in cases in which their conditions are immediately life threatening. [22611/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services**

272. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the measures he is taking to address

the under-resourcing of CAMHS nationally and specifically the service in Swords, County Dublin in which several staff are working a three day week. [22612/19]

**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**

273. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be called for an outpatient appointment; the reason for the delay in same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22617/19]

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

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

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

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

274. **Deputy Peter Burke** 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. [22622/19]

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

### **Mental Health Services Data**

275. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the budget allocation to the national counselling services in each of the years 2017 to 2019, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22628/19]

**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.

### **Disability Services Data**

276. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the number of companies contracted to provide personal assistance care on behalf of the HSE in CHO9 in each of the years 2017, 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22629/19]

**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.

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

277. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Health his plans for the FreeStyle Libre device to come under the drug payment scheme (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22647/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Respite Care Services Provision**

278. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if respite care will be made available to a person (details supplied) who is urgently in need of same. [22650/19]

**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.

### **Patient Transport**

279. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Health the provision that can be made to refund taxi transport for patients attending hospital appointments who have no access to transport especially patients with disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22661/19]

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

### **Community Care**

280. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a care facility

(details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22664/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The Report “*Time to Move on from Congregated Settings – A Strategy for Community Inclusion*” proposes a new model of support in the community moving people from Congregated settings to the community in line with Government policy. The Report identified around 4000 people (based on 2008 census) with disabilities in Ireland living in congregated settings, defined as a residential setting where people live with ten or more people.

The Programme for Partnership Government contains a commitment to continue to move people with disabilities out of congregated settings, to enable them to live independently and to be included in the community. The objective is to reduce this figure by one-third by 2021 and ultimately, to eliminate all congregated settings.

By the end of this year, we will have exceeded this target and under 2,100 people with a disability will remain living in congregated settings. I want to emphasise that the appropriate supports and resources are being put in place to ensure that people are supported as they move out of residential centres. The model of care for individuals will be based on a person centred plan (PCP). The PCP may change over time in line with an individual’s needs and circumstances and the model of service delivery applicable at a particular time.

Any opportunity for residents to live in smaller settings in the community will come after considerable planning and discussion with those residents and their families. It will be on the basis that it will enhance their life, and anyone who moves will continue to access the services they require.

The HSE has prioritised the transition of a further 160 people from congregated settings in 2019 under its Service Plan, and I am informed that 49 people have moved into their homes in the community to the end of March this year.

As the HSE is responsible for leading out on the recommendations of “*Time to Move on from Congregated Settings - A Strategy for Community Inclusion*”, I have asked the HSE to reply directly to the Deputy in relation to St. Mary of the Angels, Beaufort, Co. Kerry.

### **Nursing Homes Support Scheme**

281. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the entitlements to dental benefits and cover of older persons in receipt of a full medical card that are full-time residents in nursing homes and covered by the fair deal scheme; if his attention has been drawn to some nursing homes charging the full costs of dental treatments to these residents; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22666/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Nursing Homes Support Scheme (NHSS), commonly referred to as A Fair Deal, is a system of financial support for people who require long-term residential care. Participants contribute to the cost of their care according to their means while the State pays the balance of the cost. The NHSS covers the cost of the standard components of long-term residential care which are:

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

and

- Laundry service.

A person's eligibility for other schemes, such as the medical card scheme or the drugs payment scheme, is unaffected by participation in the NHSS or residence in a nursing home.

The Dental Treatment Services Scheme (DTSS) enables medical card holders to access basic dental treatment free of charge from contracted dental surgeons in the private sector. In addition, the Public Dental Service of the HSE provides oral healthcare to vulnerable patients and patients with special needs.

If the Deputy is aware of any incidents of nursing homes charging the full costs of dental treatment, she may wish to forward details to my Department and I will arrange to have the matter investigated by the HSE.

Future provision of oral healthcare services will be informed by Smile agus Sláinte, the new National Oral Health Policy, which was published last month. Smile agus Sláinte aims to reduce oral health inequalities by providing additional support to vulnerable groups to access oral healthcare and improve their oral health. One of the priority actions of the Policy is to commence identification of vulnerable groups and develop clinical care pathways and clinical management for these patients.

### **Blind Welfare Allowance Eligibility**

282. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if a blind welfare allowance will be reinstated in the case of a person (details supplied). [22668/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Housing Adaptation Grant Applications**

283. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health the status of an application to have a stair lift installed in their home by a person (details supplied); and when installation work will commence. [22669/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I wish to advise the Deputy that this is a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Housing, Planning & Local Government.

### **Medical Conditions**

284. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the position of the HSE with respect to the recognition of a disputed condition (details supplied); the version of the WHO International Classification of Diseases diagnostic and statistic tool used by the HSE for the purpose of recognising the condition; if cross departmental work with the Department of Justice and Equality will take place should changes to the version being used be adopted in future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22711/19]

**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**

285. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will have an angiogram; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22712/19]

**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.

### **Occupational Therapy Data**

286. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Health the number of occupational therapists working in the early years department in Kilcreene Hospital, Kilkenny; if there is a shortage of occupational therapists in the hospital; if so, his plans to address the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22738/19]

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

### **Departmental Communications**

287. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 426 of 21 May 2019, if he will provide a list of all meetings, consultations, correspondence and the purposes of each, between Ministers or officials and a person (details supplied) or members of their team since they undertook work in relation to CervicalCheck; if similar information will be provided regarding meetings between HSE officials and the person for the same time period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22741/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As outlined in my response to the Deputy's previous question, I and officials from my Department have met with Dr Scally on a number of occasions since the Scoping Inquiry was established. The dates of these meetings, insofar as they have been ascertained following a comprehensive search of records, are outlined in the following table:

Date	Details
7 May	Preliminary meeting with Department officials on work of the Inquiry
24 May	Dr Scally met with Department officials to facilitate the work of the Inquiry
11 June	Dr Scally met with Minister and Department officials to submit his First and Progress Reports
12 July	Dr Scally participated in a teleconference with Department officials and RCOG representatives
8 August	Dr Scally met with Department official to facilitate the work of the inquiry
28 August	Dr Scally met with Department official to facilitate the work of the inquiry
28 August	Dr Scally met with Department official to facilitate the work of the inquiry
10 September	Dr Scally met with Minister and Department officials to discuss his Final Report
10 October	Dr Scally met with Minister and Department officials to discuss the implementation of his recommendations and the progress of his supplementary report
20 November	Dr Scally met with Department officials to discuss implementation of his recommendations
17 December	Dr Scally met with Department officials to discuss implementation of his recommendations
31 January	Dr Scally attended Minister's meeting with 221+ Patient Support Group, following which he met with Minister and Department officials to discuss progress of supplementary report
14 February	Dr Scally met with Department officials to discuss progress of supplementary report

In addition to the above meetings, Dr Scally has corresponded with me or with Department officials on a number of occasions. The details, insofar as have been ascertained following a comprehensive search, are as follows:

From	To	Date	Subject
Minister	Dr Scally	8/5/18	Commencement of Scoping Inquiry
Dr Scally	Minister	16/5/18	Progress of Scoping Inquiry
Dr Scally	Department official	16/5/18	Administration of Scoping Inquiry

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From	To	Date	Subject
Department official	Dr Scally	17/5/18	Indemnification of Scoping Inquiry team members
Minister	Dr Scally	21/5/18	Administration of Scoping Inquiry
Department official	Dr Scally	21/5/18	Facilitation of Scoping Inquiry
Dr Scally	Minister	22/5/18	Declaration of Interests
Minister	Dr Scally	22/5/18	Administration of Scoping Inquiry
Dr Scally	Department official	30/5/18	Request for documents
Department official	Dr Scally	1/6/18	Indemnification of Scoping Inquiry team members
Department official	Dr Scally	7/6/18	Provision of documents
Dr Scally	Department official	12/6/18	Request for documents
Department official	Dr Scally	18/6/18	Provision of Documents
Department official	Dr Scally	19/6/18	Provision of Documents
Department official	Dr Scally	22/6/18	Provision of documents
Department official	Dr Scally	6/7/18	Provision of Documents
Department official	Dr Scally	9/7/18	Indemnification of Scoping Inquiry team members
Minister	Dr Scally	16/7/19	Progress of Scoping Inquiry
Department official	Crowe representative (on behalf of Dr Scally)	18/7/18	Facilitation of Scoping Inquiry
Dr Scally	Department official	8/8/18	Administration of Scoping Inquiry
Dr Scally	Minister	23/8/18	Supplementary Report
Minister	Dr Scally	30/8/18	Supplementary Report
Dr Scally	Minister	31/8/18	Update on progress of Scoping Inquiry
Minister	Dr Scally	25/10/18	Administration of Scoping Inquiry

From	To	Date	Subject
Dr Scally	Department official	1/11/18	Supplementary Report and Implementation Plan
Dr Scally	Minister	26/11/18	Implementation Plan
Department official	Dr Scally	27/11/18	Implementation Plan
Dr Scally	Minister Harris	30/11/18	Implementation Plan
Dr Scally	Minister Harris	15/2/19	Update on timeline for supplementary report
Crowe representative (on behalf of Dr Scally)	Department official	26/2/19	Submission of Progress Report on Implementation
Dr Scally	Department official	2/5/19	Administration of Scoping Inquiry

In relation to the Deputy's query regarding meetings between HSE officials and Dr Scally, I have asked the HSE to respond to him directly.

### Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

288. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health when a child (details supplied) in Co. Cork will receive orthotics; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22742/19]

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

### Health Services Provision

289. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the supports which can be extended to a person (details supplied). [22758/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** Clarification is being sought from the Deputy as to the nature of the support requested in the details supplied with the Question.

### Employment Rights

290. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 143 of 19 January 2011 and the response of the HSE, the actions taken by his Department and the HSE to resolve the issues raised; if he is satisfied that the investigation undertaken that the employment rights of a person (details supplied) were honoured and protected by the HSE; if his Department reviewed the findings; if he will take further action to resolve all matters; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22759/19]

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

## **Health Insurance**

291. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the reason private health clinics are seeking details of both private health insurance in addition to medical card details from persons who hold both; his views on whether the seeking of the information by them means they are claiming twice for patients with medical cards and private insurance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22770/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** My understanding is that the Deputy is referring to the administration of patient registration and admission in public hospitals. The Health Act 1970 (as amended) provides that all persons ordinarily resident in the country are eligible, subject to certain charges, to public in-patient and out-patient hospital services including consultant services. All persons, irrespective of illness/condition, accessing public in-patient or out-patient services in a public hospital are liable for the relevant statutory charges, subject to a number of exemptions, including where a person is a medical cardholder.

Persons can opt to be treated privately on admission to a public hospital, irrespective of whether or not they have private health insurance. Private patients are liable for the consultants fees and hospital charges arising for that episode of care, whether paid for directly by the patient or by a health insurer on a patient's behalf.

As the matters raised by the Deputy relate to management of the patient administration system within public hospitals, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the Deputy directly.

## **Cross-Border Health Services Provision**

292. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health the status of an application for reimbursement under the cross-border directive by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22775/19]

**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.

## **Disability Services Provision**

293. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the 15 additional posts in disability services for children in the south east community healthcare area that have been secured to improve access and assessments by county (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22781/19]

**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.

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

294. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health the status of an application for reimbursement under the cross-border directive (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22782/19]

**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.

### **Home Care Packages Administration**

295. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the status of a home support application by a person (details supplied); if their local public health nurse has been in contact to update and communicate with them in relation to the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22803/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Administration**

296. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment will be expedited for a child (details supplied). [22804/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland**

297. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 788 of 8 May 2019, the reason the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland, MBI, does not have an in-house legal team to deal with fitness to practise and other everyday legal issues at the organisation in view of the fact that the organisation spent approximately €7 million on legal costs and fees between 2016 and early 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22823/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As the Deputy’s question relates to an operational matter I have referred it to the NMBI for direct reply.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

298. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) can expect an appointment. [22825/19]

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

Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

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

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

### **HSE Complaints Procedures**

299. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health the number of complaints lodged with the HSE in relation to University Hospital Limerick in each of the years 2015 to 2018 and to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22826/19]

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

### **Home Care Packages Provision**

300. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health when an approved increase in home support will be in place for a person (details supplied) in County Leitrim; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22829/19]

**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.

### **Departmental Policy Reviews**

301. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health when the contraception working group within his Department which was due to commence in April 2019 will commence; if a chair and members have been appointed; if finalised terms of reference have been agreed; the stakeholders that will be engaged with; and when they will be engaged with. [22830/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Department of Health Working Group to examine the policy, regulatory and legislative issues related to improving access to contraception commenced its work on 30 April. The group, including the Chair, is comprised of officials from the relevant policy areas within the Department.

The group is working to a mandate agreed by the Minister to -

- Conduct a rapid review of the literature on contraception and associated issues;
- Examine the extent to which cost is a barrier to accessing reliable methods of contraception in Ireland and to consider whether there are other factors influencing access to contraception;

- Consider mechanisms to address any access issues identified;
- Consult with relevant stakeholders; and
- Make recommendations on the optimal policy options and next steps.

The group is currently developing its approach to stakeholder consultation. It is intended that the Group will report back to the Minister by end-September.

### **Medicinal Products**

302. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if a third party reviewer of the drugs approval and procurement process has been appointed; if so, the name of the reviewer; and if they have commenced their work. [22831/19]

303. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if the review of the drugs approval and procurement process will have a consultation with clinicians, patients or industry. [22832/19]

304. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if the review of the drugs approval and procurement process will include specific recommendations. [22833/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 302 to 304, inclusive, together.

The Department recently completed a tender process for a review of the HSE reimbursement and pricing decision-making process. Mazars has been appointed as the consultancy firm to complete this review.

The review is expected to be completed within three months of commencement and consideration will be given, in due course, to publication of a final report.

Although not it is not specifically included in the terms of reference, consideration will be given to consultation with relevant stakeholders.

The review will make recommendations, as considered appropriate, in respect of any required improvements to the HSE's systems, structures, processes, governance arrangements or use of specialist resources in respect of the review.

In making its recommendations, the review will have regard to best practice regarding the procurement of medicines, the conduct of high-value commercial negotiations, governance, organisational structures, skill-mix and oversight.

### **Energy Conservation**

305. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the steps being taken to reduce unnecessary energy consumption in buildings and the carbon dioxide emissions that accompany same in view of the range of buildings across the health service and the number of employees in the health service. [22834/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Public Sector Energy Efficiency Strategy, all public bodies are required to take action to assess and improve their energy usage and efficiency.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a matter concerning energy savings across the health service (buildings and health service employees), I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

### **Hospitals Policy**

306. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if officials in his Department or the HSE are working with vendors and suppliers to ensure that all products which hospitals purchase are as environmentally friendly as possible from medical supplies to printer paper. [22835/19]

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

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

307. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a child (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22844/19]

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

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

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

*Question No. 308 answered with Question No. 251.*

### **Hospital Services**

309. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health the progress made to date with the provision of an extra procedure room in the endoscopy unit of Galway University Hospital in view of the large number of patients waiting for this procedure at any one time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22854/19]

**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.

### **Hospital Services**

28 May 2019

310. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health the functional and operational capacity of the acute medical assessment unit in St. Luke's Hospital, Kilkenny; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22870/19]

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

### **Hospital Staff**

311. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health the overall staffing levels in the acute medical assessment unit in St. Luke's Hospital since 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22871/19]

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

### **Patient Safety**

312. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health if his attention or the attention of the HSE has been drawn to patient safety concerns in the acute medical assessment unit in St. Luke's Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22872/19]

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

### **Home Help Service**

313. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter regarding the structure of home help shift work (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22882/19]

**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.

### **General Practitioner Services**

314. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 280 of 16 April 2019, if the information requested has been collated. [22894/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I understand that a response issued from the HSE to the Deputy on this matter on 24 May 2019.

### **Departmental Agencies Data**

315. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 197 of 18 April 2019, if the information requested regarding non-commercial State agencies has been collated. [22895/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** A letter of response to Parliamentary Question No. 197 of 18 April 2019 issued in hard copy to the Deputy on the 25th April 2019.

A second copy is now attached for the Deputy's information.

[<a href="https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumentation/2019-05-28\_pq-315-28-5-19\_en.pdf">Letter to Dara Calleary</a>]

### **Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services**

316. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) is on the priority list to access child and adolescent mental health services, CAMHS, in County Donegal; if other emergency services can be accessed across the Border in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22898/19]

**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.

### **Hazardous Substances Disposal**

317. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when his attention was drawn in his role as chair of the stakeholders committee of the rehabilitation of Haulbowline Island to a report (details supplied) which detailed a serious imminent threat to human health and the environment; and the reason the report was not disseminated immediately and without delay as required by EU (Access to Information on the Environment) (Amendment) Regulations 2014. [22569/19]

327. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when his attention was drawn to a report (details supplied) which detailed a serious imminent threat to human health and the environment; and the reason the report was not disseminated immediately and without delay as required by EU (Access to Information on the Environment) (Amendment) Regulations 2014. [22568/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 317 and 327 together.

The Deputy will wish to be aware that the Government has taken responsibility for the remediation of former steelworks and attendant waste disposal at Haulbowline Island. It has been no secret that parts of this island have not been suitable for access by the public owing to their industrial legacy.

The report to which the Deputy refers was commissioned by Cork County Council, acting in its operational role as agent for my Department in the Haulbowline Island Remediation Project, and relates to the 11 hectare former steel works (factory) site only and not to the 9 hectare remediated East Tip site. This 11 hectare site is fully secured, in a different location away from the remediated East Tip, and is not accessible to the public.

The report was prepared for inclusion in a planning application for the remediation of the 11 hectare former steel works (factory) site, which is a disused industrial site containing areas of contamination. The references contained within the report relate to potential risks to users of the site, including future recreational end users. It should be noted that there are currently no

active users of the site which is fully secured.

The report does not specify any risk to future users of the remediated East Tip area. In addition, I am advised by Cork County Council that air quality monitoring undertaken on Haulbowline Island between March 2017 and December 2018, as required under the licence conditions for the East Tip remediation works, did not identify any risk to human health from the former steelworks site.

It has always been intended that all relevant reports and assessments would be made publicly available during consent application processes and this has been the case to date with the relevant planning application and waste licence for the East Tip area. In addition, Cork County Council maintains a webpage for the remediation project and posts regular updates.

### **Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme**

318. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the percentage of the €395 million allocated under the TAMS II scheme spent to date; if there are plans to extend the scheme beyond the proposed 2020 deadline; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22812/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** An indicative allocation of €395 million was provided for the suite of seven measures available under TAMS II over the course of the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020. Including transitional payments, over €144.9m has been spent to date.

It is estimated that there are outstanding commitments of over €122m in terms of approvals that have issued but have not yet matured to payment stage because the applicants have yet to submit their claims. Applications continue to be submitted on a tranche-by-tranche basis and Tranche 14 is currently open.

### **Greenhouse Gas Emissions**

319. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a reply will issue to correspondence from a person (details supplied) in relation to greenhouse gases; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22308/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** At the outset, it is important to clarify that neither I nor my Department received the correspondence referred to by the Deputy.

In response to the specific query now received, I would like to highlight that our agriculture sector is internationally recognised as one of the most carbon efficient systems of food production in the EU and we are also recognised as for the efficiency of production of our temperate grassland systems.

Calculation of the national inventory on Ireland's Greenhouse Gas (GHGs) emissions is actually a matter for the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Energy (DCCAE), with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) compiling Ireland's national greenhouse gas emission inventory on an annual basis.

Within the National Inventory report, emissions are classified into the ten following sectors; Agriculture, Transport, Energy Industries, Residential, Manufacturing Combustion, Industrial

Processes, F Gases, Waste, Commercial Services and Public Services.

The outputs produced meet the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) requirements and follow the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) guidelines. The EPA methodology is reviewed annually by international reviewers and there is significant collaboration between inventory experts, agricultural production and agri-environmental researchers, my Department and the Central Statistics Office (CSO).

Full details of the methodology applied to the calculation to the emissions for the agriculture sector are outlined in the latest National Inventory Report which can be found here: <http://www.epa.ie/pubs/reports/air/airemissions/ghg/nir2019/>

### **Aquaculture Licences**

320. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when applications (details supplied) will be renewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22411/19]

**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 accordance with the applicable legislation, the Statutory and Public Consultation phase in respect of new licence applications and renewals for the area in question is ongoing. As these licence applications are under active consideration as part of a statutory process, it would not be appropriate to comment further on the matter at this time.

### **Basic Payment Scheme Appeals**

321. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a farm payment appeal by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22517/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** An application under 2018 Basic Payment Scheme was received on 10th May 2018 from person named.

During processing, an over claim was identified on a land parcel declared. The person named was notified of this in October 2018 and subsequently appealed this decision.

The appeal has been successful and a balancing payment will issue in the coming days.

### **Stocking Densities**

322. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans in relation to using donkeys in stocking requirements (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22518/19]

**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.

Following consultation with stakeholders, 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.

### **Animal Welfare**

323. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to phase out or preferably ban the use of shock collars and shock fencing for domestic animals. [22519/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Under the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013, a person is prohibited from causing unnecessary pain or suffering or endangering the health and welfare of any animal. The Act also provides that a person having possession of an animal must ensure that the animal is kept in a manner that safeguards its health and welfare.

S.I. No. 108 of 2014 provides for a ban on electro-immobilisation by means of any electrical equipment of an instrument which applies a sustained electric current or impulse directly to a live animal. Electrical stimulation or shock collars for training dogs are designed to produce lower stimuli lasting milliseconds rather than produce a sustained electric current. This is line with the current position of scientific research on the use of shock collars.

### **Felling Licences Applications**

324. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a decision will be made in relation to an application for a felling licence by a person (details supplied) in County Galway; the reason for the delay in making a decision on the application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22543/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Officials of my Department have carried out a thorough search using the details supplied and have not found a felling licence application for the person named. All felling licence applications are acknowledged on receipt and given a reference number. If the Deputy would like to provide that reference number, I would be happy to make further enquiries.

If it is the case that a felling licence has not yet been applied for, the landowner will find information on how to do so on the Department's website [www.agriculture.gov.ie](http://www.agriculture.gov.ie) or may email [felling.forests@agriculture.gov.ie](mailto:felling.forests@agriculture.gov.ie) for further information.

### **Beef Industry**

325. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the way in which he plans to spend the approximately €100 million pledged in additional support for beef farmers; if he has revised spending plans to facilitate this new spending; the estimated impact of revised spending plans and the additional assistance on his Departmental budget in 2019, 2020 and 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22560/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** As the Deputy will be aware, I have had ongoing discussions with Commissioner Hogan regarding the potential impact of a disorderly Brexit. I have stressed the need for the Commission to be ready to deploy a range of measures to mitigate the potential impacts on the agri-food and fisheries sector. Avoiding a no-deal Brexit continues to be the Government's overriding policy priority.

I am also keenly aware that the past few months have been very difficult for beef farmers in particular, following a difficult year for farm incomes in 2018 due to weather conditions. There has been a prolonged and exceptional period of depressed prices since last autumn, with the ongoing uncertainty surrounding the outcome of Brexit, among other factors, contributing to this market disturbance.

The announcement by Commissioner Hogan of EU exceptional aid for the Irish beef sector is really welcome in this context. I have been making the case for some time for an exceptional aid package from the EU Commission for Irish beef farmers, at EU Council of Agriculture Minister meetings, and in direct consultation with the Commission.

The announcement by the Commissioner is another example of the importance of EU solidarity when it comes to facing significant economic challenges.

Details of the proposal are being discussed with the Commission and I will make information available to farmers as soon as possible. The legal provisions used to provide the aid (Council Regulation 1308/2013) were put in place by the Irish Presidency of the EU in 2013. It is expected that this decision will be given effect through an Implementing Regulation. My officials will examine its provisions, when published, and engage with the Commission on the next steps.

### **Beef Industry**

326. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the European Commission was lobbied to increase state aid to the beef industry here; if so, the grounds for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22561/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** As the Deputy will be aware, I have held a number of discussions with Commissioner Hogan regarding the potential impact of a disorderly Brexit on the sector. I have stressed the need for the Commission to be ready to deploy a range of measures to mitigate the potential impacts on agri-food and fisheries, including through traditional market supports and exceptional aid under the CAP's Single Common Market Organisation regulation (Regulation (EU) No 1308/2013), as well increased flexibility under State Aid regulations.

Avoiding a no-deal Brexit continues to be the Government's overriding policy priority.

I am also keenly aware that the past few months have been very difficult for beef farmers in particular, following a difficult year for farm incomes in 2018 due to weather conditions. There has been a prolonged and exceptional period of depressed prices since last autumn, with the ongoing uncertainty surrounding the outcome of Brexit, among other factors, contributing to

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*Question No. 327 answered with Question No. 317.*

### **GLAS Payments**

328. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a farm payment will be resumed for a person (details supplied) in view of their successful appeal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22578/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The Department received the appeal decision from the Agriculture Appeals Office in this case on 21 May 2019 and officials have commenced processing the case.

Once the payments concerned clear all validations and pre-payment checks, the outstanding GLAS payments will issue.

### **Afforestation Programme**

329. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the amount of afforestation grant due to a person (details supplied) for 2018; the amount paid to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22587/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The person named submitted an afforestation grant application in 2003 under the Afforestation Grant and Premium Scheme for an area of 4.10 hectares. The first grant instalment was paid in 2004 and the second grant instalment was paid in 2011. To date, 17 annual forestry premiums for the years 2003 to 2019 inclusive have also been paid. The 18th annual forestry premium is due for payment in January 2020. As this contract has a duration of 20 years, in total 20 annual forestry premiums will be paid to the person named, provided that all scheme terms and conditions have been complied with.

The person named should contact my officials directly to discuss any further details about this contract, including payments made to date. All contract related queries can be directed to the Forestry Premium Helpdesk, tel. No. 076 106 4437, e-mail: [forests-service-premiums@agriculture.gov.ie](mailto:forests-service-premiums@agriculture.gov.ie).

### **Basic Payment Scheme Payments**

330. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a matter regarding farm payments will be addressed in the case of persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22624/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The draft CAP Post-2020 regulations, involve significant changes, including the end of the Basic Payment Scheme and the start of the Basic Income Support Scheme (BISS). The proposed BISS, as it stands, will see a number of changes from the current Basic Payment Scheme.

Since the launch of the draft CAP Post-2020 regulations in June 2018, officials from my Department and I have been engaging with our European colleagues and analysing the effects of all of the proposed changes, including changes to the transfer of Payment Entitlements via lease. As the negotiations in relation to the draft regulations are currently on-going, my Department are not in a position to provide specific advice on individual cases beyond 2020 at this time. Farmers will however be notified of any changes which are being introduced by the new CAP legislation when the negotiation process has been finalised.

For my part, I will continue to consult with stakeholders as the negotiation process for the new CAP continues, having regard to the need to deliver on national strategic priorities and to make the most effective use of the funds available.

### **Greyhound Industry Data**

331. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the details of greyhounds rehomed directly by an organisation (details supplied); and the number of greyhounds rehomed indirectly by the organisation through Irish rescues during the past seven years. [22644/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Bord na gCon is a commercial state body, established under the Greyhound Industry Act, 1958 chiefly to control greyhound racing and to improve and develop the greyhound industry. Bord na gCon is a body corporate and a separate legal entity to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

The question raised by the Deputy is an operational matter for Bord na gCon and therefore it has been referred to Bord na gCon for direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Greyhound Industry**

332. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the amount spent by an organisation (details supplied) on greyhound dental treatment and injury repair treatment at veterinary clinics during the past seven years. [22645/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Bord na gCon is a commercial state body, established under the Greyhound Industry Act, 1958 chiefly to control greyhound racing and to improve and develop the greyhound industry. Bord na gCon is a body corporate and a separate legal entity to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

The question raised by the Deputy is an operational matter for Bord na gCon and therefore it has been referred to them for direct reply to the Deputy.

### GLAS Payments

333. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a GLAS payment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22659/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The person named was approved into GLAS 1 and has received payments for scheme years 2015, 2016 and 2017.

The 2018 advance payment has been delayed due to a validation issue with one of the parcels claimed for the Low Input Permanent Pasture (LIPP) action. This parcel has a zero reference on BPS for 2018. The Terms and Conditions of the Scheme require that all GLAS actions, with the exception of Bird, Bat and Bee Boxes, must be undertaken on land parcels that have a reference area.

An official from my Department has been in contact with the applicant and his advisor and outlined the options available to resolve this issue. Processing of the 2018 GLAS payment will resume once this issue has been resolved.

### Climate Change Policy

334. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he and his officials and all State bodies with functions in relation to agricultural policy and advice accept and endorse the findings of the IPCC fifth Assessment Report, Working Group I in relation to the emissions metric values used to describe the global warming impact of methane, CH<sub>4</sub>; his views on and if he endorses the use of global warming potential to capture the global warming potential of methane; his views on the statement (details supplied) in AR5; his further views on whether the failure to address methane emissions in agriculture here in the short-term means that more stringent measures will have to be deployed to reduce carbon dioxide emissions in other sectors of the economy instead; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22665/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** My Department recognises the importance of global consensus provided by the various reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). We also acknowledge that that rising concentrations of methane are a significant driver of global warming. However it is also important to understand that while the Global Warming Potential (GWP) was introduced in the IPCC First Assessment Report, the report also used the metric to illustrate the difficulties in comparing components with differing physical properties using a single metric.

The 5th assessment report states, “*There are significant uncertainties related to metrics, and the magnitudes of the uncertainties differ across metric type and time horizon*”. Therefore careful consideration must be given to the metric used. The IPCC’s special report on 1.5 degrees further highlights the importance of reaching and sustaining net zero global anthropogenic CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and declining net non-CO<sub>2</sub> radiative forcing would halt anthropogenic global warming on multi decadal time scales. As a result national policy seeks to divide fossil CO<sub>2</sub>, the key driver of climate change, from other non-CO<sub>2</sub> gases and the managed natural carbon cycle.

Every sector, including agriculture, will need to do its part in contributing to the Paris agreement goals and stakeholders in each sector will equally be challenges in addressing these emissions. Where zero emissions technologies are available they need to be implemented as soon as possible. Every effort will also need to be made to reduce the impact of sustainable food systems on the climate while still ensuring food production objectives are met.

In response to meeting our Paris Agreement targets, the Government is currently developing an “All of Government Plan to Tackle Climate Disruption” to supplement and expand upon the ambition set out in existing plans with a view to addressing the 2030 climate targets in particular with this process led by my colleague, Minister Bruton.

### Departmental Funding

335. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the grants awarded to a company (details supplied) since 2012. [22667/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** An Bord Iascaigh Mhara and Údarás na Gaeltachta jointly administer financial supports to the aquaculture sector as part of my Department’s European Maritime and Fisheries Fund Operational Programme. They performed a similar role under the previous programme.

I am informed by both agencies that no grants have been provided to the company named from my Department’s programmes since 2012.

### Afforestation Programme

336. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will report on the progress and projections of afforestation targets and plans in A Programme for A Partnership Government; if the targets are being met; the proportion of new forest planting that is native broadleaf species and single species conifer plantation, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22747/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The Programme for Partnership Government committed to increasing planting from 6,000 hectares in 2015 to 8,290 hectares in 2020, under the Forestry Programme 2014 - 2020. Progress to date is shown in the following table:-

Scheme	2015 target	2015 Actual	2016 target	2016 Actual	2017 target	2017 Actual	2018 Target	2018 Actual
Afforestation, ha	6,000	6,293	6,660	6,500	7,140	5,536	7,205	4,036

While targets overall have not been met, the level of native woodland planting has been increasing steadily. In fact the total area of new native woodlands established in 2018 is the highest on record at 374 hectares. Based on current levels of planting and approvals, 2019 should see an even higher rate of native woodland planting.

Our target is to reach 30% broadleaves as a % of new planting. In 2018, this figure was 27%. This was an increase on the previous year when it was 21%. This increase is directly related to the higher grant and premium rates for broadleaves introduced under the midterm review of the Forestry Programme 2014 -2020, accompanied by a mandatory requirement that all new

conifer plantations have 15% broadleaves.

With regard to the level of afforestation, while there are many challenges in reaching the targets set, not least competing land uses, I am committed to promoting planting, especially amongst farmers. To this end, I am hopeful that the increases in payment rates introduced under the mid-term review in 2018 will have the desired incentive effect and result in increased uptake. As 2018 was a particularly difficult year for planting because of inclement weather conditions, the full effect of these changes has yet to be seen. Active promotion of afforestation is also key to achieving our target which is why I recently granted support in the amount of €830,000 to 15 innovative promotion projects which will run over the next two years; their efforts will be complemented by Teagasc's promotional activities and information days, as well as the Department's own communication strategy.

We also continue to engage with stakeholders especially through the Forestry Implementation Group and a Forestry Promotion Group, which discuss implementation and ways to promote afforestation. Furthermore, my Department is engaging with Coillte to agree a model whereby Coillte may contribute to afforestation rates, in order to support the Government in its climate change mitigation effort. We will also explore all opportunities under the new CAP to encourage farm forestry.

### Forestry Data

337. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the proportion of forest estate here that is single species conifer and native broadleaf plantation, respectively; the breakdown of the two plantation types between publicly owned and privately owned forests, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22748/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The National Forestry Inventory gathers information on tree species composition within Ireland's forests. In 2017, 23% or 157,589 hectares of the stocked forest area was comprised of single species conifer stands. In terms of ownership, 62% of the single species conifer stand area is publicly owned and the remaining 42% privately owned.

A relatively high proportion of native tree species are present in the national forest estate, occupying 26.6% of the total stocked forest area or almost 178,981 hectares. Nearly two-thirds (64%) of these native tree species are in private ownership and the remaining 36% in public ownership.

It is worth noting that the mid-term review of the Forestry Programme 2014 to 2020 resulted in higher grant and premium rates been introduced to encourage more broadleaf and diverse conifer planting. The minimum mandatory requirement per site has been increased from 10% to 15% broadleaves. These changes have resulted in the proportion of broadleaves planted in the afforestation programme rising from 21% in 2016 to 27% in 2018.

### Basic Payment Scheme Payments

338. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a payment under BPS will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22822/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The number

of entitlements allocated to a farmer in 2015 under the new Basic Payment Scheme was based on the number of eligible hectares the farmer declared in either 2013 or 2015, whichever is the lesser.

The person named did not submit applications under the Basic Payment Scheme during the period 2015 to 2018 inclusive and therefore does not hold entitlements under the scheme.

Documentation in relation to an appeal was recently received and is currently being reviewed. An official from my Department will be in direct contact with the person named to clarify the position.

### **Horse Racing Ireland Funding**

339. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason a company (details supplied) was given €81,000 by Horse Racing Ireland for a 30 day foal notification project in view of the fact that breeders were not consulted in relation to this project despite the money for the project being provided by them through the foal levy. [22884/19]

**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 question raised by the Deputy is an operational matter for HRI and I have requested my officials to refer the question to them for direct reply.

### **Horse Racing Ireland Funding**

340. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the way in which the €81,000 provided by Horse Racing Ireland to a company (details supplied) for a 30 day foal notification project was spent. [22885/19]

**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 question raised by the Deputy is an operational matter for HRI and I have requested my officials to refer the question to them for direct reply.

### **Electric Vehicles**

341. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if imported hybrid electric vehicles will be included in the outdoor charge point grant scheme. [22542/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** A grant of up to €600 is available to support the purchase and installation of an electric vehicle home charger, for purchasers of new and second-hand electric vehicles since 1 January 2018. All models of Battery Electric Vehicles and Plugin Hybrid Electric Vehicles which

are (or were previously) eligible for grant support under the EV Grant Scheme are eligible for the home charger grant. This includes electric vehicles purchased new in Ireland or imported (as new or second hand) and registered in Ireland. Further information can be found on the SEAI's website or at [www.drivingelectric.ie](http://www.drivingelectric.ie).

### **National Broadband Plan Implementation**

342. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of cases in which he estimates that connections will cost over €5,000 in relation to the national broadband plan; the proposed additional payment in such circumstances beyond the flat €100 fee suggested; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22810/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Through the analysis conducted to date, National Broadband Ireland (NBI) does not anticipate that there will be many premises that will involve a high cost to connect. The Department and NBI have completed high level designs to determine the quantities of existing infrastructure that can be re-used and quantities of new infrastructure that will need to be deployed to deliver the NBP State intervention. In addition, NBI has completed a number of low-level designs to corroborate the assumptions made in the high level designs. My Department has separately completed several network models and associated cost models down to the premises level. The high level designs take into account the various passive infrastructure databases (i.e. buildings, poles and ducts) as well as the Eircode database of premises. This analysis indicates that nearly 99% of the premises in the intervention area are 150 metres or less from the road and the vast majority of these are less than 50m.

Once the deployment commences a detailed design process will be conducted by NBI which is referred to as the low-level design. This low level design includes a detailed site survey of each route and each premises to be served on that route. The site survey will confirm what infrastructure is in place and what infrastructure will be required in order to enable a connection to be made to each premises. Every effort will be made to reduce costs by utilising existing infrastructure. In cases where there are 'difficult to serve' premises that could involve a high cost to connect, NBI will consider alternative solutions to deliver the high speed broadband service.

### **Telecommunications Infrastructure**

343. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to use a cable (details supplied) to benefit communities across the west of Ireland. [22286/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The transatlantic subsea fibre optic cable referenced by the Deputy extends from the United States of America to Killala, County Mayo. This is privately owned infrastructure. The installation and operation of commercial telecommunications infrastructure in Ireland is undertaken by commercial companies operating in a liberalised market and I have no function in this area.

Additionally there is another fibre optic subsea cable project called Havfure/AEC-2 which will link America with Ireland (landing at Old Head Co. Mayo) and onwards to Northern Europe. This cable is expected to be ready for service in Q4 2019.

The combined Emerald Express/AEC-1 and Havfure/AEC-2 will create a resilient, ring-based infrastructure between US, Ireland and Northern Europe.

This additional security of infrastructure is welcome and supports the wider policy goals of the National Broadband Plan which is to provide access to high speed broadband to every premises in Ireland regardless of location through a combination of commercial investment and a State led intervention.

### **National Broadband Plan**

344. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will publish the documentation on the various alternatives which were considered to the national broadband plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22297/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** My Department has published key documentation on the National Broadband Plan including the alternatives considered in 2018 and 2019 and these are available at the following link: [www.dccae.gov.ie/en-ie/communications/topics/Broadband/national-broadband-plan/Pages/Key-Procurement-Documents--.aspx](http://www.dccae.gov.ie/en-ie/communications/topics/Broadband/national-broadband-plan/Pages/Key-Procurement-Documents--.aspx).

### **Broadband Service Provision**

345. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the efibre broadband roll-out with specific reference to a location (details supplied). [22342/19]

347. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the efibre broadband roll-out to a location (details supplied). [22361/19]

357. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to ensure fibre broadband is rolled out to a property (details supplied). [22424/19]

358. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to ensure fibre broadband is rolled out to a property (details supplied). [22425/19]

359. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to ensure fibre broadband is rolled out to a property (details supplied). [22426/19]

360. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to ensure fibre broadband is rolled out to a property (details supplied). [22427/19]

361. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to ensure fibre broadband is rolled out to a property (details supplied). [22428/19]

362. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to ensure fibre broadband is rolled out to a property (details supplied).

[22429/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 345, 347 and 357 to 362, inclusive, together.

The purpose of the National Broadband Plan is to ensure that over 1.1 million of our citizens in rural Ireland have the same opportunity to participate in the digital society as citizens living in urban areas. The availability of ubiquitous high speed broadband will bring significant benefits in areas of e-Health, e-Education, smart farming, regional development and tourism.

All of the premises referenced by the Deputy are in the AMBER area on the National Broadband Plan (NBP) High Speed Broadband Map, which is available on my Department's website at [www.broadband.gov.ie](http://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 the procurement process to engage a company to build, operate and maintain the NBP State intervention network. Following rigorous evaluation by my Department, I recently brought a recommendation to Government to confer Preferred Bidder status on Granahan McCourt, the remaining bidder in the NBP procurement process and Government agreed to this at its meeting on 7 May.

The Government Decision means that it is intended to award the State Intervention contract to the Bidder. This award is subject to contract close including finalisation of financial and legal documents. Deployment of the NBP State Intervention network will commence shortly after that.

The Bidder has indicated that the NBP State intervention will take an estimated 7 years from the beginning of deployment

In the first year of this roll out, the Bidder will deploy approximately 300 Broadband Connection Points (BCPs) across all counties. It is anticipated that between 7 and 23 BCPs will be deployed in each county. BCPs will provide a community based high speed broadband service, enhancing online participation and allowing for the establishment of digital work hubs in these locations.

A deployment plan will be made available by the Bidder once the contract is signed. The Bidder is aiming to pass 133,000 premises by end of the second year of the overall deployment, with 70-100,000 passed each year thereafter until roll out is completed.

### **Waste Disposal Charges**

346. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of deliberations on a waiver for those with disabilities who require it for waste disposal; and if he will allow backdating for all those that qualify for the waiver in view of the length of time GDPR discussions are taking with waste providers. [22368/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** My Department has engaged with relevant stakeholders, including representative organisations and public bodies, in an effort to see how best to provide a financial support to persons with long-term incontinence with respect to the disposal of medical incontinence wear. It should be noted however that none of the options around verification are straightforward, and

we must be cognisant of data minimisation where sensitive personal medical information is involved. It is disappointing that it has not yet been possible to implement a support measure. It is important for all those involved, including the representative organisations, that the support goes to the correct people and that the scheme is not dependent on applications that cannot be verified.

A number of models of delivery have been explored, but challenges arose in all options. Significant personal data concerns, under the new GDPR arrangements, were raised in one case but it is important to note that the GDPR issues are not being discussed with waste providers, the providers have tried to assist in the delivery of the scheme but all of us came across GDPR issues. Administration costs and procurement issues were also identified that would have been problematic in terms of getting the balance right between the prevention of fraudulent claims and the delivery of the scheme in a cost effective manner. Unfortunately, the absence of a database of persons who are in receipt of incontinence products from the HSE, which could be used to verify persons who are medically incontinent, has impacted on the delivery of a cost effective scheme.

Notwithstanding the complex issues at play, which are understandable given the sensitive nature of the medical data in question, I would like assure the Deputy that I continue to be committed to try to address this issue. My Department is calling the stakeholders together on 13 June to discuss the matter further and examine a number of possible solutions to deliver this scheme.

*Question No. 347 answered with Question No. 345.*

### **National Broadband Plan Data**

348. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of broadband connection points planned for south-west County Cork under the national broadband plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22369/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** In the first year of the National Broadband Plan roll-out, approximately 300 Broadband Connection Points (BCPs) will be deployed across all counties. It is anticipated that between 7 and 23 BCPs will be deployed in each county, including Cork. BCPs will provide a community based high speed broadband service, enhancing online participation and allowing for the establishment of digital work hubs in these locations. Locations for the BCPs have been identified by local broadband officers and are spread across each county. These include schools, businesses, community centres and sports clubs. BCPs will, at a minimum, provide free public Wifi access. Some locations will also have additional facilities such as hot-desking.

A list of BCPs will be published later this year.

### **National Broadband Plan Data**

349. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of premises in south-west County Cork expected to be connected to high speed broadband in Q2, Q3 and Q4 of 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22370/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The National Broadband Plan intervention is the subject of the procurement process to engage a company to build, operate and maintain the NBP State intervention network. Following rigorous evaluation by my Department, I recently brought a recommendation to Government to confer Preferred Bidder status on Granahan McCourt, the remaining bidder in the NBP procurement process and Government agreed to this at its meeting on 7 May. The Government decision means that it is intended to award the State Intervention contract to National Broadband Ireland, subject to the contract close, including the finalisation of financial and legal documents. Deployment of the NBP State Intervention network will commence shortly after that.

The number of premises in the constituency of Cork South-West with access to high speed broadband is now 21,922, which equates to 41% of all 52,673 premises in the constituency. Another 4,556 or 9% in Cork South-West will be served by eir under that company's ongoing rural deployment of a high speed broadband network. The Q1 2019 figures will be available shortly. It is anticipated that eir's 300K roll out will conclude in mid 2019.

The deployment of the network within the National Broadband Plan intervention area, including Cork South-West, will commence at contract award and take up to seven years to complete. Of the premises in Cork South-West, approximately 26,195 (50%) will receive access to high speed broadband through the State intervention. In total, it is estimated that the State will invest €90 million in Co Cork under the NBP.

A deployment plan will be made available by the Bidder once the contract is signed. The Bidder is aiming to pass 133,000 premises by the end of the second year, with 70-100,000 passed each year thereafter until roll out is completed.

### **Bituminous Fuel Ban**

350. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will implement a ban on the sale of smoky coals in locations (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22371/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The ban on the marketing, sale and distribution of bituminous coal, or 'the smoky coal ban' as it is commonly known, has proven very successful since first introduced in Dublin in 1990 and subsequently extended so that it now applies in 26 urban areas nationwide. I am, therefore, disappointed that a number of coal firms have indicated they would legally challenge the decision of two former Ministers to extend the ban nationwide. Banning the use of smoky coal would have a positive impact on air quality and public health, particularly in built up areas. I am continuing to work with the Attorney General to finalise a legally robust plan which will improve air quality by reducing particulate matter in the air.

Pending the completion of this work, I can confirm that the current ban on bituminous coal will not be extended nationwide for the 2019/20 heating season. I also do not propose to extend the smoky coal ban to other individual towns in the meantime.

High levels of particulate matter arise from a number of sources, including the burning of smoky coal. In light of this, and of the fact that air pollution is now known to cause greater health effects at lower concentrations than was previously understood, I am committed to publishing the National Clean Air Strategy this year. This will provide the policy framework necessary to identify and promote integrated measures across Government to reduce air pollution and pro-

mote cleaner air, while delivering on wider national objectives.

### **Mobile Telephony Services**

351. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the measures taken under the mobile phone and broadband taskforce in south-west County Cork; the steps taken to date to address the lack of mobile phone coverage; his future plans to address same in the area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22359/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Providing telecommunications services, including mobile phone services, is a matter for the relevant service providers operating in a fully liberalised market regulated by the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg), as independent Regulator. I do not have statutory authority to require commercial companies to roll-out services and make specific investments in particular locations. The ComReg consumer helpline is accessible at [consumerline@comreg.ie](mailto:consumerline@comreg.ie) and I would urge consumers who feel they have not received an appropriate response from service providers to make contact with the Regulator.

The Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce worked with key stakeholders to produce a report in December 2016, available on my Department's website, which contained 40 actions to alleviate some of the coverage deficits across the country. An Implementation Group is overseeing the implementation of the actions and comprises all key stakeholders responsible for delivery. The Implementation Group meets on a quarterly basis and publishes quarterly progress reports on the implementation status of actions.

Now in its third year of operation, the Taskforce has addressed over 60 actions and continues to focus on issues that are negatively impacting upon the roll-out of essential telecommunications infrastructure in rural areas. The outcome of discussions at the second Annual National Stakeholder Forum held in October 2018 informed preparation of the 2018 Annual Review Report, which was published on 21 February 2019 together with the 2019 Work Programme. Over 30 new actions are contained in the 2019 Work Programme for delivery this year.

Various measures are underway which will address mobile coverage deficits, particularly in rural areas such as south west County Cork:

My Department and the Department of Rural and Community Development have worked to achieve a greater consensus around site selection for telecoms infrastructure and therefore improve mobile phone coverage.

A focus group was established to provide guidance with respect to categories of location where high quality reliable mobile coverage should be made available as a priority. The report of the focus group was published on my Department's website on 31 August 2018. It is anticipated that the output of the focus group should influence the actions of the mobile network operators in their work to reduce mobile phone blackspots. It will also inform future policy in my Department with regards to priorities for mobile phone services.

A working group has been established with the remit of investigating the feasibility of developing standardised policy for accessing and utilising State and publicly owned assets for the deployment of telecommunications infrastructure.

ComReg has published a composite national outdoor coverage map, which will, in tandem with its work on handset testing and activities to raise consumer awareness, allow people across

Ireland to optimise the services available to them.

ComReg has developed a licensing scheme which will enable households and businesses to use mobile phone repeaters to boost signals into their premises and bring immediate improvements in mobile coverage.

In tandem with the work of the Taskforce, the release by ComReg of the 3.6GHz radio spectrum band, which has been identified at EU level as a primary band suitable for 5G roll-out, will also contribute to addressing increasing mobile data demands and improve mobile coverage. Mobile operators' commercial investment has also resulted in improved services, following ComReg's 2012 multi-band spectrum auction. At least one operator now has in excess of 90% 4G population coverage.

All of these initiatives should help enhance the quality of mobile phone and data services, particularly in areas currently experiencing a low level of service, including County Cork.

### **Illegal Dumping**

**352. Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of on-the-spot fines issued for illegal dumping; the number of persons charged; the number of persons successfully prosecuted in south-west areas of County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22372/19]

**354. Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to increase fines for illegal dumping and resource local authorities to ensure enforcement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22374/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 352 and 354 together.

Enforcement actions against illegal waste activity are a matter for the Local Authorities and the Office of Environmental Enforcement (OEE) within the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and my Department does not compile statistics in relation to prosecutions taken or fines imposed. However Recommended Criteria for Environmental Inspection (RMCEI) data compiled by the EPA for 2017 include the following waste statistics for local authorities:

- 60,806 Waste complaints received;
- 59,228 Waste complaints resolved;
- 17,814 Waste inspections undertaken;
- 59,808 Litter patrols/investigations;
- 13,387 Waste enforcement actions initiated;
- 12,013 Enforcement actions closed;
- 638 Waste prosecutions taken;
- 484 Waste prosecutions closed.

Penalties under the Waste Management Act are already substantial. Persons who are found to be responsible for, or involved in, the unauthorised disposal of waste are liable to a maximum fine of €5,000 on summary conviction and/or imprisonment for up to 12 months, and to a maxi-

mum fine of €15 million on conviction on indictment and/or imprisonment for up to 10 years.

There have been instances of individuals jailed for offences committed under the Waste Management Act and the EPA in 2015 secured a record €20 million fine against a company for causing pollution at a former landfill in Co. Kildare.

My Department has previously issued a policy direction to local authorities instructing them to pursue illegal holders of waste in accordance with the maximum potential sanctions available under the law in order to maximise the deterrent factor and aim to eliminate the economic benefit deriving from such illegal activity.

My Department has introduced a number of measures to strengthen efforts to improve waste enforcement generally and target illegal dumping. These include:

- An annual waste enforcement grant of €7.4 million to support the recruitment and retention of 150 local authority waste enforcement personnel across the country- Cork County Council receive an allocation of €455,000 in this regard;

- The establishment of the Waste Enforcement Regional Lead Authorities;

- The establishment of a National Waste Enforcement Steering Committee which facilitates more co-ordinated multi agency operations taking place on a regional basis.

In addition, my Department has developed the Anti-Dumping Initiative to work in partnership with local authorities and community organisations in identifying high risk or problem areas, developing appropriate enforcement responses and carrying out clean-up operations.

I recently announced funding of €3 million for the 2019 Anti-Dumping Initiative, an increase of 50% on last year, to support communities around the country to continue to tackle illegal dumping. Innovation, surveillance using drones, special collections for awkward items like mattresses, spreading awareness among young people and recognising the work of volunteers will play a role in this year's campaign.

There will be a special emphasis on targeting dumping blackspots and illegal operators. Since 2017, the Anti-Dumping Initiative has supported the removal of some 5,000 tonnes of illegal waste from some of the country's most notorious fly tipping black-spots and approximately 50% of this year's funding will go towards continuing to tackle this problem.

### **Illegal Dumping**

**353. Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to increase fines for littering and resource local authorities to ensure enforcement of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22373/19]

**355. Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of on-the-spot fines issued for littering; the number of persons charged; the number of persons successfully prosecuted in south-west County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22386/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 353 and 355 together.

My Department provides a robust litter policy and legislative framework. Under the Litter Pollution Act(s) 1997 to 2009, responsibility for management and enforcement falls under the

remit of Local Authorities. It is a matter for each Local Authority to decide on the most appropriate public awareness, enforcement and clean up actions to take in relation to litter and illegal dumping, taking account of its own local circumstances, competing priorities, and resources available.

Under the Act(s), €150 fixed penalty notices also known as “on-the-spot-fines may be issued by Local Authority authorised officers (and the Gardaí) for littering offences. Where a Local Authority prosecutes an offence in court, the maximum court fine for littering, on summary conviction, is currently €4,000. The level of fines for littering offences is kept under review by my Department.

The specific data requested for south-west County Cork is not collated by my Department. However, data in respect of each Local Authority area on the amount of money collected from on-the-spot litter fines is available on my Department’s website at the following link:

*<https://www.dccae.gov.ie/en-ie/environment/topics/waste/litter/Pages/Local-Authority-Litter-Fines-and-Expenditure-Statistics.aspx>*

To support Local Authorities in their role, my Department funds the Local Authority Anti-Litter Awareness Grants on an annual basis. My Department also commissions, an annual National Litter Pollution Monitoring System (NLPMS) Report based on individual Local Authority litter surveys. The most recently published results are available at: [http://www.litter.ie/system\\_survey\\_results/index.shtml](http://www.litter.ie/system_survey_results/index.shtml)

The 2018 NLPMS Report will be published shortly.

I welcome the fact that consecutive NLPMS Reports have, overall, recorded a broad improvement in the litter situation across the country in recent years. However, I recognise the challenges still presented by littering and I believe that a multi-faceted approach is required to address these. The approach taken should incorporate effective enforcement, public awareness and education. I consider that raising of awareness of the litter problem and educating the young people of this country is key to effecting a long term change in Irish society’s attitudes towards litter disposal. In this context, my Department supports a number of other national anti-litter initiatives *viz* the National Spring Clean, the Green Schools Programme, the Protecting Uplands and Rural Environments (PURE) Project, and the Irish Business Against Litter League. The Department also maintains negotiated agreements with the banking and chewing gum industries.

*Question No. 354 answered with Question No. 352.*

*Question No. 355 answered with Question No. 353.*

### **National Broadband Plan Data**

356. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O’Mahony** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of premises in south-west County Cork connected to high speed broadband in each quarter from March 2018 to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22387/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The National Broadband Plan aims to ensure that every home, school and business in Ireland has access to high speed broadband. This is being achieved through a combination of commercial investment across the country, and a State intervention in those areas where commercial operators acting alone are unlikely to invest.

There are 52,673 premises in the constituency of Cork South-West.

Since Q1 2018, the number of premises with access to high-speed broadband in the constituency has increased by 2,696, a 4% increase. In total, the number of premises in Cork South-West with access to high speed broadband is now 21,922, which equates to 41% of all premises in the county. Another 9% will be served by eir under that company's ongoing rural deployment of a high speed broadband network.

The remaining 26,195 homes, schools and businesses in the constituency of Cork South-West will receive access to high speed broadband under the National Broadband Plan State intervention.

In April 2017 my Department published an updated High Speed Broadband Map, which is available at [www.broadband.gov.ie](http://www.broadband.gov.ie). This map shows the areas targeted by commercial operators to provide high speed broadband services and the areas that will be included in the State Intervention Area under the National Broadband Plan. The Map is colour coded and searchable by address or Eircode.

- The AMBER areas represent the target areas for the proposed State led Intervention under the NBP.

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

- The LIGHT BLUE areas are where eir is in the process of deploying high speed broadband to 300,000 premises on a commercial basis.

Details of access to high speed broadband in Cork South-West in each quarter from Q1 2018 to Q4 2018 are set out in the following table.

	Amber	Blue	Light Blue	Total
Q1 2018	26,108 (50%)	19,226 (37%)	7,060(13%)	52,394
Q2 2018	26,136 (50%)	19,502 (37%)	6,811(13%)	52,449
Q3 2018	26,159(50%)	21,728 (41%)	4,736(9%)	52,623
Q4 2018	26,195 (50%)	21,922 (41%)	4,556(9%)	52,673

In accordance with the April 2017 Commitment Agreement signed between eir and my Department, my officials engage regularly with eir in relation to its ongoing rural fibre deployment.

According to the latest figures for Q4 2018 provided by eir to my Department the company has passed over 225,000 premises as part of this deployment.

The rate of take up along eir's 300k deployment has increased throughout 2018 and is expected to increase further as eir proceeds to pass and connect further premises every month and as awareness of the availability of high speed broadband improves and retailers offer a choice and variety of communications packages over the network.

It is anticipated that eir's 300k roll out will conclude in mid 2019.

*Questions Nos. 357 to 362, inclusive, answered with Question No. 345.*

### National Broadband Plan Administration

363. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to extend high-speed fibre broadband to a household (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22469/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The National Broadband Plan aims to ensure that every home, school and business in Ireland has access to high speed broadband. This is being achieved through a combination of commercial investment across the country, and a State intervention in those areas where commercial operators acting alone are unlikely to invest. The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector. In 2012, less than 700,000, or 30% of Irish premises had access to high speed broadband. Today, 74% of the 2.4 million premises in Ireland can access high speed broadband.

The premises referenced by the Deputy is in the AMBER area on the National Broadband Plan (NBP) High Speed Broadband Map, which is available on my Department's website at [www.broadband.gov.ie](http://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 the procurement process to engage a company to build, operate and maintain the NBP State intervention network. Following rigorous evaluation by my Department, I recently brought a recommendation to Government to confer Preferred Bidder status on Granahan McCourt, the remaining bidder in the NBP procurement process and Government agreed to this at its meeting on 7 May.

The Government Decision means that it is intended to award the State Intervention contract to the Bidder. This award is subject to contract close including finalisation of financial and legal documents. Deployment of the NBP State Intervention network will commence shortly after that. The Bidder has indicated that the NBP State intervention will take an estimated 7 years from the beginning of deployment.

In the first year of this roll out, the Bidder will deploy approximately 300 Broadband Connection Points (BCPs) across all counties. It is anticipated that between 7 and 23 BCPs will be deployed in each county. BCPs will provide a community based high speed broadband service, enhancing online participation and allowing for the establishment of digital work hubs in these locations.

A deployment plan will be made available by the bidder once the contract is signed. The Bidder is aiming to pass 133,000 premises by end of the second year of the overall deployment, with 70-100,000 passed each year thereafter until roll out is completed.

### **Television Licence Fee**

364. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when he will receive the interdepartmental working group report on television licence fee reform; when he will publish same; when he will act on the recommendations of the report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22490/19]

366. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when he expects to receive the interdepartmental working group report on the television licence fee reform; when he expects to publish it; when he expects to act on the recommendations of the report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22499/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard**

**Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 364 and 366 together.

In light of the recommendations in the Report of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Communications, Climate Action & Environment on the Future Funding of Public Service Broadcasting, a Working Group was set up by Government decision in July 2018 to examine options for the reform of TV licence collection.

I secured additional funding for public service broadcasting in Budget 2019. TG4 will receive €36.2m Exchequer funding in 2019, comprising a combination of €34.2m current and €2m capital, which is an increase of €443,000 compared to 2018. Additional funding of €9.245m is being provided to RTÉ and the Broadcasting Fund, of which RTÉ will receive approximately €8.6m in 2019. The Broadcasting Fund, administered by the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland and financed from 7% of net licence fee receipts, supports the Sound and Vision and Archiving Schemes and benefits the broadcasting sector as a whole.

I will bring a report to government once it has been finalised.

### **Broadband Service Provision**

365. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if broadband will be reviewed for a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22497/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The National Broadband Plan aims to ensure that every home, school and business in Ireland has access to high speed broadband. This is being achieved through a combination of commercial investment across the country, and a State intervention in those areas where commercial operators acting alone are unlikely to invest.

The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector. In 2012, less than 700,000, or 30% of Irish premises had access to high speed broadband. Today, 74% of the 2.4 million premises in Ireland can access high speed broadband.

The premises referenced by the Deputy is in the AMBER area on the National Broadband Plan (NBP) High Speed Broadband Map, which is available on my Department's website at [www.broadband.gov.ie](http://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 the procurement process to engage a company to build, operate and maintain the NBP State intervention network. Following rigorous evaluation by my Department, I recently brought a recommendation to Government to confer Preferred Bidder status on Granahan McCourt, the remaining bidder in the NBP procurement process and Government agreed to this at its meeting on 7 May.

The Government Decision means that it is intended to award the State Intervention contract to the Bidder. This award is subject to contract close including finalisation of financial and legal documents. Deployment of the NBP State Intervention network will commence shortly after that. The Bidder has indicated that the NBP State intervention will take an estimated 7 years from the beginning of deployment.

In the first year of this roll-out, the Bidder will deploy approximately 300 Broadband Connection Points (BCPs) across all counties. It is anticipated that between 7 and 23 BCPs will be deployed in each county. BCPs will provide a community based high speed broadband service,

enhancing online participation and allowing for the establishment of digital work hubs in these locations.

A deployment plan will be made available by the Bidder once the contract is signed. The Bidder is aiming to pass 133,000 premises at the end of the second year, with 70-100,000 passed each year thereafter until roll-out is completed.

*Question No. 366 answered with Question No. 364.*

### **Energy Efficiency**

367. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if there is grant assistance available to dairying farms and other small enterprises to install three-phase electricity; if not, if he will consider reintroducing such grant support; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22601/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** My Department supports a number of schemes including the Dairy Farm Grant and the Lighting Support Grant which assist businesses, including farms, to improve their energy efficiency. However, my Department does not provide grants for the installation of three phase electricity and there are no plans to introduce such a scheme. More information on the schemes, grant supports, guidance and advice that can help businesses improve their energy efficiency, cut energy spend, improve their resilience, competitiveness and green credentials is available from the SEAI on their website at <https://www.seai.ie/energy-in-business/> or by phone at 01-8082100.

### **Waste Management**

368. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the steps he can take to encourage and-or force the providers of electrical equipment to remove and recycle old appliances from the purchasers of new appliances in a like for like manner; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22623/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The amount of Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) in Ireland has grown at a significant pace with consumers using more and more electronics in their day-to-day lives. When not disposed of properly, WEEE can be very harmful to human health.

EU and national legislation on WEEE aims to promote the recycling of WEEE by setting targets for the collection, treatment, recycling and disposal of WEEE in an environmentally sound manner. Environmental Protection Agency statistics, published for the latest reference year 2016, show that Ireland surpassed the EU targets for collection of household WEEE, and for recovery of WEEE of all ten categories. The 2016 EU WEEE collection target is set at 45% of electrical and electronic equipment placed on the market. In 2016, Ireland achieved a collection percentage of 52%.

The Regulations impose obligations on persons who supply Electrical and Electronic Equipment to the Irish market, whether as retailers, importers or manufacturers. Under the legislation, final users are entitled to leave their electrical and electronic waste back free of charge in electrical retail stores on a one-for-one, like-for-like basis. Each local authority also accepts household WEEE free of charge at its recycling facilities.

Further information on what to do with household WEEE is available on Ireland's official guide to managing your waste [www.mywaste.ie](http://www.mywaste.ie) .

### **Broadband Service Provision**

369. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when fibre broadband will be rolled out at a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22625/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The National Broadband Plan aims to ensure that every home, school and business in Ireland has access to high speed broadband. This is being achieved through a combination of commercial investment across the country, and a State intervention in those areas where commercial operators acting alone are unlikely to invest.

The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector. In 2012, less than 700,000, or 30% of Irish premises had access to high speed broadband. Today, 74% of the 2.4 million premises in Ireland can access high speed broadband.

The premises referenced by the Deputy is in the AMBER area on the National Broadband Plan (NBP) High Speed Broadband Map, which is available on my Department's website at [www.broadband.gov.ie](http://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 the procurement process to engage a company to build, operate and maintain the NBP State intervention network. Following rigorous evaluation by my Department, I recently brought a recommendation to Government to confer Preferred Bidder status on Granahan McCourt, the remaining bidder in the NBP procurement process and Government agreed to this at its meeting on 7 May.

The Government Decision means that it is intended to award the State Intervention contract to the Bidder. This award is subject to contract close including finalisation of financial and legal documents. Deployment of the NBP State Intervention network will commence shortly after that. The Bidder has indicated that the NBP State intervention will take an estimated 7 years from the beginning of deployment.

In the first year of this roll-out, the Bidder will deploy approximately 300 Broadband Connection Points (BCPs) across all counties. It is anticipated that between 7 and 23 BCPs will be deployed in each county. BCPs will provide a community based high speed broadband service, enhancing online participation and allowing for the establishment of digital work hubs in these locations.

A deployment plan will be made available by the Bidder once the contract is signed. The Bidder is aiming to pass 133,000 premises at the end of the second year, with 70-100,000 passed each year thereafter until roll-out is completed.

### **National Broadband Plan Administration**

370. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if companies (details supplied) are members of a consortium; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22635/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Bidder is Granahan McCourt (Dublin) Ireland Limited.

The Bidder relied upon Tetrad Corporation and McCourt Global LLC, as “Bidder Members”, to demonstrate its capacity to meet the economic and financial pre-qualification criteria in the manner provided for in the Project Information Memorandum. As a result, both of these entities are “Bidder Members”.

“Bidder Members” is defined in the Project Information Memorandum to include:

- a) the Bidder;
- b) where the Bidder is a consortium, the members of the consortium and the Shareholders of the consortium (if different); and
- c) where the Bidder or a Bidder Member has relied on the resources of another entity (e.g. its parent company or a key subcontractor) in its PQQ response, that other entity (or entities) whose resources the Bidder or Bidder Member has relied upon (whether that be for the purposes of demonstrating its economic and financial standing or its technical and professional capability).

### **Ministerial Meetings**

371. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the meetings he has held with Eir to discuss issues related to broadband in rural Ireland since January 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22636/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I have not held any meetings with eir to discuss issues related to broadband in rural Ireland since January 2019. In accordance with the Commitment Agreement signed between eir and my Department in April 2017, my officials engage regularly with eir in relation its ongoing rural fibre deployment.

### **Ministerial Meetings**

372. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the meetings he has held with the ESB to discuss issues related to broadband in rural Ireland since January 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22637/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Following my appointment as Minister, I looked at a number of alternatives in detail before deciding to recommend to Government the appointment of preferred bidder. Those options are available to be looked at online at [www.gov.ie/nbp](http://www.gov.ie/nbp). Any alternative that aims to deliver high speed broadband across the country, would delay the process by at least another two to three years, would not be any more cost effective, would not deliver the objectives of the NBP and could involve the State taking on greater risk.

The possibility of allocating the National Broadband State intervention to the ESB was considered as part of the alternative options analysis conducted by my Department. The Attorney General has advised that there are significant legal risks in relation to both procurement law and state aid law, if the State was to mandate and fund directly outside a procurement process any economic undertaking, including a commercial semi-state body such as the ESB, to carry out

the National Broadband Plan.

Furthermore, engagement between officials of my Department and DG Competition, which is the Directorate General of the European Commission with responsibility for State Aid matters, has clearly established that it is the view of DG Competition that it would not be possible to provide a State subsidy to an economic undertaking, such as the ESB, to roll out the National Broadband Plan without undertaking a new public procurement process.

However, the ESB pole network may still be used by National Broadband Ireland where this represents the most effective use of existing infrastructure at a local deployment level.

While I have not met with the ESB directly in relation to high speed broadband, my officials have engaged extensively with ESB in relation to this matter.

### **National Broadband Plan Expenditure**

373. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the additional costs developed for the national broadband plan in the period commencing in February 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22638/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Following the evaluation of the two draft bids received in September 2017, the cost estimates for the NBP were revised to encompass learnings from the competitive dialogue, a greater understanding of project risk from the draft bids received and the reduction in the intervention area.

Based on the Department's more highly-developed knowledge of project risk, along with updated cost assumptions developed with our advisers at this time, a new cost modelling exercise was carried out leading to the development of an updated cost estimate of €1.8 billion (ex VAT and contingency) in March 2018. Since then, the procurement process has determined that the maximum possible cost to the state will be €2.1 billion (ex VAT and contingency) or €3 billion (including VAT and contingency), to be incurred and spread over a 25 year period. There is also a requirement on National Broadband Ireland to continue to operate the network for a further 10 years to 2054 with no further cost to the State.

### **National Broadband Plan Administration**

374. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if a person (details supplied) interviewed, received a statement from or had any other contact with another person that was present at a meeting with his predecessor in New York as part of a review conducted of the tendering process for the national broadband plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22646/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** A minute of this meeting was published last year amongst the documentation made available to the Process Auditor, Mr. Peter Smyth.

It was a matter for Mr. Smyth, under his terms of reference, to interview or receive statements from any relevant parties as part of his review of the NBP procurement process, prior to finalising his report. The Government noted and accepted the findings of this report on 27th November 2018, and it was discussed in detail in the Dáil on 4th December 2018, where I outlined the background to the report and responded to questions.

### **National Broadband Plan Administration**

375. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment further to Parliamentary Question No. 239 of 15 May 2019, if a company (details supplied) is 100% owned by the holding company referred to in the response; if the State has shareholdings in same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22651/19]

376. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment further to Parliamentary Question No. 239 of 15 May 2019, if the holding company referred to in the response is 100% owned by a company (details supplied); if the State has shareholdings of the holding company; if another company has a shareholding of the holding company; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22652/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 375 and 376 together.

National Broadband Ireland will be wholly owned by a holding company which is in turn wholly owned by Granahan McCourt Dublin (Ireland) Limited.

The Minister will hold one special share in National Broadband Ireland. The special share will not carry any economic rights, including a right to share in profits or to vote at shareholder meetings. The special share does not count as equity share capital.

### **National Broadband Plan Administration**

377. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if the contract in question in relation to the national broadband plan is between the State and a company (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22653/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** NBI Infrastructure Limited, trading as National Broadband Ireland (NBI) is a new entity established by Granahan McCourt for the purposes of delivering the NBP. It is this company that will be the signatory to the NBP Contract with the State.

### **National Broadband Plan Administration**

378. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment further to Parliamentary Question No. 239 of 15 May 2019, the agreement to be put in place between the holding company and a company (details supplied); if it will provide a legal guarantee that the company will provide extra equity as a contingency in order to fulfil the national broadband plan; if it fails to be implemented as expected, the person or body responsible for negotiating the agreement; if the State is involved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22654/19]

379. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment further to Parliamentary Question No. 239 of 15 May 2019, the agreement to be put in place between the holding company and a company (details supplied); if it will provide a legal guarantee that the company will provide extra equity as a contingency in order to fulfil the national broadband plan; if it fails to be implemented as expected, the person or body responsible for negotiating the agreement; if the State is involved; and if he will make a statement on

the matter. [22655/19]

380. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment further to Parliamentary Question No. 239 of 15 May 2019, the agreement to be put in place between the holding company and a company (details supplied); if it will provide a legal guarantee that the company will provide extra equity as a contingency in order to fulfil the national broadband plan; if it fails to be implemented as expected, the person or body responsible for negotiating the agreement; if the State is involved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22656/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 378 to 380, inclusive, together.

The precise manner in which National Broadband Ireland (NBI) must be capitalised and supported throughout the project term was set out in the tender documentation. These requirements were fully assessed by an expert commercial and finance team as part of the final tender evaluation process. While there are no further requirements outside of this process, the level of the State subsidy is capped, with NBI carrying project risk.

NBI is a new entity established by Granahan McCourt for the purposes of delivering the NBP. It is this company that will be the signatory to the NBP Contract. The equity of NBI will be invested in NBI via a holding company as would be typical for projects such as this. The holding company will be wholly owned by Granahan McCourt Dublin (Ireland) Limited.

The Bidder will invest a minimum level of up to €220 million including equity funding and working capital requirements. This is made up of €175 million from Tetrad Corporation and the rest from Granahan McCourt (Dublin) Ireland Ltd.

At final tender, Tetrad Corporation provided a commitment letter in relation to the equity required for the project. The equity commitments will be contractualised in advance of contract award. This means that the Minister will have the right through those contracts to enforce the equity commitment on behalf of the project.

### **Craoltóirí Seirbhíse Poiblí**

381. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Cumarsáide, Gníomhaithe ar son na hAeráide agus Comhshaoil cad iad na bearta atá i gceist aige a dhéanamh chun a chinntiú go gcomhlíonfaidh RTÉ a ndualgas reachtúil i leith na Gaeilge i bhfianaise na tuarascála a d'fhoilsigh an Coimisinéir Teanga le gairid inar dúradh go raibh RTÉ ag sarú an Achta Craolacháin, 2009 maidir le soláthar clár teilifíse Gaeilge; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráites ina thaobh. [22850/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** De réir Alt 98 den Acht Craolacháin 2009, is craoltóir neamhspleách náisiúnta seirbhíse poiblí é RTÉ agus, ar an ábhar sin, níl aon ról agamsa mar Aire ina chuid oibríochtaí ó lá go lá. Foilsíonn RTÉ Ráitis Bhliantúla ar Ghealltanais Feidhmíochta le spriocanna a bhaineann le réimse seirbhísí, an Ghaeilge san áireamh. Déanann Údarás Craolacháin na hÉireann, mar rialtóir neamhspleách, athbhreithniú ar a fheidhmíocht i gcomhthéacs na spriocanna sin gach bliain.

### **Inland Waterways By-laws**

382. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and

Environment his plans to introduce a new by-law to replace the Designated Salmonid Waters Bye-Law No. 964 2018; if so, the timescale proposed for the reintroduction of this by-law; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22851/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** My Department has almost completed its consideration of the implications of legal advice received following the outcome of proceedings in the context of intended Bye-laws going forward. I cannot comment on the legal advice itself, however, I can advise that these implications are particularly complex and challenging as regards any Bye-law in relation to the issue raised by the Deputy.

While it is my intention to introduce a similar Bye-law, I would emphasise that, in the meantime, the Lakes in question have long been designated, as a matter of policy, for management primarily for the benefit of wild brown trout and that policy designation remains. I am advised by Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) that Stock Management Plans in respect of these lakes for 2019 are being implemented.

### Road Traffic Offences

383. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if legislation is needed for the issuing of fixed charge notices on the roadside via the new roads policing mobile app; if so, when such legislation or statutory instrument will be introduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22513/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The current situation, whereby a Garda who detects a driving offence causes a fixed charge notice to be issued by post to a motorist works extremely well, with more than 80% compliance on issue of the first fixed charge notice.

As the new mobile road policing app does not have the capacity to issue fixed charge notices, no changes to existing legal provisions are required at this time.

### Free Travel Scheme

384. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the road passenger service routes funded under the LocalLink programme by the National Transport Authority in which the operators are receiving direct payment under the free travel scheme. [22534/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport.

The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for securing the provision of public passenger transport services nationally. It also has national responsibility for integrated local and rural transport, including management of the Rural Transport Programme which operates under the Local Link brand.

In light of the NTA's responsibilities in this matter, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply to her. I would ask the Deputy to advise my private office if she does not receive a reply within ten working days.

## **Bus Éireann Services**

385. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when he expects the improvements in the route 233 bus service in Cork to be introduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22296/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The issue raised is a matter for The National Transport Authority (NTA), in conjunction with Bus Éireann, and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to advise my private office if he does not receive a reply within ten working days.

## **Parking Regulations**

386. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when a vehicle displaying a valid blue badge can park on areas other than a designated disabled parking space and other valid parking areas; if it is the case that when they are already taken the vehicle owner and-or driver can park on double yellow lines in circumstances in which no obstruction or danger is present; the position in other EU countries, including the UK, in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22351/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The conditions underpinning the use of disabled parking bays are clearly laid out in regulation 44 of the Road Traffic (Traffic and Parking) Regulations 1997, as amended. Disabled parking bays are reserved for those who hold a valid disabled parking card, be they a driver or a passenger. The card does not exempt the holder from any other parking restrictions and does not allow for parking on a double yellow line in any circumstances.

Regulation of disabled parking schemes in the European Union is carried out on a country by country basis. I would remind the Deputy, however, that parking cards issued in Ireland are based on a standardised EU model and are recognised across the Union.

## **Public Transport Subsidies**

387. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the campaign to extend the short-hop zone to Drogheda, County Louth, in the immediate future will be supported in order to reduce the costs for commuters in the area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22357/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The National Transport Authority (NTA) has responsibility for regulating fares charged by public transport operators. I have therefore forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to advise my private office if he does not receive a response within ten working days.

## **Sports Capital Programme**

388. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if consideration will be given to providing local authorities the power to assess and determine the capital sports allocation in accordance with the usual criteria associated with same which would

include the provision of the necessary resources to enable them to carry out the allocation in the ordinary way in view of the provision of more power and autonomy to local authorities and in order to encourage the devolution of such powers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22415/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin):** The Sports Capital Programme (SCP) provides funding to voluntary, sporting and community organisations, and to local authorities for the provision of sports and recreational facilities. Over 12,000 projects have now benefited from sports capital funding since 1998, bringing the total allocations in that time to close to €1 billion. The programme has transformed the sporting landscape of Ireland with improvements in the quality and quantity of sporting facilities in virtually every village, town and city in the country.

The most recent fully completed round of the programme was the 2017 round. The exact amount allocated to each project was based on a formula which combined the assessment score obtained, the amount of funding sought and the total amount of funding available for that county based on a per-capita basis. The full scoring system and assessment manual was published on the Department's website prior to any assessments commencing. Further details of the allocation process are available in the Review of the 2017 Sports Capital Programme which is published on the Department's website at <http://www.dttas.ie/sites/default/files/publications/sport/english/sports-capital-programme-2017-review/review-2017-sports-capital-programme.pdf>.

Work is now under way on the assessment of applications under the 2018 round of the SCP and again the full scoring system and assessment manual was published on the Department's website before the detailed assessment work commenced. 186 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 €7 million in allocations to 170 projects were announced on 17 January. 619 equipment only applications were assessed next and 466 allocations with a value of €9.8 million were announced to these organisations last week. A number of local authorities received funding and details of these allocations are available on the website. Work is now under way in assessing the remaining applications for capital works.

In relation to future funding of larger sports projects, the National Sports Policy was published on 25 July 2018 and provided for a Large Scale Sport Infrastructure Fund (LSSIF) with at least €100 million available over the coming years. The fund was launched in November 2018 and 72 applications were submitted by the deadline of 17 April 2019. The fund is initially focused specifically on the requirements and development plans of National Governing Bodies of Sport and Local Authorities.

The SCP and the LSSIF are managed in a transparent and open manner as set out above and local authorities themselves are key beneficiaries of the schemes. While both programmes will be reviewed on an ongoing basis, I have no plans to propose devolving responsibility for sports capital grants to local authorities.

### **Driver Licences**

389. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if provision will be made to amend the driver licence of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22432/19]

**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.

### **Bus Éireann Services**

390. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the difficulties with a specific bus route (details supplied) in County Cork; and if the difficulties will be investigated and alleviated for those dependent on this route to travel to work. [22482/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The issue raised is a matter for Bus Éireann and I have forwarded the Deputy’s question to the company for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to advise my private office if he does not receive a response within ten working days.

### **Public Transport**

391. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason no public input or service user input was sought by Dublin City Council regarding the BusConnects proposal; and the steps that can be taken at this stage to make BusConnects more age friendly. [22511/19]

392. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the measures he has in place for older persons to have their say in view of the general reliance on online communication in public consultation processes in relation to public transport consultations such as BusConnects. [22512/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 391 and 392 together.

As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure including BusConnects.

I would note that there has been extensive public consultations held by the NTA in relation to both the redesign of the bus network and the proposed delivery of new bus priority measures, such as improved bus lanes. These consultations have included extensive personal engagement with communities through public information sessions, the establishment of local community fora and one-to-one offers of engagement with property owners who might be impacted by infrastructure proposals. This is in addition to the information published online as referred to by the Deputy.

Noting the NTA’s responsibility in the matter, I have referred the Deputy’s question to the NTA for a direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my private office if she does not receive a reply within 10 days.

### **Public Transport**

393. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he

will address a matter (details supplied) regarding the LocalLink tendering criteria; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22556/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport.

The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for securing the provision of public passenger transport services nationally. It also has national responsibility for integrated local and rural transport, including management of the Rural Transport Programme which now operates under the Local Link brand.

Noting this, I have forward the Deputy's Question to the NTA for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to advise my private office if he does not receive a response within ten working days.

### **Taxi Regulations**

394. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to an increase in reports from SPSV NTA issued licence holders of being prevented from transporting passengers travelling cross-Border, both to and from destinations in Northern Ireland, by authorities there; if such an escalation in enforcement by the authorities in Northern Ireland contravenes reciprocal arrangements in place across both jurisdictions by which taxi operators based either side of the Border may operate on such a cross-Border basis without impediment; if such a reciprocal regime does not exist, the efforts being made between the respective authorities to establish same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22559/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The question of reports from holders of small public service vehicle (SPSV) licences issued by the NTA of being prevented from transporting passengers travelling cross-border into Northern Ireland has been brought to the attention of my Department in the past.

The relevant Irish legislation governing taxi services is the *Taxi Regulation Act 2013*, which requires the holding of an SPSV licence and an SPSV driver licence to carry persons for hire or reward in the State. The 2013 Act and its requirements *only* apply to services provided in the State - it does not provide for services across a border. I understand that the legislative position in Northern Ireland is similar. Thus, under current legislation, a taxi operator wishing to operate cross-border services, would have to apply for and obtain licences on each side of the border. Unlike other areas of transport - such as bus and road haulage operations - taxi services are not subject to EU harmonisation, so arrangements for regulating taxi services remain a matter for the relevant authorities in each State in respect of services that operate in their jurisdiction.

With a view to ensuring that cross-border taxi services could be better legally facilitated and appropriately regulated, I previously agreed with my counterpart in Northern Ireland that primary legislation would be prepared, on a reciprocal basis, in both jurisdictions to allow for exempting licensed taxi operators in respect of certain cross-border services, subject to specified conditions.

I remain committed to developing the necessary legislative changes to the *Taxi Regulation Act 2013*, subject to Government approval, and provided that legislative arrangements can be progressed on a reciprocal basis either side of the border. My Department continues to engage with counterparts in Northern Ireland. However, in the absence of a Northern Ireland Execu-

tive, it is not possible for Northern Ireland to progress with making changes to its legislation at present.

### **Transport Infrastructure Ireland Projects**

395. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason the residents of Griffith Avenue and the surrounding district were denied their statutory entitlement to a six week consultation on the proposed intervention shaft that will have a permanent above ground footprint in the south-west corner of Albert College, the details of which were only provided less than seven days before the closing date for submissions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22573/19]

396. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason Transport Infrastructure Ireland did not release information in relation to the planned ventilation shaft for the south-west corner of Albert College in the MetroLink project until two working days before close of consultation with a quality of drawing so poor as to question its value thereby denying residents their right to a six week consultation; if there will be an extension of the timeframe accordingly; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22574/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 395 and 396 together.

As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure including MetroLink.

The Deputy will be aware that the NTA's recently concluded consultation process in relation to MetroLink, and its previous consultation process held last year, are not statutory consultation processes. Those recent consultations are completely separate from any later statutory consultations that will be required by the planning authorities once an application for a Railway Order has been made. I am informed that such an application is expected to be made around Quarter 2 of 2020; therefore, the formal, statutory consultation process will take place following that.

Noting the NTA's responsibility in the matter, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for a direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my private office if she does not receive a reply within 10 days.

### **Sports Capital Programme Applications**

397. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a grant application has been received from a club (details supplied); if not, if a request for financial assistance to expand facilities at the club has been received; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22607/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin):** Two separate applications have been received for sports capital assistance from the club referred to by the Deputy.

The first application was made under the 2018 Sports Capital Programme for a grant towards the development of the clubs playing facilities. The 2018 round of the Sports Capital Programme closed for applications on Friday, 19 October last. By that deadline, a record 2,337

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applications were submitted seeking a total of €162 million 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 €7 million in allocations to 170 projects were announced on 17 January.

619 equipment only applications were assessed next and 466 allocations with a value of €9.8 million were announced to these organisations last week. Work is now underway in assessing the remaining applications for capital works including the application from the club referred to.

For the first time, applicants who have submitted incorrect documentation under this round are being 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.

An application for financial assistance for the development of the club's facilities has also been submitted under the Large Scale Sport Infrastructure Fund by Cork County Council. The Large Scale Sport Infrastructure Fund opened for applications on 19 November 2018 and the closing date for receipt of applications was 17 April 2019. 72 applications were received in total and my officials are currently undertaking an initial assessment of them.

In view of the detailed information contained in each application, I am advised that it will take a number of months to have all of them assessed. Accordingly, I expect that it will be towards the end of this year before allocations under the Large Scale Sport Infrastructure Fund are announced.

Full details of all applications received under both schemes are available on the Department's website.

### **Proposed Legislation**

398. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to update the Public Transport Regulation Act 2009; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22705/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The licensing of public bus passenger services is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the provisions of the Public Transport Regulation Act 2009. The NTA has completed a formal review of Part 2 of the 2009 Act which is under consideration by my Department.

Following that review I have published a proposal as part of the General Scheme of the Railway Safety Amendment Bill which brings certain commercial school bus services back within the scope of the regulatory framework applied by the NTA for private operators. No decisions have yet been taken regarding any further changes to the NTA's route licensing powers.

### **Public Transport**

399. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if one hackney service per LocalLink office area will be subsidised under his recently announced pilot project; and if so, if each LocalLink office will be able to provide funding to a number of local

hackneys. [22715/19]

400. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if one community transport service per LocalLink office area will be subsidised under his recently announced pilot project and if so, if each LocalLink office will be able to provide funding to a number of projects. [22716/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 399 and 400 together.

As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport.

The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for securing the provision of public passenger transport services nationally. It also has national responsibility for integrated local and rural transport, including management of the Rural Transport Programme which now operates under the Local Link brand. The NTA is also responsible for the running of the recently announced pilot schemes relating to the Local Area Hackney Scheme and the Community Transport Service.

In light of the NTA's responsibilities in this matter, I have referred the Deputy's questions to the NTA for direct reply to him. I would ask the Deputy to advise my private office if he does not receive a response within ten working days.

### Taxi Licences

401. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding an application by a person (details supplied). [22842/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The regulation of the small public service vehicle (SPSV) industry, including the licensing of vehicles within this sector, is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the provisions of the *Taxi Regulation Act 2013*.

I have referred your question to the NTA for direct reply to you. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

### Childcare Services Funding

402. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if a community childcare centre (details supplied) will be granted Pobal funding to erect an extension to accommodate the growing number of parents who are eager for their children to avail of the services on offer; when Pobal funding announcements will take place; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22491/19]

404. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if capital funding will be approved for a childcare facility (details supplied); when she will be in a position to approve same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22321/19]

421. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if Pobal funding will be provided in respect of a childcare centre (details supplied) in County Galway which is in urgent need of a new extension in order to meet childcare needs in the area; and if

she will make a statement on the matter. [22488/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 402, 404 and 421 together.

Assisting childcare providers in extending their existing childcare services, or establishing new childcare services, have always been key areas of focus for my Department's capital programmes.

Each year the Department reviews the capital programmes as a whole and determines the priorities for Early Learning and Care and School Age Capital grants.

The capital strands have been made available to achieve the strategic priorities for 2019 as determined by the Department, having regard to the funding available, developed using analysis of the current state of the childcare sector, learnings from previous capital programmes and feedback and input from stakeholders, including childcare providers and Pobal.

I remain committed to assisting all childcare providers, both community and private, in providing world-class childcare and meeting demand for childcare places, and I anticipate that this year's Capital programme will build on last year's good work in the sector, as well as that of previous years.

The application window for the Capital programmes closed on 27th March 2019 and the appraisal process for applications is currently underway in Pobal. I am unable to comment on this service's capital application, however I would like to assure you that all applications for funding will be appraised in a fair, thorough and impartial manner. In accordance with principles of fairness and equality, no favour will be shown to any individual service or services, and all appraisal will be undertaken on the basis of the content of their applications for funding alone.

Decisions are due to be delivered to applicants in June 2019 in the hope that capital works can begin as soon as possible following this.

The results of the appraisal process, including the final decisions, will be communicated to providers directly following their completion.

### **Early Childhood Care and Education**

403. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the steps she is taking to support stay-at-home parents; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21809/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** First 5, a Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families, was published in November 2018. First 5 includes over 150 actions including a broad range of measures to support families given their fundamental importance in shaping children's experiences and outcomes. The vision for babies and young children articulated in First 5 is of a healthy childhood starting in pregnancy; time together with parents especially in the first year in a nurturing and playful home environment where material needs are met; high quality play-based Early Learning and Care experiences; positive transitions to primary school; and supportive community contexts.

The Government is committed to supporting parents in caring for young children at home in a range of ways.

Within the remit of my Department, the policy priorities are to provide access to Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare supports to parents of young children, whether they work full time or part time, or look after their children at home full-time. These policies seek to support children's early development and to support their families.

For example, in terms of Early Learning and Care supports provided by my Department, from September of last year, all children are eligible to avail of two years of universal pre-school, without cost, through the Early Childhood Care and Education programme (ECCE) prior to beginning primary school. Almost 108,000 children are currently participating, many of whom are children of stay-at-home parents.

The current targeted Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare subsidy schemes are available to families where parents are in receipt of certain social welfare payments, medical cards, or GP Visit cards, again many of whom are stay-at-home parents.

A universal subsidy is available to all parents of children from six months until their child becomes eligible for the universal preschool programme (ECCE), regardless of whether parents are working or not. The National Childcare Scheme which will be open for applications later this year will make subsidies available on the basis of family income and will also be available to stay-at-home parents. This is underpinned by the Childcare Support Act 2018.

My Department also provides funding for local parent and toddler groups to organise activities for parents and young children in the community to support their development through play. Both working parents and stay-at-home parents participate. 449 groups were supported in 2018.

In the coming years, my Department will also be leading on developing a new model of parenting services from universal to targeted provision, covering key stages of child development and taking account of parents and children in a range of contexts and parenting relationships.

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

There have also been a number of new measures to support parents to spend time at home with children in their early years. Two weeks of paternity leave and benefit for fathers was introduced in 2016. In 2017, there was an extension to maternity leave and benefit to mothers of babies born prematurely. Budget 2019 announced the introduction of a new paid parental leave scheme which will be available to both fathers and mothers from later this year. Legislation extending the amount of unpaid parental leave and increasing the age of the child to which it applies has recently passed.

First 5 sets out Government's commitment that by 2021, parents will each have an individual entitlement to seven weeks of paid parental leave, to potentially allow children to benefit from an additional 14 weeks parental care in their first year.

My Department has led the development of the implementation plan for First 5 which will be published this week. The implementation plan sets out how the first phase of delivery of the over 150 actions in First 5, including many that will benefit stay-at-home parents, will be progressed in the coming three years.

*Question No. 404 answered with Question No. 402.*

405. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the steps she is taking to assist with improvements in the pay and conditions of childcare staff; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22322/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I have been unequivocal in my support for better pay and conditions for staff in Early Learning and Care services. Early Learning and Care practitioners play a critical role in supporting young children's early learning and development and in providing a safe and caring environment. They deserve to be recognised, valued and respected for this.

While my Department funds a wide range of initiatives to support the quality, affordability and accessibility of early learning and care and school age childcare services, the State is not the employer of staff in this sector and cannot set wage levels. The large majority of Early Learning and Care settings are private businesses (74% according to the most recent figures from Pobal), with the remainder being independent, community-based, not for profit organisations (26%).

I have repeatedly called for the Early Learning and Care sector to pursue a Sectoral Employment Order, which offers a viable mechanism to establish appropriate wage levels. As the Deputy will be aware, neither I nor my officials can initiate a Sectoral Employment Order, but my Department will readily co-operate with such a process, if and when it is underway.

My Department has also supported a range of measures to improve pay and conditions using the tools available. These include the 117% increase in investment over the last 4 budgets that has supported services to operate at optimal capacity and has provided additional capitation for early learning and care programmes, including a 7% rise in September 2018 in the ECCE capitation rate. Measures also include the introduction for the first time of an annual Programme Support Payment to recognise the administrative roles that services play; this totals €21.4m in 2019. I have also continued to provide a higher rate of capitation payment for graduate-led pre-school rooms, to encourage the attraction and retention of Early Learning and Care graduates, and in 2017 I introduced a higher capitation payment for services that employ a qualified Inclusion Coordinator as part of the AIM programme. In addition, last year I introduced a pilot measure for funding services whose staff take part in continuing professional development, and I am extending the pilot this year to include the new 'Aistear and Play' CPD programme implemented by Better Start. I hope to build on this pilot further over the years to come, following an evaluation. I have encouraged providers to use such additional funding to support, wherever possible, improved pay and conditions of the hard-working frontline staff that make such a lasting difference to children's lives.

The 2018 sector profile published by Pobal showed an increase in the average wage in the sector from €11.93 per hour in 2017 to €12.17 in 2018, but it is clear that there is a long way to go before staff have the wages and working conditions (including full time, full year contracts) that reflect the importance of the work they do.

*First 5*, the Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and Families, includes commitments to move to a graduate-led workforce, with at least 50% of staff holding an appropriate degree-level qualification by 2028, and to raise the profile of careers in Early Learning and Care (and school-age childcare). Work will commence shortly on preparing a Workforce Development Plan, which will set out the actions required over the next 10 years to achieve these commitments in *First 5*.

## Foster Care

406. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if an investigation will be conducted into the fact that three times as many children are taken into foster care in County Cork compared to counties Dublin, Wicklow and Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22334/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I can advise the Deputy that a child received into care by Tusla as a result of a legal court order or through voluntary parental consent is placed in foster care or residential care.

Foster care is the main form of alternative care for children in need of care and protection, and is the preferred option for children who cannot live with their parents or guardians. Children, depending on their individual need and based on their Care Plan, may be placed in foster care either with relatives or with general foster carers. Of the children in care in Ireland, 92% are in foster care, nationally. This compares very favourably to foster care services overseas. In the UK 73% of children in care are in foster care. In fact, Ireland compares extremely well internationally with regard to placement of children with foster carers, as opposed to in institutional care. Ireland, along with Australia, has one of the highest rates of family placement (foster family care and formal relative or kinship care) in child welfare systems globally.

I wish to advise the Deputy that Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, collate data by Tusla administrative area, rather than by county.

The following table shows the number of children in foster care in each of the counties mentioned by the Deputy. These figures relate to February 2019, the latest available data. The total number of children in foster care in Dublin, Wicklow and Kildare is 1,692, while the total number for Cork is 729.

**Table :Number of children in foster care February 2019**

Tusla Area	Number of children in foster care February 2019
Dublin South Central	328
Dublin South East/Wicklow	245
Dublin South West/ Kildare/West Wicklow	360
Dublin City North	465
Dublin North	294
Cork	729

### Foster Care Policy

407. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 446 of 14 May 2019, if her reply will be amended in view of correspondence (details supplied) proving that Tusla got a court order to have a child receive first Holy Communion and be baptised against the mother's wish; and the reason for her erroneous reply. [22398/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I wish to thank the Deputy for her question. As with Parliamentary Question No. 446 of 14 May, Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, are in a better position to address the Deputy's concerns. As such, I have again referred the matter to Tusla for their direct reply.

### **Childcare Services Funding**

408. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of funding for a preschool (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22399/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** Assisting childcare providers in extending their existing childcare services, or establishing new childcare services, have always been key areas of focus for my Department's capital programmes.

Each year the Department reviews the capital programmes as a whole and determines the priorities for Early Learning and Care and School Age Capital grants.

The capital strands have been made available to achieve the strategic priorities for 2019 as determined by the Department, having regard to the funding available, developed using analysis of the current state of the childcare sector, learnings from previous capital programmes and feedback and input from stakeholders, including childcare providers and Pobal.

I remain committed to assisting all childcare providers, both community and private, in providing world-class childcare and meeting demand for childcare places, and I anticipate that this year's Capital programme will build on last year's good work in the sector, as well as that of previous years.

The application window for the Capital programmes closed on 27th March 2019 and the appraisal process for applications is currently underway in Pobal. I am unable to comment on this service's capital application, however I would like to assure you that all applications for funding will be appraised in a fair, thorough and impartial manner. In accordance with principles of fairness and equality, no favour will be shown to any individual service or services, and all appraisal will be undertaken on the basis of the content of their applications for funding alone.

Decisions are due to be delivered to applicants in June 2019 in the hope that capital works can begin as soon as possible following this.

The results of the appraisal process, including the final decisions, will be communicated to providers directly following their completion.

### **Childcare Services Funding**

409. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the position regarding the new national childcare scheme; if her attention has been drawn to the fact that changes to funding streams are affecting after-school project services in disadvantaged areas; the way in which these after-school project services will be funded; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22421/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The National Childcare Scheme is a new, national scheme of financial support for parents towards the cost of childcare. The development of this Scheme is a significant move forward in delivering quality, accessible, affordable childcare to families throughout Ireland.

The Scheme represents a fundamental shift away from subsidies grounded in medical card and social protection entitlements, and towards a comprehensive and progressive system of universal and income-based subsidies. By making this shift and by tangibly reducing the cost

of quality childcare for thousands of families across Ireland, the Scheme aims to improve children's outcomes, support lifelong learning, make work pay and reduce child poverty. It is also designed to have a positive impact on gender equality in relation to labour market participation and employment opportunities.

The Scheme will replace the existing targeted childcare schemes with a single, streamlined and user-friendly scheme, providing both universal and targeted childcare subsidies. To make the transition to the new Scheme as smooth as possible, families can choose to make the switch to the new Scheme once it launches (targeted for October/ November 2019) or can remain on their current childcare subsidy programme for one final year.

With regard to income-based subsidies awarded under the Scheme, parents who are working, studying or who meet certain other conditions will qualify for an enhanced-hours subsidy (up to a maximum of 40 hours per week). The definitions of 'work' and 'study' will be set out in regulations made under the Childcare Support Act 2018 and will be comprehensive, covering differing types of work and study arrangements, such as part-time, week on/ week off and zero hour contract arrangements.

The National Childcare Scheme will greatly increase the number of families who can access financial support. By removing many of the restrictive eligibility requirements of the existing programmes, a far greater number of families will be eligible for targeted, income-related subsidies. Many families will, for the first time, be entitled to subsidies which will reduce their childcare costs significantly.

There may, however, be a small number of cases where a family who is currently receiving the maximum rate for *full-time* childcare under an existing programme may receive less under the National Childcare Scheme, particularly if their child is – in reality – receiving *afterschool* care rather than full-time childcare. In such cases, the family can remain on their current payment in the transition period following the Scheme's launch. I have also directed my officials to undertake research and analysis to examine any adjustments 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.

Finally, the Deputy may be aware that my Department also funds Educational Welfare services which are operated by Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. The Schools Completion Programme regularly provides after-school services or homework clubs. These are most often provided in areas of disadvantage. The funding for Educational Welfare activities is unaffected by the National Childcare Scheme.

### Child and Family Agency Data

410. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of children deemed and identified to have been at risk as reported to her Department in each of the past three years to date; the extent to which it was found possible to address the issues raised; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22452/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I can advise the

Deputy that Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, is the appropriate body to receive referrals of children at risk. Tusla collate and publish data on the number of referrals received, and the actions taken in relation to referrals. I have therefore written to Tusla and asked them to revert to the Deputy directly.

### **Child Protection**

411. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which she has available the necessary resources to address the issue of children at risk as a result of a particular source or cause; the extent to which she has been able to respond directly or through agencies under her remit in such cases; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22453/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I can advise the Deputy that Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, is the appropriate body to receive referrals of children at risk. Tusla collates and publishes data on the number of referrals received, and the actions taken in relation to referrals. I have therefore written to Tusla and asked them to revert to the Deputy directly.

### **Child Protection**

412. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the degree to which she has dialogue with youth organisations nationally with a view to adequate protection for young persons when required without delay; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22454/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** Before receiving any funding from my Department, youth organisations must enter into a Service Level Agreement with either their relevant Education and Training Board or Pobal who act as funding intermediaries on behalf of my Department. This service level agreement opens the dialogue by outlining the youth services' responsibilities to protect children under the Children First Act 2015. In order to support this, my Department keeps an open dialogue with youth organisations.

The Child Protection Programme for the Youth Sector is based in the National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) and is funded by my Department. This programme, delivered by NYCI, was initially revised for 2018 to encompass the changes from the enactment of Children First. NYCI and my Department are currently working together to provide a fully revised programme, with one stream for youth volunteers and another for paid staff, in 2019.

As part of this programme, NYCI, at the request of my Department, ran general information session for Management Boards of youth organisations to support them in meeting their responsibilities relating to the Act. An information session was also provided for trainers from Youth Work Ireland and City of Dublin Youth Service Board to enable them to deliver the Board Information session to their respective boards.

In addition NYCI currently chairs the Children First Implementation Group for the Youth Sector. This group provides support to youth organisations in relation to the full enactment of the Children First Act. This group has a meeting scheduled for June 2019.

### **Child Protection Services Provision**

413. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which adequate case workers are available to her Department to meet the issues of children at risk; the extent to which access to treatment or support remains readily available for this purpose nationally and in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22455/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The question relates to operational matters for Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. I have referred the matter to Tusla and asked that a direct reply issue to the Deputy.

### Children and Family Services Provision

414. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which she has been in a position to offer grant aid to various youth organisations and/or child support agencies; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22456/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I am pleased to inform the Deputy that Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, will receive Exchequer funding of over €787m in 2019.

Tusla allocates some €150 million annually to a range of community and voluntary organisations which provide services to achieve better outcomes for vulnerable children, and families, that require interventions and supports.

In 2019, €60.4m has been allocated in current funding to support the provision of youth services, an increase of €1.5m on 2018. This additional funding is being used for programmes that target disadvantaged young people and to assist national youth organisations in their work to support local voluntary youth services.

My Department has also provided an additional 12% in overall funding for the Local Youth Club Grant Scheme, which supports youth work activities at a local level, bringing the total allocation to over €2m.

The detail of the €60.4 million funding allocation for youth work provision in 2019, according to schemes is given in the following table:

Funding Scheme	2019 Allocation
Targeted Youth Funding Scheme	€35,183,847
Youth Information Centres	€1,377,060
Youth Service Grant Scheme	€11,126,380
Revised Youth Funding Scheme VFM	€3,357,346
Local Youth Club Grant Scheme (inc CDYSB Annual Grant)	€2,531,206
Youth Officer Allocation + Technical Assistance	€3,680,092
LGBT Strategy	€400,000
Other National Youth Organisations and Youth Initiatives	€1,721,960
DCYA Policy and Support Programmes (inc. contingency)	€533,207

Funding Scheme	2019 Allocation
New Initiatives and other funding streams within Department	€483,902
Total	€60,395,000

As the Deputy is aware my Department is currently managing the most significant reform of youth services ever undertaken. This will provide an opportunity to identify need and to focus funding on young people most in need of intervention.

Future development and investment in youth services will be informed by the mapping exercise completed in 2017, which mapped youth service provision across the State as well as an Area Profiling, Needs Assessment and Service Requirement tool which was designed in collaboration with the Education and Training Board (ETB) sector and was officially launched in January 2019. This mapping and tool will assist the Department and the relevant ETB in developing a detailed social demographic profile in terms of both population numbers and deprivation levels. My Department is committed to working with ETBs to identify requirements in their area and facilitate decisions on service requirement by reference to evidenced need.

### Child Protection

415. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the degree to which her Department continues to receive information in respect of children at risk in the home, in public institutions or in foster care; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22457/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I can advise the Deputy that Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, is the appropriate body to receive referrals of children at risk. Tusla publish data on the number of referrals received, and the actions taken in relation to referrals. I have therefore written to Tusla and asked them to revert to the Deputy directly.

### Homeless Persons Supports

416. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which her Department can assist directly or indirectly children whose parents are homeless; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22458/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** While my colleague, the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, has primary responsibility for reducing and ultimately eliminating homelessness, I am committed to helping children and families experiencing homelessness as part of a whole-of-Government response to this problem.

As the Deputy will be aware, children and families experiencing homelessness are supported by Tusla, the Child and Family Agency.

In this regard, Tusla supports homeless families experiencing problems with school attendance, through the School Completion Programme. Children whose families are homeless are prioritised for services such as homework clubs and breakfast clubs.

Tusla and the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive (DRHE) have agreed a joint protocol

to facilitate an inter-agency response to the many challenges posed by homelessness. As part of the protocol, Tusla provides support to the DHRE's 'one-stop-shop' assessment centres. Here Tusla staff deal with matters of child protection and welfare, educational welfare and Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence (DSGBV) services. Tusla's Homelessness Liaison Officer supports these centres.

Family Resource Centres, funded by Tusla, provide facilities where homeless children and families can avail of a safe, warm environment for homework, relaxation and nutritious food. Tusla is engaging with the Centres to offer further, enhanced services across the greater Dublin area in 2019.

My Department funds free childcare for children and families experiencing homelessness, under the Community Childcare Subvention Resettlement (Transitional) Programme. This includes a daily meal for each child. 312 children have been registered under this scheme in the current programme year (August 2018 – August 2019).

Finally, acting on evidence that a minority of young people leaving the care of the State can have particularly complex needs, I have succeeded in having care-leavers included for the first time as a separate category for funding under the Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS). This provides targeted assistance to the most vulnerable care leavers by enabling Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) to acquire residential units to accommodate them. Where accommodation is provided under CAS, Tusla will provide and, where necessary advocate for, additional independent living supports, in particular for the most vulnerable care leavers, in accordance with the individual's pre-agreed aftercare plan.

I am pleased to be able to confirm that as of 24 May 2019, 24 care-leavers have availed of places with different Approved Housing Bodies, including 15 with Focus Ireland, six with the Peter McVerry Trust, and three with Don Bosco. Additional placements have been secured and are expected to come on stream within the coming months. These should be available for other young people leaving care in the near future. The security provided by a tenancy in CAS accommodation, combined with the aftercare supports identified by Tusla as part of the aftercare planning process, can help ensure that these young people have a safe base from which to begin their transition to independent adult life.

Our response to homelessness overall is a test of our compassion as a society. We need to eliminate child and family homelessness. While we work towards this we must provide the assistance necessary to help these children and families live in a way that goes some way to addressing the challenges of the situation.

### **Child Abuse Reports**

417. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the degree to which reports of physical, mental and-or sexual abuse of children has been made known to her Department in each of the past three years to date; the degree to which a satisfactory conclusion has been achieved in each case; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22459/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I can advise the Deputy that Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, is the appropriate body to receive referrals of abuse. Tusla publish data on the number of referrals received, and the actions taken in relation to referrals. I have therefore written to Tusla and asked them to revert to the Deputy directly.

## Internet Safety

418. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which her attention has been drawn to cyberbullying; the degree to which her Department has assisted in respect of such complaints in each of the past three years to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22460/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I am conscious of the issue referred to by the Deputy. The internet is an increasingly valuable resource for everyone, including children and young people, but it also exposes people to new risks including cyberbullying.

A range of Government Departments and agencies have a role in relation to internet safety. In recognition of the whole of government approach required, in July 2018, the Taoiseach launched the Action Plan for Online Safety 2018-19. The Action Plan involves a wide range of actions, across six Government Departments - Departments of Communications, Climate Action and Environment; Education and Skills; Justice and Equality; Children and Youth Affairs; Health and Business Enterprise and Innovation, recognising that online safety is not the responsibility of any one Department and signifying the range and breadth of the issues involved. A Sponsors Group, involving the six Departments and chaired by the Department of Education & Skills, has been established to drive implementation of the Action Plan.

Children First operates on the premise that it is the responsibility of everyone in society to keep children and young people safe from harm. This responsibility includes keeping children safe from harm online. As part of the Action Plan for Online Safety my Department committed to amending the Children First Guidance to include a specific reference to the need to consider online safety in the completion of a Child Safeguarding Statement. An addendum to the guidance, clarifying the need to consider online safety in the preparation of risk assessments and Child Safeguarding Statements, was finalised and published on my Department's website in January. In addition, the Child and Family Agency – Tusla has revised its template for the completion of Child Safeguarding Statements to refer to the need to consider online risks to children if a service provides access to the internet.

My Department does not have a role in relation to the coordination or investigation of complaints about cyberbullying.

## Child Abuse

419. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the most common forms of child abuse referred to her Department for attention in each of the past two years to date; the degree to which a satisfactory outcome has been achieved; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22461/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I can advise the Deputy that Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, is the appropriate body to receive referrals of abuse. Tusla publish data on the number of referrals received, and the actions taken in relation to referrals. I have therefore written to Tusla and asked them to revert to the Deputy directly.

## Childcare Costs

420. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the steps she

is taking to assist families in reducing the cost of childcare; and her views on whether childcare costs are unsustainable for many families. [22464/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I understand that Early Learning and Care and School Age Childcare costs can be a significant burden for families. I and officials in my Department are working towards alleviating this financial strain for all families.

The National Childcare Scheme (NCS), which will be introduced later this year, is a new user-friendly scheme to help parents meet the cost of quality childcare. The development of this Scheme is a significant move forward in delivering quality, accessible, affordable childcare to families throughout Ireland.

Through the NCS, and a range of other measures, I am 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 NCS, 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.

Under the Scheme, a Universal subsidy is available to all families using registered childcare with children aged between 24 weeks and 3 years. An Income Assessed subsidy will be 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. A priority for me in last year's budget was to increase the lower income threshold under the NCS from €22,700 to €26,000 per annum. This will 'poverty-proof' the Scheme, ensuring that families at or below the relative income poverty line will benefit from the highest subsidy rates under the Scheme, over €200 per child in some instances.

A second priority was to increase the Scheme's maximum net income threshold from €47,000 to €60,000 per annum in order to benefit moderate and middle income families struggling with the cost of childcare.

These enhancements will ensure that 7,500 more children will now benefit from the Scheme relative to the original proposals. Over 40,000 other children, already eligible for support, will see increases to their subsidies.

The NCS 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. 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.

The Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme, or ECCE as it is known, is a universal scheme available to all children in Ireland for the two years prior to them starting in primary school. It is estimated that this scheme can save parents who require full or part time childcare approximately €5000 over the course of the two years.

Over the last four budgets, investment in childcare has risen by nearly 117%. However, I acknowledge that more investment will be needed. Historic under-investment in early learning and care has created a situation that has no quick solution. The new National Childcare Scheme

will establish a sustainable platform to enable us to continue investing for years to come, and the Scheme is designed to be flexible, allowing income thresholds, maximum hours and subsidy rates to be adjusted in line with Government decisions and as more investment becomes available.

*Question No. 421 answered with Question No. 402.*

### **Child and Family Agency Investigations**

422. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the procedures in place for Tusla regarding investigations of companies and agencies used by the courts to supervise children in court orders in relation to their non-compliance with the Children First Act 2015, with particular reference to the reason the list of non-compliant organisations is not publicly accessible; the further reason there is no sanction in place to publish the details of non-compliant organisations; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22537/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I can advise the Deputy that Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, is the appropriate body to investigate the non-compliance of a provider of a relevant service under the Children First Act 2015. I have, therefore, written to Tusla and asked them to revert to the Deputy directly.

### **Children in Care**

423. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to provide support from Tusla to families with access orders; the reason such assistance is not already available; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22538/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The impact of violence and abuse witnessed or experienced in childhood can last a lifetime.

Where a child is in the care of Tusla, and where there is a history of violence or other forms of abuse, the Courts may order, or social workers may arrange, for access to be supervised to ensure safe oversight of the access visit.

I am deeply conscious of, and sensitive to, the concerns of parents who have experienced domestic abuse. Having to arrange for their children to meet with the other parent can be difficult and worrying.

This was highlighted in a report I launched for Women's Aid last month, which suggested that as many as one in five women were under threat of abuse from a violent partner during access visits. This is shocking.

My own Department and the Department of Justice and Equality have been engaging on this issue for some time.

I am convinced of the need for the provision of safe child contact spaces when they are needed for protective purposes.

My Department has embarked on work to firstly assess exactly what facilities and supports are available for families in this situation.

Child Access Services exist through the Family Resource Centres. Preliminary indications

are that at least 42 Family Resource Centres provide some sort of service for access visits.

These have grown up in an organic and ad hoc way and are dependent on the facilities and staff available within a Centre. For example some Family Resource Centres provide a pick up and drop off service which helps in the avoidance of contact between parents, if that is desirable.

I want to build on the services available through FRCs and expand the number of locations where a child's right to have access to both parents is preserved in a safe way.

The Deputy may also be aware of the Time4Us service in Galway which is a family access service. Following the resolution of funding and governance issues the service has now been absorbed into the ARD Family Resource Centre.

I understand that this is operating very successfully and is now facilitating even more families than originally planned. Parents and children are also participating in other activities in the FRC outside of the family access service. This is a very positive benefit of being part of the FRC.

Family breakdown is difficult for children. Parental separation can take a toll on children. I am keen to support children and families as much as possible and to keep them safe if there is evidence of family violence.

### **Child and Family Agency Investigations**

424. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the reason the results of investigations conducted by Tusla are not made publicly available when a complaint is made through the compliance unit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22539/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I can advise the Deputy that Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, is the appropriate body to investigate the non-compliance of a provider of a relevant service under the Children First Act 2015. I have, therefore, written to Tusla and asked them to revert to the Deputy directly.

### **Garda Vetting**

425. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to enable parents to access Garda vetting for childminders to work with children as distinct from applications being taken only from organisations; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22540/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** Garda vetting in Ireland is governed by the Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Acts 2012 to 2016 which fall under the remit of my colleague the Minister of Justice and Equality. These Acts set out in detail the range of persons/activities to which vetting applies.

With regard the Deputy's specific query around childminders, my Department is currently finalising a Childminding Action Plan which will set out steps to move incrementally towards wider regulation, support and professional development of childminders, and will aim at extending National Childcare Scheme subsidies to them, thus improving access to high quality and subsidised childminding services. This Plan will include considerations in relation to Garda vetting requirements. Officials from my Department are currently liaising with officials

from the Department of Justice and Equality in the context of these plans.

### **Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries**

426. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if the remit of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes will be extended to include pregnant women and girls detained in psychiatric hospitals in order to determine the outcomes of them and their children. [22544/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** This Commission of Investigation was established by Government in response to significant concerns around the experiences of pregnant women in a specific type of institution, namely mother and baby homes. The comprehensive investigation was framed to provide a clear emphasis on the experiences of women and children who spent time in these institutions. This was a deliberately focused rather than a limited approach.

In previously responding to calls to extend the remit of the Commission into other types of institution, the Government concluded that completing the current programme of work must be the priority. In reaching this decision, the Government was cognisant of the necessity to allow the Commission to complete its extensive analysis of available information before it can be definitively established whether additional matters may warrant investigation.

The Commission is tasked with examining arrangements with other institutions that were part of the entry or exit pathways for mothers into Mother and Baby Homes, and upon their leaving these institutions. These matters are also appropriately incorporated in the social history module of the Commission's investigations. In addition, the Commission is required to report on any specific matters outside its scope which it considers may warrant further investigation in the public interest as part of the Commission's work (Article 6). The Government has stated that it will consider any recommendations made by the Commission in this regard.

### **Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries**

427. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 164 of 16 May 2019, her views on the advice from a religious order (details supplied) that burial sites at a site are to remain in the ownership of the order; and if she has raised the recent finding of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes that the religious order failed to provide evidence that infants were not buried in unapproved cemeteries. [22581/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I published the Commission's Fifth Interim Report, which had a focus on burial arrangements, on the 16 April 2019 and it has been circulated to relevant State authorities for their appropriate attention. We know from this Interim Report that the Commission has dedicated significant time and effort to advancing its investigations into these matters. As the matters referred to by the Deputy are within the scope of an extant Commission of Investigation, it would not be appropriate for me to make direct contact with the religious order while these independent statutory investigations are on-going. Therefore, I have not raised these issues directly with the religious order.

The Commission of Investigation is the appropriate authority to investigate these matters. It has the necessary legal powers and resources to conduct these investigations. The Commission's Fifth Interim Report describes its engagement with the order, and its interim findings are

based on its assessment of the available documentary evidence and witness testimony. Notably, the Commission also confirmed that private burial grounds, including those owned by religious institutions during the period in question, were not automatically subject to the same regulation as publicly owned burial grounds. Most significantly, there was no legal requirement to keep a register of burials in such burial grounds.

The Commission has conducted geophysical surveys and test excavations on the designated child burial grounds on the site of Sean Ross Abbey. The Commission has stated that it will report further on these investigations in its final report. Information regarding the sale of parts of the former institution at Sean Ross Abbey is available in the public domain. This information indicates that the areas designated as burial grounds were excluded from the sale and would remain in the ownership of the religious order. It is important to clarify that the sale of these lands in the course of the Commission's on-going work does not alter the powers of the Commission or impede the exercise of these powers.

While I do appreciate the deep personal sensitivity for families around these issues, as Minister for Children and Youth Affairs I do not have statutory powers or responsibilities in relation to burial grounds or a role in the Planning and Development Acts. There is scope within current planning regulations for the relevant Local Authority to consider archaeological and heritage concerns in the context of any proposal or application for redevelopment of the site.

### **Childcare Services Funding**

428. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the grants available to a playschool (details supplied) in County Kildare for upgrades; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22602/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I am committed to ensuring childcare is affordable, accessible and of a high quality. Capital funding is aimed at increasing the capacity of services, creating new services and maintaining and improving existing services.

Each year my Department reviews the capital programmes as a whole and determines the priorities for Early Learning and Care and School Age Capital grants. The capital strands have been made available to achieve the strategic priorities for 2019 as determined by my Department, having regard to the funding available, developed using analysis of the current state of the childcare sector, learnings from previous capital programmes and feedback and input from stakeholders, including childcare providers and Pobal.

This year I focused the funding of the 2019 Early Learning and Care and School Age Capital programme on the expansion of early learning and care places for 0-3 year olds and school age childcare places where this is most needed.

In 2019, I secured €6.106m in funding for the Early Learning and Care and School Age Childcare Capital programmes.

This funding will be delivered in three strands, as follows:

- €4.231m has been allocated to **Strand A**, which will offer grants of up to €50,000 in value to early learning and care providers for the creation of new 0-3 places where demand for these is clearly evidenced.

- €0.875m has been allocated to **Strand B**, which will offer individual grants of up to

€15,000 in value to aid community/not-for-profit early learning and care services in addressing fire safety issues that have been highlighted in inspection reports by Tusla, the HSE or Local Authorities.

- €1m has been allocated to **Strand C**, which will offer individual grants of up to €20,000 in value to school age childcare providers for the creation of new school age places where demand for these is clearly evidenced.

Funding was available to providers nationwide in a competitive process, with the application window open from Monday 25th February. The application window for the Capital programmes closed on 27th March 2019 and Pobal are currently in the process of appraising all applications received.

The service in question may have been eligible to apply for Strand A, Strand B or Strand C. In the event that the service applied for either of these strands decisions are due to be delivered in June 2019 with the anticipation that capital works can begin as soon as possible following this.

### **Childcare Services Provision**

429. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the measures she is taking to increase the number of childcare places in Dublin city and county including places for children not eligible for the ECCE scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22620/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** Historically, there have been low levels of investment in Early Learning and Care (ELC) and School Age Childcare (SAC) in Ireland. Over the past four budgets however, investment has increased by some 117% - rising from in €260 million in 2015, to €575 million in 2019.

This 117% increase in investment in childcare over the last 4 budgets has assisted with an unprecedented doubling of capacity in the sector, most growth occurring in ECCE, but some elsewhere.

Assisting childcare providers in extending their existing childcare services, or establishing new childcare services, have always been key areas of focus for my Department's capital programmes.

My Department's 2019 Early Years Capital Scheme includes a focus on baby and toddler places. €4m is available and in excess of 100 development proposals are currently being assessed. This will create hundreds of more places, significantly increasing capacity in just one year.

Concerns have been raised about the availability of childcare places in the registered childcare sector. I am aware that the higher cost of operating baby rooms, due to higher staffing ratios being required, may be contributing to the capacity issue and my Department is monitoring this situation closely whilst also taking a number of measures to address it.

Access to high quality and affordable childcare generally remains a topical issue. The particular focus on availability of places in the centre based sector for the 0-3 age range has emerged in the context of recent media coverage. There is a suggestion that ECCE has been expanded (successfully) at the cost on provision for younger children.

The National Childcare Scheme (NCS), due to be launched later this year will also be a significant intervention to address this challenge. The NCS recognises the different costs associated with providing childcare for children of different ages. The Scheme will provide for a progressive system of subsidies starting with the highest subsidy rates for children under 1 (up to €5.10 per hour) and the next highest subsidy for children from 1 to under 3 (up to €4.35 per hour).

In relation to childminding, I was delighted to secure €500,000 in Budget 2019 to recruit a National Childminding Coordinator and a team of six Development Officers around the country, to support the registration of more childminders with Tusla and thus enable them access subsidies under the National Childcare Scheme. My Department will publish a Childminding Action Plan in the coming months to follow through on the commitments in First 5 and the Programme for Government to further develop the childminding sector.

My Department funds 30 City and County Childcare Committees across the country. Part of their role is to advise my Department on capacity issues. I would encourage anyone having difficulty in securing a place to make contact with their local CCC. Contact details for all of the CCCs, in addition to other information about the services they provide, may be found on [www.myccc.ie](http://www.myccc.ie)

As regards capacity issues more generally, each year Pobal conducts research on behalf of my Department to examine a number of factors related to childcare services in Ireland, including the monitoring of capacity. The Early Years Sector Profile report, which was published in November and relates to the 2017/2018 programme year, indicates that existing childcare provision nationally meets current needs nationwide in terms of capacity whilst recognising that small pockets of under supply may exist within this.

This report outlines a 4% vacancy rate as a percentage of children enrolled in Dublin. Pobal reports that nationally the trend for waiting lists suggests a reduction in waiting lists for older children and an increase for under twos. Pobal cautions that its data on waiting lists cannot by itself be used to inform capacity decisions as parents often place their children on more than one waiting list.

Under the National Planning Framework and the National Development Plan published in 2018, I ensured that Childcare was identified as one of our nation's strategic priorities. I am delighted that €250 million in additional funding has been committed to for the expansion of high quality, early learning and care and school age childcare over the duration of the Plan.

### **Early Childhood Care and Education Data**

430. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the notice periods for childcare providers to give a parent whose child is occupying an ECCE place; if days or weeks notice is required in this regard; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22710/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** Early Childcare Care and Education (ECCE) services are either privately run or operated by community/not for profit services. The Department of Children and Youth Affairs is not the owner or operator of any childcare service, but through a Funding Agreement provides a range of funding supports, through capitation payments and other programmes, to support the sector. My Department generally cannot prescribe the enrolment policies of private businesses. Accordingly, the notice period that a childcare provider gives to a parent/guardian of a child occupying an ECCE place

is subject to this private agreement and therefore outside of our remit.

In relation to parents securing childcare places on our programmes, our requirement regarding parental notice on our childcare schemes are based solely to my Department's public funding obligations and the administration of the childcare schemes by service providers. In order to accommodate the smooth registration of children on our childcare programmes, we do ask parents who wish to remove a child or move them to another service to provide their current service provider with four weeks notice (where possible) in order to provide a space for that service provider to de-register the child from their service, thus enabling my Department to cease payments to that service in relation to that child. This notice period prevents the IT payment system from declining their child's registration in their new chosen service due to a 'double registration' scenario.

### Local Improvement Scheme Data

431. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if additional funding will be provided to the local improvement scheme, LIS, to local authorities particularly in counties Leitrim, Sligo, Roscommon and Donegal; the number of rural roads that have received funding under the LIS in each of the years 2016 to 2018, by the local authority in tabular form; the projected number of road projects to be completed in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22395/19]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** The Local Improvement Scheme, or LIS, is a programme for improvement works on small private or non-public roads in rural areas. The scheme is funded by my Department and is administered through the Local Authorities.

There was no dedicated funding available for this scheme for a number of years due to constraints on public expenditure. However, I was very conscious of the underlying demand for the scheme in rural areas throughout the country and I re-launched the scheme in 2017. Since then, €48 million has been allocated for LIS road improvements.

The following table outlines the number of LIS road projects completed in 2017 and those completed under the 2018 LIS scheme to date, by Local Authority. Final figures in respect of 2018 will not be available until final returns have been submitted to my Department by all Local Authorities. However, it is anticipated that approximately 250 additional roads will be completed under the 2018 scheme.

I launched the 2019 LIS on 7th February last and allocated a sum of €10 million to Local Authorities under the scheme. This included €250,000 for Leitrim, €256,154 for Sligo, €355,104 for Roscommon, and €677,456 for Donegal. The number and location of roads to benefit from improvement works in 2019 will be a matter for the relevant Local Authority.

I will be closely monitoring expenditure under the scheme over the coming months, and will make decisions regarding any future funding in due course.

#### LIS

County	2017 Roads Completed	2018 Roads Completion Confirmed
Carlow	20	28
Cavan	10	6
Clare	28	30

County	2017 Roads Completed	2018 Roads Completion Confirmed
Cork	21	42
Donegal	164	56
Galway	57	69
Kerry	41	36
Kildare	0	12
Kilkenny	16	9
Laois	21	10
Leitrim	18	24
Limerick	18	10
Longford	18	13
Louth	8	6
Mayo	89	79
Meath	22	8
Monaghan	21	28
Offaly	20	31
Roscommon	41	54
Sligo	16	22
Tipperary	9	24
Waterford	17	20
Westmeath	23	22
Wexford	18	17
Wicklow	7	15
TOTAL	723	671

### Defibrillators in Schools Provision

432. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if funding will be considered for a defibrillator to be installed in a school (details supplied); the programmes that provide such funding supports; the application process involved; the available grant aid in each programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22545/19]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** In general, the provision of defibrillators may be eligible for funding under a number of my Department's programmes, including CLÁR, LEADER and the Community Enhancement Programme. Each programme has its own particular objectives and eligibility criteria.

CLÁR is a targeted investment programme that provides funding for small infrastructural projects in designated rural areas that have experienced significant depopulation in the past. The school referred to by the Deputy is not in a designated CLÁR area and therefore does not qualify under the CLÁR criteria.

LEADER is a multi-annual programme covering the period 2014-2020 which is delivered through Local Action Groups in each of the 28 LEADER sub-regional areas around the country. The Social Inclusion theme of the LEADER Programme focuses on the provision of services for people living in rural areas and, in that context, support for the services referred to by the Deputy could potentially be considered eligible for LEADER funding.

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In order for a project to be eligible under LEADER, it must be compatible with the actions outlined in the approved Local Development Strategy in the LEADER sub-regional area concerned, and it must comply with the Operating Rules and EU Regulations in place for the programme.

The decision to approve a project, or otherwise, is a matter for the Local Action Groups (LAGs) which administer the programme in each LEADER area. Contact details for all LAGs are available on my Department's website at <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/c45498-local-action-groups/> .

The Community Enhancement Programme (CEP) replaces and builds on the former RAPID programme and the Community Facilities Scheme, providing a more flexible, streamlined and targeted approach to funding communities most in need while reducing the level of administration involved. The CEP is administered by the Local Community Development Committees in each Local Authority area, on behalf of my Department. Some of the funding available under this programme is ring-fenced to provide small capital grants of €1,000 or less. The Community Enhancement Programme (CEP) 2019 is now open for applications. The deadline for applications is 5pm on 30th May 2019.

### **National Broadband Plan Data**

433. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the interactions and discussions of his Department with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment regarding the national broadband plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22810/19]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** Through the analysis conducted to date, National Broadband Ireland (NBI) does not anticipate that there will be many premises that will involve a high cost to connect. The Department and NBI have completed high level designs to determine the quantities of existing infrastructure that can be re-used and quantities of new infrastructure that will need to be deployed to deliver the NBP State intervention.

In addition, NBI has completed a number of low-level designs to corroborate the assumptions made in the high level designs. My Department has separately completed several network models and associated cost models down to the premises level. The high level designs take into account the various passive infrastructure databases (i.e. buildings, poles and ducts) as well as the Eircode database of premises. This analysis indicates that nearly 99% of the premises in the intervention area are 150 metres or less from the road and the vast majority of these are less than 50m.

Once the deployment commences a detailed design process will be conducted by NBI which is referred to as the low-level design. This low level design includes a detailed site survey of each route and each premises to be served on that route. The site survey will confirm what infrastructure is in place and what infrastructure will be required in order to enable a connection to be made to each premises. Every effort will be made to reduce costs by utilising existing infrastructure. In cases where there are 'difficult to serve' premises that could involve a high cost to connect, NBI will consider alternative solutions to deliver the high speed broadband service.

### **National Broadband Plan Data**

434. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if he has had discussions with the Department of Finance regarding the national broadband plan; if the anticipated cost will lead to a reduction of funding for other rural programmes such as the community enhancement scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22811/19]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** As the Deputy will be aware, the Government recently announced its intention to award the contract for the roll out of high-speed broadband in the State Intervention Area to a preferred bidder following a detailed tendering process. The question of securing funding for the National Broadband Plan (NBP) is a matter for the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment.

I do not anticipate that investment in the NBP will result in a reduction in funding for other rural programmes. In fact, the roll out of high speed broadband will complement the commitment in the National Development Plan to invest €1 billion over the next ten years through the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund.

Funding for rural programmes in my Department's Vote this year amounts to €138.371 million. This compares to a provision of €93.384 million for rural programmes in 2018.

The 48% increase year-on-year in my Department's Vote shows the Government's clear commitment to supporting rural communities. This commitment is further enhanced by the recent announcement regarding the NBP.

### **LEADER Programmes Data**

435. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the person or body conducting the circling the Great Western Lakes feasibility study; the anticipated completion date; when it will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22883/19]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** The Great Western Lakes feasibility study referred to by the Deputy is funded under the Co-operation strand of the LEADER programme. The Co-operation strand supports Local Action Groups (LAGs) to come together to jointly deliver a LEADER project.

Funding of €9,750 was approved for the project in question, which is a joint project between the LAGs in counties Mayo and West Galway.

The feasibility study, undertaken by First Western Consulting, involved an investigation into the possibility of creating a scenic tourist driving route linked to the Wild Atlantic Way through counties Galway and Mayo.

I am pleased to inform the Deputy that the feasibility study has now been completed and final report will be launched in the coming weeks.

### **CLÁR Programme**

436. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of the review of the CLÁR programme. [22892/19]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** The CLÁR programme is an important part of the Action Plan for Rural Development and the Govern-

ment's Project Ireland 2040 Rural Regeneration Programme. CLÁR provides funding for small capital projects in rural areas which have suffered high levels of population decline.

The programme was first launched in October 2001 and the areas originally selected for inclusion in CLÁR were those which suffered the greatest population decline from 1926 to 1996. The Cooley Peninsula was also included on the basis of the serious difficulties caused in that area by Foot and Mouth disease. The average population loss in the original CLÁR regions over the period 1926 to 1996 was 50%.

In 2006, an analysis of the 2002 Census data was carried out by the NIRSA Institute at Maynooth University and the programme was extended to include areas with an average population loss of 35% between 1926 and 2002.

The CLÁR programme was closed for new applications in 2010. However, I re-launched the programme in the second half of 2016, using as a base-line the areas identified in the work carried out by NIRSA. Over 1,200 projects have been approved for funding of more than €25 million under CLÁR since I re-launched the programme in 2016.

I have initiated a review of the CLÁR programme which will examine CLÁR areas by reference to the 2016 Census of Population data. It will also consider whether there are any other factors that should be taken into account in designating areas for eligibility under CLÁR in the future.

The review process began in November last with a targeted consultation meeting with a number of experts recognised for their background in rural development issues. Following on from this, my officials have been in contact with NIRSA with regard to carrying out a detailed analysis of the most recent Census data to further inform the review process.

I envisage that a wider stakeholder consultation will also take place before the review is completed. Once completed, the review will help to inform the design of future CLÁR programmes.

### **Action Plan for Rural Development Implementation**

437. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the progress made with the implementation of the Action Plan for Rural Development to date; when the next progress report will issue; and the status of the pilot scheme to encourage residential occupancy in rural towns and villages as committed to under the plan. [22893/19]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** The Action Plan for Rural Development was published in January 2017 as a whole-of-Government initiative to support the economic and social progress of rural Ireland.

The coordinated approach of the Action Plan is achieving benefits in terms of increased employment in the regions and increased investment in projects and communities across the country. Since 2015, there has been an increase of over 146,000 in the number of people employed in regions outside of Dublin, surpassing the Government's target of 135,000 extra jobs by 2020.

The level of investment being made in rural Ireland is also unprecedented. Thousands of projects have been supported by my Department alone since the start of 2017, with further investment across Government also benefitting rural communities in areas such as agriculture, fisheries, tourism and transport. The Rural Regeneration and Development Fund, which was launched last year, will provide €1 billion for rural development over the period 2019-2027.

Progress Reports on the implementation of the Action Plan for Rural Development are published twice a year on my Department's website, [www.drcd.gov.ie](http://www.drcd.gov.ie). The Third Progress Report was published in November 2018 and outlined the progress which took place between January and June 2018. Of the 275 actions reported on, 266 had been completed or were substantially advanced. The Fourth Progress Report, focusing on activity between July and December 2018, was approved on 22 May by the Monitoring Committee which oversees the Action Plan, and will be published in the coming weeks.

The Action Plan for Rural Development includes a commitment to developing a pilot scheme to encourage increased residential occupancy in rural towns and villages. In October 2018, I announced that six rural towns (Boyle in Co. Roscommon, Callan in Co. Kilkenny, Ballinrobe in Co. Mayo, Banagher in Co. Offaly, Castleblayney in Co. Monaghan, Cappoquin in Co. Waterford) would participate in the pilot scheme.

Funding of up to €100,000 is being made available to each of the towns to develop proposals to encourage town centre living. This funding will be used by the Local Authorities to engage with communities and local businesses, and identify practical solutions to increase the number of people living in their towns.

I am expecting to receive a report from each of the relevant Local Authorities next month on the progress they have made. It is envisaged that the solutions identified through this pilot could lead to the development of more substantive proposals for funding from the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund in due course.

### **Disability Allowance Payments**

438. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an overpayment for a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22367/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** This lady was awarded disability allowance (DA) with effect from 26 June 2002. The debt in question occurred as the person concerned had means which was not disclosed to my Department from 11 August 2004 to 2 August 2005.

The Department is obliged to recoup any debt owing to it and the method of recovery, and negotiations regarding the amount recoverable, are dealt with under the Department's code of practice. The original debt amounted to €14,977.20 and the current balance is €2,317.20. The person concerned is currently repaying €20 per week.

The repayment of debt to the department is governed by guidelines. Those guidelines allow for the means and other circumstances of the debtor to be taken into account in deciding upon an appropriate recovery plan. If the person concerned wishes my Department to consider reducing the amount of weekly repayment, they should apply in writing to DA section and include as much information as possible about their weekly outgoings. On receipt of this information, a deciding officer will review the current recovery amount.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

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

439. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protec-

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tion when a person (details supplied) will receive notice regarding their application for disability allowance which was confirmed as having been received by the HSE on 10 January 2019. [22285/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** I confirm that an application from this lady for disability allowance (DA) was received by my Department on 8 January 2019.

The application was referred to a Social Welfare Inspector (SWI) for a report on the person's means and circumstances. The SWI has submitted his/her report to DA section on 7 May 2019.

Further medical evidence was received from the person concerned on 25 March 2019 and on 2 May 2019 and this is being reviewed by a deciding officer (DO). After the DO has considered all the evidence provided, they will make a decision on the application and this lady will be notified directly of the outcome.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Working Family Payment Waiting Times**

440. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application for a working family payment by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22291/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Working Family Payment (WFP) is a weekly in-work payment which provides additional income support to employees on low earnings with children.

An application for WFP was received from the person concerned on 13 March 2019. In order to process their application, further information is required from them. The Department wrote to the person concerned on 16 May 2019 to request additional details.

On receipt of the requested information from the person concerned, their WFP application will be processed without delay and they will be notified of the decision.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Tús Programme**

441. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will consider making changes to the Tús scheme (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22292/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Tús commenced operation in 2011 as a response to the high level of unemployment and the large numbers on the Live Register. It is a community work placement initiative which aims to provide short-term work opportunities for those who are unemployed for more than a year. The duration of the Tús contract is a maximum of 12 months and this ensures that as many people as possible who are unemployed for over 12 months are able to benefit from the initiative.

It is recognised by Government that Tús is a positive initiative that enables the long-term unemployed to make a contribution to their communities whilst up-skilling themselves for pro-

spective future employment.

If a person is interested in pursuing a work placement with training and development opportunities, it is open to them to apply for a placement on a Community Employment (CE) scheme. CE participants between 21 and 55 years are entitled to one year on the programme, this can be extended by up to 2 more years if they are engaged in a recognised training or education award that is helping them progress towards employment. All CE participants age 55 and over can avail of 3 consecutive years on a CE scheme. The overall limit of participation on CE is 6 years from 1st January 2007 (7 years if on a disability payment).

Participants over age 62 are allowed to participate on a continuous basis up to the State Pension age on the CE Service Support Stream (SSS), subject to availability of places on the SSS, satisfactory performance on the scheme and to annual approval by the Department. The places allocated for these participants within each individual CE scheme are subject to limitation criteria.

Customers of my Department who are engaged with the JobPath service have, from 1st June 2018, the option of taking up a placement on Tús or CE while continuing to engage with the JobPath service. This ensures that jobseekers can benefit from the job-seeking support of the JobPath service while also availing of a part-time work placement provided by Tús or CE.

My Department will continue to review its activation programmes to ensure the best outcomes for participants. The Government is very mindful of the large number of work programme places involved in service delivery and other valuable services to individuals and communities across Ireland.

I trust this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

### **Carer's Allowance Payments**

442. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a statement will issue in relation to all payments made to a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22294/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a child or an adult who has such a disability that as a result they require that level of care.

A statement of CA payments from 2 January 2014 to 1 November 2017 was issued to the person concerned on 20 May 2019.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Community Employment Schemes Supervisors**

443. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will review a matter (details supplied); if matters will be clarified in relation to the community employment scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22307/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Community Employment (CE) is a positive initiative that enables the long-term unemployed to

make a contribution to their communities whilst up-skilling themselves and obtaining valuable work experience for prospective future employment. This scheme helps to break the cycle of unemployment and improve a person's chances of returning to the labour market.

CE schemes are typically sponsored by groups (known as sponsors) wishing to benefit the local community. My Department agrees participant numbers annually with each CE sponsor organisation who are responsible for the recruitment of participants and for identifying suitable work placements.

CE projects are entitled to a supervisor wage grant. The supervisor is responsible for developing an Individual Learner Plan for each participant employed on the project, and for its implementation. The level of supervision required depends on the circumstances pertaining to each particular CE scheme. Each application is examined on a case-by-case basis taking into account the particular circumstances.

Where a sponsor considers that the number of participants employed on a project warrants the hiring of additional supervision, an application for the additional resource should be submitted to the relevant Community Development Officer in my Department.

I can assure the Deputy that I am very aware of the key role supervisors play in their communities and of the valuable work undertaken by participants. If the Deputy would like to forward details of this particular case, I will ensure that it is followed up on.

### **Pension Provisions**

444. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of the pension review in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22341/19]

**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) to pension calculation which includes provision for homecaring periods.

The person concerned was awarded a reduced rate state pension (contributory) in 2016. Following award to their spouse of a higher rate increase for qualified adult on their spouse's pension, the state pension (contributory) of the person concerned was withdrawn, in favour of the higher payment.

The person concerned has 788 reckonable paid contributions, which combined with the maximum permissible number of HomeCaring periods and reckonable credits (1,040, as set out in legislation) results in a payment rate of 87.9% of the maximum rate of pension. The person is already in receipt of equivalent to 89.6% of the maximum rate of pension, (or €222.50 per week), so is better off to remain as a qualified adult on their spouse's pension.

A review outcome letter has issued to the person concerned, which includes a copy of their social insurance contribution record.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Invalidity Pension Applications**

445. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a decision will be made on an invalidity pension application by a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22346/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** Invalidation pension (IP) is a payment for people who are permanently incapable of work because of illness or incapacity and who satisfy the pay related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions.

The department received a claim for IP from the gentleman concerned on 01 March 2019. His claim was disallowed on the grounds that the contribution conditions for the scheme were not satisfied. He was notified on 20 May 2019 of this decision, the reasons for it and of his right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Carer's Allowance Appeals**

446. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the result of the appeal against a decision to refuse a carer's allowance payment lodged in February 2019 in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22347/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an Appeals Officer, having fully considered all of the available evidence including that adduced at the oral hearing, has decided to disallow the carer's allowance appeal of the person concerned. The person concerned has been notified of the Appeals Officer's decision.

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

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Carer's Allowance Eligibility**

447. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the procedures in place regarding the exchange of information arrangements between her Department and the Revenue Commissioners in relation to persons' P60s who are in receipt of a means tested payment such as carer's allowance for a number of years and in circumstances in which a person or their spouse's income increases after taking up employment and the person continues to be in receipt of the carer's allowance; the reason her Department does not have a mechanism in place to have an exchange of information with the Revenue Commissioners in order that persons can be notified early in relation to possible non-entitlement to carer's allowance such as in cases (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22352/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):**

Carer's Allowance (CA) is a means tested payment, made to people who are providing full-time care and attention to elderly people or to people with disabilities and whose income falls below certain limits. The principal conditions for receipt of the allowance are that full time care and attention is required and being provided and that the means test which applies is satisfied.

The means test is one of the least onerous in the social protection system. €332.50 of gross weekly income is disregarded in the calculation of means for a single person. The equivalent disregard for someone who is married, in a civil partnership or cohabiting is €665 of combined gross weekly income. This means that a couple under 66 with two children, earning a joint annual income of up to €35,400 can qualify for maximum payment Carer's Allowance. A couple with combined income or earning €59,300 will still qualify for the minimum rate.

In addition a carer may, with the prior permission of the Department, engage in employment outside the home for up to 15 hours per week. The caree must be adequately cared for in the carer's absence. Income from this employment would be assessable as means if the aggregate of all income exceeds the relevant disregard amounts.

As with any other social welfare payment there is an onus on the individual in receipt of the payment to contact the Department of Employment Affairs Social Protection and advise of any change in their personal circumstances. There are a number circumstances and events which may affect a person's entitlement to a Carer's Allowance, including a change in their means. It is also important to note that a change in circumstances could mean an increase in a social welfare payment or a person may be entitled to different social welfare payment.

Issues relating to the tax treatment of social welfare payments, including income contained on P60s, is a matter for the Revenue Commissioners. There are however a number of social welfare payments including Carer's Allowance which, depending on a person's circumstances, may be liable to income tax. The Department of Employment Affairs Social Protection makes the payment to the individual without deducting tax. The Department does not give Revenue details of the taxable amount of the payment but does advise the individual to contact Revenue to confirm the taxable amount of the payment.

### **State Pension (Contributory) Eligibility**

448. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the extent of the State pension available to a person (details supplied) and their spouse; if both have an entitlement on foot of contributions; if each has an entitlement in their own right; the maximum pension to which they are entitled jointly or separately; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22362/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The person concerned has been in receipt of a maximum rate state pension (contributory) with effect from their 66th birthday. Their current weekly rate of payment is €258.30, which includes an over age 80 increase of €10.00 per week. A qualified adult increase in respect of the claimant's spouse is also in payment. This is a means tested payment, based on the means of the qualified adult. The rate of increase for qualified adult payable was reduced from the maximum rate of €222.50 to €119.10, with effect from 17 May 2019, following a means assessment review.

An application form for state pension (contributory) has been sent to the claimant's spouse for completion if they wish to have their own personal entitlement assessed. On return, their eligibility to pension will be examined and they will be informed of the outcome in writing.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

## **Child Benefit Eligibility**

449. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she has examined the impact of transition year on child benefit in view of the fact that parents have two full school years after child benefit is ceased; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22364/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Child Benefit is a monthly payment made to families with children in respect of all qualified children up to the age of 16 years. The payment continues to be paid in respect of children up to their 18th birthday who are in full-time education, or who have a disability. Child Benefit is currently paid, as of end-March 2019 to almost 632,000 families in respect of nearly 1.2 million children, with an estimated expenditure of more than €2 billion in 2018.

Given the universality of Child Benefit, extending entitlement to parents of full time students in second level education who are over 18 years of age would not be a targeted approach. The adoption of such a proposal would have significant cost implications and would have to be considered in an overall budgetary context.

Families on low incomes may be able to avail of a number of social welfare schemes that support children in full-time education until the age of 22, including:

- Increase for a Qualified Child (IQCs) with primary social welfare payments;
- the Working Family Payment for low-paid employees with children;
- the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance.

These schemes provide targeted assistance that is directly linked to household income and thereby support low-income families with older children participating in full-time education.

## **Household Benefits Scheme**

450. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her views on the reintroduction of the household benefits package for carers who do not live with the person they care for in view of the low level of financial support that they receive for such an important role; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22396/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The household benefits package (HHB) comprises the electricity or gas allowance, and the free television licence. My Department will spend approximately €248 million this year on HHB for over 440,000 customers. The package is generally available to people living in the State aged 66 years or over who are in receipt of a social welfare type payment or who satisfy a means test. The package is also available to some people under the age of 66 who are in receipt of certain welfare type payments.

From 1 April 2012, new applicants in receipt of Carers Allowance who are not living with the person for whom they provide care are not entitled to the household benefits package. Carers who live with the person they are caring for still have an entitlement of their own to the household benefits package and do not have to satisfy the household composition criteria.

The Government values the role of carers very much and it is for this reason that they receive significant income supports from the Department. In addition to carer's allowance carers

receive additional support in the form of free travel and household benefits (for those who live with the person for whom they care) and the annual carers support grant (€1700) in respect of each person for whom they care. Where a person is in receipt of certain qualifying social welfare payments, and also providing full time care and attention to another person, they can keep their primary social welfare payment and also get the half-rate carer's allowance.

Any decision to change the qualifying criteria for HHB would have budgetary consequences and would have to be considered in the context of budget negotiations.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Illness Benefit Waiting Times**

451. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an illness benefit application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22401/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** I confirm that my department received an application for disability allowance (DA) from this gentleman on 11 March 2019. On completion of the necessary investigations on all aspects of the claim a decision will be made and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

The processing time for individual DA claims may vary in accordance with their relative complexity in terms of the three main qualifying criteria, the person's circumstances and the information they provide in support of their claim.

The person concerned applied for Illness Benefit on 15th January 2019 and was informed that he was not entitled to payment as he does not satisfy the contribution conditions, one of which is that a person must have 39 weeks of PRSI contributions paid or credited in the relevant tax year, which in this case is 2017.

According to the Department's records, the person concerned does not have any paid contributions in the relevant tax year.

If he believes he has further contributions that are not reflected in the Department's records, he should supply the Department with evidence of this from his employer and his entitlement to Illness Benefit will be reviewed.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Fuel Allowance Eligibility**

452. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will address a matter (details supplied) regarding allowances; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22408/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The fuel allowance is a payment of €22.50 per week for 28 weeks (a total of €630 each year) from October to April, to over 375,000 low income households, at an estimated cost of €240 million in 2019. The purpose of this payment is to assist these households with their energy costs. The allowance represents a contribution towards the energy costs of a household. It is not intended

to meet those costs in full. Only one allowance is paid per household.

My Department also pays an electricity or gas allowance under the Household benefits scheme at an estimated cost of €187 million in 2019. This is paid at a rate of €35 per month, 12 months of the year. This comes to €420 per annum, or €8 per week, plus free TV licence, travel etc. It's worth noting that Jobseekers Allowance is not a qualifying payment for this benefit, nor the other benefits available under the Household Benefits scheme.

The Government values the role of carers very much and it is for this reason that they receive significant income supports from the Department. In addition to carer's allowance carers receive additional support in the form of free travel and household benefits (for those who live with the person for whom they care) and the annual carers support grant (€1700) in respect of each person for whom they care.

If a person is getting certain qualifying social welfare payments and also providing full time care and attention to another person, they can keep their main social protection payment and get the half-rate carer's allowance as well. They can also receive an extra half-rate carer's allowance if they care for more than one person.

The maximum rates of Carer's Allowance, at €219 for where one person is being cared for, and €328.50 where there are two or more carees, is significantly higher than that for Jobseekers Allowance, which is €203 for those aged 26, and lower for younger claimants. In addition to this higher rate, the means test for Carer's Allowance is very significantly more generous than that which applies to Jobseekers Allowance, which widens further the gap in payments between Carers and Jobseekers. Also, Fuel Allowance is a household-based payment, and a Carer will very often live with and be caring for a person with a qualifying payment for Fuel Allowance. A similar household, where the person received Jobseekers Allowance instead of Carers Allowance, would have the same rate of Fuel Allowance, as only one payment is permitted per household.

It would not be accurate, therefore, to suggest that those in receipt of Carer's Allowance are in a less advantageous position than those paid Jobseekers Allowance. Even when the more generous means test is not taken into account, and even during the Fuel Allowance season, the payments made to Carer's Allowance recipients, including Electricity/Gas payments, are higher than those made to those in receipt of Jobseekers Allowance.

It should also be noted that the payment of half-rate carer's allowance does not preclude a person from qualifying for fuel allowance. If a person is in receipt of a non-contributory social welfare payment and a half-rate carer's allowance, then they are deemed to have satisfied the means test and fuel allowance is payable subject to all remaining criteria being satisfied. If a person is in receipt of a contributory social welfare payment and a half-rate carer's allowance then they will have to undergo a means test for fuel allowance.

Any decision to amend the criteria for receiving fuel allowance to include carer's allowance as a qualifying payment would have to be considered in the overall policy and budgetary context.

Under the supplementary welfare allowance scheme, exceptional needs payments may be made to help meet an essential, once-off cost which customers are unable to meet out of their own resources and this may include exceptional heating cost.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

## **Carer's Allowance Appeals**

453. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a carer's allowance appeal by a person (details supplied) will be expedited; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22416/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a child or an adult who has such a disability that as a result they require that level of care.

An application for CA was received from the person concerned on 2 July 2018.

It is a condition for receipt of a CA that the person being cared for must have such disability that they require full-time care and attention.

This is defined as requiring from another person, continual supervision and frequent assistance throughout the day in connection with normal bodily functions or continual supervision in order to avoid danger to him or herself and likely to require that level of care for at least twelve months.

The evidence submitted in support of this application was examined and the deciding officer decided that this evidence did not indicate that the requirement for full-time care was satisfied for the care recipient.

The person concerned was notified on 12 September 2018 of this decision, the reasons for it and of his right of review and appeal.

According to the records of the Department, he has not exercised either right of review or appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

## **Rent Supplement Scheme Payments**

454. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to ensure no interruption occurs in respect of rent supplement in the case of a person (details supplied); the maximum rent support available in this case; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22434/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The purpose of rent supplement is to assist with reasonable accommodation costs of eligible persons living in private rental accommodation, where they are unable to provide for their accommodation costs from their own resources and do not have accommodation available to them from any other source. It is subject to a means test and other criteria.

Rent supplement payments are subject to on-going reviews and payments may be affected if relevant information is not provided, or if there are changes of circumstances. The person concerned is currently in receipt of a rent supplement payment. Information has been requested recently in relation to the provision of a current Housing Needs Assessment. Payment may be affected if the requested information is not provided.

The maximum rent limit for the family composition of the person concerned, a single person living in Kildare is €500 per calendar month. As an exceptional measure, under Article 38, the

person concerned was awarded rent supplement based on a current lease of €970 per month. This is in excess of €470 or 94% of the maximum rent limits set for this family composition. The person concerned has been advised to engage with HAP and the local authority in order to have her long-term housing needs addressed. In line with these measures the person concerned was recently requested to supply a current Housing Needs Assessment.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Exceptional Needs Payments**

455. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if an urgent exceptional needs payment will be made in the case of a person (details supplied); if the case will be examined with a view to alleviation of the situation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22435/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** An application form issued to the person concerned on 16th April 2019 which was returned on the 15th May 2019. In a letter dated the 16th May 2019, the Community Welfare Officer (CWO) requested further information in order to allow for a decision on the application. The CWO made further contact by telephone with the person concerned on the 20th May 2019 to clarify the outstanding information needed but the information required has not been provided yet. A decision will be made by the CWO on receipt of this outstanding information.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Working Family Payment Payments**

456. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the correct payment in respect of a working family payment in the case of a person (details supplied); the extent to which entitlement is likely to be affected by the recovery of a debt weekly payment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22436/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Working Family Payment (WFP) is a weekly in-work payment which provides additional income support to employees on low earnings with children.

The person concerned has an outstanding debt with the Department and this debt is being recovered through an agreed direct debit recovery plan which amounts to repayments of €30.00 per week.

It is the Department's policy is to pursue all overpayments & debts and to ensure the recovery of outstanding debt in the shortest possible time frame. When scheme arrears are due to a customer, all or part of the arrears may be withheld to repay a debt.

The Department wrote to the person concerned on 15 May 2019 to inform them of the proposal to withhold all WFP arrears which are currently due. The person concerned may submit any comments relating to this proposal within 21 days for consideration by the debt recovery officer before any decision is made.

The person concerned is currently in receipt of WFP at the weekly rate of €121.00 and no deductions from this rate will take place until 21 days. Weekly deductions from a customer's Social Welfare rate are determined by factors such as debt balance, a person's circumstances,

means and capacity to repay etc.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Social Welfare Benefits Payments**

457. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the correct level of jobseeker's allowance and-or rent support payable in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22449/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The person concerned is currently in receipt of jobseeker's allowance at the following rate:

Personal rate:	€203
Half rate for 5 qualified children	€ 91
Sub total	€294
Less means from employment	€20
<b>Total weekly payment</b>	<b>€274</b>

An increase is not payable in respect of a Qualified Adult due to maternity benefit currently in payment. Half rate payment for 5 qualified children is applicable while maternity benefit is in payment and means have also been halved from €40 to €20 for the same period. According to the records of the Department the person concerned is in receipt of the correct payment for a person of his circumstances.

The person concerned does not have an application for rent supplement with the Department.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Jobseeker's Allowance Eligibility**

458. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a person (details supplied) can qualify for jobseeker's allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22450/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** It is open to the person concerned to apply for Jobseekers Allowance. Once an application is received, a decision will be made by the Deciding Officer to determine if the person concerned is eligible for payment. The person concerned should be advised to contact their local Intreo Centre where information is available on all schemes and services offered by my Department.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Jobseeker's Allowance Payments**

459. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the correct level of jobseeker's allowance payable in the case of a person (details

supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22451/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The person concerned is in receipt of a jobseeker's allowance payment at the following rate:

Personal Rate	€203
Increase for 2 Qualified Children over 12	€74
Sub Total	€277
Nil Means assessed	-
<b>Weekly rate of jobseeker's allowance</b>	<b>€277</b>

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Disability Allowance Applications**

460. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a disability allowance application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22478/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** I confirm that my department received an application for disability allowance from this gentleman on 8 May 2019. On completion of the necessary investigations on all aspects of the claim a decision will be made and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

The processing time for individual DA claims may vary in accordance with their relative complexity in terms of the three main qualifying criteria, the person's circumstances and the information they provide in support of their claim.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Rent Supplement Scheme Appeals**

461. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason a person (details supplied) is being refused rent supplement; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22480/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The person concerned was in receipt of rent supplement from 24/9/09 to 30/11/18. She was requested to provide the Department with relevant documentation regarding her rent supplement claim, which she failed to provide. The person concerned informed the Department on 19/12/18 that she had received notice to quit her privately rented accommodation and accordingly, her rent supplement claim was closed. The person concerned was subsequently provided with exceptional needs payments (ENPs) to assist with her rental costs from November 2018 to January 2019. However, as ENPs are designed to be one-off payments for unforeseen and exceptional circumstances and rent is a regular and recurring expense, this was not a long-term solution.

The strategic policy of this Department is to return rent supplement to its original purpose

of being a short-term income support scheme. As the person concerned has an identified long-term housing need, she is therefore advised to engage with her local authority at her earliest opportunity to ascertain her eligibility for the housing assistance payment (HAP).

The person concerned has not made a new application for rent supplement and this option is available to her to do. However, if she were to fully complete the review document from November 2018 then her case would be reviewed based on that information provided.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **EU Directives**

462. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 157 of 9 May 2019, if the timeline by which schemes of one to 14 members and 15 to 100 members, respectively, will be required to be in compliance with the provisions of the IORP II directive; her plans to introduce legislation in this regard; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22493/19]

463. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the consultation with pension scheme representatives and other industry bodies her Department has undertaken in respect of the transposition of IORP II into law; her plans for further such meetings; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22494/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 462 and 463 together.

The transposition of the IORP II Directive will result in significant improvements to the regulation and governance of funded occupational pension schemes in Ireland. Officials in my Department, supported by the Pensions Authority, are managing the transposition process of the IORP II Directive. This is a substantial Directive and preparation of regulations to transpose it is at an advanced stage.

In 2014, the Department undertook an open public consultation on the IORP II Directive. Further to that, the Pensions Authority undertook a consultation process on the reform and simplification of supplementary funded private pensions in 2016. In addition, officials of my Department have engaged on the provisions of the Directive with numerous representatives and stakeholders over a number of years.

As previously stated in my reply to Parliamentary Question No. 157 of 9 May 2019, an application has been granted for a judicial review for a set of reliefs and a stay in relation to the transposition into Irish law of the IORP II Directive. As such, it would not be appropriate for me to comment on matters that are currently before the Courts.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Pensions Reform**

464. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the recent progress in relation to the implementation of A Roadmap for Pensions Reform 2018-2023; if she is satisfied that it is on target to be completed on time; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22495/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The ‘Roadmap for Pensions Reform 2018-2023’ represents an all-of-Government approach to reforming pensions in Ireland. The plan details 43 individual actions that, taken together, will modernise our pension system while continuing to target resources at those most in need. Given the wide breadth of actions included under the plan, action owners include three Government Departments, two Government agencies, a public body and some interdepartmental structures (where policy responsibilities span a number of departments).

In delivering on the actions contained within the reform plan, extensive consultation exercises have been undertaken with respect to a new Total Contributions Approach for calculation of the State Pension Contributory, the development of a new Auto Enrolment system for occupational pensions, and general reform and simplification of the existing pensions landscape. This level of engagement, and the subsequent collation and analysis of views, takes considerable time, both to allow people the opportunity to engage and subsequently feedback on proposals made. The time and effort expended on this analysis and consideration of options is invaluable to the deliberative process and is critical in ensuring optimum design of solutions that will follow.

In this context, the majority of actions set out in the Roadmap due for delivery within the plan’s first year of operation have been completed or are at a very advanced stage of progression. I am also encouraged that the general feedback to date has been very supportive of the proposed reform measures and efforts will be continuing apace to implement these over the coming years in accordance with the Roadmap’s ambitious targets.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Carer’s Allowance Applications**

465. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a decision will be made on a carer’s allowance application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22533/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Carer’s allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a child or an adult who has such a disability that as a result they require that level of care.

An application for CA was received from the person concerned on 4 March 2019.

Additional information in relation to the person’s employment was requested by a deciding officer from the person concerned on 21 May 2019. Once the information is received the application will be processed and she will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Carer’s Allowance Applications**

466. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a carer’s allowance will be awarded to a person (details supplied). [22535/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Carer’s allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is

habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a child or an adult who has such a disability that as a result they require that level of care.

An application for CA was received from the person concerned on 13 March 2019. The application is currently being processed and once completed, the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Household Benefits Scheme**

467. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if consideration will be given to reintroducing the household benefit package for carers who do not live with the person they care for in view of the heavy workload for carers who are living on low means; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22555/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The household benefits package (HHB) comprises the electricity or gas allowance, and the free television licence. My Department will spend approximately €248 million this year on HHB for over 446,000 customers. The package is generally available to people living in the State aged 66 years or over who are in receipt of a social welfare type payment or who satisfy a means test. The package is also available to some people under the age of 66 who are in receipt of certain welfare type payments.

Since 1 April 2012, new applicants in receipt of Carers Allowance who are not living with the person for whom they provide care do not have an automatic entitlement to the household benefits package. Carers who live with the person they are caring for still have an entitlement of their own to the household benefits package and do not have to satisfy the household composition criteria.

The Government values the role of carers very much and it is for this reason that they receive significant income supports from the Department. In addition to carer's allowance carers receive additional support in the form of free travel and household benefits (for those who live with the person for whom they care) and the annual carers support grant (€1700) in respect of each person for whom they care. Where a person is in receipt of certain qualifying social welfare payments, and also providing full time care and attention to another person, they can keep their primary social welfare payment and also get the half-rate carer's allowance.

It should be noted that Carer's payments are made at a higher level than other working age income-maintenance payments made by my Department. The weekly rate for Carer's Allowance is €219 where one person is being cared for, and €328.50 where it is two or more, compared to €203 for most other income-maintenance payments to those below pension age. The means test for Carer's Allowance is also significantly more generous than those applying to other schemes.

Any decision to change the qualifying criteria for HHB would have budgetary consequences and would have to be considered in the context of budget negotiations.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Medical Aids and Appliances Applications**

468. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a person (details supplied) is entitled to a hearing aid; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22575/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The person concerned is entitled to the hearing aid grant under the Department's PRSI scheme.

A claim was received on 9th May 2019, payment will issue to her provider on the next payment date, which is 14th June 2019.

I hope this clarifies matters for the Deputy.

### **Community Employment Schemes Review**

469. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans for rehabilitative community employment schemes within her Department to be transferred to the Department of Health and the HSE; if there are plans, the details and decision making process of same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22577/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Community employment (CE) is the largest employment programme administered by my Department. It aims to enhance employability and mobility by providing work experience and training opportunities for unemployed persons within their own communities.

A key function of CE is supporting social inclusion and counteracting the drift into structural unemployment. It is a broad and flexible programme that has been utilised to address many social challenges presenting at individual and/or societal level. 5% of CE placements are reserved to support the re-integration of participants referred to a CE place on a drug rehabilitation scheme through the delivery of the agreed inter-agency CE Drug Rehabilitation Programme within the CE Social Inclusion strand.

All CE placements are categorised as either a training/activation strand or a social inclusion strand. This is to acknowledge that not all CE places are the same. The Social Inclusion placements provide an opportunity for those who are very distant from the labour market to gain employment and deliver services in their local communities while the activation placements are more directly related to employment opportunities for participants who are long-term unemployed with a view to providing them with more labour market relevant work experience.

Deputies on all sides of the House are fully aware of the positive benefits derived from schemes like CE. Communities benefit from the skills and talents of participants and, in addition, participants are provided with the opportunity to improve existing skills, or develop new skills, while performing valuable work in their local communities. Furthermore, many CE schemes provide vital community services across the country, all of which are well embedded in these communities.

The Government agreed to establish an Interdepartmental Group (IDG) to explore the most appropriate organisational arrangements, in particular in respect of those CE schemes whose primary focus is social inclusion and the delivery of social services. The first meeting of the IDG was held on 26th March and my Department are currently engaging with key stakeholders.

I am fully committed to the future of this programme and will continue to support and improve the programme for the benefit of the participants and the valuable contribution it makes to local communities.

### State Pension (Contributory)

470. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason a person (details supplied) who is in receipt of a payment, is receiving this payment in their State pension (contributory) in view of the fact they were advised that this payment would be paid separately to their pension; and if the person has received homecaring credits for caring for their children. [22648/19]

**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) to pension calculation which includes provision for homecaring periods.

The person has 751 reckonable paid contributions which combined with the maximum permissible number of HomeCaring periods and reckonable credits of 1,040, as set out in legislation, results in an increase from 85% to 86.11% of maximum rate State pension contributory. A review outcome letter has issued to the person, outlining details of their increase of State pension contributory and includes a breakdown of their social insurance contribution record.

Under the terms of the restorative justice payment, a claimant aged over 66 years is entitled to a maximum payment of €248.30 per week (which is equivalent to maximum rate state pension (contributory)). The rate of restorative justice payment is the difference between the person’s personal rate of social welfare entitlement and the maximum rate of state pension (contribution). The person concerned was previously in receipt of a state pension contributory payment at the weekly rate of €211.40 and their applicable rate under the restorative justice scheme was €36.90 per week. As the person’s state pension contributory rate has increased to €213.90, the applicable weekly rate payable under the restorative justice scheme is now €34.40.

The provision of a weekly income of €248.30 per week under the scheme, for a person over state pension age, is intended to put the person in a position that they would have occupied had they acquired sufficient contributions to qualify for the maximum rate of state pension contributory. Any person who is already in receipt of another state benefit, such as state pension contributory, does not receive the restorative justice payment in addition to their social welfare entitlement, but as a top up payment to bring the person’s rate of payment up to the current maximum rate of state pension (contributory).

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### Legislative Reviews

471. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to update the Civil Registration Act 2004; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22706/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Civil Registration Act 2019 passed its final stages through the Dáil and Seanad on 15 May and has been signed into law by the President. This Act will facilitate commencement of existing legislation that provides for registration of children of donor-assisted births.

The Act will make possible the registration, as parents, of both partners in a female same-

sex relationship, whereas formerly only the particulars of the mother could be recorded in the birth register. Inclusion of both partners as parents on birth certificates will assist in affirming their parental rights in practical day-to-day matters. These new arrangements will support easier access to services such as passports for their children, school enrolment, interaction with medical practitioners, and other situations where the demonstration of parental relationship may be required.

Another key provision in the Act brings civil registration legislation in line with current legislation governing the presumption of paternity. This will make it less onerous on a woman to rebut automatic presumption of paternity of her estranged husband in the birth registration process. It will be possible for a woman to present her own evidence of separation in order to rebut automatic presumption that her estranged husband is the father of a child she may subsequently give birth to with a new partner.

The Act also includes other amendments to civil registration that include provisions:

- to allow a role for family members in registering a death in cases involving a coroner;
- to allow the Civil Registration Service to share historical records with a body under the aegis of the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht;
- to enable the Central Statistics Office to comply with EU Regulations concerning data collected as part of the death registration process; and
- other technical amendments concerning civil registrations.

I will keep under review the need to bring forward further amendments to the Civil Registration Act, to ensure that the legislative provisions keep pace with new developments.

### **Working Family Payment**

472. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a person (details supplied) will receive a decision on their application for a working family payment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22707/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Working Family Payment (WFP) is an in-work family payment which provides additional income support to employees on low earnings with children.

An application for WFP was received from the person concerned on 03 April 2019.

They have been awarded WFP with effect from 21 February 2019 to 19 February 2020.

The first weekly payment will issue to their nominated bank account on 27 May 2019 and any arrears owing will issue shortly.

The person concerned was notified on 23 May 2019 of this decision and of the right of review and appeal.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Wage-setting Mechanisms**

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473. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the sectoral employment order she plans to introduce will ban tips being used as part of payment of wages. [22714/19]

474. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to ban businesses from adding service charges that often go to the employer and not staff. [22744/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 473 and 474 together.

I have met with relevant stakeholders and industry bodies (including the Restaurants Association of Ireland, Irish Hotels Federation and the Vintners Federation) who have expressed their support for the development of an agreement or code of practice in this area.

In the short term I would like to bring greater clarity and transparency around this complex issue via an amendment to the Payment of Wages Act 1991 in order to distinguish between tips, gratuities and service charges and to place tips outside the scope of a person's contractual wages. I am currently awaiting legal advice on the proposed amendment.

### **Invalidity Pension**

475. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when an application by a person (details supplied) will receive a decision; the reason for the delay in same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22750/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** Invalidity pension (IP) is a payment for people who are permanently incapable of work because of illness or incapacity and who satisfy the pay related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions.

The department received a claim for IP for the lady concerned on 28 February 2019. This claim was disallowed on the grounds that the medical conditions for the scheme were not satisfied. She was notified on the 23 May 2019 of this decision, the reasons for it and of her right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **JobPath Programme**

476. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the JobPath scheme will continue; if not, if it is due to cease shortly; her plans in relation to the scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22769/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The JobPath employment service commenced in 2015 and, under the terms of the contracts signed with the providers will run for at least six years. This includes a period of at least four years of client referrals to the end of 2019, and a run off period of at least two years. The contract includes an option to extend the term of referrals for a period of up to two years beyond the end of 2019.

The process of procuring contracted public employment services for 2020 and beyond is

being progressed and my officials are working to design a procurement model that will balance the need for value for money for taxpayers with the importance of preserving high-quality employment advisory services. As part of this process the ongoing requirements of the public employment service including the period for client referrals under the JobPath programme are currently being considered.

To date no decisions have been taken in this regard. However, my Department is currently considering how best to continue to provide a high quality public employment service that meets the needs of all jobseekers, while looking to provide employment services to those most distant from the labour market and to people who have not previously availed of these services.

### **Working Family Payment Applications**

477. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a decision will be made on a working family payment application by a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22771/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Working Family Payment (WFP) is an in-work family payment which provides additional income support to employees on low earnings with children.

An application for WFP was received from the person concerned on 08 May 2019.

In order to process their application, further information is required from them. The Department wrote to the person concerned on 23 May 2019 to request additional details.

On receipt of the requested information from the person concerned, their WFP application will be processed without delay and they will be notified of the decision.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Disability Allowance Appeals**

478. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a disability allowance appeal by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22793/19]

**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 referred on 10th April 2019 to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

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

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Social Welfare Appeals**

479. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protec-

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tion the status of an appeal by a person (details supplied); when a decision will be made; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22805/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I am informed by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an appeal was registered on 4th April 2019 and in accordance with the statutory requirements, the Appeals Office contacted the appellant and asked him to set out the complete grounds of his appeal. The grounds of the appeal were subsequently received on 8th May 2019 and the relevant departmental papers have been requested from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

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.

### **Working Family Payment**

480. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a working family payment renewal in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22828/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Working Family Payment (WFP) is a weekly in-work payment which provides additional income support to employees on low earnings with children.

Working Family Payment for the person concerned is due to expire on the 05/06/2019.

A Working Family Payment renewal application was received from the person concerned on 18 April 2019. This renewal application has now been processed and the person concerned will be entitled to Working Family payment at a rate of €43 per week from the 06/06/2019. This payment will continue for 52 weeks from that date.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility**

481. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the contributions of a person (details supplied); and if they qualify for dental treatment. [22843/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Qualification for Dental Benefit is based on satisfying certain PRSI conditions, including having paid the required total number of contributions since first starting work, along with having the required number of contributions paid or credited in the relevant tax year on which the claim is based.

A social insurance record in another EU country may be counted towards qualification for

Benefit, provided the person concerned has at least one PRSI contribution paid, at Class A, E, H, P or S, following their return or arrival in Ireland. Unfortunately, the person concerned in this case does not have any contributions paid since returning to Ireland, and therefore does not qualify for Benefit.

If the person concerned has a Medical Card, he should contact his local HSE office which will advise on entitlements under the HSE scheme.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Household Benefits Scheme**

482. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the saving that was achieved in a full year due to the scrapping of the automatic entitlement to the household benefits package for those not resident with the carer; her plans to reintroduce this provision; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22853/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The household benefits package (HHB) comprises the electricity or gas allowance, and the free television licence. My Department will spend approximately €248 million this year on HHB for over 446,000 customers. The package is generally available to people living in the State aged 66 years or over who are in receipt of a social welfare type payment or who satisfy a means test. The package is also available to some people under the age of 66 who are in receipt of certain welfare type payments.

Since 1 April 2012, new applicants in receipt of Carers Allowance who are not living with the person for whom they provide care do not have an automatic entitlement to the household benefits package. At the time the measure was introduced the estimated yearly saving that would be achieved was €5.9 million.

Carers who live with the person they are caring for still have an entitlement of their own to the household benefits package and do not have to satisfy the household composition criteria.

The Government values the role of carers very much and it is for this reason that they receive significant income supports from the Department. In addition to carer's allowance carers receive additional support in the form of free travel and household benefits (for those who live with the person for whom they care) and the annual carers support grant (€1,700) in respect of each person for whom they care. Where a person is in receipt of certain qualifying social welfare payments, and also providing full time care and attention to another person, they can keep their primary social welfare payment and also get the half-rate carer's allowance.

It should be noted that Carer's payments are made at a higher level than other working age income-maintenance payments made by my Department. The weekly rate for Carer's Allowance is €219 where one person is being cared for, and €328.50 where it is two or more, compared to €203 for most other income-maintenance payments to those below pension age. The means test for Carer's Allowance is also significantly more generous than those applying to other schemes.

Any decision to change the qualifying criteria for HHB would have budgetary consequences and would have to be considered in the context of budget negotiations.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications**

483. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a domiciliary care allowance application by a person (details supplied) will be expedited. [22855/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** An application for Domiciliary Care Allowance was received from the person concerned on the 11th January 2019. The application was not allowed as the child was not considered to satisfy the qualifying conditions for the allowance. A letter issued on the 13th March 2019 setting out the decision of the deciding officer to refuse the allowance.

A review of the decision was requested on the 11th April 2019. Further medical evidence that was received in support of the review has been referred to the Department's Medical Assessor for their medical opinion. When this is received the claim will be re-examined by a deciding officer and a revised decision will be made if warranted. The person concerned will be notified of the outcome of the review as soon as possible.

Reviews are currently taking approximately 10-12 weeks to process.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Disability Allowance**

484. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if and when payment including a basic supplementary payment and a disability allowance will be made in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22867/19]

**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 26 September 2018. The first payment will be made by her chosen payment method on 5 June 2019.

Arrears of payment due will issue as soon as possible.

No application for supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) has been received from this lady. An application for SWA was posted to her on 23 May 2019.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **National Housing Strategy for People with a Disability**

485. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the resources available to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22649/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** The current *National Housing Strategy for People with a Disability*(NHSPWD) and associated *National Implementation Framework*, were jointly published by my Department and the Department of Health. They set out the Government's broad framework for the delivery of housing for people with disabilities through mainstream housing policy and were developed as part

of a coherent framework, in conjunction with the Government's mental health policy, *A Vision for Change*, and the *Congregated Settings Report*.

Implementation of actions in the NHSPWD, which has been extended to 2020, is being driven primarily by the Housing Agency, through a dedicated sub-group comprising representatives from my Department, the HSE, Department of Health, local authorities, the Irish Council for Social Housing and various disability representative organisations.

One of the key initiatives involved has been the establishment of Housing and Disability Steering Groups (HDSGs) in all housing authority areas, to achieve a coordinated and integrated approach to meeting the housing needs of people with a disability at local level. These are chaired by Directors of Housing in each authority and include HSE and disability representative organisations.

Each HDSG has prepared a local Strategic Plan for its own City/County area, to develop specific local strategies to meet identified and emerging need over the next five years. These Plans, the majority of which are now available on the relevant local authority websites, along with the annual Summary of Social Housing Assessments (SSHA), will allow local authorities to plan more strategically for the housing needs of people with a disability and will support the delivery of accommodation using all appropriate housing supply mechanisms.

The specific persons mentioned will be able to get more detailed information from their local authority in respect of its own local Strategic Plan.

### **Wind Energy Guidelines**

486. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the guidelines for wind farms will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22807/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** My Department is currently undertaking a focused review of the 2006 Wind Energy Development Guidelines. The review is addressing a number of key aspects including sound or noise, visual amenity setback distances, shadow flicker, community obligation, community dividend and grid connections.

As part of the overall review, a strategic environmental assessment (SEA) is being undertaken on the revised Guidelines before they come into effect, in accordance with the requirements of EU Directive 2001/24/EC on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment, otherwise known as the SEA Directive.

SEA is a process by which environmental considerations are required to be fully integrated into the preparation of plans and programmes which act as frameworks for development consent, prior to their final adoption, with public consultation as part of that process. My Department appointed SEA experts in December 2017 to assist in this regard.

While the revised draft guidelines were to be published in Quarter 1 2019, some delays to the planned schedule arose, due to the recent publication of updated World Health Organisation (WHO) noise standards and the need to focus on certain Brexit-related planning issues. As part of the SEA process, there will be an 8 week public consultation on the revised draft Guidelines, together with the comprehensive environmental report with the aim of issuing the finalised Guidelines, following detailed analysis and consideration of the submissions and views received during the consultation phase, later in 2019.

When finalised, the revised Guidelines will be issued under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended. Planning authorities and, where applicable, An Bord Pleanála must have regard to guidelines issued under Section 28 in the performance of their functions generally under the Planning Acts. In the meantime, the current 2006 Wind Energy Development Guidelines remain in force.

### Septic Tank Grants

487. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if consideration will be given to making a grant available to private residents whose domestic septic tanks are not compliant with section 70 of the Water Services Act 2007 in circumstances in which the resident is not in a financial position to replace their septic tank and needs to under health and safety. [22325/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** On 8 February this year, I announced details of the measures being funded through my Department under the Multi-annual Rural Water Programme 2019-2021. This included an improved funding scheme for on-site wastewater treatment systems (more commonly known as septic tanks).

The composition of the new multi-annual programme is based on recommendations from the Working Group that I established in April 2018 to conduct a review of investment needs and rural water services. The Working Group, which is chaired by my Department, includes nominees from the National Federation of Group Water Schemes, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Health Service Executive, Department of Rural and Community Development and local authorities, through the County and City Management Association (CCMA). The Working Group considered all elements of Rural Water Services, including enhancements to the scheme for Domestic Wastewater Treatment systems to better support the programme of measures in the River Basin Management Plan for Ireland 2018-2021, published in 2018.

Work is at an advanced stage of development for the funding scheme. I expect that the process will be completed in the coming weeks when the necessary Statutory Instruments containing regulations dealing with the financial assistance arrangements and related administrative matters are put in place. This will enable circular letters, terms and conditions, guidance and application forms to issue to local authorities shortly thereafter.

### Home Loan Scheme

488. **Deputy Frank O’Rourke** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when further funding will be provided to Kildare County Council to facilitate the drawdown of Rebuilding Ireland mortgage loans in view of the fact that the council is unable to approve loans due to a lack of funding; the amount of funding that will be made available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22385/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** The Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan launched on 1 February 2018. Prior to its launch, an initial tranche of €200 million of long-term fixed-rate finance was borrowed by the Housing Finance Agency to provide funds for the scheme to local authorities.

When the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan was initially being developed, it was estimated that the drawdown of loans under the scheme would be approximately €200 million over three years. From the data collated on the scheme to date, the RIHL has proven to be more success-

ful than initially anticipated, as a result of which, the scheme would require a further tranche of funds to be borrowed by the HFA in order to enable its continuation.

My Department is currently in discussions with the Departments of Public Expenditure and Reform and Finance with regard to the amount of a second tranche, which I anticipate, will be finalised soon. When these discussions are concluded I will be in a position to make an announcement on the matter. However, the scheme remains open and all local authorities have been advised to continue to receive and process applications up to and including the issuing of loans. An announcement on the amount of additional funding to be provided is not inhibiting the running of the scheme in any way.

### Departmental Funding

489. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if approval will be given to Kerry County Council to purchase a house (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22504/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Funding for the acquisition of the property in question has been approved by my Department and it is now a matter for Kerry County Council to pursue.

### Local Authority Housing

490. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the steps being taken to implement the recommendations of the National Taking In Charge Initiative Report; the projected timescale for implementing the recommendations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22531/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Findings and recommendations from the National Taking in Charge Initiative (NTICI) were included in a report on the initiative that was published by my Department in December 2018. The report is available on my Department's website at the following link:

[www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/national\\_taking\\_in\\_charge\\_initiative\\_report\\_dec2018.pdf](http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/national_taking_in_charge_initiative_report_dec2018.pdf).

The publication of the NTICI report is of value to local authorities and other stakeholders in applying the lessons from the pilot authorities, in a more general roll-out of a streamlined approach to taking-in-charge, which is currently in progress, including through coordination with capital works by Irish Water. In this regard, my Department is liaising with Irish Water in relation to the report.

My Department issued Circular Letter PL 02-2019 earlier this year which sets out procedures relating to new arrangements that came into force in April 2019 concerning securities for the satisfactory completion of developments, including bonds, and the application of Irish Water's Connection Charging Policy as regards such matters. The circular is available on my Department's website at the following link:

[www.housing.gov.ie/planning/guidelines/circular-pl-022019-planning-securities-irish-water-connection-agreements](http://www.housing.gov.ie/planning/guidelines/circular-pl-022019-planning-securities-irish-water-connection-agreements)

In addition, in 2018, my Department published draft *Water Services Guidelines for Plan-*

ning Authorities under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), which address the issues of bonds and cash securities applied to permissions granted before April 2019. I intend to issue final Guidelines shortly.

The Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) and financial institutions, in conjunction with my Department, are currently considering an approach to the wording and process of future planning security arrangements.

The National Development Plan, published last year, includes a provision for €31 million for the period 2018-2021 for developer-provided infrastructure, commencing with a provision of €6 million in 2019. The multi-annual programme will be initiated through the invitation of project bids from local authorities followed by their evaluation by an Expert Panel, set up by my Department, to independently evaluate the bid projects to be approved for funding.

My Department is currently finalising the details of the programme and it is expected that the invitation for project bids from local authorities will issue shortly, with approval of projects for this first cycle multi-annual programme to take place once proposals submitted have been assessed.

### **Water Services Funding**

491. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if an application has been received for funding from Mayo County Council on behalf of a local group water scheme (details supplied); if so, the status of the application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22550/19]

497. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if an application has been received from Mayo County Council for a group water scheme (details supplied); when a decision on funding will be made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22700/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 491 and 497 together.

On 8 February this year, I announced details of the measures being funded through my Department under the Multi-annual Rural Water Programme 2019-2021. Local authorities were invited to submit their bids for the funding of schemes or projects in their functional areas, with the deadline for receipt of proposals set as 14 March 2019.

Mayo County Council has included the scheme in question in its application to my Department under the new Programme.

My Department is currently considering local authorities' bids for funding allocations. An Expert Panel has been put in place to support the evaluation process. In addition to providing an expert perspective, the Panel brings independence, openness and transparency to the bids evaluation process which is done on a national prioritised basis. The Expert Panel's membership includes Departmental, stakeholder and independent representation.

The Expert Panel will make recommendations to my Department on the suitability of schemes and projects for funding based on objective criteria which are set out in the framework document issued to local authorities when requesting proposals. My Department will then consider the recommendations of the Panel, and based on these, will propose allocations for my consideration as Minister. I expect this process to be completed later in the second quarter

of 2019.

### **Register of Electors Administration**

492. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to improve the user friendliness of the Check the Register website, including reducing sensitivities in relation to the spelling of place names such as in circumstances where more than one English or Gaeilge version of an address exists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22558/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan):** The preparation of the register of electors is a matter for local authorities in their areas. It is their duty, as far as possible and with the cooperation and engagement of the public, to ensure the accuracy and comprehensiveness of that register. The Check the Register facility reflects the information contained in each local authority's register of electors and enables voters to check their details by reference to their address (street or townland, as appropriate) or, in many cases, by Eircode.

More generally, the Government determined in March 2017 that work should commence on modernisation of the voter registration process. The proposals currently under consideration include an optional online registration process in parallel with the existing paper based system, the creation of a unique identifier for individuals, simplification of the forms and processes, and data sharing between public bodies and electoral registration authorities to ensure accuracy and completeness. It is expected that the online facility will enable individuals to manage their own information, such as amending their address details.

A public consultation process on the modernisation process closed on 15 March 2019, at which stage some 187 submissions had been received from a range of individuals, public representatives, local authorities, political parties and community and voluntary and business organisations. These submissions are now being examined and details of the consultation are available on my Department's website at the following link: <https://www.housing.gov.ie/public-consultation-proposals-modernise-electoral-registration-process>.

### **Home Loan Scheme**

493. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to extend the criteria for the Rebuilding Ireland scheme to allow persons who previously had a property which they lost to avail of the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22562/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Applicants for the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan must be of good credit standing and have a satisfactory credit record. The Housing Agency provides a central credit assessment service to local authorities and credit checks are undertaken as part of the credit assessment process. The final decision on loan approval is a matter for the relevant local authority and its credit committee on a case-by-case basis. Decisions on all housing loan applications must be made in accordance with the statutory credit policy, that underpins the scheme, in order to ensure prudence and consistency in approaches in the best interests of both borrowers and the lending local authorities.

As with the previous local authority home loan offerings, the Rebuilding Ireland Home

Loan is available to first time buyers only. This is to ensure the effective targeting of limited resources, and I have no plans to amend this requirement.

### **Home Loan Scheme**

494. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he plans to extend the number of exemptions for applicants to the home loan scheme under the Rebuilding Ireland programme (details supplied); if so, the range of exemptions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22563/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Applicants for the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan must be of good credit standing and have a satisfactory credit record. The Housing Agency provides a central credit assessment service to local authorities and credit checks are undertaken as part of the credit assessment process. The final decision on loan approval is a matter for the relevant local authority and its credit committee on a case-by-case basis. Decisions on all housing loan applications must be made in accordance with the statutory credit policy, that underpins the scheme, in order to ensure prudence and consistency in approaches in the best interests of both borrowers and the lending local authorities.

A person who has been discharged from bankruptcy and is eligible in all other respects, including being a first-time buyer, for a Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan may apply for a loan and will be subject to the same credit assessment process that applies to all applicants.

As with the previous local authority home loan offerings, the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan is available to first time buyers only. This is to ensure the effective targeting of limited resources, and I have no plans to amend this requirement.

Applicants who are separated or divorced may be treated as first-time buyers, in accordance with the regulations, if they meet certain conditions, including:

- they are separated or divorced under a court order or by a separation agreement;
- the property being purchased is the first property since leaving the family home;
- they have left the family home and retain no interest in it; or
- the other party has remained in the family home.

In meeting the conditions as set out above, in particular that the other party has remained in the family home and that the potential applicant has relinquished any rights they had over that property, no financial gain should have been made by the potential applicant in exchange for relinquishing their rights to the property in this manner. Were the individual to have made a financial gain in releasing their rights to the property, such as being bought out by the other party who remains resident in it, they would be deemed to have been compensated for their interest in the property, and therefore not be eligible as a first-time buyer.

### **Social and Affordable Housing**

495. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he has set an administrative fee for local authorities in respect of turnkey purchases of social housing units; if data on the level of fee charged by each local authority in this regard

are collated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22621/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** My Department is currently examining the management and procurement arrangements relating to turnkey delivery for social housing and will issue a Circular on this to local authorities shortly. Turnkeys frequently involve activating housing developments which otherwise would not be built, or completing unfinished estates. Accordingly, the upcoming Circular is likely to include support for local authorities in utilising this approach to deliver new social housing, operating on a consistent basis across all authorities, based on the scale of delivery achieved.

### **Local Authority Members' Remuneration**

496. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the final report on the Independent Review of the Role and Remuneration of Local Authority Elected Members by a person (details supplied) will be published. [22660/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan):** Ms. Sara Moorhead, Senior Counsel, is carrying out the Independent Review of the Role and Remuneration of Local Authority Elected Members. Ms. Moorhead has submitted an Interim Report and it was published in November 2018. In order to progress towards the final report it was necessary to survey all local authority members and to seek financial information from all local authorities. The survey has now been completed and, in both cases, deadline extensions were granted to allow sufficient time for comprehensive responses to be made. I understand that the drafting of the Final Report is progressing well and I expect to receive it shortly.

Following the necessary consultation with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, the Review will be submitted to Government in due course and published thereafter.

*Question No. 497 answered with Question No. 491.*

### **Social and Affordable Housing Eligibility**

498. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the rationale behind the income limits to qualify for social housing; and the reason this has resulted in a €6,000 difference in the amount a person or family can earn to qualify for social housing in counties Waterford and Tipperary. [22743/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Applications for social housing support are assessed by the relevant local authority, in accordance with the eligibility and need criteria set down in section 20 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 and the associated Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011, as amended.

The 2011 Regulations prescribe maximum net income limits for each local authority, in different bands according to the area concerned, with income being defined and assessed according to a standard Household Means Policy. The 2011 Regulations do not provide local authorities with any discretion to exceed the limits that apply to their administrative areas.

Under the Household Means Policy, which applies in all local authorities, net income for social housing assessment is defined as gross household income less income tax, and the universal social charge. The Policy provides for a range of income disregards, and local authorities also

have discretion to decide to disregard income that is temporary, short-term or once off in nature.

The income bands are expressed in terms of a maximum net income threshold for a single-person household, with an allowance of 5% for each additional adult household member, subject to a maximum allowance under this category of 10%; and 2.5% for each child, subject to a maximum allowance under this category of 10%. On that basis if the household consists of three adults and at least four children, the maximum net income threshold for a household in Co. Tipperary is €30,000 and the maximum net income threshold for a household in Waterford City and County is €36,000.

The income bands and the authority area assigned to each band were based on an assessment of the income needed to provide for a household's basic needs, plus a comparative analysis of the local rental cost of housing accommodation across the country. It is important to note that the limits introduced at that time also reflected a blanket increase of €5,000 introduced prior to the new system coming into operation, in order to broaden the base from which social housing tenants are drawn, both promoting sustainable communities and also providing a degree of future-proofing.

Given the cost to the State of providing social housing, it is considered prudent and fair to direct resources to those most in need of social housing support. The current income eligibility requirements generally achieve this, providing for a fair and equitable system of identifying those households facing the greatest challenge in meeting their accommodation needs from their own resources.

However, as part of the broader social housing reform agenda, a review of income eligibility for social housing supports in each local authority area is underway. The review will also have regard to current initiatives being brought forward in terms of affordability and cost rental and will be completed when the impacts of these parallel initiatives have been considered.

### **Home Loan Scheme**

499. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans for a revised credit policy in respect of the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme to include a provision to provide persons who previously owned a home but that have gone through bankruptcy the opportunity to apply for a loan rather than being deemed ineligible in view of their not being a first-time buyer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22746/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Applicants for the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan must be of good credit standing and have a satisfactory credit record. The Housing Agency provides a central credit assessment service to local authorities and credit checks are undertaken as part of the credit assessment process. The final decision on loan approval is a matter for the relevant local authority and its credit committee on a case-by-case basis. Decisions on all housing loan applications must be made in accordance with the statutory credit policy, that underpins the scheme, in order to ensure prudence and consistency in approaches in the best interests of both borrowers and the lending local authorities.

A person who has been discharged from bankruptcy and is eligible in all other respects, including being a first-time buyer, for a Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan may apply for a loan and will be subject to the same credit assessment process that applies to all applicants.

As with the previous local authority home loan offerings, the Rebuilding Ireland Home

Loan is available to first time buyers only. This is to ensure the effective targeting of limited resources, and I have no plans to amend this requirement.

### **Urban Renewal Schemes**

500. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the establishment of the task force for Tipperary town following the appointment of an independent chairperson in March 2019; the State agencies appointed to the taskforce; and the budget allocated to same. [22768/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English):** Supporting the development and growth of towns and villages across Ireland is a major priority for this Government and to this end policy interventions are being pursued across a number of Government Departments and are being implemented by local authorities around the country. In particular, €2 billion is available under the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund, with a further €1 billion available under the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund.

In relation to Tipperary Town, I met with local stakeholders on 24 January 2019. Following on from that meeting:

- an independent expert has been appointed to assist and advise Tipperary Town Centre Forum on the development and regeneration of Tipperary Town,

- a Director of Services has been assigned by Tipperary County Council to assist the process and to work closely with the Town Centre Forum towards the delivery of a 3-year Action Plan,

- a planning consultant is being appointed to support the process in preparing an Action Plan for the Town,

- Queens University Belfast has agreed to carry out a consultation exercise in the Town that will afford an opportunity to all stakeholders to participate, with a public engagement set for June, and,

- a Project Manager is to be recruited for a three-year period reporting to the Town Centre Forum and responsible for the day-to-day delivery of the Action Plan.

The work of the Town Centre Forum over the three year period will focus on preparing projects for submission under the various funding programmes that have been put in place by the Government.

My Department continues to engage with Tipperary County Council to provide advices and support in relation to its work on the development and regeneration of its towns, including Tipperary Town.

### **Homeless Persons Data**

501. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of persons in emergency accommodation for longer than six months in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22777/19]

502. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Gov-

ernment the number of persons in emergency accommodation for longer than six months in County Laois; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22778/19]

503. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of persons sleeping rough voluntarily and involuntarily in County Kildare in 2016, 2017 and January 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22779/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 501 to 503, inclusive, together.

My Department's role in relation to homelessness involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of housing authorities in addressing homelessness at local level. While responsibility for the provision of accommodation for homeless persons rests with individual housing authorities, the administration of homeless services is organised on a regional basis.

The administration of homeless services is organised on a regional basis as this approach is considered more effective, bringing a strategic perspective to bear, including avoidance of over-concentration of homelessness services in certain areas and promoting appropriate regional availability of services, consistent with need. In this regard, Kildare is included in the Mid-East Region along with the counties of Meath and Wicklow, while Laois is included in the Midlands Region along with the counties of Longford, Offaly and Westmeath.

Regional funding allocations are delegated to a lead-authority in each region and under these arrangements responsibility for assessment and decision-making in relation to the funding of services rests with the relevant regional Homeless Management Group, overseen by the lead-authority, within the available allocations.

As part of the delegated arrangements in place, my Department receives performance reports on a quarterly basis from the regional lead authorities. These reports provide information on the numbers of adults in emergency accommodation for longer than six months. The most recently submitted reports (Quarter 1 2019) show that on 31 March 2019, 47 adults in the Midlands Region and 124 adults in the Mid-East Region had been in emergency accommodation for longer than six months.

With regard to the numbers of persons rough sleeping in Co. Kildare, the data requested by the Deputy is not held by my Department. I understand that the incidence of rough sleeping in Co. Kildare is limited to a small number of individuals, with no one sleeping rough due to a lack of available services. When rough sleeping does occur, housing authority-funded outreach workers will engage with the rough sleeper to encourage them to avail of services, including accommodation.

### **Traveller Accommodation**

504. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the funding allocated and drawn down by local authorities for Traveller accommodation in 2018, in tabular form. [22780/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English):** In accordance with the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998, housing authorities have statutory responsibility for the assessment of the accommodation needs of Travellers and the preparation, adoption and implementation of multi-annual

Traveller Accommodation Programmes (TAPs) in their areas. My Department's role is to ensure that there are adequate structures and supports in place to assist the authorities in providing such accommodation, including a national framework of policy, legislation and funding.

Housing authorities submit funding proposals for individual Traveller-specific projects and developments on an annual basis. These projects are assessed on a case-by-case basis in my Department in advance of allocations being made. In addition, further funding may be considered by my Department throughout the year in the light of progress across the programme generally. There is regular contact between my Department and housing authorities in order to try to ensure maximum progress and drawdown. If it becomes clear that allocations or part thereof may be unspent, then those allocations will be diverted to alternative projects and developments.

The amount of funding allocated and drawn down by housing authorities for Traveller-specific accommodation for 2018 is set out in the following table.

County Council	Allocation 2018	Drawdown 2018
Carlow	€167,740.00	€ -
Cavan	€30,000.00	€ -
Clare	€853,250.00	€13,250
Cork City	€310,000.00	€180,250
Cork County	€251,197.00	€ -
Donegal	€121,800.00	€52,700
Dublin City	€1,321,558.39	€744,400
South Dublin	€869,642.50	€1,284,100
Fingal	€851,189.00	€886,957
Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown	€673,685.78	€1,099,940
Galway City	€176,996.00	€ -
Galway County	€1,080,100.00	€267,031
Kerry	€15,350.00	€62,538
Kildare	€80,000.00	€29,510
Kilkenny	€201,682.00	€60,067
Laois	€30,000.00	€ -
Leitrim	€159,614.00	€54,306
Limerick	€858,739.00	€470,997
Longford	€2,922.00	€ -
Louth	€17,039.00	€3,810
Mayo	€30,000.00	€ -
Meath	€65,000.00	€ -
Monaghan	€400,000.00	€54,745
Offaly	€49,379.00	€10,999
Roscommon	€230,000.00	€102,273
Sligo	€1,046,095.00	€282,882
Tipperary	€25,655.00	€42,002
Waterford	€317,280.00	€472,725
Westmeath	€150,000.00	€ -
Wexford	€498,801.00	€ -
Wicklow	€209,620.00	€88,783

County Council	Allocation 2018	Drawdown 2018
Reserve	€905,665.33	
TOTAL	€12,000,000	€6,264,345

### Housing Assistance Payment Eligibility

505. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the income limits that are used to determine if an applicant is eligible for HAP; the discretion allowed regarding previously owned homes or existing co-owned properties that the applicant can no longer inhabit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22840/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** In order to be eligible for HAP support, a household must first qualify for social housing support and be placed on a housing list. Applications for social housing support are assessed by the relevant local authority, in accordance with the eligibility and need criteria set down in section 20 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 and the associated Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011, as amended.

The Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011 prescribe maximum net income limits for each local authority, in different bands according to the area concerned, with income being defined and assessed according to a standard Household Means Policy. The 2011 Regulations do not provide local authorities with any discretion to exceed the limits that apply to their administrative areas. The current income limits are available on my Department's website at

<https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/other/social-housing-support-table-income-limits>

The income bands and the authority area assigned to each band were based on an assessment of the income needed to provide for a household's basic needs, plus a comparative analysis of the local rental cost of housing accommodation across the country. It is important to note that the limits introduced at that time also reflected a blanket increase of €5,000 introduced prior to the new system coming into operation, in order to broaden the base from which social housing tenants are drawn, both promoting sustainable communities and also providing a degree of future-proofing.

Under the Household Means Policy, which applies to all local authorities, net income for social housing assessment is defined as gross household income less income tax, and the universal social charge. The Policy provides for a range of income disregards. Local authorities also have discretion to decide to disregard income that is temporary, short-term or once off in nature.

In relation to previously owned homes or existing co-owned properties, under Section 20 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 and Regulation 22(1) of the Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011, a household shall be ineligible for social housing support if it has alternative accommodation that the household could reasonably be expected to use to meet its housing need, either by occupying it or by selling the accommodation and using the proceeds to secure suitable accommodation suitable for the household's adequate housing. However, Regulation 22(2) of the 2011 Regulations provides that this ineligibility does not apply where an applicant for social housing support owns accommodation that is occupied by his or her spouse, from whom he or she is formally separated or divorced. Under the enactment, a deed of separation is sufficient to set aside this ineligibility ground and it is not necessary to await judicial separation or divorce to get a decision on social housing support in these cases. The rationale for this exception is that the terms of a formal separation or divorce will provide for the

future ownership and occupation of the family home and it will be clear whether the household that has left the family home can return to live there.

In order to provide more flexibility to local authorities to deal with cases where the ownership of the family home had not yet been finalised, the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014 amended section 20 of the 2009 Act and Local authorities may now provide such households with social housing support under the Rental Accommodation Scheme or the Housing Assistance Payment scheme until ownership of the family home is resolved in a formal separation or divorce settlement.

The 2014 Act amendment provides that support in these circumstances will be reviewed by the local authority at prescribed intervals and the household will not be able to transfer to other forms of social housing support while ownership of the family home remains to be determined. However, where the household ultimately qualifies for the full range of social housing supports, the length of time the household was supported under RAS or HAP will be reckonable for the purposes of determining the household's relative priority for a transfer.

### **Social and Affordable Housing Eligibility**

506. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of EU nationals refused social housing support due to owning a property in their country of origin, in each of the years 2017, 2018 and to date in 2019; the avenues that exist for those who have properties that have little or no value; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22841/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** My Department does not hold information of the type requested by the Deputy.

The assessment of households for social housing support, and the allocation of that support to qualified households is a matter for individual local authorities in accordance with the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 and associated regulations.

Under Section 20 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 and Regulation 22(1) of the Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011, a household shall be ineligible for social housing support if it has alternative accommodation that the household could reasonably be expected to use to meet its housing need, either by occupying it or by selling the accommodation and using the proceeds to secure suitable accommodation suitable for the household's adequate housing.

### **Departmental Bodies Data**

507. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 315 of 18 April 2019, if he will provide the original information requested in tabular form, in view of that fact that the county location and agency staff breakdown is not accessible in the link provided. [22897/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** The county location for each Agency/Body under my Department's aegis was provided in the reply to Question No. 315 of 18 April 2019 but is set out again in Table 1.

My Department collects information on staffing numbers for certain non commercial state bodies quarterly, broken down by total number of employees and the number of whole time

equivalents. The most recent data, up to end quarter 4 2018, is available on the Public Service Numbers Databank at the following link: [http://databank.per.gov.ie/Public\\_Service\\_Numbers.aspx](http://databank.per.gov.ie/Public_Service_Numbers.aspx). The data for quarter 1 2019 will be published in the coming weeks.

Information on each State body, including staffing information in relation to any of the bodies not separately identified at the link above, is available directly from each agency/body at the relevant email address provided in Table 2.

**Table 1**

Agency/Body	Location of Headquarters
An Bord Pleanála	Dublin
Ervia	Dublin
Gas Networks Ireland	Cork
Housing Sustainable Communities Agency	Dublin
Housing Finance Agency	Dublin
Irish Water	Dublin
Local Government Management Agency	Dublin
Ordnance Survey Ireland	Dublin
Property Registration Authority	Dublin
Pyrite Resolution Board	Dublin
Residential Tenancies Board	Dublin
Valuation Office	Dublin
Valuation Tribunal	Dublin
Land Development Agency *	Dublin
Office of the Planning Regulator *	Dublin
National Oversight and Audit Commission	Dublin

\* Temporary pending final decisions

**Table 2**

Agency	Email address
An Bord Pleanála	Oireachtasqueries@pleanala.ie
Ervia, Gas Networks Ireland	oireachtas@ervia.ie
Housing Sustainable Communities Agency	publicreps@housingagency.ie
Housing Finance Agency	oireachtas.enquiries@hfa.ie
Irish Water	oireachtasmembers@water.ie
Local Government Management Agency	corporate@lgma.ie
Ordnance Survey Ireland	Oireachtas@osi.ie
Property Registration Authority	reps@prai.ie
Pyrite Resolution Board	oireachtasinfo@pyriteboard.ie
Residential Tenancies Board	OireachtasMembersQueries@rtb.ie
Valuation Office	oireachtas.enquiries@VALOFF.ie
Valuation Tribunal	info@valuationtribunal.ie
Land Development Agency	oireachtas@lda.ie
Office of the Planning Regulator	oireachtas@opr.ie
National Oversight and Audit Commission	info@noac.ie

**Ministerial Meetings**

508. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of times she has met formally with the CEO, chairperson or equivalent in each State agency under the remit of her Department to date in 2019, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22317/19]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** Details of my Ministerial Diary are published on my Department's website on a quarterly basis. For the convenience of the Deputy, the details requested in relation to formal meetings with the CEO and or chairperson or equivalent of those State agencies under the remit of my Department to date in 2019 are as follows.

March: Maura McGrath, Chair of the National Concert Hall

April: Rose McHugh (Chair) and Mary McCarthy (Director) of the Crawford Gallery

For the sake of completeness, I would also advise the Deputy that my colleague the Minister of State (with special responsibility for the Gaeltacht), Sean Kyne, T.D, met with the Chair and CEO of Foras na Gaeilge in March of this year.

In addition to these meetings the Deputy will be aware that my Department officials are in regular co contact with the management of these agencies on an ongoing basis.