

Written Answers.

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

Questions Nos. 1 to 14, inclusive, answered orally.

Questions Nos. 15 to 18, inclusive, resubmitted.

Taoiseach's Meetings and Engagements

19. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he spoke with Prime Minister May in relation to her upcoming vote on the withdrawal treaty Bill in June 2019 while in Paris. [22083/19]

The Taoiseach: I travelled to Paris on 15 May for an event co-hosted by French President Emmanuel Macron and New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern in response to the terrorist attack on the Muslim community in Christchurch. I had the opportunity to speak with Prime Minister May and other leaders in the margins of the event. Prime Minister May expressed her hope at that stage that she would be able to secure support in the House of Commons for her Withdrawal Bill. Of course, the situation is less clear now in light of her announcement that she will resign as PM in June. We agreed to keep in contact on the matter.

Questions Nos. 20 to 25, inclusive, resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 26 to 29, inclusive, answered orally.

Rural Transport Services

30. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development his plans to develop better rural connectivity through increased funding to the transport measures of his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23049/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Seán Canney): Responsibility for overall Government transport policy and funding lies with my colleague the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport.

This includes funding for the national road network and public transport services in rural areas.

Work being funded through Project Ireland 2040 and the National Development Plan underlines the Government's commitment to ensuring that people living in rural Ireland remain connected with their local communities and beyond, through investment in public transport and the road network.

My Department provides some funding for transport measures which help connect those

in rural areas.

These include the Local Improvement Scheme, a programme for improvement works on small private or non-public roads in rural areas. I reintroduced the LIS in September 2017 and since then have allocated €48 million to the Scheme.

I have also provided €1.4 million under the CLÁR Programme for Supports for Mobility and Cancer Care Transport.

My Department also continues to provide funding for projects such as trails and blueways that may help connect rural towns and villages across the country under the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme.

The €1 billion Rural Regeneration and Development Fund is currently open for applications and will consider applications for funding for the development of community or public facilities infrastructure including improvements to roads, bridges and car parking facilities but only in the context of wider rural regeneration projects.

Additionally, my Department is the coordinating Department in respect of the Action Plan for Rural Development. This all of Government Plan for rural Ireland contains a number of actions relating to improvements in transport services, the majority of which are delivered by the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and agencies under their aegis.

We are now looking towards the next phase of rural development policy. We are currently consulting with stakeholders and interested parties around the country on the future policy and welcome all views on improving connectivity in rural Ireland as part of that process.

Departmental Programmes

31. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development his plans to help communities which require assistance in formulating proposals for funding from the various programmes under his remit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22719/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): Communities across the country can access many different sources of funding and supports and I am delighted that many of these are delivered by my Department.

The recent series of regional Rural Opportunity events highlighted the funding opportunities available to those in rural communities across Government. It was inspiring at these events to hear from people who have used Government supports to improve the quality of life in their communities. Government funding is being used to create jobs, develop community facilities and tourism offerings and generally improve quality of life for those in rural communities.

The response to these events has been overwhelmingly positive to date and my hope is that individuals and communities will be encouraged to take their own ideas or projects forward.

I want to do all I can to help communities access the funding that is available. I therefore asked my Department to review the applications process for a number of funding programmes to ensure it is understandable and fit for purpose.

I also know that there are some groups or community organisations that may not have considered seeking funding because they don't have the experience of submitting funding applications or lack understanding of the criteria in place.

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To help these groups, I am currently running a series of ‘Helping Hands’ events nationwide to make groups more aware of funding programmes, and to provide practical guidance on making applications. The fifth event was in Tullamore yesterday evening and the final event takes place in Darndale, in Dublin, tomorrow.

These events provide hints and tips on how to make a better funding application and how to identify local supports that community groups can draw upon.

My hope is that these events and other ongoing measures will ensure that our funding has the broadest possible reach and that all eligible groups have the opportunity to access available supports.

CLÁR Programme

32. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development when successful applications under 2019 CLÁR funding will be announced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22754/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The CLÁR programme provides funding for small scale infrastructural projects in disadvantaged rural areas that have experienced significant levels of de-population. Since I relaunched the programme in 2016, more than 1,200 projects have been approved funding of almost €27 million.

I launched the 2019 CLÁR programme on the 28th of February last, and invited applications under three separate measures.

Measure 1 provides support for “School and Community Safety Measures”,

Measure 2 provides support for “Play Areas and Multi-Use Games Areas”, and

Measure 3 provides funding for “Community Wellbeing Support” .

Community Wellbeing Support covers the provision of equipment and vehicles for voluntary first-response organisations, as well as the provision of specialist vehicles to bring people to cancer-care centres and other community-care services. The measure will also provide funding for sensory gardens.

The closing date for the 2019 CLÁR programme was 30th April, and almost 500 applications were received by my Department.

My officials are currently assessing all of the applications received and I hope to be in a position to announce the successful projects shortly.

Questions Nos. 33 to 40, inclusive, answered orally.

Community Enhancement Programme Funding

41. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the level of funding under the community enhancement programme for 2019 compared to 2018; the number of additional projects that will be funded; if all funding has been allocated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22797/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): In 2018, I

launched the Community Enhancement Programme with initial funding of €4.5m. The programme helps community groups to improve facilities in their area. It supports a range of investment in all areas of communities, such as childcare facilities, playgrounds, recreational facilities, sports grounds, landscaping projects, and supports for the elderly.

in 2018, there was a huge level of interest in the programme right across the country following its launch. So I was delighted to be in a position to allocate additional once-off funding to the programme later in the year and the final amount allocated was €13 million. This included €0.5 million that was ring-fenced for Men's Sheds.

Over 3,000 projects across the country were funded, all of them targeted at enhancing facilities in disadvantaged communities.

In March of this year, I launched the 2019 programme with funding of €4.5m, the same amount that was initially provided in 2018. The 2019 funding has been allocated and the allocations to each local authority can be found on my Department's website.

If savings elsewhere in the Department are identified as the year progresses, I will consider additional funding for the Community Enhancement Programme.

Capital Expenditure Programme

42. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the projects delayed or shelved as a result of the financial burden created by the excessive costs of the national children's hospital and the national broadband plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22752/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): As the Deputy is aware, the Government has agreed to the re-allocation of €99 million in capital funding to accommodate the additional 2019 capital costs associated with the National Children's Hospital Project.

In this context, it has been agreed to re-schedule €3 million in capital expenditure in relation to the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF) this year. This changed the capital allocation in 2019 from €55 million to €52 million under the Fund.

The RRDF supports ambitious and strategic multi-annual projects which contribute to sustainable rural regeneration and development. There will not be any adverse impact on the delivery of projects supported by the Fund and it remains the case that €315 million will be invested through the Fund over the period 2019 to 2021.

The decision by Government to approve the appointment of a preferred bidder for the National Broadband Plan has not impacted on any programmes or projects being funded by my Department.

Town and Village Renewal Scheme

43. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if he will report on the town and village renewal scheme and the rural regeneration pilot scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22726/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Town

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and Village Renewal Scheme is a key initiative under the Action Plan for Rural Development and forms part of a range of measures to support rural Ireland under the Government's Project Ireland 2040 Rural Regeneration Programme.

Since the scheme was introduced in 2016, almost €53 million has been approved for more than 670 projects across the country.

I launched the 2019 Town and Village Renewal Scheme on 16th April last. Local Authorities have each been invited to submit up to 12 applications to my Department for consideration under the scheme. The closing date for receipt of applications is 28th June.

The Action Plan for Rural Development includes a commitment to develop a pilot scheme to encourage increased residential occupancy in rural towns and villages. I launched this initiative last October and announced that six towns had been invited to participate in the initial pilot. The 6 towns which were identified for inclusion in the pilot are:

1. Boyle, Co Roscommon
2. Callan, Co Kilkenny
3. Ballinrobe, Co Mayo
4. Banagher, Co Offaly
5. Castleblayney, Co Monaghan
6. Cappoquin, Co Waterford

Funding of up to €100,000 each is being made available to these 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 to identify practical solutions to increase the number of people living in their town centres. It is envisaged that the solutions they identify could lead to the development of more substantive proposals for funding from the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund in due course.

I expect to receive a report from each of the Local Authorities in the next month on the progress which they have made under the pilot.

Action Plan for Rural Development

44. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of the consultations taking place with stakeholders for the next phase of rural policy post-2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22721/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Government's Action Plan for Rural Development was published in January 2017 as a three-year plan to support the economic and social development of rural Ireland. The Action Plan runs to the end of 2019, and my Department has now commenced work on developing the next phase of rural policy, from 2020 onwards.

As part of this process, my Department is holding a series of consultation events throughout the country to obtain the views of stakeholders on the challenges and opportunities facing rural Ireland over the next five years.

The new policy will build on the Action Plan for Rural Development. It will be forward-

looking, and will seek to strengthen and build resilience in rural economies and communities. As is the case with the current Action Plan, the new policy will reflect a whole-of-Government commitment to rural Ireland.

To date, four events have taken place, in Cavan, Donegal Town, Carlow and Thurles. Four further events are scheduled to take place in the coming weeks, in the Aran Islands on 29th May, Claremorris on 30th May, Ennis on 20th June, and Tralee on 21st June.

The events which have taken place to date have been well attended by a range of stakeholders from local communities, State Agencies, local government, and central Government Departments. All of the contributions from these events will assist my Department in developing the next phase of policy for rural Ireland.

My objective is to publish the policy at the start of 2020.

Greenways Funding

45. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of funding for the SLNCR greenway and the Cavan and Leitrim greenway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22751/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): Since I introduced funding for Outdoor Recreation infrastructure developments in 2016, I have approved almost 600 projects for funding of over €41 million. This funding has gone to walkways, blueways, greenways, trails and other outdoor infrastructure projects around the country.

In 2016, Leitrim County Council received €401,354 in funding for 3 projects under the Outdoor Recreation Scheme, which included €135,000 for the “Sligo Leitrim Northern Counties Railway (SLNCR)” project and €190,000 for the “Cavan and Leitrim Railway Greenway Pilot Project”. It is now more than two years since this funding was provided to the Local Authority.

In September 2018, I wrote to all Local Authorities, requesting them to complete and close off projects funded under 2016 Outdoor Recreation Scheme, and other 2016 schemes.

My officials reviewed the position with regard to the close-off of the 2016 schemes recently and noted significant levels of underspend on projects. I instructed my officials to write to each relevant Local Authority advising them that the unspent 2016 funding would be offset against future payments to the Authorities.

A letter regarding unspent funding issued to Leitrim Co. Council on the 25th April this year and noted a total underspend of €268,196 with respect to the SLNCR and Cavan and Leitrim Railway Greenway Pilot projects.

I understand that the County Council has subsequently been in contact with my Department and has submitted a written case outlining the circumstances relating to the delay in the completion of these particular projects. This submission is under consideration at the moment and my officials will revert to the Local Authority in due course.

Question No. 46 answered with Question No. 40.

CLÁR Programme

47. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of the 2019 CLÁR programme, the 2019 outdoor recreational infrastructural scheme and the walks scheme, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22723/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The CLÁR programme provides funding for small scale infrastructure projects in rural areas that have experienced significant levels of de-population. I launched the 2019 CLÁR programme on 28th February last, with a closing date of 25th April for applications.

Almost 500 applications were received by my Department and my officials are currently assessing all of these applications. I hope to be in a position to announce the successful 2019 CLÁR projects in the coming weeks.

The Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme provides funding for the development of new outdoor recreational infrastructure and the maintenance, enhancement or promotion of existing recreational infrastructure.

I launched the 2019 Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme on 29th March. The closing date for receipt of applications under the scheme is 31st May, after which my officials will assess the applications received.

The Walks Scheme supports the development and maintenance of some of Ireland's key walking trails. The scheme currently covers 39 trails, with payments made to approximately 1,900 private land-holders to maintain those trails.

The Programme for a Partnership Government included a commitment to increase the number of walks covered by the scheme. In line with this commitment, funding for the scheme was doubled in Budget 2019 - from €2 million to €4 million.

In February of this year, I invited Expressions of Interest for the inclusion of additional trails in the Walks Scheme. Trail management committees, community groups and other interested bodies should contact their Local Authority or Local Development Company with regard to this process. To allow sufficient time for proposals to be developed against the scheme criteria, there is no closing date for the submission of Expressions of Interest at this time.

LEADER Programmes

48. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of the roll-out of the Leader programme as at the end of April 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22722/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): LEADER is a multi-annual programme with a budget of €250 million for the period 2014-2020. The current LEADER programme effectively became operational in the second half of 2016, following the signing of Funding Agreements with most of the Local Action Groups who deliver the programme.

The volume of LEADER project approvals has increased substantially since the beginning of 2018 in particular. At the end of April 2019, 1,867 projects were approved for funding of over €64.3 million. This represents a three-fold increase in project approvals since December 2017.

A further 403 LEADER projects with a value of €25.4 million were at earlier stages of the approvals process. I expect to see the approvals and expenditure figures continue to rise sub-

stantially as the year progresses.

Overall, programme expenditure to end of April was almost €48 million. This has increased further to €49.5 million since the start of May. Expenditure includes both project costs and the costs of the Local Action Groups who administer the programme and work with promoters to develop projects. Project expenditure will increase further throughout the year as approved works are completed and claims are submitted to my Department for payment.

The level of project approvals and the increase in expenditure shows that we are now making good progress in the delivery of the LEADER programme. However, I will continue to closely monitor the programme carefully to ensure that the budget available is fully utilised.

Rural Broadband Scheme

49. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of discussions he has had with the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment with regard to broadband provision in rural areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22889/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Seán Canney): As Minister of State with responsibility for Community Development, Natural Resources and Digital Development, I work across both the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment. I also chair the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce which was established in 2016 to identify and overcome obstacles to mobile phone and broadband services.

As someone who comes from a rural area, I am keenly aware of the importance of access to high-speed, high-quality broadband services in rural areas and I engage regularly with my Ministerial colleagues in both Departments in finding ways to remove barriers to the rollout of telecommunications infrastructure.

The Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment has overall policy responsibility for the National Broadband Plan. However, the Department of Rural and Community Development works closely with that Department and with Local Authorities to help prepare rural communities for the roll out of high-speed broadband.

The Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce, which is co-ordinated by officials of the two Departments, has successfully addressed a number of complex issues over the last three years, many of which will facilitate the roll-out of the National Broadband Plan when the contract for the State Intervention Area is signed. Quarterly Progress Reports on the work of the Taskforce are published on the websites of both Departments, with the most recent report covering the first quarter of 2019.

The Department of Rural and Community Development also supports preparations for the roll out of the National Broadband Plan through the network of Broadband Officers located in each Local Authority. The Broadband Officers are co-funded by the Department and provide a vital point of contact for industry and the public regarding telecoms issues.

The Broadband Officers are also leading on the development of Digital Strategies for each Local Authority. These Digital Strategies will enable communities to make full use of digital technology in their daily lives, and will be particularly beneficial when the Broadband Plan is rolled out.

Western Development Commission Remit

50. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of the operations of the Western Development Commission and its role in the development of the Atlantic economic corridor; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22728/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Programme for a Partnership Government committed to both strengthening the role of the Western Development Commission (WDC) and to developing the Atlantic Economic Corridor initiative. As the Programme for Government has been implemented, my Department has built on the synergies between these two objectives.

My Department has been working with Board and Chief Executive of the WDC to establish the agency as a valued enabler of the Government's regional development objectives under Project Ireland 2040. The WDC's role in this regard is reflected in the agency's new 5-year Strategy which was published recently.

The AEC initiative aims to maximise the assets of the region from Kerry to Donegal and to better utilise the economic hubs, clusters and catchments of the area to attract investment, support job creation and contribute to an improved quality of life for people who live in the region.

The Atlantic Economic Corridor Taskforce was established in March 2017 to oversee the initiative. The Taskforce, which I now chair, includes representatives of key public and private sector stakeholders, including the WDC.

In December 2018, I requested the WDC to take on the role of Co-ordinating body for the AEC initiative. Since then, the WDC has been transitioning into this role, by providing a secretariat function to the AEC Taskforce subgroups, supporting the work of the AEC Officers who have been appointed by the Local Authorities along the Corridor, and by assisting my Department in identifying and developing projects to support the goals of the AEC initiative.

A significant project in this regard is the development of an AEC-wide 'Hub Network'. Preliminary data indicates that there is a sizable number of Enterprise Hubs, Digital Hubs and other Hubs in the AEC area. The WDC, in collaboration with my Department and other key stakeholders, will develop an strategy to co-ordinate the activities of these hubs and better align the services they provide. I have allocated €1 million from the Dormant Accounts Fund to support this project, which will place a focus on enabling disadvantaged people and communities to utilize the hub space.

It is envisaged that this co-ordinated 'Hub Network' will also serve as a critical asset to support business development, encourage innovation and to attract investment to the AEC region.

The WDC's 5 year strategy commits the agency to supporting the AEC initiative as a flagship project. I am confident that the talent, regional knowledge and enthusiasm which the Board and staff of the WDC bring to the AEC initiative will be immensely valuable going forward.

LEADER Programmes Administration

51. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the response he received from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to his recent letter on treating community groups applying for LEADER funding with greater flexibility in the procurement process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22874/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): Earlier this year, I received an invitation from the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform to input into the Office of Government Procurement's (OGP's) review of the Public Procurement Programme.

My Department wrote to the OGP in response to this request to suggest that consideration should be given to adopting a more simplified process under procurement rules for community-based groups applying for programmes such as LEADER. Such groups often procure goods and services of relatively low value, yet they are required to follow the full rigours of the national procurement guidelines. These community-based groups do not have public procurement expertise and the procurement requirements can deter good projects or lead to additional costs for the groups.

My Department received a response from the OGP in recent days. My officials are currently considering this response and will continue to engage with the OGP and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform on the matter as appropriate.

Charitable and Voluntary Organisations

52. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if he or his officials have been briefed by the board of Pobal in relation to its review of its charitable status; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22886/19]

57. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if he has considered the independent review of the charitable status of Pobal; when the review will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22878/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I propose to take Questions Nos. 52 and 57 together.

Pobal is a not for profit company which was originally established by Government in 1992 as Area Development Management (ADM) Ltd. Charitable status was granted to the company by the Revenue Commissioners on the 20th November 1996. In 2005 ADM was re-named Pobal. In accordance with Section 40 of the Charities Act, 2009, Pobal was entered onto the Register of Charitable Organisations on 16 October 2014.

The basis for Pobal having charitable status is tied to the objects of the Company, which are specified in its Memorandum and Articles of Association. I am satisfied that Pobal is fully compliant with the relevant legislative requirements including those of the Charities Act, 2009.

Pobal has undertaken a review of its charitable status and in that regard sought independent legal advice on the matter. The review has now concluded. The Board of Pobal met on Friday, May 24th, 2019 to finalise their discussions relating to the review of charitable status. I understand that it was decided by the Board that it was appropriate for the company to retain charitable status. An update will be provided at the next scheduled liaison meeting with my Department in early June.

National Volunteering Strategy

53. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development his proposals for the development of a national volunteering strategy and for the drawing up of a national social enterprise policy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22868/19]

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Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The development of a National Volunteering Strategy and a National Social Enterprise Policy are key priorities for my Department this year.

In relation to the Volunteering Strategy, my Department has collated the information received from a Call for Input (CFI) exercise last December that was designed as a first step towards developing a draft National Volunteering Strategy. This material is being presented to a National Advisory Group on Volunteering at its inaugural meeting today, 29th May 2019. The group is made up of a range of stakeholders representing Government and the community and voluntary sector.

It is anticipated that the draft strategy will be completed later this year, following which there will be a further opportunity for the public to provide input before the strategy is presented to Government for approval.

My Department published a draft National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland in April for public consultation. The consultation closed on 14th May and over 100 submissions were received. My officials are now reviewing these submissions which will help to inform the final draft of the policy. The policy will be brought to Government for approval in the near future, prior to its launch and publication.

The Social Enterprise Policy will complement the National Volunteering Strategy and a new 10-Year Strategy to Support the Community and Voluntary Sectors in Ireland, which is also being developed by my Department. Taken together, this suite of initiatives will support the full range of organisations that are providing services to communities or tackling social issues, whether through a social enterprise model or through more traditional community services delivery.

Local Improvement Scheme Funding

54. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development his plans to provide additional funding for the local improvement scheme in County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22730/19]

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.

On 7th February last I launched the 2019 LIS and allocated a sum of €10 million to Local Authorities under the scheme. The number and location of roads to benefit from improvement works in 2019 is a matter for the relevant Local Authority. Funding Allocations on a county by county basis can be found on the Gov.ie website at the following link: <https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/d309ea-local-improvement-scheme/>. Co. Wexford received an allocation of €329,878 under the 2019 LIS.

It is clear that there is a continuing demand for LIS funding in rural communities across Ireland. The level of funding available for the scheme is determined as part of the annual Estimates process.

Rural Broadband Scheme

55. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the implications for rural Ireland of the roll-out of the national broadband plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22720/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Seán Canney): As the Deputy will be aware, on 7th May and following a detailed tendering process, the Government announced its intention to award the contract to a preferred bidder for the roll out of high speed broadband in areas not covered on a commercial basis.

Broadband connectivity is vital to supporting all of our future living standards and this project will have a transformative effect on rural Ireland, encompassing 540,000 premises and 1.1 million people.

Every policy area that supports our society and our economy will require effective broadband connectivity in the future – this includes areas such as education, health, transport, farming, and employment.

The NBP will facilitate a structural shift in how people live and work in rural Ireland. The availability of high-speed broadband will enable their full participation in the digital economy and in society more generally.

For example, the rapid deployment of high speed broadband is critically important for farm and food businesses in rural areas. On-line application for the Basic Payment Scheme is mandatory under EU law since 2018.

Businesses will be able to expand their markets by trading online, and a range of citizen-focused initiatives can be rolled-out equally across the country, improving health, safety and security, and services for isolated, disadvantaged and vulnerable communities.

Improved broadband connectivity will also help to support further job creation through remote working in regional locations. It will enable employers to access a wider group of skilled on-line workers who might not otherwise be available to them.

It will also help to revitalise and re-establish rural Ireland as an attractive place to live and work.

The Government has a responsibility to increase the economic prospects for those living in rural areas. The National Broadband Plan will contribute significantly to this objective by closing the gap between the level of broadband service available in urban centres and rural areas.

Local Improvement Scheme

56. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of the 2019 local improvement scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22724/19]

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 the reintroduction of the scheme I have allocated over €48 million to it, which has led to the completion of over 1,400 roads.

I launched the 2019 LIS on 7th February last and allocated a sum of €10 million to Local Authorities under the scheme. Decisions on the number and location of roads to benefit from improvement works in 2019 is a matter for the relevant Local Authority. Funding allocations on a county by county basis can be found on the Gov.ie website at the following link <https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/d309ea-local-improvement-scheme/>.

Question No. 57 answered with Question No. 52.

Rural Regeneration and Development Fund

58. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the spend to date in 2019 under the rural regeneration fund; the expenditure expected by year end; the value of the grant approvals to date under the fund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22845/19]

61. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the position regarding the first allocation under the rural regeneration and development fund; the project review mechanisms in place; when the second call for funding under the fund will be announced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22881/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I propose to take Questions Nos. 58 and 61 together.

The Rural Regeneration and Development Fund seeks to support ambitious and strategic projects which have the potential to transform rural economies and communities. The Government has committed €1 billion over 10 years to the Fund and €315 million is allocated to the Fund for the period 2019-2022. My Department has allocated €52 million from the Fund to support the RRDF projects in 2019.

The first call for applications for the Fund closed at the end of September. There were 280 applications submitted to the first call. 126 applications related to Category 1, “shovel ready” projects. 154 related to Category 2 projects, those which needed development funding to become potential Category 1 applications in future calls for applications.

In November 2018, I announced the first set of 18 successful Category 1 projects. These 18 projects will receive €24.4m in funding and have an overall value of €34.6m. In February 2019, I announced another 20 successful Category 1 projects and 46 Category 2 projects. These 66 projects will receive €62m in funding and have a total project value of €83m. Overall, the first call from the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund will provide €86m in support for projects worth €117m.

To ensure the prompt delivery of projects, my Department has drawn up contractual obligations for successful applicants with funding based on the achievement of key milestones in the projects. In that regard, while there has been no drawdown from the Fund to date though I am pleased that a number of the projects are approaching the completion of their first key milestone.

I launched the second call for applications to the Fund in April 2019. This current call is open to Category 1, shovel-ready, applications only and the closing date is 12 noon on Tuesday, 6th August 2019. A further call for Category 2 applications will follow in October. Information on the requirements of the second call are on the gov.ie website and information sessions

to assist potential applicants will be held by my Department.

59. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the amount approved for projects to date under the current LEADER programme by local action group, LAG; the total paid out to date by LAG; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22846/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): LEADER is a multi-annual programme with a total budget of €250 million over the period 2014-2020. €220 million of this funding has been allocated to the Local Action Groups (LAGs) throughout the country who deliver the LEADER programme. This funding is allocated to the LAGs for the full period of the programme.

The remaining €30 million is available for thematic schemes to be delivered at a national level and is allocated as projects are approved.

Total expenditure on the LEADER programme since it commenced, effectively in 2016, is in excess of €50 million. This includes expenditure on projects and the operating costs of the Local Action Groups.

The level of project activity under the LEADER programme has increased significantly over the last year, and 1,991 projects have now been approved for funding of almost €69 million. A further 373 project applications, requesting in excess of €26 million, are at various stages in the approval process.

Table 1 provides a breakdown of the projects approved by each Local Action Group together with details of the project payments made to date. The figures do not include expenditure or approvals under national-level thematic schemes, such as the LEADER Food Initiative and Co-operation Projects, as they are not funded from the LAGs' existing allocations.

Table 1: Total LEADER Project approvals and payments by LAG as at 26th May 2019

Local Action Group	Project Allocation	Projects Approved	Projects Approved	Project Payments made
Name	Value	No	Value	Value
Carlow	€4,797,602	32	€1,926,280	€1,047,831
Cavan	€6,391,715	48	€2,937,974	€1,035,548
Clare	€6,645,000	126	€2,437,046	€716,579
Cork North	€3,810,543	52	€1,944,561	€559,971
Cork South	€2,803,477	22	€873,004	€291,376
Cork West	€3,691,755	27	€1,265,267	€203,364
Donegal	€9,631,407	108	€4,805,920	€2,541,080
Dublin Rural	€4,777,829	49	€1,433,976	€467,865
Galway East	€5,741,888	47	€1,768,286	€53,019
Galway West	€3,425,425	31	€685,654	€215,412
Kerry	€7,650,904	222	€4,402,952	€1,632,026
Kildare	€3,946,200	21	€912,242	€211,422
Kilkenny	€5,798,949	61	€1,628,417	€686,708
Laois	€5,325,000	61	€1,374,314	€741,053
Leitrim	€4,490,000	54	€2,032,537	€453,919

Local Action Group	Project Allocation	Projects Approved	Projects Approved	Project Payments made
Limerick	€6,946,151	78	€4,294,519	€1,268,845
Longford	€5,698,500	54	€1,351,669	€358,706
Louth	€4,576,397	65	€1,740,610	€477,644
Mayo	€8,260,822	121	€4,811,744	€788,010
Meath	€5,137,345	50	€2,182,725	€223,235
Monaghan	€5,694,500	41	€2,420,542	€690,942
Offaly	€6,000,000	126	€2,995,345	€1,119,990
Roscommon	€6,581,283	44	€2,484,487	€546,829
Sligo	€5,720,737	84	€2,679,588	€884,398
Tipperary	€7,562,584	118	€3,926,055	€932,154
Waterford	€5,525,346	50	€3,393,484	€1,657,159
Westmeath	€5,563,495	55	€1,339,403	€402,401
Wexford	€7,580,104	95	€3,465,816	€860,356
Wicklow	€4,728,231	49	€1,331,716	€229,727
Grand Total	€164,503,189	1,991	€68,846,135	€21,297,571

Local and Community Development Programme Planning

60. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development when the mid-term review of local economic and community plans will be published; the extent to which each of the sustainable development goals have been incorporated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22879/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): Local Authorities are required to review their Local Economic and Community Plans at least once in their six year life cycle and such a review is now due on the current plans. However, the 2014 Local Government Act also requires each LECP to be consistent with any regional spatial and economic strategy or, as appropriate, regional planning guidelines.

The Regional Assemblies are currently finalising their Regional Economic and Spatial Strategies in line with the planning process detailed in the 2014 Act. These strategies are expected to be published towards the end of 2019.

Having consulted with Regional Assemblies in relation to the timing of Local Economic Community Plans (LECPs) mid-term reviews, officials in my Department have recommended that local authorities defer their mid-term reviews until Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy are finalised in order to ensure that the Local Authority plans are in line with the Regional strategies as required in the legislation.

My Department is currently working on a guidance note to support the LECP review process and will engage with LAs in the coming weeks to complete and circulate this guidance. This will include direction on the necessity to incorporate Sustainable Development Goals into their updated LECP.

Question No. 61 answered with Question No. 58.

Town and Village Renewal Scheme

62. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development when the reports in relation to the town and village pilot residential occupancy scheme from each of the six local authorities will be published; when the pilot scheme will be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22880/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I launched the pilot scheme to encourage increased residential occupancy in rural towns and villages last October, and announced that six towns had been invited to participate in the initial pilot.

The primary objective of the scheme is to encourage people to return to living in town centres. This is part of a wider range of measures being taken across Government to revitalise towns and villages and address the issue of vacant premises. The scheme is being led locally by the relevant Local Authorities, in close collaboration with all relevant stakeholders, and is overseen by my Department.

The 6 towns which were identified for inclusion in the pilot are:

1. Boyle, Co Roscommon
2. Callan, Co Kilkenny
3. Ballinrobe, Co Mayo
4. Banagher, Co Offaly
5. Castleblayney, Co Monaghan
6. Cappoquin, Co Waterford

Funding of up to €100,000 is being made available to each of these 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 town centres. It is envisaged that the solutions identified could lead to the development of more substantive proposals for funding from the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund in due course.

I expect to receive a report from each of the relevant Local Authorities in the next month on the progress which they have made so far. The lessons learnt through this pilot initiative can help to inform our approach to supporting and investing in rural towns and villages in the future.

Community Services Programme

63. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the details of the community services programme; the number of groups in receipt of assistance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22718/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Community Services Programme, or CSP, supports around 400 community organisations to provide local services through a social enterprise model. Funding is provided as a contribution to the cost of a manager and an agreed number of full-time equivalent (FTE) positions.

More than €46 million is available under the programme in 2019. Between part-time and full-time positions, approximately 3,000 people are supported through the CSP, comprising

1,660 FTEs and 306 managers.

Since my Department took responsibility for the programme in 2018 some 40 new organisations have entered the CSP and additional new entrants are expected during 2019.

My Department recently commenced a review of the programme. A review was considered opportune as the programme had not been formally reviewed since 2006, during which time the external environment had changed significantly.

The review will consider how the programme fits with overall Government priorities, as well as with my Department's other community programmes and policy objectives, and will help inform decisions on the future shape and structure of the CSP.

The review is being carried out by an independent review body, Indecon Consultants. It will take six months to complete, with a final report expected in early Autumn 2019.

Community Development Initiatives

64. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development further to Parliamentary Question No. 1383 of 8 May 2019, the details of the types of information received from the call for input for the national strategy on volunteering; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22717/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Seán Canney): My Department has collated information received following a Call for Input (CFI) exercise last December that was designed as a first step towards developing a draft national volunteering strategy. This material will be presented to a National Advisory Group on Volunteering, representative of relevant stakeholders, that is scheduled to have its inaugural meeting today, 29 May 2019. I look forward to progressing, in partnership, to the next phase in the development of a Strategy on Volunteering.

Among the areas that stakeholders were asked to provide their views on were:

- a definition of volunteering;
- a shared vision for the future of Irish volunteering;
- the objectives of a draft volunteering strategy;
- the volunteering community
- governance and funding issues;
- various challenges and opportunities that exist within volunteering today; and
- monitoring, measuring and evaluating the impact of volunteering in society.

My Department is making arrangements to have the submissions received from the public published online shortly as outlined in the CFI.

Appointments to State Boards

65. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the progress to date in appointing a CEO to the Charities Regulator and Pobal, respectively; and

if he will make a statement on the matter. [22869/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): A Chief Executive Officer has been appointed to Pobal. Ms. Anna Shakespeare will commence in this position on August 6th, 2019.

The process of appointing the new Chief Executive Officer of the Charities Regulatory Authority is at an advanced stage and I expect an appointment will be made in the near future.

Local Improvement Scheme

66. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of the local improvement scheme nationally; his plans to increase funding to clear backlogs on waiting lists for the scheme over the past ten years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22755/19]

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 the reintroduction of the scheme I have allocated over €48 million to the LIS, which has led to the completion of over 1,400 roads to date.

On 7th February last I launched the 2019 LIS and allocated a sum of €10 million to Local Authorities under the scheme. Decisions on the number and location of roads to benefit from improvement works in 2019 is a matter for the relevant Local Authority.

Funding allocations on a county by county basis can be found on the Gov.ie website at the following link:<https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/d309ea-local-improvement-scheme/>.

It is clear that there is a continuing demand for LIS funding in rural communities across Ireland. Funding for the scheme is determined as part of the annual Estimates process.

Departmental Expenditure

67. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development his views on expenditure in his Department up until the end of quarter 1 of 2019 with regard to 2017 and 2018 allocation made for schemes (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22888/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): My Department has made significant investment into communities and rural areas throughout Ireland since 2017 through the schemes referred to by the Deputy.

In general, the level of allocations and expenditure under these schemes has increased year on year, and I am satisfied that good progress is being made in the delivery of projects across these programmes.

In many cases, projects funded under the programmes in question can take 12 to 18 months to complete and payments are made only when significant milestones are met. In some instances, projects must be fully completed before payments will be made.

I monitor expenditure on all my Department's programmes on an on-going basis to ensure that my Department's budget is used as effectively as possible.

My Department's overall budget for 2018 was €238.5 million and expenditure was €238.8 million. This represents a spend of 99.3% of the available allocation. The shortfall related mostly to administrative savings within my Department's Vote.

Local Development Companies Administration

68. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the progress of the training programme for procurement staff in local development companies and local authorities administering the Leader programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22873/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): In April of this year, my Department commenced the delivery of a one-day training programme on procurement to upskill staff in the Local Development Companies (LDC) and the Local Authorities administering the LEADER programme. The aim of the training course is to equip project officers and other relevant personnel with the skills and knowledge to better assist project applicants in navigating the national public procurement requirements when preparing requests for tenders.

To date, training has been delivered to Local Authority and LDC staff at nine training sessions held at four regional locations. The final session is scheduled to be delivered on 11th June.

A total of 187 individuals will have received procurement training nationally by the time all of the sessions have been concluded.

Defence Forces Personnel Data

69. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of athletes being sent to China for the CISM World Games 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22969/19]

70. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if triathletes in the Defence Forces will be travelling to China to represent Ireland in the CISM World Games 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22970/19]

71. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the amount being spent to accommodate athletes travelling to the CISM World Games in China in October 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22971/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 69 to 71, inclusive, together.

The decision on whether members of the Irish Defence Forces will participate in the 2019 CISM World Games in China is currently under consideration and as such there are no details of costs and numbers travelling, if any, available at present. When the details become available

I will forward them to the Deputy.

Middle East Issues

72. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the Israel and Palestine issue was discussed at the recent EU Foreign Affairs Council meeting. [22673/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The conflict between Israel and Palestine was not on the agenda of the most recent meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council on 13 May.

The rocket fire from Gaza into Israel, and the Israeli airstrikes on Gaza which occurred in early May, were matters of deep concern to me and to the EU generally. I absolutely deplore the deaths of civilians on both sides as a result of these events. I issued a public statement on 5 May calling for de-escalation of the situation, and thankfully a ceasefire came into effect on 6 May. The situation therefore did not arise at the Council.

Election Monitoring Missions

73. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the name of the members appointed to the 2018 election observation roster; if all those placed on the roster had sought to be reappointed; if current or past departmental staff members have been appointed to the 2018 roster; the detail of each observer placed by mission since the commencement of the new roster; the costs incurred per placement; the expenses and grants paid for each observer placed; the number of observers with disabilities placed on missions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22958/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): I refer the Deputy to the responses to the following Parliamentary Questions tabled during the months of February and March which provide further information on the election observation roster, including Questions No. 152 of 12 February 2019, No. 108 of 26 February 2019 and No. 74 of 6 March 2019.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade maintains and administers a roster of suitably skilled individuals who are available to participate in election observation missions overseas, organised in the main by the EU and the OSCE. A new roster was put in place in January 2019 following a Call for Volunteers which issued in July 2018.

To date in 2019 members of that roster have participated in election observation missions in El Salvador, Nigeria, North Macedonia, Malawi, Moldova, Senegal and Ukraine. Roster members are also being nominated to participate in the forthcoming OSCE Election Observation Missions in Albania and Kazakhstan.

39 observers have participated in these missions. This comprises 2 Long Term Observers and 37 Short Term Observers. The total cost to the Department to date is €110,704.09. This cost represents the flight costs for OSCE missions, OSCE mission costs shared per observer contributing States which cover in-country costs such as drivers, fuel, interpreters, meals and accommodation, and the pre-departure expenses of €600 which are paid to every observer who participates in a mission once in a 12 month period. This payment covers the cost of pre-departure medical visits, vaccinations, transport costs to the airport of departure, where relevant

pre-departure hotel accommodation costs and other miscellaneous expenses.

While serving members of staff of the Department are not excluded from applying to be members of the roster, they are not considered to be eligible for nomination to an overseas election observer mission while in the employ of the Department. One non-established member of staff was mustered to the current roster, but will not be considered eligible for nomination to a mission until a short-term contract of employment with the Department expires.

Separately, the Director of a regional or thematic unit in the Department can nominate a desk officer from that unit to participate in a mission where it is directly relevant to their area of work. This would be an additional nomination to the roster nominations and these officials do not receive pre-departure expenses, which are only paid to roster members. For example, the First Secretary responsible for bilateral relations with Ukraine participated in the recent OSCE-ODIHR Election Observation in Ukraine. No other member of the Department's staff has participated in a mission to date in 2019.

It remains my intention that the names of the members of the new roster, and the names of those who participated in missions to date in 2019, will be released once security vetting is complete. Under the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), the Department cannot disclose the personal data of any member of the election observation roster without their specific, informed, unambiguous and freely-given consent. There is of course a public interest in disclosing the names of roster members. For this reason, as roster members are being trained, the Department is seeking the consent of individual roster members to allow publication of the names of those on the current roster once security vetting is complete. This process is ongoing.

Where a roster member with a disability requests that a reasonable accommodation be made to enable their participation in a mission, the Department's Elections Desk would liaise with the EU or OSCE-ODIHR, as appropriate, to see whether the arrangement could be facilitated, while also taking into account logistical, accommodation and security challenges on the ground. No reasonable accommodation has been requested by any of those nominated thus far from the current roster.

Departmental Funding

74. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the reason funding is only provided to UN youth volunteers for 12 months; his plans to extend the period of funding for volunteers in the future to a two-year period similar to other countries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23009/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade currently provides funding to UN Volunteers on an annual basis in line with our funding approach to other UN agencies. In 2017 and 2018 our funding was €500,000.

Our current policy is to assign volunteers through UNV for a twelve month period. This ensures that as many applicants to what is a competitive selection process have the opportunity to volunteer through the UNV programme. I am aware that a number of Irish UNVs have been successful in obtaining follow-on contracts to facilitate their continued work within the UN system as a result of their work during their UNV tenure and thereby allowing other Irish UNVs to be appointed.

I have asked my officials to consider the potential benefits and disadvantages of a two year cycle for volunteers as part of their planning process for budget 2020.

Passport Applications

75. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade further to Parliamentary Question No. 116 of 21 May 2019, the status of a passport application by a person (details supplied); the approximate date for the issuing of the passport; if the application will be expedited to allow the person to travel for Eid on 5 June 2019 in view of the fact that proof of travel has been supplied; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23053/19]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am advised by the Passport Service that the application referred to was registered with the Passport Service on May 13th.

First-time applications require additional security measures including robust identity verification and entitlement checking and, as a result, take longer to process. The Passport Service aims to process first-time passport applications submitted via Passport Express within 20 working days.

The individual's travel date of 5 June has been noted and if all is in order with the application it will be processed before that travel date.

Economic Growth

76. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance if his officials have received the recent OECD Economic Outlook Report published on 21 May 2019. [22681/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I regularly monitor the latest economic developments. My Department continually analyses short and medium-term macroeconomic trends in the European and international economy. This includes informing me of the latest forecasts of the global economy, and of our key trading partners from the international institutions.

The OECD Economic Outlook Report, published on 21 May 2019, shows a marked deterioration in the external environment. Global GDP growth slowed sharply in late 2018 and early 2019, and is stabilising at a lower level. The OECD is forecasting global growth to be 3.2 per cent this year before increasing slightly to 3.4 per cent in 2020.

Within the EU, the principal concerns at the present juncture relate to the timing and nature of Brexit, and the continued moderation of growth, which the OECD expects to remain subdued at 1.2 per cent in 2019 and 1.4 per cent in 2020.

The OECD project Ireland's economy to continue to grow strongly at 3.9 per cent this year, and 3.3 per cent in 2020. On this basis, although the pace of growth is easing, Ireland's growth is set to remain above the Euro Area average. These forecasts are in line with my Department's latest macroeconomic outlook, published in the *Stability Programme Update 2019* last month.

Escalating trade conflicts are negatively affecting the growth outlook in all countries. The key issue for Europe and the world economy is to safeguard the open, rules-based, global trading system which has been associated with raising living standards throughout the world.

Ireland, as a highly open, export focused, economy is particularly sensitive to a slowdown in world trade and overall economic growth. The slowing world growth momentum and the implications for Ireland's economy, underline the importance of improving the resilience of the economy by building fiscal buffers and focussing on productivity and competitiveness.

The OECD Economic Outlook notes that the Government should remain committed to improving the public finances, but that it should stand ready to mitigate disruptive consequences if significant risks materialise, such as a disorderly conclusion of the Brexit negotiations. Government policy is consistent with this objective. The forthcoming Summer Economic Statement will set out the broad parameters for macroeconomic growth, the fiscal outlook and constraints over the medium term in advance of this Autumn's Budget.

Corporation Tax

77. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance if the OECD report on corporation tax was discussed at recent EU Ecofin meetings or when he met his EU counterparts. [22677/19]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I recently had the opportunity to discuss the OECD work with some of my EU counterparts on the margins of Eurogroup, and there was a more in depth discussion at Ecofin, where I was represented by Minister D'Arcy.

It was agreed at the ECOFIN that the various OECD tax proposals should continue to be discussed at EU level to try and identify common areas of interest or concern. The regular taxation working parties have been mandated to explore possible areas of EU convergence, and will update Ecofin on a regular basis.

Discussions with our fellow EU Member States are important in terms of refining our understanding and maximising our contribution to the debate at OECD. We also need to explore how the various proposals at OECD may impact EU law.

Last week I attended the OECD Ministerial Council Meeting in Paris which presented a further occasion to discuss the OECD proposals with fellow Ministers.

Flood Prevention Measures

78. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of the flood defences for Athea, County Limerick; and the location in Athea they will be carried out. [22988/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): Athea, Co. Limerick, was one of 300 areas that were believed to be at significant flood risk, and hence assessed as part of the Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) Programme, the largest ever flood risk study carried out in the State. The CFRAM Programme culminated with the launch of 29 Flood Risk Management Plans on 3 May 2018, and proposed 118 new outline flood relief projects on top of the 42 major projects already completed and the 33 major schemes within the existing capital works programme of the Office of Public Works (OPW).

All of these projects are to be funded under the Government's 10 year flood risk investment programme of almost €1 billion under the *National Development Plan 2018 – 2027*.

As it is not possible to progress all 118 proposed new schemes at once, funding of €257 million was also announced for an initial phase of 50 flood relief projects throughout the country, to be progressed to detailed design and construction; including the five largest schemes identified in the Plans and 31 small, or minor projects (with an estimated preliminary project budget of under €1 million) which will be progressed directly by local authorities. The proposed flood

relief scheme in Athea is included in the 31 small projects under €1 million, and is being progressed directly by Limerick City and County Council with full funding from the OPW.

Potentially viable flood relief works for Athea (to be implemented subject to project-level assessment) are likely to include construction of 160m of flood defence walls and construction of 150m of flood defence embankments. The exact location in Athea at which the defences will be built will be determined through detailed design and project level assessment. Accordingly Limerick City and County Council is currently running a tendering process for Engineering and Environmental Consultants for this project.

Brexit Preparations

79. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the expenditure incurred to date by various Departments in acquiring and developing physical infrastructure for all possible Brexit scenarios, including, for example, buying or leasing of land at ports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22992/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The Office of Public Works has spent €7,806,963 to date on acquiring and developing physical infrastructure for use at Dublin Port, Rosslare Europort and Dublin Airport as a consequence of Brexit.

Schools Building Projects Data

80. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of school building projects at an advanced stage of architectural planning stage 2(B) - detailed design; the number of school building projects that have been at stage 2B for more than one, two, three and over five years, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22912/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): Stage 2(b) Detailed Design is arguably the most complex and detailed of all the stages in Architectural Planning.

In the majority of school building projects, this stage includes the planning application, the application for Fire Cert and Disability Access Cert and the pre-qualification of contractors. It also includes the preparation of complex and detailed tender documents.

Over the past year, some school building projects have undergone a longer than normal Stage 2b process. This can be due to a complicated or detailed planning application, appeals to An Bord Pleanála, complications around decant arrangements or issues relating to the site. Furthermore, in completing Stage 2(b), Design Teams are now required to upgrade design details to ensure that new school buildings are Near Zero Energy Buildings (NZEB) in compliance with the 2017 amendment to Part L of the current Building Regulations. In many cases this has involved a second planning application to allow for the installation of photovoltaic panels on the roof following receipt of the initial planning permission.

In addition, since November 2018, a number of competitions to pre-qualify suitable and competent building contractors have been challenged in the High Court leading to the need to completely redraft the procedures and processes involved in pre-qualification. This has impacted over the past few months on projects which were not themselves subject to a direct challenge.

In terms of current projects at Stage 2b, 7 such projects have been progressing through the

stage for 1 year, 19 projects have been progressing for 2 years, 19 further projects have been progressing for 3 years and 9 projects have been progressing through the stage for 5 years. This is in the context of currently over 70 major school building projects in advanced architectural planning and a continuous throughput of projects moving into Stage 2b and onwards towards Tender Stage and Construction.

In the small number of cases where projects have been in Stage 2b for 5 years, these projects have generally experienced planning difficulties and/or unavoidable changes to the brief or scope of the project in addition to the other general impediments to progress mentioned previously.

School Transport Provision

81. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the options available in terms of transport provision for children including children with special educational needs not attending their nearest primary and post-primary schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22922/19]

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

There are currently over 117,500 children, including over 13,000 children with special educational needs, transported in over 5,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually.

The purpose of the Primary and Post Primary School Transport Schemes is, having regard to available resources, to support the transport to and from school of children who reside remote from their nearest school. In general children are eligible for school transport if they meet the distance criteria and are attending their nearest school having regard to ethos and language.

Children who are eligible for school transport under the terms of the Primary and Post Primary School Transport Schemes and who complete the application process on time will be accommodated on school transport services where such services are in operation for the 2019/20 school year.

Children who are not eligible for school transport may apply for transport on a concessionary basis only and will be facilitated where there are existing services with spare seats available after eligible children have been accommodated. In this regard families should liaise with their local Bus Éireann office regarding the availability of transport on a concessionary basis for the next school year.

In general, children with special educational needs are eligible for school transport if they are attending the nearest school that is resourced to meet their educational needs. Eligibility is determined following consultation with the National Council for Special Education through its network of Special Education Needs Organisers.

Children who are eligible for school transport under the terms of the Special Educational Needs Scheme may be accommodated on existing services, be offered a Special Transport Grant towards the cost of making private transport arrangements or have a new service established to provide them with transport from their home to school. Children who are not eligible for school transport under the terms of this scheme may also apply for transport on a concessionary basis where suitable services are available.

The terms of the School Transport Schemes are applied equitably on a national basis.

Special Educational Needs Data

82. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of school places for students with autism in both primary and secondary schools in Dublin by location; and the steps he is taking to address the shortage of school places for students with autism in Dublin. [22952/19]

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.

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.

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. Of these, 17 are ASD Early Intervention Classes, 139 are ASD Primary Classes and 41 are ASD Post Primary Classes. Each ASD Special class provides 6 placements.

Details of all special classes for children with special educational needs are available on www.ncse.ie.

The NCSE has informed my Department that they intend to establish over 170 new special classes nationally for 2019/20 school year of which approximately 165 will be new ASD spe-

cial classes.

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

The NCSE formally advised me that there is insufficient special school and special class capacity in Dublin 15.

This letter is the formal activation of section 37A of the Education Act 1998 (as inserted by section 8 of the Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018). This contains a procedure through which the capacity of schools in an area can be tested and through which ultimately a Ministerial direction can be made requiring a school to make additional special education provision available.

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

I am encouraged that to date these efforts have resulted in progress in Dublin 15.

Engagement with schools, patrons bodies, parents and others is continuing in Dublin 15 to bring the required additional special class and special school placements on stream.

The NCSE will keep in regular contact with the Parents of the children concerned to advise them of progress and identify placements as they become available.

The new power to compel schools to make additional special education provision available has yet to be invoked.

While the NCSE and the Department continue to encourage stakeholders to open special classes, the process under the admissions legislation will continue and may lead to interaction with education providers entering a more formal process.

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

Special Educational Needs Staff Contracts

83. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason secondary school SNAs work during the month of June in view of the fact that only State exams are taking place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22978/19]

84. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding differing levels of pay between SNAs at primary and secondary level, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22979/19]

85. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason for salary and working hours disparity between primary and secondary school SNAs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22980/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I propose to take Questions Nos. 83 to 85, inclusive, together.

All Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) are paid on the SNA salary scale which is set by the Minister for Education and Skills in conjunction with the Minister for Public Expenditure and

Reform. SNAs who are employed in a regular part-time capacity are paid a pro-rata amount dependent upon their level of hours of employment. Part-time SNAs are paid on the agreed divisor rate for pay purposes for part-time SNAs which is 32 hours.

The current salary scales for Special Needs Assistants are set out Department of Education and Skills circular 0071/2018 'REVISION OF SALARIES FOR SPECIAL NEEDS ASSISTANTS (SNAs) WITH EFFECT FROM 1 JANUARY 2019'.

The position on working hours for SNAs is that there are no nationally set working hours for full-time SNAs. In this regard, the contractual position in respect of the working hours of SNAs is as outlined in their contracts of employment which were agreed with the school management authorities and the relevant Trade Unions representing SNAs (FÓRSA and SIPTU) prior to their introduction in 2005. The working week for SNAs is defined in paragraph 2.5 of their contract as follows: "You will be required to work normal classroom hours including class break periods and in addition to attend before and after school in order to help with the preparation and tidying up of classrooms, reception and dispersal of children etc. The hours of work will normally be from [xxxx] to [xxxx] daily during term time." This standard contract has been designed to be flexible to cater for the different spectrum of working hours across all the various schools including primary, post-primary and special schools. No set hours were agreed but instead, full-time SNAs are expected to work for the normal school hours in the school that they are working in, and in addition to be available for a period of time before and after school in order to help with reception and dispersal of children and preparation and tidying up of classrooms etc. These times are set locally by the school management and will vary from school to school depending on the requirements of the school. In addition, all SNAs were required to be available for a number of days at the start and finish of each school term not exceeding 12 in total. Under the Croke Park Agreement it was agreed to introduce greater flexibility to the use of these 12 days. These 12 days now equate to 72 hours (pro-rata for part-time SNAs) to be used by schools as an additional bank of hours to be utilised and delivered outside of normal school opening hours and/or the normal school year.

Furthermore, the contract for Special Needs Assistants in the post primary sector (link below) specifically requires that SNAs are required to work the month of June on examinations and work appropriate to the grade including training. This was agreed with the Unions representing SNAs (FÓRSA and SIPTU) when the contract was devised in 2005. This condition of service places a clear onus and obligation on the SNA to attend at their place of work and be available for work during the month of June. It is a matter for school management as their employer to determine the precise work that is to be completed by SNAs during the month of June. The utilisation of this period is not specifically for examinations or training purposes only, although these are two of the purposes for which the period of work can be utilised. Link to the SNA Contract of Employment for the Post Primary sector: Department of Education and Skills Circular SNA 12/05 (Post-Primary) http://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/sna12_05.pdf This contract of employment is augmented by all of the relevant Departmental Circulars governing Special Needs Assistants which detail the standardised terms and conditions of employment for SNAs. These Circulars are amended and new Circulars are issued by the Minister for Education and Skills from time to time.

Schools Refurbishment

86. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to expand and add additional resources if needed to carry out energy efficient retrofits of schools nationally in view of the fact that a climate emergency has been declared; and if he will make a state-

ment on the matter. [23037/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): In the National Development Plan (2018-2027) €2.5bn is identified for the refurbishment and construction of schools. Part of this is intended for a deep energy retrofit of schools built prior to 2008.

My Department and the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland are currently involved in an energy efficiency retrofit pilot scheme for schools. Now in its third year, the aim of the pilot is to create a scalable model for energy efficiency retrofitting of schools. This is taking place in advance of the major programme of retrofits scheduled to commence in 2022, as outlined in Project Ireland 2040. Subject to resources, it is intended to expand the intake of schools in the pilot programme in the lead up to 2022.

This pilot commenced in 2017 when ten schools received energy retrofits. In 2018 six schools received retrofits and seventeen schools are set to benefit from this scheme in 2019.

Schools Refurbishment

87. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the number of schools that are set to benefit from deep energy retrofits in 2019 will be announced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23038/19]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that a joint press release issued from myself and Minister Bruton on the 29th March announcing the details of the 2019 deep energy retrofit programme. This included a list of the seventeen schools that have been identified for these works in 2019. This initiative is to be jointly funded with a €7 million budget from the Department of Education and Skills and Department of Communication, Climate Action and Environment.

This press release is available on my Departments Website at www.education.ie.

Citizenship Applications

88. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in the determination of an application for citizenship in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22905/19]

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.

Witness Intimidation

89. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 218 of 2 April 2019, when the information will issue (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22934/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have again requested a report from An Garda Síochána in relation to the information sought by the Deputy and I will be in contact with the Deputy directly on receipt of this report.

Immigration Status

90. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current and possible residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22942/19]

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 made an application for a right of residency accompanied by a right to work in this State based on their parentage of an Irish citizen child on 25 June 2018.

The Deputy will appreciate that applications are dealt within chronological order. I understand that INIS wrote to the person concerned on 13 July 2018 and 12 November 2018 seeking further information which has since been received. I also understand that the application is now under consideration and INIS will be in contact with the person concerned, in writing, in due course.

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

Immigration Status

91. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current and expected residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22944/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that it received an application for permission to reside in this State on 18 October 2018. I understand that the ap-

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plication is under consideration and it is expected that INIS will be in contact with the person concerned, in writing, by the end of June, 2019.

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

Garda Data

92. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí by rank attached to each community policing unit in the Coolock Garda District as of 20 May 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22959/19]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Budget for An Garda Síochána is in excess of €1.7 billion this year. As the Deputy will be aware, the Garda Commissioner is statutorily responsible for the management of An Garda Síochána, and I, as Minister, do not have responsibility for this matter.

Garda management keeps the distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the optimum use is made of these resources.

Community policing is at the heart of An Garda Síochána as it recognises that every community, either urban or rural, has its own concerns and expectations. The role of a community Garda is not a specialist role in An Garda Síochána; rather it is the case that all Gardaí have a role to play in community policing in carrying out their duties. The official categorisation of Community Garda simply refers to those who are exclusively assigned to building relationships with local communities and civil society including giving talks to schools, community groups and others. It is a matter for the Divisional Chief Superintendent to determine the optimum distribution of duties among the personnel available to him or her having regard to the profile of the area and its specific needs.

The strength of the officially categorised Community Gardaí in each station in the DMR North Division on the 30 April 2019, the latest date for which figures are currently available, as supplied by the Garda Commissioner is as set out in the following table.

The Garda strength of the Coolock District for 30 April 2019, as provided by the Commissioner, is in the following file.

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

http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/An_Garda_Siochana_facts_and_figures

COMMUNITY GARDA 30/04/2019

DMR NORTH	INSPECTOR	SERGEANT	GARDA	TOTAL
Balbriggan	0	0	5	5
Ballymun	0	1	7	8
Clontarf	0	0	5	5

Questions - Written Answers

DMR NORTH	INSPECTOR	SERGEANT	GARDA	TOTAL
Coolock	0	1	3	4
Howth	0	0	1	1
Raheny	0	1	3	4
Santry	0	1	4	5
Skerries	0	0	1	1
Swords	0	1	8	9
Total	0	5	37	42

GARDA STATISTICS MONTH ENDING for D.M.R. NORTH on 30 April 2019

Division	District	Station	GD	SG	IN	SU	CS	AC	Total
D.M.R. NORTH	BAL-BRIG-GAN	BALBRIG-GAN	71	9	3	1			84
		GARRIS-TOWN	2						2
		LUSK	12	1					13
		SKERRIES	10	1					11
		TOTAL	95	11	3	1			110
	BALLY-MUN	BALLY-MUN	103	15	4	2	1		125
		DUBLIN AIRPORT	20	5					25
		SANTRY	65	8	1				74
		TOTAL	188	28	5	2	1		224
	CO-OLOCK	CO-OLOCK	95	14	5	1			115
		MALA-HIDE	24	3					27
		SWORDS	68	11	1				80
		TOTAL	187	28	6	1			222
	RAHENY	CLON-TARF	57	8					65
		HOWTH	24	4					28
		RAHENY	65	8	4	1			78
		TOTAL	146	20	4	1			171
D.M.R. NORTH Total			616	87	18	5	1		727

Garda Resources

93. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to increase the number of Garda vehicles in Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23034/19]

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 a total of €46 million for investment in the Garda fleet between 2016 and

2021. This continuing investment is intended to ensure that An Garda Síochána has a modern, effective and fit-for-purpose fleet and that Gardaí can be mobile, visible and responsive on the roads and in the community to prevent and tackle crime.

As the Deputy will appreciate, in accordance with Section 26 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005 as amended, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for managing and controlling the administration and business of An Garda Síochána. Further, the allocation of Garda resources is a matter for the Commissioner, in light of identified operational demands. This includes responsibility for the allocation of Garda vehicles among the various Garda divisions. As Minister, I have no role in these matters. I am assured, however, that Garda management keeps the distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities to ensure their optimum use.

A total of €10 million has been made available for the purchase and fit-out of Garda vehicles in 2019. I understand from the Garda authorities that this allocation will be used for purchase and fit-out of over 300 new vehicles for operational use this year.

I am further informed by the Garda authorities that as of 24 May 2019, there were 499 Garda vehicles attached to the Dublin Metropolitan Region.

Trade Union Membership

94. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to revise legislation regarding trade unions with particular reference to if it is possible for persons to be in multiple unions and if unions can on that basis request a member to resign and maintain sole membership; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22998/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen): The right of workers to form associations and the right to join a trade union are enshrined in Article 40 of the Irish Constitution.

Section 13 of the Trade Union Act 1871 provides that when Trade Unions are applying for registration with the Registrar of Friendly Societies they must provide a copy of their rules. Furthermore, Section 12 of the Trade Union Act 1941 provides that an authorised trade union must include in its rules provisions specifying the conditions of entry into and cessation of membership of such trade union.

Therefore, issues relating to trade union membership are matters for individual trade unions and I as Minister have no function in such matters. Furthermore, I have no plans to introduce or amend legislation in this regard.

Departmental Policy Functions

95. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health if officials in his Department work with officials in other Departments on the formulation of health policy. [22679/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My Department, like other Government Departments, is committed to a wide range of cross-Departmental and cross-agency policy work.

Recent examples of this collaborative approach to health policy development include the Policy Review of Sexual Assault Treatment Unit Service (Department of Health, HSE, Department of Justice, SATUs); The Housing Options of Our Ageing Population Policy Statement

(Department of Health/Department of Housing Planning and Local Government) and the ‘Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery’ 2017-2025, a whole-of-Government response to the problem of drug and alcohol misuse in Ireland.

Harnessing the collective expertise and experience across Departments strengthens policy coherence, and enhances our understanding of the impact of policy, helping us to better serve the needs of our citizens.

Autism Support Services

96. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the number of assessments of need carried out by the ASD team located in Waterford city and county in each of the years 2016 to 2018, by age groups of zero to six, seven to 12 and 13 to 18 years of age in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22901/19]

97. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the average length of time a child may be waiting for an assessment of need for an ASD diagnosis in Waterford city and county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22902/19]

98. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the reason some HSE disability services in various CHOs are reluctant to accept privately sourced assessment of needs diagnosis for ASD which parents have privately undertaken from qualified medical personnel due to the length of the waiting lists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22903/19]

99. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health when and the way in which the 15 additional posts promised under the 2019 National Service Plan of the HSE to improve access and assessments for children in County Waterford and the south-east will be allocated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22904/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I propose to take Questions Nos. 96 to 99, inclusive, together.

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

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

Audiology Services Data

100. **Deputy Louise O’Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if the audiologist working with the HSE to screen and monitor persons with hearing impairments in counties Westmeath, Roscommon, Laois and Offaly is no longer employed by the HSE; the length of time the position of audiologist been vacant; his plans to rectify the situation; the number of patients seeking screening and monitoring that had their appointments cancelled or postponed as a result of there being no audiologist available to provide this service in the counties in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22935/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for reply to the Deputy.

Audiology Services Provision

101. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health his plans to address concerns of parents with children with hearing impairments in counties Westmeath, Roscommon, Laois and Offaly that have had their screening and monitoring appointments cancelled due to the fact the audiologist employed by the HSE to provide this service in the counties is no longer employed by the HSE; and the measures being put in place to ensure children are regularly monitored by a hearing specialist. [22936/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for reply to the Deputy.

HSE Planning

102. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 43 of 15 May 2019, the recommended medical, infrastructural and accessibility designation criteria for a major trauma centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22937/19]

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.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

103. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health when the HSE plans to provide pembrolizumab to public cancer patients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22940/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has statutory responsibility for medicine pricing and reimbursement decisions, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013. As Minister for Health, I do not have any statutory power or function in relation to the reimbursement of medicines.

In Ireland the majority of patients access medicines through the publicly funded Community Drug Schemes.

In line with the 2013 Act and the national framework agreed with industry, if a company would like a medicine to be reimbursed by the HSE, it must apply to have the new medicine added to the reimbursement list.

Reimbursement is for licensed indications which have been granted market authorisation by the European Medicines Agency (EMA) or the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA).

HSE decisions on which medicines are reimbursed by the taxpayer are made on objective, scientific and economic grounds, on the advice of the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE).

Pembrolizumab has market authorisation in Ireland/the EU for a number of indications.

The HSE has approved the reimbursement of Pembrolizumab for the following indications:

- as monotherapy for the treatment of advanced (unresectable or metastatic) melanoma in adults;

- as monotherapy for the first-line treatment of metastatic non-small cell lung carcinoma (NSCLC) in adults whose tumours express PD-L1 with a $\geq 50\%$ tumour proportion score (TPS) with no EGFR or ALK positive tumour mutations;

- as monotherapy for the treatment of adult patients with relapsed or refractory classical Hodgkin lymphoma (cHL) who have failed autologous stem cell transplant (ASCT) and brentuximab vedotin (BV), or who are transplant-ineligible and have failed BV.

It should be noted that the first part of the last indication is not reimbursed because the HSE is already reimbursing another immunotherapy with similar efficacy (nivolumab) at lower cost. Patients who are transplant-ineligible and have failed BV can receive reimbursement support for pembrolizumab, as nivolumab does not have market authorisation for this sub-group of patients.

Pembrolizumab is currently being assessed by the HSE, using the criteria as set out in the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, for a number of other indications for which it has received marketing authorisation.

Medicinal Products Availability

104. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if pembrolizumab has received marketing authorisation here and in the EU, respectively, for the treatment of cervical and colorectal cancer. [22941/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I wish to advise the Deputy that pembrolizumab has marketing authorisation in Ireland and the EU for a number of indications and is reimbursed by the HSE for some of those indications. However, pembrolizumab does not have marketing authorisation in Ireland or the EU for the treatment of cervical or colorectal cancer.

It should be noted clinical trials for various immunotherapies, including pembrolizumab, are ongoing globally for a range of other possible indications, which may receive marketing authorisation in the EU over the next number of years. Each of those indications will be considered for reimbursement as market authorisations are granted and applications received.

Services for People with Disabilities

105. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be given an urgent date for an appointment for an assessment of need, early intervention, genetics and neurodevelopment. [22943/19]

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

106. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Clare will receive cataract surgery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22947/19]

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.

Healthcare Infrastructure Provision

107. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the building of a new HSE nursing home (details supplied) in Dublin 24 has caused significant issues for residents living in an area; if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that the construction of the nursing home is ongoing and the lights in the facility are being left on all night each night; the reason for same; and the amount the HSE is spending each week on electricity for the building. [22951/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of public healthcare infrastructure projects, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to you in relation to this matter.

Paediatric Services

108. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health his plans to appoint a new consultant to the diabetic paediatric service in Cork University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22954/19]

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 Consultant Recruitment

109. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health the reason another consultant has not been allocated to the diabetic adult services team in Cork University Hospital in view of the fact that one consultant clinic is closed to new patients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22955/19]

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 Consultant Recruitment

110. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health if a psychologist will be appointed in Cork University Hospital to assist children come to terms with their diabetes diagnosis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22956/19]

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

111. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health his plans to allocate more dieticians to the diabetic services team in Cork University Hospital in view of the fact that there is one and a half dieticians at the hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22957/19]

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.

Health Services Provision

112. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if and when occupational therapy and an appointment for a child psychologist will be facilitated in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22963/19]

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.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

113. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if medical equipment can be provided to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22964/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for reply to the Deputy.

Vaccination Programme

114. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health if the HPV vaccine is to be extended to boys; when the report of the health technology assessment being carried out by HIQA in respect of the HPV vaccine for boys will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22966/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC) is an independent committee of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland which is comprised of experts from several specialties, including infectious diseases, paediatrics, and public health, which makes recommendations to my Department on vaccination policy in Ireland. Its recommendations are based on the prevalence of the relevant disease in Ireland and international best practice in relation to immunisation. NIAC made a recommendation that the HPV vaccine should be given to boys.

On foot of NIAC's recommendation, my Department asked the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) to undertake a health technology assessment (HTA) in relation to extending the national immunisation schedule to include human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination of boys. HIQA completed the HTA in Q4 2018 and published its report on its website on 7 December 2018.

The HTA recommended that the HPV immunisation programme be extended to include boys with the introduction of a 9-valent HPV vaccine. Inclusion of a catch-up programme for males in sixth year in school as part of a gender neutral programme was not considered a cost-effective option and therefore not recommended. A policy decision was made to extend the HPV immunisation programme to include boys and introduce a 9-valent HPV vaccine starting in September 2019.

The HSE National Immunisation Office is developing information materials and a communication strategy for a gender neutral HPV programme which will be available for parents and healthcare professionals in advance of the start of the gender neutral programme.

Health Services Provision

115. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the number of nurses employed to assist with persons who have Parkinson's disease; his plans to employ more nurses in the area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22967/19]

116. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health his plans to assist persons with Parkinson's disease; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22968/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 115 and 116 together.

Health services are provided and funded by the HSE. The objective of the HSE, as stated in the Health Act, is to use the resources available to it in the most beneficial, effective and efficient manner to improve, promote and protect the health and welfare of the public.

The HSE National Service Plan 2019 was published on 20 December 2018. The Service Plan sets out the type and volume of services that the HSE will provide for a budget of over €16 billion.

Each year the HSE sets out the type and volume of health and social care services that it will provide in its National Service Plan, having regard to the level of funding provided to it. It includes a National Scorecard of priority areas to be reported against and a National Performance

Indicator suite which sets out a wide range of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) against which progress is reported on throughout the year.

KPIs fall into one of four key quadrants:

- Finance, Governance and Compliance;
- Workforce;
- Access and Integration;
- Quality and Safety.

As the Deputy's questions relate to the provision of services, I have arranged for the questions to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Admissions

117. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health when he expects the outcome of a review in relation to admissions policy for a psychiatric hospital (details supplied); if the review has yet commenced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22972/19]

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

118. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health if it is policy not to provide low or medium support hostel accommodation for persons with mental health issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22973/19]

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 Services

119. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health if he will seek funding in budget 2020 to provide resources for the establishment of a dedicated department at a university hospital here to treat persons with Ehlers-Danlos syndrome and hypermobility spectrum disorders to be led by a specialist consultant on the conditions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22975/19]

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.

Medical Conditions

120. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the steps he is taking to

address the needs of persons with Ehlers-Danlos syndrome and hypermobility spectrum disorders; his plans to improve services for persons with the conditions in 2019 and 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22976/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Appointments Status

121. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive a hospital appointment with an orthopaedic surgeon at the Midland Regional Hospital, Tullamore. [22981/19]

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 Procedures

122. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the number and types of surgical procedures and treatments carried out in 2018 and to date in 2019 by each public and private hospital under the NTPF scheme; the number by each public and private facility contracted under the fund; the quantum and types of procedures and treatments provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22990/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The information requested by the Deputy is currently being collated by officials in my Department and will be provided to the Deputy directly as soon as it becomes available.

Hospital Appointments Status

123. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive a date for surgery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22991/19]

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

individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

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

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

Health Services

124. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the steps he will take regarding the new in loco parentis rule which means that parents who are carers cannot leave their children with a qualified nurse unless another competent nurse to be present is nominated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23000/19]

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.

Home Care Packages Provision

125. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 52 of 5 February 2019, the progress he has made in examining the disparity of home support services for the elderly in CHO area 7; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23036/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): Improving access to home support is a priority for Government. Over the past four years we have seen a considerable increase of nearly €140 million in the budget which has grown from €306 million in 2015 to almost €446 million in 2019. Over 53,000 people will receive more than 18 million home support hours this year, including intensive home care packages to 235 people.

Despite this significant level of service provision, the demand for home support continues to grow. The allocation of funding for home supports across the system, though significant, is finite and services must be delivered within the funding available.

Arrangements for home supports have developed over the years with a significant local focus although it is acknowledged that there may be a considerable variation in access to services in different parts of the country. There is also a considerable demand for home support services over and above existing service levels.

The HSE has assured the Department that those people who are on a waiting list are reviewed, as funding becomes available, to ensure that individual cases continue to be dealt with on a priority basis within the available resources and as determined by the local front line staff who know and understand the clients' needs, and who undertake regular reviews of those care needs to ensure that the services being provided remain appropriate.

We are aiming to improve home support services so that people can remain living with con-

confidence, dignity and security in their own homes. While the existing service is delivering crucial support across the country, it is recognised that home support services need to be augmented to better meet the changing needs of our older population. The Department is currently engaged in a detailed process to develop a new stand-alone, statutory scheme for the financing and regulation of home support services.

The allocated Home support budget for Community Healthcare Organisation Area 7 is approximately €54.5m which is an increase of almost €6m on last year's allocated budget and the HSE target is to deliver 2.1m hours to 6,192 people. As the allocation of home supports is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Ministerial Meetings

126. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health if he has met the new Director General of the HSE since their appointment. [22675/19]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Yes, I have met with Paul Reid, the new Director General, since his appointment. I have had a one to one meeting as well as attending the Joint Committee on Health with Mr. Reid on 22 May last.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme

127. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Health if there are circumstances in which a refund can be sought by persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23050/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The Nursing Homes Support Scheme is a system of financial support for those in need of long-term nursing home care. Participants contribute to the cost of their care according to their means while the State pays the balance of the cost. The Scheme aims to ensure that long-term nursing home care is accessible and affordable for everyone and that people are cared for in the most appropriate settings.

The Department of Health agree a set level of funding for the NHSS with the HSE each year having regard for the demand for the Scheme and the overall fiscal position. The 2019 budget for NHSS is €985.8m. In order to manage the demand for the Scheme over a 12 month period, the HSE has a target of maintaining the wait time for funding approval at no more than 4 weeks. This target has consistently been achieved since April 2015 and it is a significant reduction from the October 2014 wait time of 15 weeks. The target of 4 weeks for approval of funding remains a commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government. State support can only be paid once a financial assessment has been completed and authorised.

The National Guidelines for the Standardised Implementation of the NHSS provide that State Support and the Nursing Home Loan should be paid in respect of qualified applicants from either the date that the application is approved, or date of admission to the nursing home whichever is the later. Therefore in the case where an applicant is already residing in a nursing home when they apply for State support through NHSS this support will be paid from the date that the application is approved and cannot be backdated to the admission date.

This provision enables the HSE to manage the budget and commitments under the Scheme

over a 12 month period, ensuring that long-term residential care remains accessible and affordable for those that require it.

Animal Disease Controls

128. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the procedures in place to detect disease on imported bees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22924/19]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): We all recognise the important role bees play within agriculture and for biodiversity as both pollinators and honey producers. In support of this role, my Department implements the animal health requirements for trade in bees (*Apis mellifera* and *Bombus spp*) between EU Member States that are contained in **Council Directive 92/65/EEC** (as amended). This Directive harmonised rules for intra-Community trade and established the animal health guarantees for trade between Member States. Rules governing checks on imports contained in **Council Directive 90/425/EEC** also apply.

All imports of bees from other EU Member States must be notified to my Department 24 hours before the consignment's arrival in this country. A Health Certificate must accompany each consignment of bees which must be certified by the competent authority in the Member State of origin. This health certificate ensures bees are healthy and free of disease and is checked for compliance by my Department before entry of the imported bees into Ireland. Consignments of bees that do not have a Health Certificate accompanying them are destroyed.

It is important to note that bees may not be imported directly into Ireland from countries outside the EU.

Postal Codes

129. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the steps a person (details supplied) can take in order to receive an Eircode; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22914/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): Eircodes are assigned to new property addresses using a valid postal address and verified geo-locations. An Post collects information on new and existing buildings, as well as changes to existing addresses and Ordnance Survey Ireland provides the geo-locations for these buildings. An Post GeoDirectory, issue a new release of the GeoDirectory database file on a quarterly basis to Capita Business Support Services Ireland, trading as Eircode, in accordance with their licence agreement.

Each new address assigned an Eircode is published on the free to use Eircode Finder website, a notification letter is issued to the occupant containing the Eircode of that address and the latest updated Eircode database is made available to licenced businesses for their use. Eircode have informed my Department that 78,400 addresses have been assigned an Eircode since the launch in 2015.

My Department has requested Eircode to contact and liaise directly with the individual in question regarding the assignment of an Eircode for this new property.

However, in recognition of the fact that earlier assignment of Eircodes to new builds is

desirable, my officials are working with An Post, Ordnance Survey Ireland (OSi), An Post Geo-Directory and Capita to improve and expedite the existing process.

Broadband Service Provision

130. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if fibre broadband will be installed at a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22953/19]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton): The premises referenced by the Deputy, is in the AMBER area on the National Broadband Plan (NBP) High Speed Broadband Map, which is available on my Department's website at www.broadband.gov.ie. The AMBER areas represent the target areas for the proposed State led Intervention under the NBP.

This intervention is the subject of the procurement process to engage a company to build, operate and maintain the NBP State intervention network. 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.

The Government Decision of 7 May 2019 means that it is intended to award the State Intervention contract to the Bidder. This award is subject to the completion of the final stage of the procurement process, including finalisation of financial and legal documents. Deployment of the NBP State Intervention network will commence shortly after contract signature. 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 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.

Public Transport Provision

131. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the degree to which assistance is available to facilitate localised transport with particular reference to areas not covered by public transport with a view to facilitating shopping, socialising or community interaction with specific reference to the need to prevent isolation in either urban or rural communities nationally and in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23029/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport.

The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for securing the provision of public passenger transport services nationally. It also has national responsibility for integrated local and rural transport, including management of the Rural Transport Programme

which now operates under the Local Link brand.

In light of the NTA's responsibilities in this matter I have forwarded the your question to the NTA for direct reply to you. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Mechanically Propelled Vehicles

132. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the Road Safety Authority will carry out research into the way in which e-scooters and other such vehicles are regulated in other countries, particularly other member states; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22906/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Escooters and other such vehicles fall into the category of a mechanically propelled vehicle under the Road Traffic Act 1961. Any users of such vehicles in a public place must have insurance, road tax and a driving licence, with penalties under road traffic laws (including fixed charge notices, penalty points, fines and possible seizure of the vehicle) for not being in compliance with these requirements.

As it is currently not possible to tax or insure escooters or other such vehicles, they are not considered suitable for use in a public place.

I have requested the Road Safety Authority to research how escooters and other such vehicles are regulated in other countries, particularly other Member States. I am keen to understand the road safety implications of the use of such vehicles on public roads, especially when interacting with other vehicles.

I will make a decision on whether or not to amend existing legislation when I have received and considered the outcome of the Authority's research, and not before then. I will need to be satisfied that permitting such vehicles on our roads will not give rise to safety concerns, both for the users themselves and for all other road users including cyclists, pedestrians and motorists. I have been advised that the report will be submitted to me within the next few weeks.

Bus Services

133. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the commitment under the BusConnects plan to provide accessible buses for wheelchair users; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22908/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure including BusConnects.

Noting the NTA's responsibility in the matter, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for a direct reply. Please contact my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 days.

Public Service Vehicles

134. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the targets and timelines he has set out in order to increase the number of accessible taxis in the fleet; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22909/19]

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 regulation of the small public service vehicle industry is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA), under the provisions of the Taxi Regulation Act 2013. The NTA also has statutory responsibility for promoting the development of an integrated, accessible public transport network under the Dublin Transport Authority Act 2008.

In light of the NTA's responsibilities in these matters, I have forwarded your question to the NTA for direct reply to you. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Public Transport Provision

135. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to invest in accessible coach stop infrastructure in Bus Éireann under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 9 on accessibility; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22910/19]

136. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to ensure a fully wheelchair accessible rail service under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 9 on accessibility; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22911/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 135 and 136 together.

As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport.

Under the Dublin Transport Authority Act 2008, the National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for promoting the development of an integrated, accessible public transport network.

Accessibility features, such as wheelchair access and audio/visual aids, are built into all new public transport infrastructure projects and vehicles from the design stage, including the 17 new rail stations built since 2007. Newer systems such as LUAS are fully accessible.

The National Development Plan (NDP) for the period 2018-2027, sets out the national vision and ambition for the delivery of key critical infrastructure over the 10 year period of the Plan, including in relation to public transport infrastructure. Investment in public transport will be accelerated under the NDP to support the development of an integrated and sustainable national public transport system. A number of key new major public transport programmes are due to be delivered under the NDP over the period to 2027. As with all new recently developed public transport projects, these programmes will be fully accessible as part of the normal design.

However, work remains to be done in terms of the retro-fitting of older infrastructure to make it accessible for people with a disability. In particular, gaps remain in relation to railway

infrastructure and facilities as most of the rail network was originally developed during the Victorian era, as well as in bus stop infrastructure outside of the cities.

To address infrastructural legacy issues, my Department funds a programme of accessibility improvement grants to upgrade existing and older infrastructure and facilities, such as the installation of accessible bus stops, upgrading train stations to make them accessible to wheelchair users, and providing grant support for the introduction of more wheelchair accessible vehicles into the taxi fleet. In this regard, I secured a trebling of the funding provided for the Accessibility Retro-fit Programme to €28 million for the period 2018 to 2021, as part of the 4-year capital envelope for public transport announced in Budget 2018. €7 million of that funding has been allocated for 2019, up from €4 million in 2018. The NTA manages the Retro-fit Programme.

In light of the NTA's responsibilities in this matter, I have forwarded your questions to the NTA for further response to you. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Bus Services

137. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to plans to introduce a bus service linking Caragh village to Naas town and Sallins train station. [22923/19]

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. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Road Projects

138. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of progress on the Macroom bypass; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22939/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the planning, design and construction of individual national roads is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Noting the above position, I have referred the question to TII for a direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Bus Services

139. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of vehicles in the Dublin Bus fleet and a company (details supplied) to date; and the number in the Dublin Bus fleet in each of the years 2009 to 2018, in tabular form. [23007/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the

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planning and development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area, including the PSO fleet for the Dublin region.

Noting the NTA's responsibility in the matter, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for a direct reply. Please contact my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 days.

Bus Services

140. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of buses removed from service during the summer period in both Dublin Bus and a company (details supplied). [23008/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue raised is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA), in conjunction with both operators. I have therefore forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Bus Services

141. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the exact low emission technology for the future purchasing of Dublin buses has been determined; the work being prepared for the implementation of no longer purchasing diesel only buses from July 2019 onwards; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23039/19]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area, including bus fleet procurement.

The Deputy is aware that *Project Ireland 2040* commits toward ending the purchase of diesel-only buses of our urban PSO bus fleets from July 2019 onward. The NTA has very recently advertised its intent to enter into a new bus purchase framework agreement which reflects that commitment and seeks to purchase hybrid buses for next year.

The medium and longer term approach to the NTA's procurement of low-carbon buses will be informed by a range of matters, including the outcomes of trials of low-emission buses, being conducted for my Department. Those trials, which are expected to conclude in the coming weeks, are examining a range of alternatives including electric, diesel-electric hybrid, hydrogen, compressed natural gas/biogas and retrofitted diesel buses to Euro VI-class standard.

I am pleased to see fulfilment of our commitment to ending the purchase of diesel-only buses for the urban PSO bus fleets and am satisfied that our on-going research on the medium and longer term technology potential will inform the NTA's approach to its bus purchase programme in the years ahead.

Childcare Services Regulation

142. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her atten-

tion has been drawn to the fact that the new regulations under the Childcare Support Act 2018 have forced crèches to reduce the number of places they are offering which will leave many children without childcare; her plans to accommodate those children; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22946/19]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) (Registration of School Age Services) Regulations 2018, followed an amendment to the Child Care Act 1991 that was made in the Childcare Support Act 2018. These regulations enable us to begin the long sought after quality assurance of school-age childcare services which is required to best serve children and families

In setting regulatory requirements, the primary consideration must be children's health, safety and well-being, and these were the primary factors considered when setting a minimum 1:12 adult-to-child ratio in the new Regulations for school-age childcare. The 1:12 ratio was selected following consultation with an expert group on school-age childcare standards, which included a range of sector representatives among its members. The working group report that was submitted to my Department in 2018 recommended a 1 adult to 11 children ratio. A 1:8 ratio was recommended in a 2005 working-group report. My Department ultimately decided on a 1:12 ratio.

I do not expect to see an overall reduction in the number of school-age childcare places as a result of the School-Age Childcare Regulations. In setting the ratio requirement, current practice was considered; while some providers have until now operated higher ratios than 1:12, many have operated lower ratios. The 1:12 ratio requirement is close to the working group recommendation, and while some individual services may have to recruit additional staff or reduce places (if they choose to keep their staffing level constant), this will not be true for all school-age childcare services. Nevertheless, following discussions with sector representatives, to give service providers time to adjust to the new requirement I made a decision earlier this year to delay the date on which the 1:12 ratio comes into force by 6 months, from 18th February to 18th August 2019. This decision recognised the difficulty for providers of adjusting their staffing ratio in the middle of the school year. If, in spite of the adjustment period for service providers, any parent finds it difficult securing a school-age childcare place for September, they should contact their local City / County Childcare Committee, which is available to support parents to locate childcare within their locality. Local contact details for City / County Childcare Committees can be found at www.myccc.ie. The introduction of Regulations for school-age childcare is a new and important development. While the Regulations introduced this year are limited in scope, I intend to introduce comprehensive Regulations that build on the initial Regulations as well as on the recommendations made by the standards working group.

Public consultation is built into the process of developing these comprehensive Regulations for school-age childcare. On May 21st my Department launched the public consultation process. The consultation comprises an open call for submissions and an online public survey which are open until 5th July, as well as a focus group session with School Age Childcare Providers and an Open Policy Debate, both of which will take place in June. Further information and links to the online survey and call for submissions can be found on the DCYA website www.dcy.gov.ie.

Local Authority Functions

143. **Deputy Noel Greally** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if legislation or powers are available to allow local authorities to CPO land for the provision of burial grounds; if so, the details of the legislation or powers; if there is no legislation, his plans

to introduce such legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23017/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Seán Canney): The Local Government Acts provide powers to local authorities to compulsorily purchase lands, including for the provision of land for burial grounds.

Part 14 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 can also be used by local authorities to compulsorily acquire land.

Community Development Initiatives

144. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if he will report on the national community weekend; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23020/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): ‘The Big Hello’, the National Community Weekend, took place over the recent May public holiday weekend. The event aimed to support communities to host events in their local area in order to strengthen community ties and help tackle the issue of social isolation.

The event was organised by my Department in partnership with a number of representatives of community and voluntary organisations.

€10,000 was allocated to each Local Community Development Committee to support local events, with many local authorities providing additional funding from their own resources.

The Big Hello proved to be a great success, with 800 events taking place as well as 1,100 Street Feasts who are one of my Department’s partners in this initiative. A report on the impact of the initiative is being compiled and will be submitted to me shortly.

Community Services Programme

145. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of the review of the community services programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23021/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Community Services Programme, or CSP, supports around 400 community organisations to provide local services through a social enterprise model. Funding is provided as a contribution to the cost of a manager and an agreed number of full-time equivalent (FTE) positions. More than €46 million is available under the programme in 2019.

My Department recently commenced a review of the CSP. A review was considered opportune as the programme had not been formally reviewed since 2006, during which time the external environment had changed significantly.

The review will consider how the programme fits with overall Government priorities, as well as with my Department’s other community programmes and policy objectives, and will help inform decisions on the future shape and structure of the programme.

The review is being carried out by an independent review body, Indecon Consultants. They have commenced engagement with key stakeholders including all CSP supported organisa-

tions. The review will take six months to complete, with a final report expected in early Autumn 2019.

Recreational Facilities

146. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of his proposal to introduce an indemnity scheme for landowners with regards to the use of their land for recreational purposes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23022/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): Sport Ireland Trails (formally The National Trails Office) holds an insurance policy covering approved National Way-Marked Ways and Looped Walks, to protect landowners against claims for loss or damage from recreational users of these trails.

The insurance policy covers trails that meet a specified standard, and includes all trails currently included in my Department's Walks Scheme.

As the Deputy will be aware, my officials have been working to develop a national scheme to protect private landowners in upland areas from possible claims from recreational users while on their lands. My Department has been advised that the introduction of any such indemnity scheme will require legislation.

My officials met with the Attorney General's Office recently to explore the various options open to the Department and to identify the precise legislation which would be required to implement an indemnity scheme.

This is a complex issue, as it is not possible to define trails on hills and mountains in the same manner as the Way-Marked Trails; many of the lands are also commonages.

The legal rights of landowners must also be respected by any scheme, while at the same time trying to maintain access to these lands for recreational users on a permissive basis.

My officials will continue to work to resolve this matter. In the meantime, I will shortly be announcing details of a new mandate for Comhairle na Tuaithe (The Countryside Council) to help strengthen the development of the outdoor recreation sector generally and to realise the potential of outdoor activities for the benefit of rural communities.

Comhairle na Tuaithe

147. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of the restructuring of Comhairle na Tuaithe; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23023/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): Comhairle na Tuaithe (the Countryside Council) was established as a non-statutory group in February 2004 to address the issues of:

- access to the countryside
- developing a countryside code, and
- developing a countryside recreation strategy.

While Comhairle has been successful in delivering on its original mandate, an independent review of Comhairle na Tuaithe was completed in 2016 which made a number of recommendations to improve the structures and operations of the group to achieve a more integrated and shared vision around countryside access and usage.

The review noted that countryside recreation has an increasingly important role as a mechanism for rural economic development, job creation, social interaction, education, and enhanced physical and mental health.

I met with Comhairle last year to hear directly from the members their views on the recommendations of the independent review. I also heard the members' views on the future direction of Comhairle and on the development of the outdoor recreation sector in Ireland generally. That meeting was very constructive in helping me to formulate proposals for the future development of the outdoor recreation sector.

A meeting of Comhairle na Tuaithe has been scheduled for 6th June and I will outline my proposals on the future structure, operation and mandate of Comhairle na Tuaithe at that meeting.

Dog Breeding Industry

148. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of the review of dog legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23024/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Seán Canney): Last year, following a public consultation process my Department published new Guidelines for Dog Breeding Establishments. These were put in place under the Dog Breeding Establishments Act 2010, and came into effect on 1 January of this year.

Having published the new Guidelines, my Department is now identifying any necessary legislative changes that may be required to further improve standards.

This review will involve examining relevant legislation to ensure that existing laws and international best practice, as well as the views of stakeholders, are taken into account. Any amendments to the Act will be dependent on the outcome of this review. This work is ongoing and will continue throughout 2019.

It is also my intention to publish a consultation paper in the coming weeks that will seek to review measures relating to the control of dogs in Ireland to ensure an appropriate approach is in place for the effective control of dogs in Ireland.

Library Projects

149. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of the roll-out of the 2019 libraries programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23025/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): My Department funds a libraries capital programme that will invest some €29 million in 19 projects, and in the *My Open Library* service, between 2016 and 2022.

Two major developments have already been completed under the programme with Kevin Street library in Dublin and Athy library in County Kildare opening in 2018. Moreover, two mobile libraries have been commissioned in Kerry and Wexford; a new schools library van has been funded in Tipperary. Equipment, furniture and fittings have been funded for approximately 20 libraries to support the continued roll-out of *My Open Library* service which is now available in 13 public libraries and due to launch in seven more in the coming months.

I expect local authorities to continue to make good progress in 2019. To this end, I have secured an increased capital allocation of €6 million for the programme this year. The allocation reflects increasing activity under the programme with, for example, construction on four major developments advancing significantly or completing this year, namely the libraries in Edgeworthstown (Longford), Portlaoise (Laois), Ennis (Clare) and North Clondalkin (South Dublin).

To date in 2019 just over €628,000 has been paid. I expect this to increase considerably as the year progresses and further projects commence.

Local and Community Development Programme

150. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of the review of the operation of the local community development committees and the national public participation networks advisory group; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23026/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): A report on the LCDC review is being drafted by my Department with guidance and input from the LCDC Review Steering Group and is at an advanced stage. The aim of the report is to provide a set of practical recommendations that address the challenges identified in the consultation and strengthen the operation of the LCDCs going forward.

The Local Government Reform Act 2014 significantly increased the community function in Local authorities providing for the establishment of LCDCs and Our Public Service 2020 recognises the LCDCs as the primary vehicle for collaboration at a local level. In this context my Department is currently involved in comprehensive consultation with the City and County Management Association and other stakeholders to ensure that the LCDC review is as robust as possible. While this engagement has been very worthwhile, it has taken longer than anticipated. I expect to have a draft for my consideration very shortly and would hope to publish the final report in July 2019.

The National Public Participation Network (PPN) Advisory Group, representative of all stakeholders, was established to advise and support my Department in the operation and development of PPNs. The first group was established in 2016 and ran until September 2017. The second group was established in late 2017 and has met on eight occasions to date. This group is working well with my Department in relation to the ongoing support and development of PPNs and there are no proposals, at this stage, to review the operation of the group.

As part of its work programme, the Advisory Group is reviewing the PPN User Guide, in consultation with PPNs around the country. A public consultation process on the matter has recently been concluded and the responses received are currently being considered by a subgroup of the PPN Advisory Group.

LEADER Programmes Funding

151. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the extent to which LEADER funding is available to communities and bodies in County Kildare; the amount available for distribution in 2019; the amount made available in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23027/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): LEADER is a multi-annual programme for the period 2014-2020 and has a total budget of €250 million over that period. The amount allocated to Co. Kildare under the LEADER Programme is €5.2 million. This allocation is provided for the duration of the programme, rather than on an annualised basis, to provide greater flexibility to the Local Action Group (LAG) which administers the programme. All project approvals are made by the LAG.

The Local Action Group in Co. Kildare is the Kildare Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) in partnership with Kildare County Council and Kildare County LEADER Partnership.

To-date, 21 projects with a combined grant value of over €900,000 have been approved for funding by the LAG. A further 14 projects, with a grant value of over €1 million, are at earlier stages of the approvals process.

Project payments are drawn down as approved works are completed and claims for payment are submitted by the project promoters. My Department has approved and paid claims totaling €221,422 in respect of projects in County Kildare. In addition, funding has also been provided to cover the costs of the LAG in delivering the LEADER strategy in Kildare.

I will be closely monitoring progress across all LEADER areas in the coming months to ensure that the budget available to Ireland under the programme is fully utilised.

Departmental Schemes

152. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the extent to which he expects various supports administered by his Department to benefit persons, groups or bodies throughout County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23028/19]

154. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the extent to which he expects to be in a position to support applications from County Kildare for assistance under the various schemes operated by his Department in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23031/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I propose to take Questions Nos. 152 and 154 together.

My Department is committed to the successful delivery of the following programmes which have provided financial and other supports to organisations in County Kildare. Funding is being made available under each of these schemes in 2019.

I would encourage community groups and local bodies to submit applications where eligible and I look forward to providing further supports to rural and urban communities in the county moving forward:

- The Rural Regeneration and Development Fund, which I launched in 2018 as part of Project Ireland 2040, supports ambitious and strategic projects which have the potential to transform rural economies and communities. Three projects located in County Kildare were awarded funding of €2,865,500 from the first call to the Fund. The second call for applications to the Fund was launched in April 2019, and will close on 6 August 2019.

- The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme is our country's primary social inclusion intervention. This is a five-year, €190m national programme that is delivered locally, to help those in the greatest need. The funding allocation to Kildare for 2019 is €1,061,036.00.

- The Community Enhancement Programme, which I launched in 2018, has provided funding of €468,671 to projects in Kildare, including more than €26,000 to Men's Sheds groups, which provide a safe space where men can gather and participate in their communities, develop social networks and potentially gain new skills and access information. The funding allocation to Kildare for 2019 is €148,013.00.

- The LEADER Local Action Group (LAG) in Kildare has been allocated €5,261,600 to invest in the economic and social development of County Kildare over the period of the programme to 2020. In 2019, €238,716 has so far been approved for three LEADER projects in Kildare.

- 224 projects were approved for €21.3 million of funding under the 2018 Town and Village Renewal Scheme. This included eight projects totaling €520,000 for Kildare. The closing date for receipt of applications for 2019 is 28 June, and the main focus this year will be on public-realm type activities and the enhancement of town centre amenities. Building on the pilot scheme launched by Minister Ring in October 2018, measures to encourage town centre living will also be welcome.

- The Seniors Alert Scheme facilitates valuable community-based support for vulnerable older people. A total of 1,432 installations have been approved for elderly persons in Kildare since September 2015.

- The Local Improvement Scheme delivers 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. The funding allocated to Kildare is €250,000 for 2019.

- €85,684 was announced in January 2019 for the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure scheme in Kildare and further funding will be available under the scheme later this year.

- Kildare also received funding of €8,000 which assisted two agricultural shows for 2019.

- A total of 35 Tidy Towns committees in Kildare received €63,000 in funding in 2018. I will consider, later this year, whether I will be in a position to allocate funding to Tidy Towns Committees through this particular funding stream in 2019.

- The Community Services Programme (CSP) supports community organisations to provide local services through a social enterprise model. The funding is provided as a contribution to the cost of a manager and an agreed number of full-time equivalent positions. In 2019, the CSP is providing funding of some €440,628 towards the cost of employing approximately 17.5 full-time equivalent positions and three managers in five community based organisations and social enterprises based in County Kildare.

- Two of the five CSP supported organisations were approved for additional support through the CSP Support Fund, which was announced in January to assist organisations that are struggling to meet the current minimum wage requirements in 2019.

Departmental Funding

153. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development when the next tranche of grant aid will be awarded; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23030/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): My Department delivers a variety of programmes that provide financial supports to rural and urban communities. The application periods for these programmes vary and full details of all relevant dates and deadlines can be found on the Government of Ireland website, gov.ie. Funding announcements are made following the processing and evaluation of applications in accordance with the criteria set out in respect of each programme.

The LEADER Programme is a multi-annual funding programme from 2014-2020. Decisions to approve a project, or otherwise, are a matter for the Local Action Groups (LAGs) which administer the programme in each LEADER area. Interested applicants should, in the first instance, contact the relevant LAG through its Implementing Partners to discuss the funding that may be available. Funding can be provided under a broad range of defined themes, which include enterprise development and social inclusion. Contact details for all LAGs are available on the gov.ie website at <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/c45498-local-action-groups/>

The Community Enhancement Programme (CEP) deadline for receipt of applications for 2019 in most Local Authority areas is 30 May. The CEP is managed by Local Community Development Committees in each Local Authority area. Applications should check with their LCDC for details regarding the CEP, including the closing date, in their area.

Some €46m is available under the Community Services Programme (CSP) in 2019. The CSP supports around 400 community organisations, with funding provided as a fixed annual contribution to the cost of a manager and an agreed number of full-time equivalent (FTE) positions. Expressions of Interest are accepted on an ongoing basis throughout the year, with funding for new organisations considered, in light of available budgets, during the year and subject to their suitability with the programme criteria.

The Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme provides funding for the development of new outdoor recreational infrastructure or the necessary maintenance, enhancement or promotion of existing outdoor recreational infrastructure in Ireland. I launched the 2019 Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme on Friday 29 March. The closing date is 31 May.

The Walks Scheme covers 39 trails, with payments to approximately 1,900 private landholders to maintain those trails. In line with the Programme for a Partnership Government commitment to increase the number of walks covered by the scheme, funding for the scheme was doubled in Budget 2019 - from €2 million to €4 million. Expression of Interest Forms are available on the gov.ie website.

I have allocated €86 million in support for 84 projects worth €117m under the first call applications for the €1 billion Rural Regeneration and Development Fund. The Second Call for applications under the Fund opened on 12 April 2019 and closes on 6 August 2019. As with the 1st call funding announcements will be made in each case when applications have been processed and evaluated.

Almost €53 million has been approved under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme for more than 670 projects since 2016. For 2019, the main focus of the Town and Village Renewal Scheme will be on public-realm type activities and the enhancement of town centre amenities. Building on the pilot scheme I launched in October 2018, measures to encourage town centre

living will also be welcome. Details of the 2019 Town and Village Renewal Scheme which was launched on 16 April 2019 are on gov.ie and closing date for receipt of applications is 28 June 2019.

The CLÁR programme provides funding for small infrastructural projects in specific designated rural areas that have experienced significant levels of depopulation. I launched the 2019 programme on 28 February and the application period closed on 25 April 2019.

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

Measure 1: Support for Schools/Community Safety Measures Measure 2: Play Areas (including MUGAs) Measure 3: Community Wellbeing Supports, comprising of: 3(a) First Response Support; 3(b) Mobility and Cancer Care Transport; and 3(c) Sensory Gardens

My officials are currently assessing all applications received and I hope to be in a position to announce the successful 2019 CLÁR projects in the coming weeks.

Question No. 154 answered with Question No. 152.

Departmental Projects

155. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of an application by a school (details supplied); when a decision will be made on the application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23052/19]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I can confirm that an application has been received under the scheme in question in respect of the group referred to by the Deputy.

Almost 500 applications were received by my Department under this scheme. My officials are currently assessing all of the applications received and I hope to be in a position to announce the successful projects in the coming weeks.

Social Welfare Appeals Status

156. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an appeal by a person (details supplied). [22945/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal from the person concerned was referred to an Appeals Officer who has decided to hold an oral hearing in this case on 6th June 2019. The person concerned has been notified of the arrangements for the hearing.

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

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Departmental Schemes

157. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to expand the carer's leave scheme or to introduce more flexibility into the scheme or introduce a new scheme to enable persons to take more time off work to care for elderly parents who are living at home; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22977/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Government acknowledges the crucial role that family carers play and is fully committed to supporting carers in that role. This commitment is recognised in both the Programme for a Partnership Government and the National Carers' Strategy.

My colleague, the Minister for Justice and Equality, has policy responsibility for maternity leave, parental leave, force majeure leave and carer's leave.

My Department provides a range of supports to those who are caring for family members, friends or neighbours. These measures aim to recognise the needs of carers through the provision of appropriate income supports, to enable carers to remain in touch with the labour market to the greatest extent possible and to empower carers to participate fully in economic and social life.

These income supports include the following:

- Carer's Allowance
- Carer's Benefit
- Carer's Support Grant
- Domiciliary Care Allowance

Carer's leave from employment is unpaid but the Carer's Leave Act ensures that people who need to avail of carer's leave will have their jobs kept open for them while they are on carer's leave. They may be eligible for Carer's Benefit if they have the required number of PRSI contributions or they may qualify for Carer's Allowance, which is means-tested, while they are on carer's leave.

State Pension (Contributory)

158. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the basis on which earned homecare credits appear to have been reduced within the calculation for a State pension resulting in a lower rate of payment in the case of a person (details supplied); if a review will be carried out in this instance with a view to awarding full rate of pension; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22989/19]

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.

Under the new measures, a maximum of 1,040 (equal to 20 years) HomeCaring periods can be included in the pension calculation for time spent out of the workforce for parenting and caring reasons.

The person concerned was awarded 1,145 HomeCaring periods based on information already held by my Department. The person has 887 reckonable paid contributions which when combined with the maximum permissible number of HomeCaring periods and reckonable credits of 1,040, as set out in legislation, results in a usable total of 1,927. When this number is divided by 2,080 (equivalent to 40 years), this results in an increase in rate from 90% to 92.64% of maximum state pension (contributory).

A review outcome letter has issued to the person, outlining details of their increase in rate and includes a breakdown of their social insurance contribution record and the maximum HomeCaring periods which can be used in the pension re-calculation.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Civil Registration Legislation

159. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the position in relation to the commencement of section 13 of the Civil Registration (Amendment) Act 2014; the position that pertains to the recognition and recording here of death certificates issued in other jurisdictions in respect of Irish citizens that died abroad; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22993/19]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The commencement of section 13 of the Civil Registration (Amendment) Act 2014 is subject to engagement by Civil Registration Service staff in the HSE with training that has been developed by the General Register Office of my Department. Officials from my Department are meeting shortly with counterparts from the Department of Health and the HSE to progress the matter with a view to early commencement of section 13 and subsequent implementation of the record of deaths abroad.

Social Welfare Benefits

160. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the reintroduction of the fuel allowance and household benefits package will be considered for carers who do not live with the person they care for in view of the fact that during the winter period claimants on jobseeker's allowance receive a higher payment than carers; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23001/19]

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 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.

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. Carers Allowance is not a qualifying payment for fuel allowance and there were no recent Budget changes that would have caused people in receipt of carers allowance to lose entitlement to fuel allowance.

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 also be noted that since October 2013 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.

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.

Any decision to change the qualifying criteria for HHB or fuel allowance 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.

Housing for People with Disabilities Provision

161. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the steps he is taking to ensure a percentage of all social housing projects supported by capital funding deliver a percentage of integrated wheelchair accessible social housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22907/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Local authorities are responsible for the provision of social housing in their areas, and, as such, decide on the number and specific types of dwellings to provide in their developments, based on identified need.

One of the key initiatives under the National Housing Strategy for People with a Disability (NHSPWD), which has been extended to 2020, was the establishment of Housing and Disability Steering Groups (HDSGs) in all housing authority areas to achieve a coordinated and integrated approach to meeting the housing needs of people with a disability at local level. These are chaired by Directors of Housing in each authority and include HSE and disability representative organisations.

Each HDSG has prepared a local Strategic Plan for its own City/County area to develop specific local strategies to meet identified and emerging need, over all of the categories of disability, 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. This is a more targeted and responsive way to meet actual need

identified rather than designating a specific percentage or number of new social housing builds that are fully wheelchair accessible.

Home Loan Scheme

162. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the situation faced by many persons who are ineligible for social housing or HAP and renting privately and saving to apply to the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22921/19]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Further information in relation to Help to Buy is available on the website of the Revenue Commissioners at the following web link: <https://www.revenue.ie/en/property/help-to-buy-incentive/index.aspx>.

Home Loan Scheme

163. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local

Government when further funds will be released to Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council to facilitate the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22925/19]

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

Social and Affordable Housing Eligibility

164. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the review of income eligibility for social housing supports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22926/19]

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.

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 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.

Fire Service

165. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of requests received from Dublin City Council seeking funding for the purchase of additional fire appliances to date in 2019; the proportion of those which were approved, pending or refused in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22961/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The provision of a fire service in its functional area, including the establishment and maintenance of a fire brigade, the assessment of fire cover needs and the provision of fire station premises and fire appliances is a statutory function of individual fire authorities under the Fire Services Act 1981. My Department supports the fire authorities through the setting of over-arching policy, providing a central training programme, issuing guidance on operational and other related matters and providing capital funding for priority projects.

Management of the number and type of fire appliances is a matter for each of the local authorities, which have responsibility for the assessment of their individual fire cover needs, including the provision and management of a fleet adequate to their requirements, taking account of national policy.

My Department funds new fire appliances under national procurement programmes, the most recent of which operated in 2015 and 2017. Dublin City Council were approved and grant-aided to procure three Class B fire appliances under both of these programmes. Continued investment in the fire appliance fleet is one of the key national priorities for the Fire Services Capital Programme.

Dublin City Council provides fire services on behalf of the four Dublin local authorities. In September 2018, the Council sought approval to purchase a new turntable ladder/aerial appliance at a cost of €800,000 plus VAT. Further information in relation to deployment and staffing of specialist vehicles was requested from the City Council in January 2019. A further submission was received this month and the request is now being considered further.

All requests for funding from my Department's Fire Services Capital Programme are considered within the constraints of available resources and have regard to local authorities' own priorities, consistency with national policy, the value for money offered by proposals and the totality of requests from fire authorities.

Housing Provision

166. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on low or medium support hostel accommodation for persons with mental health issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22974/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Rebuilding Ireland, the Government's Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness, includes a range of the measures to support individuals experiencing homelessness. Under the Plan, my

Department is providing capital funding to local authorities to ensure that there is sufficient emergency accommodation in place to provide shelter for all who require it. In 2019, the operational budget available to local authorities to support households experiencing homelessness, including the provision of emergency accommodation, has been increased by over 25% to €146m.

Under Rebuilding Ireland, over 200 permanent emergency beds have been introduced in the Dublin region in each of the years from 2016 to 2018. All of these beds are classified as ‘supported temporary accommodation’, where individuals receive the housing and health supports that they require to exit homelessness into an independent tenancy. Many of the individuals accessing emergency accommodation require significant health supports, particularly in the area of addiction and mental health. I am working closely with the Minister for Health, who is responsible for funding the provision of health supports, to ensure that the necessary arrangements and funding are in place. At the local level, statutory management groups are in place, including representatives of the local authorities and the HSE, to coordinate the delivery of housing and health supports as appropriate.

Election Management System

167. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if legislation will be brought forward outlawing election posters and replacing them with equal access to a public space in which posters from all candidates could be displayed together with reform of the election expenses system to allow all candidates to set out their key priorities. [22996/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): Election and referendum posters are regulated by law under the Litter Pollution Act 1997 (as amended) and by electoral law. Electoral law provides that every notice, bill, poster or similar document having reference to a Dáil, Presidential or European election or to a referendum shall bear upon its face the name and address of the printer and publisher thereof. Failure to comply with this provision is an offence.

The Electoral Acts do not regulate the content of electoral material, including election posters, either during or outside of electoral campaigns. However, the Public Order Act 1994 provides that it is an offence for any person in a public place to distribute or display any writing, sign or visible representation, which is threatening, abusive, insulting or obscene with intent to provoke a breach of peace.

The Litter Pollution Act (section 19(7)) provides that election or referendum posters may be erected/exhibited for a specified time period prior to and after a polling date. Failure to comply with this provision is also an offence. By way of background, section 19(7) of the Litter Pollution Act 1997 was amended by the Electoral (Amendment) (No.2) Act 2009 to introduce a 30-day time limit prior to an election taking place, during which election posters can be displayed. Prior to this amendment, the relevant legislation had required that election posters be taken down within 7 days of an election but provided no time limit for the period prior to an election within which posters could be displayed. This legislation now ensures that posters are only displayed for a finite and reasonable period.

There is no requirement in law that posters at an election or referendum must be erected. It is open to political parties, candidates or other groups to decide whether or not to do so.

I am satisfied that, overall, the existing arrangements are operating quite well and while

electoral law is subject to ongoing review, I have no plans in the short term to revise the legislation related to the erection of election posters or to revise legislation on election expenses in that regard.

Postal Voting

168. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if electoral legislation will be revised in order that persons working abroad at election time in public service roles can be allowed to vote in the same way as members of the Defence Forces. [22997/19]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): Postal voting is provided for in electoral law in respect of a number of categories of electors, including: -

- Irish diplomats serving abroad and their spouses/civil partners,
- whole-time members of the Defence Forces,
- members of An Garda Síochána,
- electors living at home who are unable to vote because of a physical illness or a physical disability,
- certain election staff employed at the poll outside the constituency where they reside,
- full-time students registered at their home who are living elsewhere while attending an educational institution in the State,
- prisoners, and
- electors whose occupation, service or employment makes it likely that they will be unable to vote in person at their local polling station on polling day.

Any person who has to travel, either within or outside of the State, for work on polling day and, as a result, is unable to attend at the local polling station is eligible to apply to his or her registration authority for inclusion in the supplement to the postal voters list to avail of a postal vote for the election or referendum concerned.

Subject to a limited number of exceptions, Irish citizens resident outside the State do not have the right to vote at elections or at referendums held in the State. To provide for such an extended franchise at Dáil and at presidential elections as well as at referendums would require Constitutional amendment.

In this context and in response to the evolving needs of Irish society and its relationship with the wider Irish diaspora, the Government agreed in March 2017 to accept in principle the main recommendation in the Fifth Report of the Convention on the Constitution that Irish citizens resident outside the State, including citizens resident in Northern Ireland, should have the right to vote at presidential elections and that a referendum would be held to seek to amend the Constitution to give effect to this. The extension of voting rights at other elections to Irish citizens resident outside the State is not under consideration at this point in time.

In order to inform public discourse on this significant policy change, an Options Paper was published on 22 March 2017 by my Department and the Department of Foreign Affairs and

Trade. The Options Paper sets out a broad range of options for the extension of voting rights, international comparisons, the estimated costs involved and related resource issues as well as many of the legal, policy, administrative and logistical challenges associated with extending voting rights to Irish citizens resident outside the State. These options provided a basis for the discussion on voting rights which took place at the Global Irish Civic Forum in Dublin on 5 May 2017.

More recently, the Government agreed on 5 February 2019 that, subject to the timely passage of a Constitution Amendment Bill by each House of the Oireachtas, the proposed referendum on extending the franchise at presidential elections would be held in October 2019. The Government also agreed that the preferred option to be put to the people in a referendum is for an extension of the franchise to all citizens resident outside the State, including citizens resident in Northern Ireland. This will inform the development of a Constitution Amendment Bill in good time for the holding of a referendum in October 2019.

Tenant Purchase Scheme Review

169. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when a review of the tenant incremental purchase scheme will be published; if tenants of Part V housing will be allowed to purchase their houses under the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23018/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Housing (Sale of Local Authority Houses) Regulations 2015 set the commencement date as 1 January 2016 for the introduction of the Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme for existing local authority houses.

The Scheme is open to eligible tenants, including joint tenants, of local authority houses that are available for sale under the Scheme. To be eligible, tenants must meet certain criteria, including having a minimum reckonable income of €15,000 per annum and having been in receipt of social housing support for at least one year.

The provisions of Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, are designed to enable the development of mixed tenure sustainable communities. Part V homes are excluded from the Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme 2016 to ensure that homes delivered under this mechanism will remain available for people in need of social housing support and that the original policy goals of the legislation are not eroded over time. The continued development of mixed tenure communities remains very important in promoting social integration.

Local authorities may also, within the provisions of the Regulations, exclude certain houses which, in the opinion of the authority, should not be sold for reasons such as proper stock or estate management. It is a matter for each individual local authority to administer the Scheme in its operational area in line with the over-arching provisions of the governing legislation for the scheme, and in a manner appropriate to its housing requirements.

In line with the commitment given in the Government's Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness, a review of the operation of the first 12 months of the Tenant Purchase (Incremental) Scheme has been completed and a full report has been prepared setting out findings and recommendations.

Following consideration of a number of implementation issues arising, I expect to be in a position to publish the Review very shortly. I intend to bring a comprehensive package of social housing reform measures to Government in the near future and the relevant recommendations

made in the Review of the Tenant Purchase Scheme will be progressed as part of that process.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

170. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the basis on which he has made the decision to amend the regulations to provide that a household that refuses two offers in a 12-month period will not receive further offers from local authorities for a period of five years instead of the current period of one year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23032/19]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The current position in relation to the refusal by households of offers of social housing dwellings is set down in Regulation 12 of the Social Housing Allocation Regulations 2011, made under section 22 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009.

Under Regulation 12, a household that refuses two reasonable offers of social housing tenancies in any twelve-month period, other than an offer made under the Choice Based Letting procedure, will not receive any further offers from any local authority for a period of one year from the date of the second refusal. An offer is deemed to be reasonable where the dwelling concerned would, in the opinion of the authority, meet the housing needs of the household and, except in an emergency, is located in an area of choice specified by the household.

From engagement with the local authority sector, it has become apparent that the current 12-month sanction is not operating in a manner that sufficiently addresses the potential for households on the waiting list to turn down reasonable housing offers. The refusal of offers can have a serious impact on the efforts by local authorities to manage their social housing letting process effectively and efficiently, lengthening the period ultimately required to complete lettings or re-lettings and resulting in a loss of essential differential rent revenue for extended periods.

For these reasons, I plan to amend the regulations to provide that a household that refuses two reasonable offers in any twelve-month period, other than an offer made under the Choice Based Letting procedure, will not receive any further offers from any local authority for a period of five years. The latter period will not be reckonable subsequently for the purposes of determining the household's relative priority for another social housing tenancy.

Having regard to the overall level of demand for social housing, I am satisfied that the change proposed is a measured step. It is ultimately fair to all households on local authority social housing waiting lists and will be supportive of the work of local authorities, as they seek to improve the efficient use of their social housing stock. I intend to bring this change forward as part of a comprehensive social housing reform package of measures that I expect to be in a position to bring to Government in the near future.

Local Authority Housing

171. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to direct all local authorities to acknowledge the climate emergency and to take the necessary urgent action to deal with same in view of the fact that a climate emergency has been declared; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23033/19]

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

Lead policy responsibility in relation to climate action is a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and the Environment. However, I and my Department play a strongly supportive role, recognising the significant part that the built environment, planning and local government generally play in contributing to the achievement of Ireland's climate targets.

Through our building regulations, we are ensuring that homes in Ireland are built to the highest energy efficiency standards. In relation to social housing specifically, funding of approximately €128 million has been provided from 2013 to the end of 2018 to improve energy efficiency in almost 68,000 local authority homes. In addition, energy efficiency measures have been incorporated into over 9,000 vacant social housing units that have been returned to productive use since 2014. This effectively means that approximately 50% of our social housing stock have had improvements to their energy efficiency.

To support the effort needed by the public sector to reach its target of a 33% improvement in energy efficiency by 2020, a Public Sector Energy Efficiency Strategy has been approved by Government and published by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment. This Strategy contains a governance structure based around the designation of a senior manager as Energy Performance Officer (EPO) in each public sector body whose purpose is to provide oversight and strategic leadership on structured energy management within the organisation and to report to Government. My Department recently hosted a workshop with bodies and agencies under the aegis of the Department to provide an opportunity for each body and the group collectively to organise for performance and delivery of improved energy efficiency outcomes.

My Department is also playing a significant role in delivering on the Government's climate ambitions through the National Planning Framework (NPF), which was published in early 2018 as part of Project Ireland 2040. The NPF sets out long-term policy for the future spatial pattern of development and urban structure in Ireland. The national objective to transition to a low carbon and climate resilient society by 2050 is a key aspect of the NPF, particularly reflected in the "compact growth" objective of targeting a greater proportion of development to take place in settlements of all sizes, through urban infill and the re-use of brownfield lands. The NPF operates horizontally across Government and will cascade vertically down through three Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSEs), to directly influence the operation of the planning system through the thirty-one local authority Development Plans.

Turf Cutting Compensation Scheme Eligibility

172. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if a person (details supplied) is eligible for inclusion in the turf cutting compensation scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22900/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): An application for compensation under the cessation of turf cutting compensation scheme was received by my Department from the individual referred to in the Deputy's Question. With respect to 53 raised bog special areas of conservation sites, the qualifying criteria for the scheme are that:

- The applicant must have had a legal interest (ownership or a turbary right (right to cut turf)) in one of these sites on 25 May 2010 and must have had the right to cut and remove turf from the property on that date;
- The applicant must have been cutting turf on the land in question during the relevant five

year period up to 25 May 2010;

- The turf resource on the site has not been exhausted; and
- No turf cutting or associated activity is ongoing on the property.

I am advised that the applicant, referred to in the Deputy's Question was informed in 2017 that he did not fulfil the qualifying criteria of the scheme. This applicant was provided with the opportunity to seek a Departmental review of this decision and did so. The decision was upheld and the applicant was advised that he could appeal this decision to the Peatlands Council.

My Department has been advised that, to date, no appeal has been received by the Peatlands Council.

Creative Ireland Programme

173. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the estimated full year cost if the budget for the Creative Ireland programme was increased by 25%. [22960/19]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): The allocation from my Department's Vote to the Creative Ireland Programme for 2019 is €7,150,000.

A 25% increase in this allocation would amount to €1,787,500 and result in a total annual allocation of €8,937,500.